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Introduction: 'the dark backward and abysm of time'

PROSPERO Canst thou remember
A time before we came unto this cell?
I do not think thou canst, for then thou was not
Out three years old.
MIRANDA Certainly, sir, I can.
PROSPERO By what? by any other house or person?
Of any thing the image tell me, that
Hath kept with thy remembrance.
…
What seest thou else
In the dark backward and abysm of time?
…
ARIEL Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,
Let me remember thee what thou hast promis'd
Which is not yet perform'd me.
…
PROSPERO Dost thou forget
From what a torment I did free thee?
…
CALIBAN This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me …

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii.38–44, 49–50, 242–4, 250–1, 333–5[1]

In many ways the entire unfolding of *The Tempest* is framed by coercive acts of memory prompted in the minds of the island inhabitants by keen experiences of absence and lack. Such retrospective endeavours excite many of these figures not only to recall their implication in the *doings* of the past but, equally importantly, to 'remember themselves' – to reflect urgently upon the ethical business of self-government. More generally, these carefully orchestrated performances compel audiences on- and off-stage to ponder, like Miranda, their own trajectories from a 'dark

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backward'. As may be witnessed in the extracts above from the second scene of Shakespeare's play, this symbolic practice of remembering is disciplinary in nature. Here, Prospero (and he has a number of imitators among the islanders) seeks to control those around him by carefully monitoring the relationships between memory and epiphany for his growing community, attempting to allow only restricted access to the changeful materials of the past.

The narrative drive in *The Tempest* to structure human experience in terms of recovery and retrieval is clearly in evidence from our very first encounters with those who find themselves on the magic island: in Act One we are swiftly presented with an all too persuasive human order in which the organising principles of society depend strategically upon the flexing of (selective) memory, the spectacle of violence and access to secret knowledge. In recent times Paul Ricoeur has invited his readers to consider that the revisiting of the past may not only disclose expectations relating to the ways in which our cultural identities are formulated but also open up 'forgotten possibilities, aborted potentialities, repressed endeavours in the supposedly closed past. One of the functions of history in this respect is to lead us back to those moments of the past where the future was not yet decided, where the past was itself a space of experience open to a horizon of expectation.'[2] Clearly, the subject positions of agency that Ricoeur describes here are eminently attractive to both Ariel and Caliban: instead of sharing Prospero's appetite for fixity (a bid for *emplotment* in Ricoeur's critical lexis[3]), these minions wish to interrogate the master's wisdom, and thus cumulatively offer competing angles of vision on a past that attend most particularly to questions of trauma, violation and obligation. Prospero is continually pained by the realisation that those around him are unwilling or unable to perform the labours of memory that define his very existence; yet in this final phase of his island residence he is condemned to maintain relationships with these unruly underlings in order to frame authoritative narratives of sovereignty and identity for the newly arrived Europeans.

An account of the (often desperate) competition for cultural narrativisation that lies at the heart of *The Tempest* also shapes this present study. Charting the burgeoning debate concerning memory through the strategic textual interventions of a series of early modern writers, I seek to uncover the ways in which sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century writers fully exploited the intellectual riches of the classical and medieval centuries on the subject made available by the increasingly vigorous industry of the printing presses. However, equally importantly, this study highlights how these philosophical and theological legacies were expressed

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in English textual cultures as a response to: the traumas of religious schism and widely articulated desires for social mobility; the pervasive European influences of *Petrarchismo*; the radically changing constructs of intellectual and cultural leadership; as well as the challenges posed by those who sought scientific and technological innovation. For a society that was enormously diversifying its understandings of epistemology and, indeed, ontological difference, it was inevitable that key concepts associated with acts of cognition, such as *memoria*, would undergo intense and sustained interrogation.

Each of the chapters that follow engages with some of the major perspectives upon memorial debate during the Tudor and Jacobean periods (Platonic, Aristotelian, Augustinian, rhetorical, historiographical, somatic, technological) and the various discussions relating to different decades, different authors, different reading communities, different textual genres are designed to be open – suggestive – rather than exhaustive. The very different narrative techniques and reading strategies that early modern writers employed to examine the status and functions of memory not only point to a consuming interest of critical speculation from the reign of Henry VIII to that of James VI/I but also to the Age's radically changing formulations of subjectivity that coexisted and spoke to each other across social, intellectual and religious divides.

