

# VIVIENNE WESTBROOK

## What Remains of Rawleigh/Raleigh/Ralegh (1554-1618)<sup>1</sup>

Nations do not remember spontaneously and collectively any more than smaller groups do. Essentially, the bearers of national memory since the arrival of capitalism in each country are the upper middle classes and the intelligentsia, who have inherited the mantle from the aristocracies, lawyers, and clergy of previous epochs. Memory on this level can be spontaneous or manipulated; it can involve rhetorical discourses directed at internal or at external opponents; it can be internally divided and fought over. Its articulation belongs essentially to political elites, however, and is relatively rarely contested by other social groups—and very rarely with success.<sup>2</sup>

This paper explores how societies fail to remember the figures they seek to memorialise, and the extent to which those memorials retain, or fail to retain, significance across time and contexts, by focusing on some of the more prominent literary historical and artistic representations of Sir Walter Raleigh from the sixteenth through to the twentieth century.

In his seminal work *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs argued that present.”

Reluctantly<sup>3</sup> to preserve, the memorialis

ing process, too,





light at his departure.” He was like the Jesuits at Tyburn, he argued, insofar as they had

attempt to explain away his political (and sexual) betrayal of Queen Elizabeth in the poetry of 1592, attempt to justify his lack of gold in his 1596 pamphlet, *The Discoverie of Guiana*, and deny his political betrayal of King James in the series of texts written in the months prior to his execution.”<sup>13</sup> Rawleigh’s rewritings extended to Scripture. In his *Excellent observations*, for example, he reinterpreted the message of peace at *Matthew* 5.9 as an endorsement of the violent means of ensuring it, on the grounds that God works by secondary means: “blessed are the Peacemakers, and therefore doubtlesse blessed are those means whereby peace is gained and maintained.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, in the process of rewriting the past for present purposes, Rawleigh appropriated the biblical text’s generic styles, its typologies and the authority of the text itself, continually rewriting in the light of the ever-changing spatial and political contexts in which he found himself. However, some contexts were easier to navigate than others.

As a Tudor courtier at a Stuart court, Rawleigh was out of place. Being implicated in the “Main Plot” to kill James and substitute Arabella Stuart did not make that context any easier for Rawleigh. He protested vehemently against what he perceived to be an unfair trial, and, demonstrating his consummate skill for appropriation, he invoked the apocryphal narrative of Susanna in his defence

In his letters, too, which Stephen Greenblatt has described as Rawleigh's "miniature stages on which to perform, spaces to be filled with grand—usually tragic—gestures," we can see Rawleigh as the alienated David of the Psalms.<sup>16</sup> In his letter to Winwood bemoaning the death of his son in the disastrous expedition to Guiana he declares: "I would have left my body at S. Thomes by my sons, or have brought with me out of that or other Mynes, so much Gold oar, as should have satisfied the King. I propounded no vain thing; what shall become of me I know not, I am unpardoned in England, and my poor estate consumed, and whether any Princes will give me bread or no I know not."<sup>17</sup> Escaping the wrath of James, Rawleigh imagined himself as David, desolate and despe

On the morning of 29 October 1618, the superlative actor delivered an execution speech by which he clearly intended to shape his own monument as one of England's great heroes. One surviving account describes the scene in vivid detail:

Upon Thursday morning this Couragious, although Committed Knight, was brought before the Parliament house, where there was a Scaffold created for his Beheading: yet it was doubted over night that he should be hanged, but it fell out otherwise. He had no sooner mounted the scaffold, but with a chearfull Countenance and undaunted Look, he saluted the Companie. His Attire was a wrought Night-cap, a Ruff band, a hair-coloured Satin Doublet, with a black wrought Waste-coat under it, a pair of black cut Tassery Breeches, a pair of ash-coloured Silk stockings, & a wrought black Velvet Night gown; putting off his Hat, he directed his Speech to the Lords present.<sup>21</sup>

Rawleigh's theatrical presentation of his final scene effectively subverted the punitive function of the execution and fixed a heroic memorial in the collective memory of his age. Stephen Greenblatt has noted that "throughout his final declaration Raleigh manipulated the facts of his life in order to present the desired last image of himself, just as the writer of a history play manipulates the chronicler's facts to accord with his conception of the characters."<sup>22</sup> There was a great deal at stake in his final performance, and Rawleigh demonstrated that there was more than one way to present a life. Anna Beer has observed that Rawleigh's audience responded to his final scene as though it were a theatrical event:

