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978-1-107-04277-3 - Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory

Edited by Clara Calvo and Coppélia Kahn

Excerpt

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Introduction: Shakespeare and commemoration

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This book participates in the worldwide commemoration of Shakespeare in 2016, the four hundredth anniversary of his death. Like the performances, exhibits, academic conferences, television shows, film festivals, t-shirts, tea towels and postage stamps likely to mark that special year, this volume can never fully succeed in the chimerical goal of making Shakespeare a monument, something permanent, the same throughout time, an ‘ever-fixed mark.’¹ Yet for centuries, commemoration of Shakespeare has persisted, and recently, with digital technology to beam it across the globe, increased.

Whatever Shakespeare has become in the four hundred years since he died, the diverse practices of commemoration have had a lot to do with it. No one could deny that Shakespeare deserves to be famous for his myriad achievements as a writer, but it must also be admitted that his fame has outstripped both the man and his writings. He is still, as he has been since the eighteenth century, an icon of Englishness wherever English is spoken, but he is now woven into the cultural fabric of many nations. His name is current almost anywhere in the world, and especially in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, India and Europe. Shakespeare has indeed become what Graham Holderness calls ‘the Shakespeare myth’: ‘A powerful cultural institution, constructed around the figure of Shakespeare, that [can] be analysed to some degree separately from the person of the Elizabethan dramatist, and the texts of his works’.² This myth, refurbished as tastes, technology, interpretive fashions or political interests change, sustains the poet’s cultural presence as a ‘timeless’ figure even as, through time, it changes.

Though this book was called into existence by the Quatercentenary, its fifteen essays, we believe, differ from other anniversary observances

¹ William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116, line 5, in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 100.

² Graham Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare: Essays in the Shakespeare Myth* (Hatfield, Herts: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), ix.

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because they offer a critical perspective on the very activity in which they participate. They bring analytical scrutiny to the diverse forms commemoration takes, the political interests it has engaged, the philosophical questions inherent in it, the kinds of cultural work it does in the name of praising Shakespeare. Commemoration has a long history, beginning with the edition of Shakespeare's plays collected and published by John Heminge and Henry Condell in 1623. *Celebrating Shakespeare* isn't intended to be a comprehensive survey, however, though several essays deal with significant historical high points: the Garrick Jubilee of 1769 and the anniversary festivities of 1816, 1864, 1916 and 1964, for example. Rather, these essays present ways of understanding why and how Shakespeare has been celebrated at certain moments: not only according to the calendar of anniversaries, but in many other forms as well, and always in dense social contexts: war, international relations, tourism and commerce, modernism, imperialism, popular culture, social conflict. By not offering a survey of anniversaries, we aim to transcend the 'cult of the centenary' and explore forms of commemoration which are often excluded from official celebrations, such as gardens, cartoons, replicas or parodies. Through these case studies, we aim to understand how various modes of celebrating Shakespeare depend on certain tropes, but may also transform them; what discourses they appropriate, what debates they engage in, how they influence and perpetuate the poet's presence in the world.

Modes of celebration are diverse, to be sure, but we discern several problematics underlying that diversity: unresolvable contradictions and theoretical issues that run through these essays. The first is the dilemma of any memorial: in the face of inexorable change, how to represent a lost object of the past to an audience in the present. When Ovid, probably the poet who most inspired Shakespeare, came to the end of the *Metamorphoses*, he proclaimed that it would last as long as the Roman Empire lasted:

And now my work is done: no wrath of Jove
nor fire nor sword nor time, which would erode
all things, has power to blot out this poem . . .
And everywhere that Roman power has sway,
in all domains the Latins gain, my lines
Will be on people's lips . . .
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV³

³ *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, 1993), 549.

