

Dig

Imagine finding a man's whole skeleton.
Then discovering
the injured bones were once King Richard III,
dead since 1485.

You go to work to operate the steam shovel,
excavate a parking lot in Leicester
and uncover the hacked bones
of a despised king, the scoliosis
plus evidence of battle wounds
that re-open wounds and battles:
who gets the bones? where should they rest?
who's legitimate? who not?

The bones left long ago in a Franciscan priory
fallen to disrepair since Henry VIII
(heir to Richard's killer one generation removed)
separated England's church from Rome, dissolved
the monasteries seized their wealth.

Now new quarrels: cities of Leicester and York
both want the bones to separate tourists from their money.
Queen Elizabeth II doesn't want them in Westminster Abbey:
she is, after all, the consequence
of the line of succession laid down by Richard's killer.

Leicester in the midlands, where the Battle of Bosworth Field
was fought, where Shakespeare's wicked Richard cries,
A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!
(and once, I've heard, during a performance,
a drunken audience member laughed,
at which the actor on stage flung out,
Make haste and saddle yonder braying ass!)

York to the north also claims the bones---
Richard was of the House of York, contender
in the Wars of the Roses, civil and uncivil battle,
dynasties fighting, Lancastrians and Yorkists---
Henry Tudor winning out at Bosworth Field.

Richard and Henry were rival parts of the same royal line---

Plantagenet---different branches of one tree.
Was Richard III Shakespeare's crooked villain
who needed to be done away with?

Or a good king basely murdered by someone
who wanted the throne for himself
and slandered the monarch he'd unseated?

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(Author's note: see Josephine Tey's novel Daughter of Time, in which Richard III is
cleared of his crimes.)