

**2019 Seminar Abstracts: "Washed in Lethe":  
Renaissance Cultures of Remembering and Forgetting  
Jonathan Baldo, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester  
Isabel Karremann, University of Würzburg**

**Stephanie Bahr (Hamilton College)**

**"Divided Remembrance: Rewriting Thomas More in Elizabethan England"**

This essay will consider the divided remembrance of Thomas More in Elizabethan England: scholar, wit, statesman, traitor, papist, and saint. Drawing on Roper's biography, Harpsfield's *Life*, and Munday and Chettle's *Sir Thomas More* play, this essay will explore the ways in which Elizabethan Protestants and Catholics alike laid claim to a divided version of Thomas More that isolated the various elements of his identity. More himself thus becomes a touchstone for remembering, forgetting, and rewriting the fraught and all too recent past of Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

**J. F. Bernard (Champlain College)**

**"Shakespeare's Sticky Stories"**

How can my students, who have never read *Hamlet*, know that there is a skull involved? And why (more interestingly, perhaps) do they consistently think that Hamlet holds it up while reciting the "to be or not to be" speech? There is an obvious answer here pertaining to Shakespeare's ubiquitous popular and market culture presence, but my paper suggests that there is something else at play in terms of remembering the play: my students, like many people only glancingly familiar with *Hamlet*, share a collective false memory.

Dramatically speaking, Shakespeare's theatre constantly asks us to remember things (think Horatio, Gower's narration of *Pericles*, or the seemingly innocuous mention of the sea captain near the end of *Twelfth Night*). The plays also surreptitiously attempt to make forget certain elements that would otherwise jeopardize the conclusion of certain narratives (Mamilius' death in *The Winter's Tale* or even the appearance of the third DeBoys brother in *As You Like It*, bearing the same surname as the melancholy Jaques). I am thus interested in the dyad of remembering and forgetting that runs through all of Shakespeare's plays, one built into the stories themselves, but one which also operates outside of the playhouse, once theatregoers return to their larger communities with certain memories (and gaps) about the play they just watched, and who then disseminate it in various forms.

Though such a process rests on undeniable affective underpinnings, it also functions (more efficiently, perhaps), at the intersection of narration, cognition, and contagion. Part of what makes Shakespeare's theatre so memorable in early modernity is the fact that audiences can both recognize the stories it tells (and their familiar narratives) but also discover them as new dramatic iterations. In other words, Shakespeare's plays stick because they allow us to remember and forget all at once. My paper examines this phenomenon both in its modern context and beyond, through the aforementioned context of false memories about Shakespeare and his work.

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**Evan Choate (Rice University)**

**"Pattern and Precedent in *Richard II*"**

*Richard II* famously begins *in media res*, dealing with the consequences of Thomas of Woodstock's mysterious death without providing a full account of the events and circumstances that lead to the political crisis that precipitates the events of the plays. In this paper, I read this gap as part of the play's ongoing engagement with the ways that precedents pattern interpretation in dramatic contexts. More so than even other Chronicle histories, *Richard II* seems to depend on a complex web of references to the popular dramatic culture in which it was performed. To this end, I consider the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock* as a response to the peculiarly theatrical problems of interpretation set up by *Richard II*, particularly its omissions. I argue that the Essex crisis revealed the stakes of such omissions for constructing and deploying historical meanings. By attempting to go back and fill in the blanks, *Woodstock* reveals an interpretive volatility more fundamental to drama as a form, which gives us reciprocal purchase on *Richard II*'s own meditations on the theatricality of politics. I will ultimately suggest that this interpretive volatility can help us to account not only for *Woodstock*'s own tenuous position outside the canon of Renaissance drama, but also the rapid decline in the popularity of Chronicle history plays after the turn of the century.

**William Engel (University of the South, Sewanee)**

**"The Tug of Memory, 'I know you of old':  
the invention of Shakespearean backstories"**

Whether Beatrice's reminder to Benedick that they have a history and she knows his tricks (*Ado* 1.1), or Pompey's bitter tethered memory that Antony still has his father's house even as they toast an alliance (*Ant.* 2.7), the sharp tug of memory features significantly in Shakespeare's plays. The present is shown to be informed by actions and discernible behavioral patterns from the past which constitute the ground of one's being (notably in *Henry V*), what Heidegger calls "fundamental ontology" (*Being and Time*, §3), and, more specifically, "process ontology," distinct from applied ontologies because not claiming to be accessible to any empirical proof but understood as a structural design pattern out of which things can be explained and put together consistently. These brief reminders, by way of ostensible "throwaway lines," are dramaturgically expedient triggers for the recall of key elements in characters' backstories otherwise inaccessible to the audience. Fortinbras declares to the remnant of the Danish court he has "some rights of memory in this kingdom" (*Ham.* 5.2), and preparatory corroborative information (*Ham.* 1.1) impels the audience to imagine this whole history as being dragged along—or tugged—by memory.