As it happens, his poem has outlasted that empire; in the original or in translation, we still speak his lines. However, as Supriya Chaudhuri says in this volume, ‘Texts and their readers exist in time... the “afterlives” of texts and artefacts negotiate multiple temporalities.’⁴ So do theatres, audiences, cities, schools, governments. Graham Holderness, in this volume, offers a helpful distinction between ‘rehearsal’ of Shakespeare as a figure ‘alien, incongruous, from the distant past’ (an image on a bank note, for example), and ‘remembrance’, which cultivates in the present an ‘antiqued’ poet (as in the annual Stratford-upon-Avon birthday celebrations).⁵

The Shakespeare we celebrate in 2016 is simply not the same author celebrated one or two hundred years, or even a decade, ago. Tradition would freeze the past for consumption today, but consumers eventually come to embrace, if not to crave, innovation. The performance tradition upheld by Betterton, for instance, which was believed to descend from the playwright himself, lasted two centuries until, as Richard Schoch explains, Henry Irving sensed that ‘if the theatre were to survive it would not be through veneration of the past, but through overt renewal’.⁶ As many essays in this book attest, memorialisation is nearly always belated: what is intended to be eternal eventually goes out of date. In 1926, when Henry Gullett’s heirs managed to erect the statue of Shakespeare in Sydney that their forebear had envisioned before he died in 1914, Philip Mead notes, the statue and the urban niche created for it ‘represented a backward-looking gesture of late-Victorian-Edwardian memorialisation’.⁷ The statue or memorial, as in Ovid’s lines, may survive fire, sword and time, may last in its physical form, but it will cease speaking to its viewers. It will no longer prompt them to remember Shakespeare, but rather will slip into a limbo of the outmoded, the done with and long gone – or, as Robert Musil declares, ‘Everything permanent loses its ability to impress.’⁸

⁴ Supriya Chaudhuri, ‘Remembering Shakespeare in India: colonial and postcolonial memory’, Chapter 5 in this volume.

⁵ Graham Holderness, ‘Remembrance of things past: Shakespeare 1851, 1951, 2012’, Chapter 4 in this volume.

⁶ Richard Schoch, ‘Commemorating Shakespeare in performance: Betterton and Irving’, Chapter 2 in this volume.

⁷ Philip Mead, ‘Lest we forget: Shakespeare tercentenary commemoration in Sydney and London, 1916’, Chapter 11 in this volume.

⁸ Robert Musil, ‘Monuments’, in *Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Burton Pike (New York: Continuum, 1986), 320–2.

Yet, as Ton Hoenselaars points out, certain statues of the poet ‘have become canonical worldwide’, proliferating not only in squares and parks but also in everyday objects such as key chains and bookends.⁹ Clara Calvo notes the visual hallmarks of the image of Shakespeare in tercentenary cartoons: doublet and hose, receding hairline, ample brow – visual tags still current in 2016.¹⁰ It is easy to dismiss such images as mere clichés. Nonetheless, as Hoenselaars demonstrates, they possess ‘sizeable cultural capital’. Furthermore, the histories of their creation, and in some cases eventual disappearance, reveal both passionate cultural investment in the poet and the vulnerability of such investment to the transience of tastes and to the violence of war: a statue of Shakespeare donated to the city of Paris in 1871 was melted down in 1941 for the war industry.¹¹ Similarly, topical, ephemeral cartoons, as Calvo shows, display a rich and healthy ambivalence toward the venerable poet, whose ‘presence is memorialized and questioned simultaneously’ in them.¹²

But what do we mean when we speak of remembering, or commemorating, ‘Shakespeare’? In commemoration, the slippage between the man and his works in the familiar metonymy becomes problematic. We can no longer assume that the playwright who didn’t even own his play scripts (they belonged to the Lord Chamberlain’s or the King’s Men) wrote them only to be performed, or showed no interest in publishing them.¹³ Still, it fell to his colleagues Heminge and Condell, the otherwise undistinguished actors, ‘to keepe the memory of so worthy a Friend, and Fellow, alive’, by publishing the best copies of his plays they could find in a handsome Folio volume.¹⁴ To them, he was both friend and colleague, but the mode of memorialisation they chose evokes Shakespeare not as friend but rather as author: they kept the man’s memory alive by preserving his writings, so that his words might still be on our lips, centuries later. That is the form of commemoration in which Ovid trusted.

⁹ Ton Hoenselaars, ‘Sculpted Shakespeare’, Chapter 13 in this volume.

¹⁰ Clara Calvo, ‘Brought up to date: Shakespeare in cartoons’, Chapter 12, *passim*.

¹¹ Hoenselaars, Chapter 13. ¹² Calvo, Chapter 12.

¹³ See Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2013), *passim*. Erne argues that Shakespeare consciously aimed to have his plays published as well as performed.

¹⁴ Quoted in David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 55.

