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A New Contribution to Early Modern Memory Studies

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Shaping Remembrance from Shakespeare to Milton by Patricia Phillippy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 269 pp. Hardcover \$110.00.

Patricia Phillippy's latest publication is a complex and intriguing project. Whereas many studies exploring the field of early modern memory studies have trained their readers' attentions resolutely upon the axis of time or space, *Shaping Remembrance from Shakespeare to Milton* places its discussions firmly in a situational logic, theoretically framed by the referencing of the phenomenological thinking of Merleau-Ponty—"the crisscrossing of the self and the world" (qtd. in Phillippy, 85)—among others. Phillippy acknowledges the widely held contention down the ages that memorial prowess might serve as an index to selfhood, but extends her study further by formulating the vision of collaborative cultural matrices in the early modern period whereby objects and their subjects emerge as "mutual partners in acts and performances of memory" (13). The quarries in this study are many and various, extending to the fields of architectural, monumental, textile, jewelry, textual, and literary interest as well as to the curiosities of *wunderkammern*. In this fluent and absorbing discussion, the dominant metaphor that guides the reader through one consideration of remembrance—"the retrieval and reuse of remnants of the past" (1)—speaking to another through multiple experiences of materiality is that of "bleeding through" a sequence of cultural planes: "I remove monuments from

limited antiquarian and parochial interests to locate them in provocative relationship with early modern texts” (9).

The study begins by examining how material artefacts in the early modern period might, or might not, be seen to preserve and to renew the past. Here, the initial test case of humanist attitudes towards the perceived properties of amber—“capable of quasi-miraculous works, valued for its curative properties, mysteriously endowed with a magnetism . . . and emitting a sweet smell” (5)—remains highly illuminating and offers an excellent base from which to launch an ambitious investigation into early modern material culture in seventeenth-century England. Phillippy’s account of the post-Reformation island realm negotiating a change of focus in its cultures of worship “from the spiritual efficacy of remembrance toward a proliferation of its material displays” (8) remains highly readable and complements in its meticulous detail other key contributions that have already been made to this lively field of scholarly studies.

In her first chapter, Phillippy explores early modern cultural discourses of iconography and iconoclasm as sometimes remarkably evenly matched in a number of narratives of post-Reformation religious communities. Equally illuminatingly, in the same way that some studies of Medieval

drama have pointed to the ways in which materials and properties by companies were rescued and recycled for alternative forms of performance, this study looks at how certain ecclesiastical practices and objects might be discarded, recovered, and redeployed according to the changeful environments of parish and household affiliations. Detailed accounts of the architectural and monumental spaces of church buildings (notably an enquiry into the reported motivations and actions that characterized the violent transformation of Peterborough cathedral) as well as revealing insights into the commemorative practices identified at the heart of early modern family life (especially that of the Northamptonshire Puritan family of the Montagus) build incrementally to offer the reader a rich and complex panorama of early modern society’s theatres of remembrance.

Phillippy’s emphases upon the staging and performance of memory in such locales seamlessly leads to a sequence of insights into selected dramatic works such as Shakespeare’s late romances (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*) and Milton’s *Comus*. The initial account of *Cymbeline* is among the most intriguing, foregrounding the motifs of “dispersal and reincorporation” (94) linked to Innogen’s roles as wife, daughter, and sister. Exploring how the romance’s narrative may be seen to be structured

around attempted sacraments and rites (and, on occasions, their failures), Phillippy draws attention to the ways in which figures come back and forth from perceived afterlives to shape present experience: thus, “when her brothers lay Innogen (as Fidele) to rest, they perform a ritual that is improvised, yet recycled; natural, but framed by supernatural intimations” (115). In later discussion, an account of Tradescant’s collection of curiosities and its eventual procurement by Elias Ashmole leads to an impressively creative analysis of the wondrous objects, knowledge, and characters populating *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*: “The confluence of remembrance and loss in the cabinet, as in the romance, is expressed in a preoccupation with beautiful remains” (166), and, from this perspective, Cerimon emerges as “at once a collector and magus” (176).

The final discussions in this wide-ranging collection bring together *The Winter’s Tale*, *Comus*, and the memorials (textual and monumental) to Anne Bradstreet. A consideration of the role of Shakespeare’s Paulina to enforce “continual remembrance” (205) upon the grieving Leontes is also combined with an appreciation of her as facilitating familial renewal in the play’s royal dynasty with the recovery of Hermione from her status as monument. An analogous function is identified subsequently for Milton’s Sabrina who intervenes,

redeems, and resolves the physical and metaphysical crises of temptation visited upon the chaste and/or innocent wanderers in the enchanted forest. Phillippy finally turns to Bradstreet’s “Dialogue between Old England and New” for a final iteration of her interest in the way in which early modern discourses of remembrance *crisscrossed* across material distances and planes of experience and may thus be seen to create memorial “points of convergence . . . [in] aesthetic, religious, political, and cultural” terms (234). In short, *Shaping Remembrance from Shakespeare to Milton* constitutes an ambitious, wide-ranging analysis of early modern English practices of commemoration, straddling the disciplines of literary, historical, and architectural study as well as those of the applied arts, and will not fail to excite further enquiries on the part of the reader as it unfolds.

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