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's work, this paper focuses on staged performances of the tug of memory in Shakespearean backstories with special reference to the rhetorical principles of *inventio* (the discovery of arguments) and *memoria* (the treasury of things invented). Regarding the latter, as exemplified in Iacomo's report based on his fabricated *domus locorum* (*Cym.* 2.4), pre-packaged images and suggestively urged associations cause the narrative to fold back on itself in order to move forward plausibly. The audience thus is primed to gain access to a "memory picture," in the same way emblems and other

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mnemotechnic devices enable one to invent and hold in mind whole histories for future recollection and use.

**Rebeca Helfer (University of California, Irvine)**

**“Forgetfulness in me”:  
Ruin and the Art of Recollection in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets***

In Sonnet 122, Shakespeare’s poetic persona inverts the commonplace claim to poetic immortality – namely, that monuments of poetry outlast monuments of stone, which inevitably fall to ruin – by asserting material monuments to memory in writing will only hasten the destruction of his beloved’s memory. “That poor retention could not so much hold,” the speaker says of writing’s ability to retain his beloved’s memory, deciding no longer to “trust those tables” to future remembrance, concluding that “To keep an adjunct to remember thee / Were to import forgetfulness in me.” In place of writing, the speaker offers his mind’s own place as a mnemonic space and monument to memory, albeit a mortal one: destined to fall to ruin, like the memory of his beloved and the poetic memorial fashioned for him. The immortality of poetry topos thus collapses in a twofold sense: the speaker subjects both internal and external locations to memory, those without and within, to inexorable ruin and ultimately to oblivion – despite the obvious irony that the speaker makes this claim in writing and poetry. In this paper, I explore the threat of forgetfulness and its relationship to the art of memory in sonnet 122, situating it within the *ars memorativa* tradition that the poem both recalls and reforms, remembers and rewrites.

**Peter Holland (Notre Dame)**

**“Forgiving and Forgetting: Shakespeare and Power”**

Context: my paper will be drawn from the early draft of a chapter in the book-length study I am “writing” on Shakespeare and forgetting, provisionally titled, with remarkable originality, *Shakespeare and Forgetting*.

The phrase “forgive and forget” has become little more than a cliché. I shall be concerned with Shakespeare’s uses of the phrase or of the concept, looking closely at what makes the usages similar and what dissimilar. It will also look at some intriguing (to me at least) evidence about the characteristics and contexts of early modern usages of “forgive and forget” and/or “forget and forgive”, a formulation that sounds strange to our ears but which proves to be almost as frequent in early modern English. How does Shakespeare’s exploration of the phrase reveal a forgetting that is not a forgetting and a forgiving that may or may not be what it says? What does such phrasing say of the performance of power in his plays’ social structures? The paper will, at the end, also turn briefly to modern institutionalizations of the concept as ways of rethinking and refashioning the modern state.

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**William Kerwin (University of Missouri)**

**“Redy to take on me the payn / Ther fall to remember’:  
*Metrical Visions* and the Hybrid Memories of Complaint”**

As my contribution to our exploration of memory culture, in this paper I look at the workings of the mid-century complaint movement, with a focus on George Cavendish’s collection of individual stories, *Metrical Visions*. Less famous than its almost-contemporary complaint collection *The Mirror for Magistrates*, *Metrical Visions* (composed, conjecturally, between 1552-54), transforms the *de casibus* tradition of individual tragic stories by borrowing from Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* but creating a completely different sense of individual character. His characters tell their own tales, to a recorder, and in doing so they actively sort through their own memories, and make the listening author-figure sort through his as well. The poems spend a fair bit of time pointing out faulty forms of memory, connected to shame and ingratitude. This form of complaint takes part in the transformation of older narratives of penance and confession, and it also takes part in an extending of individual memory-texts to people much more socially diverse than in the *de casibus* tradition. Cavendish is more famous for his *Life of Wolsey*, sometimes called the first major English biography, and *Metrical Visions*, perhaps because it pointed to contemporary political figures or perhaps because of its occasional Catholic sympathies, was not published until 1825. But its representations of the power of individual’s memories points to a number of interesting issues. Part of my broader argument is that complaint becomes the character-focused place of memory, and as such stands as a primary precursor to dramatic forms such as the soliloquy and the set speech. In this paper I’m focusing more narrowly on the ways memories are transformed and transferred in this volume of complaint poetry.