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It was Ben Jonson who first articulated the problematic that subtends the metonymy of man for writings, in his poem, ‘To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author William Shakespeare: And What He Hath Left Us’, one of several prefatory poems included in the Folio edition of 1623. To memorialise Shakespeare, Jonson adopts a time-honoured trope of poetic fame used by Horace, Ovid and Shakespeare himself:

Thou art a Monument, without a tombe,
And art alive still, while thy Booke doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.¹⁵

Jonson creates a metonymy for Shakespeare as an author in his ‘Booke’. Though the author is physically dead, metonymically he lives on in his book, because those living in the present moment read his work. Similarly, Ovid proclaims that his poem will survive the ravages of time because in posterity, readers will speak his lines. ‘Thy Booke’, the Folio, in attracting readers, is meant to displace and render superfluous any ostentatious ‘Moniment’ gracing the tomb of a once-living human being. Because this metonymy has become a cliché, we no longer attend to the conditional phrase that limits it: Shakespeare is ‘alive still’ only ‘while ... we have wits to read’ what’s in his book. Like Ovid, Jonson wants the poet’s lines, more than the poet as man, to be remembered. We *misread* Jonson’s metonymy when we confound Shakespeare the man with his writing, as commemoration of Shakespeare over subsequent centuries has, with few exceptions, confounded it. The cult of Shakespeare as man, rather than an appreciation of his works, has largely dominated commemoration.

It is possible that neither the man nor his works, extraordinary as they are, might have survived to be commemorated today. Samuel Schoenbaum notes, in his study of biographies of Shakespeare, that the poet ‘did not in his day inspire the mysterious veneration that afterwards came to surround him. No playwright in that day did, and certainly no actor.’¹⁶ Between the 1623 Folio and, say, Rowe’s edition of 1709, any eminence won for the poet by the Folio might well have vanished. Between his death in 1616 and the Restoration in 1660,

¹⁵ Ben Jonson, ‘To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us’, lines 22–4, in *The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson*, ed. William B. Hunter, Jr (New York University Press, 1963), 372–4.

¹⁶ Samuel Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare’s Lives*, new edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 36.

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the Folio was reprinted only once, in 1632, and though scores of his contemporaries' plays were published, only three of his were reprinted. Plays by his contemporaries were staged despite the law forbidding it, but only three scenes from his were performed by vagabond players. Though his works were 'occasionally ... plagiarized or echoed or quoted', or 'summarily judged in passing', no extended discussion of them in that forty-four year period exists.¹⁷ He was rescued from a likely oblivion mainly by the enterprising theatrical manager William Davenant, his godson. When the theatres re-opened in 1660, Davenant begged a few old Shakespeare scripts considered less desirable than those of Beaumont and Fletcher, and his innovative productions of these plays drew crowds.¹⁸ Till the end of the seventeenth century, however, 'most people who saw his plays performed could not have known that Shakespeare wrote the plays they were seeing', because those plays were adapted by contemporary playwrights to suit contemporary tastes. It wasn't his name, but rather, acclaimed actors and the social cachet of theatre going, that drew audiences.¹⁹

Without the pre-eminence of David Garrick as actor, theatrical manager and publicist, it is doubtful that we'd be celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death this year. True, the proliferation of eighteenth-century editions brought new attention to his 'Booke', and his plays were performed more and more, but it was Garrick who inaugurated the commemoration of the poet not, as Jonson stipulated, by reading that book, but rather by the social practice of festivities celebrating the man. Of course, Garrick had already won the adulation of theatre-goers by his stunning performances in Shakespearean roles, and that fame enabled him to engage the general public in his Jubilee, putting the poet on England's cultural calendar in a way that no other English author had so far enjoyed or ever would.

Garrick established rituals of bardolatry that endure to this day, notably in the annual Shakespeare's birthday celebration in Stratford-upon-Avon. First of all, in calling his celebration of Shakespeare a 'jubilee', Garrick linked it to the calendar, and paved the way for

¹⁷ Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 11–12.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, 14, 23, 36.

¹⁹ Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660–1740* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), ix, 7–9.