THE ANXIETY OF MEMORY

Andreas Huyssen has proposed for contemporary audiences that 'It does not require much theoretical sophistication to see that all representation – whether in language, narrative, image, or recorded sound – is based on memory'.[4] And, as we have seen, nowhere does this become more evident than in a work such as *The Tempest* whose intrigue has its roots in the protagonist's failure to 'remember' his own ducal obligations of service. As the play opens, Miranda is beginning to negotiate the disorienting possibilities of adult experience, and is progressively exposed to the uneasy economy of control at work on the island. Nonetheless, if her father seeks to restrain those around him with a *grand narrative* of the past, Shakespeare's late romance (like his earlier tragedy *Hamlet*) urges us repeatedly to consider the desperate struggle that is being enacted to establish what *should be* remembered and to consider the very partial nature of any human act of memory. If, in the *Arcadia*, Sidney's 'good Kalander' submits (aptly in the Shakespearean context of this discussion) that 'too much thinking doth consume the spirits and oft it falles out, that while one thinkes too much

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of his doing, he leaues to doe the effect of his thinking', we directly learn that even this bountiful host did not stint in remembering 'how much *Arcadia* was chaunged since his youth … according to the nature of the growing world, stil worse and worse'.[5] Indeed, the irrepressible, unmasterable, competitive, multifarious nature of memory is a subject that has preoccupied much cultural debate in recent years. Pierre Nora has argued for a memory that is 'par nature, multiple et démultipliée, collective, plurielle et individualisée', whereas Mary Warnock has drawn attention in an equally telling manner to the profoundly individuated nature of recollection: 'Insofar as each living creature persists through time as a separate distinguishable individual thing, it can be said to have its own history, to live its own life. Therefore each has its own memory and makes its own choices in the light of its own past.'[6]

That the past may be subject to revision clearly renders Prospero and all the other islanders progressively insecure. Indeed, this seemingly obsessive theme runs the length of the play and has a direct analogue in the anxieties repeatedly expressed in the anti-theatrical literature of the early modern period – anxieties that theatregoers (among other hedonists) would succumb to all kinds of amnesia and 'forget' themselves in the seductive environment of the *wooden O*. In a fairly representative specimen of this writing, *Spiritus est vicarius Christi in terra* (1577), John Northbrooke lamented that

> we kepe ioly cheare one with an other in banquetting, surfeting and dronkennesse, also we vse al the night long, in ranging from town to town and from house to house with Mummeries and Maskes, Diceplaying, Carding and Dauncing, hauing nothing lesse in our memories than the day of death: for Salomon, byddeth vs remember our end and last day, and then we shal neuer do amisse: but they remember it not, therfore they do amisse.[7]

Interestingly, the Oxford academic John Rainolds would take up this enquiry with renewed vigour in *Th'overthrow of stage-playes* (1599), attacking the temptations supposedly on offer in the theatre environment with remorseless moral outrage. However, Rainolds's wide-ranging account of sinful practices linked to the theatre would not have come as a surprise to his readers on this occasion: for his Oxford printer, John Lichfield, had helpfully taken the trouble in a prefatory discussion to set the reader's pulse racing by summoning up the whole panorama of a fallen populace that seemed to have severed all links with its spiritual and moral inheritance and given itself over to the forbidden fruits of forgetfulness.[8]

Inevitably, the early modern reader was also repeatedly encouraged to ponder the antithesis to the amnesiac horde and to greet with rejoicing

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those enviable individuals who unfailingly displayed the gifts of a well-tempered memory. The popular collection *A Helpe to memory and discourse with table-talke as musicke to a banquet of wine* (1619, attributed to William Basse) organised such meditations in dialogue form:

> Q. Who haue the best naturall Memories?
> A. They that exercise them most, and abuse them least: and therefore I haue knowne diuers vnlettered persons trusting onely to strength of Memory, could record and retaine much more then the Scholler or Penman that committeth all to Record.[9]

Discussions such as these clearly demonstrate the breadth of early modern memorial debate, and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* reflects upon and interrogates at length many of the contemporary expectations surrounding the faculty. This present study not only explores the very different cultural appetites and motivations that governed the cultural perception of memory in the early modern period, it also seeks to throw light upon the ways in which more modern fixations with remembering (in terms of formulating an index to selfhood, consolidating structures of cultural ownership and privilege, or restoring collapsed mythologies of belonging, for example) may find analogues or counter-evidence when we travel back to the documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It has become a common practice in contemporary debates, most especially those spanning our very own millennial divide, to scrutinise the ways in which memory is constituted culturally and to promote its operations as the *raw material* for productions of the self, despite its seemingly weakening hold on our cultural life. In his collection *Twilight Memories* Huyssen draws attention to 'the deepening sense of crisis' in our experience of modernity, which, he insists, is triggered by 'the reproach that our culture is terminally ill with amnesia'.[10] Striking a similarly plangent note in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora contends that 'On ne parle tant de mémoire que parce qu'il n'y a plus'.[11] It is sobering to remember that such lines of thinking were frequently also being attributed with a specifically moral character some four hundred years earlier, as may be witnessed in William Rankins's tract *A Mirrour of Monsters* (1587). In this particular case, an exhaustive review of the general malaise of human delinquency is linked specifically to the faulty operations of memory:

