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Skull and Other Histories

Howard Marchitello

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Howard Marchitello's study of narrative techniques in Renaissance discourse analyzes imaginative conjunctions of literary texts, such as those by Shakespeare and Thomas Browne, with developments in scientific and technical writing. In *Narrative and meaning in early modern England* he explores the relationship between a range of early modern discourses, such as cartography, anatomy, and travel writing, and the developing sense of the importance of narrative in producing meaning. Narrative was used in the Renaissance as both a mode of discourse and an epistemology; it produced knowledge, but also dictated how that knowledge should be understood. Marchitello uses a wide range of cultural documents to illustrate the importance of narrative in constructing the Renaissance understanding of time and identity. By highlighting the inherent textual element in imaginative and scientific discourses, his study also evaluates a range of contemporary critical practices and explores their relation to narrative and the production of meaning.

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# Narrative and meaning in early modern England

*Browne's skull and other histories*

Howard Marchitello

*Texas A&M University*



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When the bones of King *Arthur* were digged up, the old *Race* might think, they beheld therein some Originals of themselves; Unto these of our Urnes none here can pretend relation, and can only behold the Reliques of those persons, who in their life giving the Laws unto their predecessors, after long obscurity, now lye at their mercies. But remembering the early civility they brought upon these Countreys, and forgetting long passed mischiefs; We mercifully preserve their bones, and pisse not upon their ashes.

(Sir Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia, Urne-Buriall*)

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