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such celebrations to be repeated periodically, for the word denotes a special anniversary – a twenty-fifth, fiftieth, sixtieth or seventy-fifth anniversary. Jubilees having long been appropriated by the Catholic Church to designate years of special plenary indulgence, however, in 1769 had become politically fraught. As Peter Holland explains in this volume, ‘jubilee’ struck a cultural nerve by associating the national poet with practices considered alien and papist.²⁰ We cannot document, even today, the exact date of the poet’s birth, for the parish register records only his baptism.²¹ Since that date was close to 23 April, the day celebrating St George, England’s patron saint, when the poet’s fame had been well established, 23 April became his birthday.²² The date wasn’t determined by fact but driven, rather, by the Shakespeare myth. Nonetheless, in pegging a lavish public celebration of Shakespeare to a regular calendrical interval, Garrick initiated a cultural habit that took firm hold. Arbitrary as birthdays are, they recur regularly; they are the subalterns of commemoration.

As is well known, Garrick’s three-day extravaganza didn’t include a single performance of Shakespeare’s plays or even a recitation of his poems. What was performed over and over again in various modes was an *idea* of Shakespeare, or rather, of Garrick’s partnership with the Bard, for Garrick had long linked his name to Shakespeare’s.²³ The actor had reintroduced neglected plays, and built a temple to Shakespeare at his estate in Hampton; Gainsborough had painted him with one arm draped around a bust of the poet.²⁴ The acme of Garrick’s several Jubilee expressions of adulation for the poet at the Jubilee was his ‘Ode . . . to Shakespeare’, which he had written himself and which he declaimed to great effect, invoking Shakespeare in the memorable epithet, ‘The god of our idolatry!’²⁵ Again, the emphasis falls on the man, not the works.

²⁰ Peter Holland, ‘David Garrick: saints, temples and jubilees’, Chapter 1 in this volume.

²¹ Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare’s Lives*, 7–8.

²² Peter Holland, ‘William Shakespeare’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (Oxford University Press, 2004): www.oxforddnb.com. Accessed 15 October 2014.

²³ Christian Deelman, *The Great Shakespeare Jubilee* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), 74.

²⁴ Deelman, *Great Shakespeare Jubilee*, 71, 97–9.

²⁵ David Garrick, *Garrick’s Ode*, rpt. in Martha Winburn England, *Garrick’s Jubilee* (Ohio State University Press, 1964), Appendix B, 251–3, line 14.

By calling Shakespeare ‘Sweet Swan of Avon’, Garrick’s ode cemented a certain representation of the poet that Jonson’s poem had forecast.²⁶ Garrick situated the Jubilee not in London, where the poet lived most of his life and where he probably wrote most of his works, but in the country town by the Avon, in Garrick’s words, ‘Where Nature led him by the hand, / Instructed him in all she knew, / And gave him absolute command!’²⁷ As Nicola Watson shows in this volume, Garrick’s identification of Shakespeare with ‘Nature’ was extended, through the custom of Shakespeare gardens, to the ‘topobiographical’ idea of ‘an organic continuity between land and poet mediated by flora’.²⁸ Similarly, Katherine Scheil’s essay documents the role of Anne Hathaway’s cottage not only in securing the image of Shakespeare as a Warwickshire poet, but also as a rural lover wooing Anne among fields and flowers. During the Second World War, a photo of the cosy thatched house was captioned, ‘There’ll always be an England!’, identifying it, and Shakespeare, with a nostalgic idea of a pastoral, pre-industrial nation.²⁹

Stratford-upon-Avon, no longer pastoral, is now sustained by the tourist industry, yet no matter how global or multicultural, post colonial or post modern the presence of Shakespeare has become in film adaptations, avant-garde theatrical performances, and video games, the ‘Shakespeare calendar’ continues to mark anniversaries of the poet’s birth and death. As we emerge from the 2014 celebrations and plunge into those of 2016, it seems a good idea to ask how they perpetuate Shakespeare, and what kind of Shakespeare they perpetuate.

As French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs suggested in *On Collective Memory*, published posthumously in 1950, ‘collective memory’ is to be distinguished from written history based on documents pertaining to the past and produced by trained scholars. It also differs from autobiographical memories of events personally experienced by individuals. In contrast, collective memory is created by and within a group, and group experience is essential to its creation. That experience, says Halbwachs, creates the framework or context that enables

²⁶ Jonson, ‘To the Memory of My Beloved . . .’, line 71.