In Raleigh's case, one reporter uses the discriminating tone of the theatre critic, commenting that his "voyce and courage never failed him (insomuch that some might thinke it forced than natural, and somewhat overdonne)" (British Library









biographical collection better known as *Brief Lives*, John Aubrey remembered a somewhat different Rawleigh through a series of anecdotes of seduction and whoring, and the memorably disdainful address to Rawleigh by James I upon their first meeting “I have heard Rawly of thee”—a pun that suggests that James, at least, was confident about the correct pronunciation of a name of which Stebbing has noted 68 versions in Rawleigh’s own and other correspondence of the time.<sup>39</sup> In his 1682 popular play *The Unhappy (or, unfortunate) Favourite* John Bankes depicted not Rawleigh, but Essex as the hero: an admired, noble and ambitious courtier desired by Elizabeth but with deadly enemies in Cecil and Rawleigh. In this play a marginalised and envious Rawleigh not only suggests that in dealing with Essex Elizabeth should have “snatch’d a Holbard from her nearest Guard, / And thrust it to his Heart,” he is also a willing accomplice in the swift despatch of Essex before Elizabeth has a chance to sign a countermand.<sup>40</sup> In 1719 George Sewell published *The Tragedy of Sir Walter Rawleigh*, a short five-act play in which he was morally hand-polished. The Prologue written by Major Pack and spoken by Mr. Ryan promised the audience,

An English Martyr shall ascend the stage,  
To shame the last, and warn the present age.  
The tragic scene with moving art will tell  
How brave he fought—how wrong’d the soldier fell.<sup>41</sup>

As Robert Lawson-Peebles has pointed out, “Sewell’s Rawlegh is so irreproachable that he fills his nation not only with ‘Contempt of Danger’ but also with ‘the Love of Virtue.’”<sup>42</sup> Sewell addressed the play to the Right Honourable James Craggs, esq., Secretary of State, who, in consummate prefatorial rhetoric, was assured that he bore the qualities of Rawleigh and that by accepting the play he would be participating in the

protection of the virtuous memory of Sir Walter, and, by extension, his own: “Protect the virtuous memory of the dead, as you do the brave acts of the living, and the world will be afraid or ashamed to censure what you approve.” Lawson-



the honour of his country against the ambitions of Spain, fell a sacrifice to the influence of that court, whose arms he had vanquish'd and whose designs he oppos'd.”<sup>45</sup> In the early eighteenth century, then, Rawleigh was remembered primarily as a great soldier, his execution for treason was forgotten in the collective amnesia of a culture that preferred, and needed, to reconstruct a history of victorious England. With such a morally ambiguous character and life as Rawleigh's, a certain amount of collective amnesia was certainly required, but once reconstructed the attributes of the monument redounded synecdochically to represent the whole figure unambiguously as heroic.

Throughout what might be termed the monumentalising nineteenth century, Rawleigh continued to be a popular inspiration for adventure stories and historical paintings, among the more famous of which is undoubtedly Millais' painting *The Boyhood of Raleigh* (1870). In reading this painting as a discourse of boundaries, “between the exotic man-sailor and the aristocratic English boys; between the parrot (nature) on one side and the toy ship (culture) on the other; between the land and the sea and the sea and the skies beyond: between the representation and the real as emphasized by the broken frame,” Regenia Gagnier also acknowledges that to the Victorian beholder of this painting, it might symbolise emigration from the UK and Ireland.<sup>46</sup> What we should not miss here is the fact that in this oblique memorial Millais has defined Rawleigh in terms of time and tide, as the boy Rawleigh avidly attends to seafaring tales of the kind in which he will later feature.

The early twentieth century saw numerous appropriations of Rawleigh's glamour and seductiveness in the promotion of the habit of smoking. It defined him







is to move the statue from its present site where it looks ridiculous.” According to Lord McIntosh of Haringey, the House had agreed that “Sir Walter Raleigh’s statue is out of place on Raleigh Green outside the Ministry of Defence for no other reason than that it is much smaller than the other three statues sited there.” Attempting to circumvent the battle between Westminster City Council and the Dean and Chapter of St. Margaret’s, Lord Strabolgi argued that Rawleigh was a “national figure of historic importance” and that other sites associated with him throughout the country might be considered as alternatives. Lord McIntosh pointed out that the Public Statues Metropolis Act 1854 restricted Government intervention and that local authorities anywhere might similarly refuse permission for the relocation. Westminster City Council had refused permission for relocation to St. Margaret’s on the grounds that it would create a precedent, suggesting an anxiety that the locally cherished open space to the west of St. Margaret’s might become a dumping ground for dead monuments.

Lord Annan suggested the alternative sites of “Poets’ Corner, Millbank, near which Sir Walter lost his head, and Horse Guards Road... in a place between the statue of Lord Mountbatten and the statue of Lord Clive, where it would be in competition with neither[?]” Meanwhile, Lord Morris of Manchester was already thinking about what new memorial might replace Sir Walter Rawleigh’s and suggested an Anzac memorial, which he felt would be “warmly welcomed by the all-party Anzac group of MPs and Peers” of which he was the president.