**Devori Kimbro (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga)**

**" Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, Cultural Trauma, and the English Reformation**

A cornerstone text of England’s Reformation, John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, originally published in 1563, is a text deeply concerned with constructs of cultural memory. Borrowing from the hagiographical tradition, in *Acts and Monuments* Foxe attempts to legitimize the English Reformation by placing it in the continuum of early Christian persecutions and martyrdoms, and by further vilifying Catholics at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign following the Marian counter-Reformation. This essay will attempt to situate Foxe’s work in the context of cultural memorialization and traumatic historiography. Drawing on work in early modern trauma studies by Lisa Starks-Estes, Thomas Anderson, and examinations of historiography by Dominic LaCapra, I will explore *Acts and Monuments* as a text invested in using a form of early modern traumatic historiography to create a framework for cultural memory that utilizes Protestantism’s significant connections to literacy of religious texts. Using this familiarity as a generic tool, Foxe establishes a sense of legitimacy for English Protestant martyrs by connecting them to the objectively traumatic narratives of early Christianity. As a result, this foundational text positions English Protestantism as a religion rooted in traumatic narratives. As a tool of cultural memory, trauma relies on this construction of a continuum wherein an event is revisited constantly, re-inflicting a “wound” of sorts on the culture’s participants. I will argue that Foxe was aware of the importance of nascent Reformation-related trauma (although not in fully Freudian terms) as a means of creating a cultural means

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of remembering events of the Marian period in context of a much broader scope of Christian history.

**Gaywyn Moore (Missouri Western State University)**

**"Un-Willing Queens in Rowley's *When You See Me. You Know Me* and Shakespeare and Fletcher's *King Henry VIII*"**

In *King Henry VIII*, Katherine of Aragon verbally conveys the contents of her will to Caputius, Ambassador to Charles V, as well as to the few remaining loyal members of her court. Her will is both specific and hopeless, full of rhetorical gestures asking that Henry remember her as former queen and mother of his first heir, and based on this memory, honor her last requests. We do not see if her will is honored. Like Katherine of Aragon, *When You See Me, You Know Me* gives us queens in their last moments--or what might prove to be their last moments--making requests of the king, their husband. These requests attempt to assert Jane Seymour's and Katherine Parr's will and control their posthumous memory, somewhat unsuccessfully. Wills can be employed to do more than divvy up property and funds; they can request specific funeral arrangements (as Katherine of Aragon's does) and give memorial tokens or provide for loved ones via received honors. The care invested in the will acts as a kind of memorial itself, crafting a final identity for dying queen. What happens to the queen whose wills fail to be executed? I argue that wills, or final requests, in these two plays about Henry VIII's queens offer a specific memory of each queen even while performing the erasure of that same memory.

**Marissa Nicosia (Penn State Abington)**

**"Remembering and Forgetting in the History Play"**

The prologue to William Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *All is True/Henry VIII* proposes a theory of history playmaking that invites audiences to witness and interpret historical events as they unfold on the stage. The prologue implores the audience: "Think ye see / The very persons of our noble story / As they were living."<sup>1</sup> The imperative "think" urges a spectating or reading audience to remember or even to transport themselves from the present into the recent past (25). The prologue demands that the audience "see" the historical persons "as they were living," but newly embodied by actors or imagination (25, 27). The audience must join the playwright and the actors in the work of remembering and forgetting: They will witness the greatness and the misery that will unfold in the play, but has already happened. It is also likely that the audience would know about these kings, queens, and other noble persons or have even seen visual representations such as popular woodcut images that circulated in ballads, chapbooks, and other printed works. Moreover, the prologue's imperative does not simply reveal a tension between the historical record and the play – either experienced through embodied actors on the stage or an act of solitary or communal reading. It also attests to the larger issues of remembering the past, inhabiting the present, and predicting the future in early modern culture. In this paper I examine the dynamics of remembering and forgetting in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *All is True*. I argue here (and in a chapter of my book manuscript)

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<sup>1</sup> John Fletcher and William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII (All is True)*, ed. Gordon McMullan (London: Arden, 2000), Prologue 25-7.

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that cultural memory and oblivion are a crucial part of dramatic renditions of national pasts and futures.