²⁷ *Garrick’s Ode*, lines 10–12.

²⁸ Nicola J. Watson, ‘Gardening with Shakespeare’, Chapter 14 in this volume.

²⁹ Katherine West Scheil, ‘Anne Hathaway’s Cottage: myth, tourism, diplomacy’, Chapter 15 in this volume.

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memory of any kind. Each person's memory may be particular to her or him but, says Halbwachs, 'We can remember only on condition of retrieving the position of past events that interest us from the frameworks of collective memory . . . landmarks that we always carry within ourselves.'³⁰

Building on Halbwachs's idea of frameworks and contexts, the anthropologist Paul Connerton stresses performance and repetition as key factors in the creation of collective memory. By coming together to perform rituals that they repeat regularly, he argues, groups form collective habits and collective memories. Connerton identifies a 'rhetoric of reenactment' in which everyday life is 'envisaged as a structure of exemplary recurrences'. This rhetoric consists of 'calendrically observed repetition' – celebrating the same thing on the same day at regular intervals, through verbal and gestural repetition.³¹ These kinds of repetition make up rituals, and the important thing about rituals is that people have to perform them. They have to say certain things, make certain motions, and repeat them from one year to the next. When they do, they create cultural memory.

Eric Hobsbawm, the influential British historian, connects the foregoing ideas of collective memory to a historical moment in which 'invented tradition' began to shape public symbolic discourse. His idea of tradition has strong affinities with Connerton's 'rhetoric of reenactment'. Defining tradition as 'a set of practices . . . governed by rules of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms . . . by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past', Hobsbawm argues that tradition is 'invented' most often when rapid social change 'weakens or destroys the social patterns for which "old" traditions had been designed'. 'Where the old traditions are alive', he writes, 'traditions need be neither revived nor invented.'³² He identifies the period 1870–1914 as one in which numbers of 'new official public holidays, ceremonies, heroes or symbols' arose, spurred by the demise or decline of monarchies, revolutions that produced new nations, and the need to create 'an alternative "civic religion" for 'a

³⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 172, 175.

³¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 65.

³² Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4, 5, 8.

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relatively large, upper middle class élite'. In this era, for example, Bastille Day (made official only in 1880), the Internationale, the Olympic Games and anniversaries of the British royal family (notably, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and her Diamond Jubilee in 1897) became major public events, ritualised, participatory and spectacular.³³ These rituals convey and sustain an image of the past, though they are in fact recently invented. In like fashion, at Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare's birthday is celebrated annually in a ritual initiated in 1824. A procession led by the boys of King Edward VI Grammar School starts at the Great Garden of New Place and ends at Holy Trinity Church, where an actor impersonating Shakespeare hands a quill pen to the head boy of the school, who carries it inside the church to Shakespeare's grave, thus 'symbolizing', says the website, 'Shakespeare's journey from the cradle to the grave'.³⁴ Despite the symbolism of the quill pen, again, the emphasis falls not on the literary heritage that the poet bequeaths, but rather, on his basic humanity.

It may be revealing to compare these calendrical commemorations to one centring on place: Shakespeare's so-called 'Birthplace', the house on Henley Street in Stratford-upon-Avon. If the rituals through which we celebrate Shakespeare are in large measure invented, so is the mystique surrounding the birthplace, which literally re-placed the house first associated with the Shakespeare Myth, New Place, when the latter was demolished in 1759, and took on its rituals of literary tourism.³⁵ Even more than birthday and centennial celebrations, the Birthplace mystique depends, as Julia Thomas argues, 'on the idea of Shakespeare as a real man to whose life the building bore witness'. At the Birthplace, as it was recreated and presented during the Victorian era, that 'real man' was shown to have 'an affinity with common people'; he lived according to 'the values of a pre-industrial community', and was represented, says Thomas, in terms of nostalgic yearnings for an uncomplicated past.³⁶

³³ Hobsbawm, 'Mass-producing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, 263, 269, 292.

³⁴ See www.shakespearesbirthday.org.uk.

³⁵ See Richard Schoch, 'The Birth of Shakespeare's Birthplace', *Theatre Survey* 53:2 (2012), 181–97.

³⁶ Julia Thomas, *Shakespeare's Shrine: The Bard's Birthplace and the Invention of Stratford-upon-Avon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 16, 5, 9.