Lord McIntosh, responding to Lord Annan, explained that St. Margaret’s churchyard was deemed more appropriate since Rawleigh was already buried there, thereby suggesting a relationship between the dead man and the dead monument. St.





On the 14 November 2000 at 2.45pm the Rawleigh monument was yet once more on the parliamentary agenda. An exasperated Baroness Trumpington asked again, “When is this ridiculous saga about moving that tiny little statue of Walter Raleigh going to end?” Lord McIntosh concurred: “I entirely agree with the noble Baroness that it seems to be taking a very long time and that it is inappropriate to have the small statue of Sir Walter Raleigh next to three very much larger statues of 20<sup>th</sup>-century generals.”<sup>52</sup> Viscount Slim then remarked that his own father’s statue was next to Raleigh’s, adding “he would be very proud to be alongside a pirate”[?]. To this Lord McIntosh responded

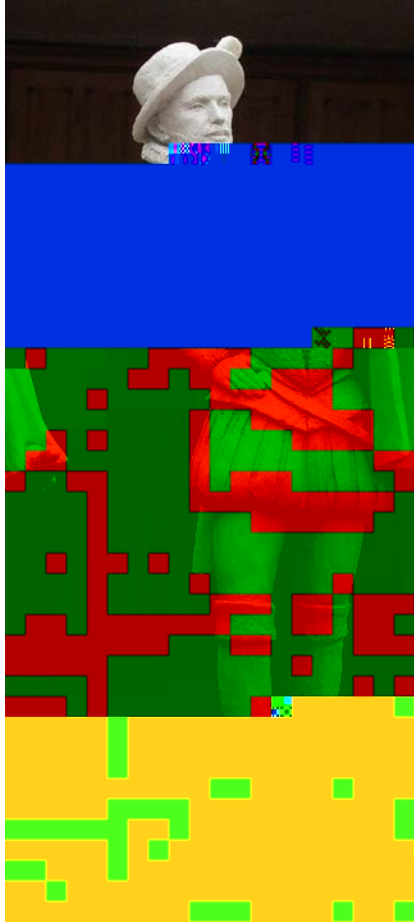
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look at it? Such memorials have less to do with cultural memory and more to do with private vested interest; they are merely claims to power through the very public claim to public space.

The Lord Bishop of Wakefield argued that since Westminster Abbey was full of memorials to poets, artists and musicians, it would not be true to say that London was full of military statues, to which Lord McIntosh responded that visitors had to pay five pounds to get into Westminster Abbey. What we might reasonably conclude from this engagement is that although memorials to British culture are housed and accessible to those with the money and the will to pay, military and political memorials are in the public space and free, to be ignored. Lord Acton made the

Far from expecting no one to notice it, Mr Swire hoped that it would become a tourist attraction, adding that “I think it is very exciting that, after all these years, we will finally have a lasting tribute to our most famous local son.”<sup>55</sup> I asked Mr Michael

Prideaux, Director of Corporate and Regulatory Affairs at British American Tobacco,



why B.A.T. wanted to fund the project, to which he replied: “it seemed to us to be a pity that there was no statue of Sir Walter near his birthplace.” He admitted that, unfortunately, it might be denounced by anti-smoking groups as “a cunning plan to sell more cigarettes.” When I asked Vivien Mallock what she hoped to convey in the new statue, pictured here as a ghostly apparition prior to bronze casting, she replied, “The brief was fairly open but essentially I was invited to show him in his prime, with an air of arrogance and a whiff of mischief!”<sup>56</sup>

Vivien Mallock has created a portrait sculpture of Rawleigh, six feet tall, dressed in Elizabethan costume. His sheathed sword, which rests on his left hip, is half obscured by “the cape,” suggesting a negotiation between courtier and soldier. Rawleigh’s shoulder carries all of the synecdochical weight of his representation to the new millennium. Only time will reveal whether this portrait sculpture of Rawleigh will attract tourists, contribute to the economy of its locality, regenerate Rawleigh’s reputation as a courtier and soldier in the collective memory of East Budleigh, or, indeed, whether it will resist the pressure of



<sup>3</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 119.

<sup>4</sup> Fentress, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory" in Thomas Butler, ed., *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, 97-113), 101.

<sup>6</sup> Burke, 104.

<sup>7</sup> Leonardus Lessius, *Rawleigh his ghost*, trans. A. B. (Saint Omer: G. Seutin, 1631), STC 15523. See William Stebbing, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: 1891), JRL 942.055/R7.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Sir Walter Raleigh: The Renaissance Man and His Roles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Stucley, *To the Kings Most Excellent Majestie. The Humble Petition* (London: Bonham Norton and John Bill, 1618), STC 23401, 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London: William Stansby, 1614), STC 20637 (sig. A2r).