**Dan Normandin (Washington University in St. Louis)**

**"The Pict and the Virginian: Colonial Memory in *Cymbeline*"**

A late romance; an unsettled island; nascent colonialism. No, not *that* play. *The Tempest* may be the most famous literary statement on Renaissance colonialism, but my paper argues that *Cymbeline* stages an even more searching political analysis precisely because it remembers the colonial past of Shakespeare's own nation. Its "prewritten" or primordial political space is Roman Britain itself, a colonized territory whose frontier settlement at Lud's Town lies not far from the Welsh wilderness, where the banished lord Belarius has raised the eponymous king's sons as "rustic mountaineers." Reading this mutually reinforcing paradigm of court and wilderness, civilization and primitivism, I show that the "nostalgic," backward-looking, antiquarian treatment of ancient Britain in *Cymbeline* is of a piece with the forward-looking presentation of new territories in *The Tempest*. As Shakespeare's work of nationalized cultural memory demonstrates, colonial rhetoric depends on a translation not only across space but across time; it demands the excavation, not just the discovery, of new worlds.

**Lieke Stelling (Utrecht University)**

**"Memory, Religion and the Early Modern English Jest Book"**

While it has been suggested that the Reformation strictures on festive culture and many forms of laughter resulted in a *de facto* separation of humour from the sacred, the presence of (pre-Reformation) jokes about religion in a wide range of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century jest books and comical prose narratives serves as a reminder of a persistent correlation between the two. This correlation often manifests itself in the ridiculing of religious enemies, notably in the form of anti-Catholic satire. However, not all post-Reformation religious humour was of a divisive or polemical nature.

In this paper, I will argue that humour in jestbooks and comical prose narratives was also employed to emphasize communality that was forged in the past, even in relation to confessional difference. This is because jest book wit itself was firmly rooted in pre-Reformation (oral) traditions, expressing a sense of nostalgia that was, moreover, aimed at all strata of society. In addition, humour could also serve as a cathartic imaginative space in which incongruities of faith, for instance in relation to death, could be addressed without antagonizing members of other confessions. I will pay special attention to the anonymous comical prose narrative *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* (1607), which presents the story of a post-Reformation world that seems untouched by the Protestant Reformation and is strikingly sympathetic to Catholic traditions. Exploring the ways in which it combines humour and religion, I will argue that jest book humour played an important but overlooked role in early modern English acts of remembering and cherishing the shared religious past.

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**Catherine Elliott Tisdale (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)**

**"Choosing to Remember:  
The Function of Forgetting in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humor*"**

Strategically forgetting information that does not fit neatly within one's worldview is a talent that many have mastered in the current social and political climate, but it is not a new phenomenon. The epistemological maneuver of "disknowledge," a term coined by Katherine Eggert, works as a strategy for managing information and risk, allowing members of the same society to craft different epistemologies and logics. In this paper, I argue that Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* uses transformation as a revelatory process through which forms of disknowledge are generated, compounded, and ridiculed. The country gallant, Stephen, his city-wise cousin, Edward, and the braggard, Bobadill, triangulate discourse on typology, forgetting, and the transformative potential of early modern London.

**Evelyn Tribble (University of Connecticut)**

**"A good sprag memory":  
remembering and forgetting in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*"**

In this essay, I want to ask whether memory and forgetting can be seen homologous across micro-level phenomena such as verbal memory; thematic or internal preoccupations within the play; and reception, thought of in the context as a form of cultural memory. My test case is *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play that prompts consideration of memory at multiple levels.

A. C. Bradley wrote that all of Shakespeare's characters, "in passing from the mind of their creator into other minds, suffer change; they tend to lose their harmony through the disproportionate attention bestowed on some one feature, or to lose their uniqueness by being conventionalised into types already familiar.<sup>2</sup> Thus far Bradley's observation sounds strikingly like Cambridge psychologist F. C. Bartlett's famous account of the processes of familiarization, rationalism and conventionalism that govern story-telling. In this account, cultural memory is a form of forgetting, of burnishing the rough edges off of a narrative so that "it may be accepted without uneasiness, and without question."<sup>3</sup> But Bradley goes on to say that Falstaff "was degraded by Shakespeare himself," a position that has been taken by many critics who accused Shakespeare of forgetting the Falstaff of the history plays. In contrast, I argue that the explicit attention to acts of remembering in the play point to resistance to the sentimental reception of the character; in turn, its critical reception shows how Shakespearean scholarship can be itself subject to the psychological processes of familiarization, rationalism and conventionalism.

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<sup>2</sup> A. C. Bradley, "The Rejection of Falstaff," *Fortnightly review* (May 1902), 849.

<sup>3</sup> F.C. Bartlett, 'Some experiments on the reproduction of folk stories', *Folk-Lore*, 31 (1920), 30-47 (p. 37).