<sup>11</sup> See: "Take especiall care that thou delight not in Wine, for there never was any man that came to honour or preferment that loved it; for it transformeth a man into a Beast, decayeth health, poisoneth the breath, destroyeth natural hear, brings a mans stomacke to an artificiall heat, deformeth the face, rotteth the teeth, and to conclude, maketh a man contemptible, soone old, and despised of all wise and worthy men; hated in they servants, in they selfe and Companions; for it is a bewitching and infectious vice...." *Sir Walter Raleigh's Instructions to His Sonnes* (London: 1633), STC 20644, 83-4.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Oakeshott, *The Queen and the Poet* (London: Faber, 1960), 96.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Beer, *Sir Walter Raleigh and his Readers in the Seventeenth Century: Speaking to the People* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 4.

<sup>14</sup> "I confesse that peace is a great blessing of God, and blessed are the Peacemakers, and therefore doubtlesse blessed are those means whereby peace is gained and maintained. For well we know that God worketh all things here amongst us mediatly by a secondary means, The which meanes of our defence and safety being shipping, and Sea-Forces, are to be esteemed as his gifts, and then only avaiailable and benefittfull, when they are used with a good conscience, and in a just manner." *Works of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: 1630), STC 20644, 83-4.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965; 1980), 154.

<sup>29</sup> Shirley, A3r-v. Rawleigh maintained in his preface to his *History of the World* that his text was a mirror only to those who saw it as a mirror, a rhetorical manoeuvre that enabled him to escape responsibility for any historical connections with the present that his readers might make. Rawleigh feared nothing from malicious readers of his *History* that had not already been done to him by those who had misread his life, ill readers to whom he owed thanks for this leisure time in the Tower in which to write the *History*. See Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London: William Stansby, 1614), STC 20637.63.

<sup>30</sup> John Shirley, *The Life of the Valiant and Learned Sir Walter Rawleigh* (London: J. D., 1677), JRL 22639, 242.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Naunton, *Fragmenta Regalia* (London, 1641), Wing N250.

<sup>32</sup> See also John Donne's letter, addressee unknown, circa 1600, in which he uses the same analogy to describe Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel (1524-1600): "that last dyed (that tennis ball whome fortune after tossing and banding brikwald into the hazard) in his imprisonment used more than much reading, and to him that asked him why he did so he answerd he read so much lest he should remember something."

<sup>33</sup> See Robert Lawson-Peebles, "The many faces of Sir Walter Raleigh" (*History Today* 48.3, 1998, 17-24), for a discussion of Hakluyt's treatment of Rawleigh.

<sup>34</sup> See J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt, eds., *Spenser: Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Spenser playfully describes Rawleigh as a rival poet for Cynthia's (Elizabeth's) affections in the poem, addressed "To the right noble and valourous knight, Sir Walter Rawleigh, Lo. Wardein of the Stanneryes, and lieftenaunt of Cornewaile," 413. In "The Third Booke of the Faerie Queene Conteyning The Legend of Britomartis or Of Chastitie: 4" Spenser praises Rawleigh's poem to "Cynthia" (Elizabeth) as "...that sweet verse, with Nectar sprinckeled, / In which a gracious servant pictured / His Cynthia, his heavens fairest light? / That with his melting sweetnesse ravished," 4. 4-7.

<sup>35</sup> Beer, 139.

<sup>36</sup> Wilbur Cortez Abbott, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* vol. II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 6.

<sup>37</sup> See *The Cabinet-Council Containing the Chief Arts of Empire, and Mysteries of State... By the Ever-renowned Knight, Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1658), A2r-v.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Nicholls and Penry Williams, "Sir Walter Raleigh" in *New DNB on-line* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-2006).

<sup>39</sup> For what is still considered to be the best biography of Rawleigh,

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<sup>52</sup> The statue of Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, Commander of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army is by Oscar Nemon. That of Viscount Slim, Commander of the British 14<sup>th</sup> Army, is by Ivor Roberts-Jones. The third sculpture is of Viscount Alanbrooke. See *Hansard* Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 1992 “written answers to questions” in which the matter of the removal of Sir Walter’s statue is first raised in connection with a planned statue of Viscount Alanbrooke at Raleigh Green.

<sup>53</sup> Hugo Swire, <http://www.hugoswire.org.uk/index.jsp>.

<sup>54</sup> The actual cost of the sculpture was £25,000+ VAT, according to Michael Prideaux, Director, Corporate and Regulatory Affairs, B.A.T. Personal email, 2 September 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Swire.

<sup>56</sup> Photograph of Rawleigh-in-process courtesy of Vivien Mallock.

<sup>57</sup> The statue was resituated in 2001. A statue of Rawleigh occupies a site in Perth, Western Australia, called “London Court.” This street of little shops was built in 1937 to represent England during Elizabeth’s reign. The statues of Sir Walter Rawleigh and Dick Whittington face each other from the far sides of the court, encapsulating for the Australi