> *Pythagoras* might warne men to auoyde such folly. But the infection of this vice is so contagious, that as the Ryuer *Laethes* maketh hym that drynketh therof, presentlie to forget his own condition & former deedes, so this damnable vice of idlenes, so besotteth the sences, and bewitcheth the myndes of menne, as they remembred not the profitable fruites of vertuous labor.[12]

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As we have seen, an analogous fear of memorial (and, thus, ethical) failure in his fellow creatures is clearly uppermost in the mind of Shakespeare's usurped ruler on the magic island. When Prospero performs his memorial labours at the beginning of the play in the desire to 'enlighten' his servants, his daughter and the new arrivals, he has also determined to renew power relationships in this society by stressing the burdens that his accounts of the past impose. In opposition to the unruly factions who seek to author their own destinies, Prospero reminds his various subjects of their own decaying knowledge and his own inevitable status as patriarch. As the historian J. H. Plumb underlined in *The Death of the Past*, in times of conflict 'the past has to be fought for as well as the present. Authority, once achieved, must have a secure and usable past'.[13] The deeply precarious nature of such an undertaking can only impress upon audiences on- and off-stage the very fragility of the social network that they inhabit – a network that requires constant renewal through acts of memory. Painfully aware of the terrifying provisionality of his own political order, Shakespeare's protagonist finds himself for most of the play attempting to shore up the collapsing limits of memory with spectacular acts of violence.

EARLY MODERN MEMORY AND ANTIQUITY

In her landmark study of medieval constructions of memory, Mary Carruthers observed that in our post-Romantic world 'when we think of our highest creative power, we think invariably of the imagination … Ancient and medieval people reserved *their* awe for memory.'[14] Carruthers's study (like Frances Yates's *The Art of Memory*, Paolo Rossi's *Logic and the Art of Memory* and, more recently, Janet Coleman's *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, Lina Bolzoni's *Gallery of Memory* and Mary Warnock's *Memory*)[15] has highlighted in a highly illuminating manner the ways in which a discourse of *memoria* became institutionalised in medieval culture and played a strategic role in the cultural debates of antiquity.[16] Indeed, an abiding interest in the properties of this faculty is recorded in the earliest writings of the Western tradition. Memory was imagined as the goddess Mnemosyne by the earliest Greeks, and among her offspring sired by Zeus (or Apollo) were traditionally numbered the nine Muses. An account of such mythologies clearly lived on into the Roman period, for Plutarch argued in his *Moralia* for the faculty's importance, as may be witnessed in the 1532 edition translated by Sir Thomas Elyot: 'Aboue all thynges the memorie of chylderne is to be exercised and kepte

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in vsage: for that is as it were the store house of lernynge … Memorie is named the mother of Muses.'[17] And, indeed, an appreciation of the exalted status accorded to Memory was common currency throughout the early modern period: in Book Three of *The Faerie Queene*, we discover Spenser hailing Clio, the Muse of history, as 'my dearest sacred Dame, | Daughter of *Phebus* and of *Memorye*' (III.iii.4); and in *The Castel of Memorie … Made by Gulielmus Gratarolus Bergomatis Doctor of Artes and Phisike. Englished by Willyam Fulwood* (1562) the reader is reminded that 'the poetes not without a cause haue feyned wisdome to be the daughter of Memory'.[18]

The imbrication of cultural expectations surrounding wisdom, history and memory had clearly been occupying thinkers since earliest times, and in his dialogue *Meno* Plato made one of his most influential contributions to this debate. Here, the mentor Socrates impresses upon the young Meno that, 'As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things'.[19] The later *Phaedo* affirms that memory (rather than instruction) is the vital resource for the recapturing of residual knowledges surviving from prenatal engagement with a higher realm of Being, or Forms: the mentor Socrates argues that 'if we acquired … knowledge before birth, then lost it at birth, and then later … we recovered the knowledge we had before, would not what we call learning be the recovery of our own knowledge, and we are right to call this recollection'.[20] Equally evocative for later generations was the assertion made in *Theaetetus* that the faculty of memory might be construed symbolically as 'a block of wax' lodged in our spiritual being ('larger in one person, smaller in another'):

> SOCRATES We may look upon it, then, as a gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses. We make impressions upon this of everything we wish to remember among the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves; we hold the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and take a stamp from them, in the way in which we take the imprints of signet rings. Whatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget and do not know.[21]

Plato revealed in these constructions of memory not only a theory of human epistemology but a key perspective upon a transcendent realm whose mythic wisdom symbolises a desperately needed possibility of redemption for humanity from this sublunary world. Platonic dualist

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thinking (which maintained an emphasis upon an absolute ontological division and hierarchical distinction between the contrary motions of the physical and spiritual realms of experience) also became a recurring referent in many early modern considerations of memory. In *Phaedo*, for example, the mentor Socrates asks, 'When then … does the soul grasp the truth? For whenever it attempts to examine anything with the body, it is clearly deceived by it … And indeed the soul reasons best when … taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality.'[22] Crucially, within these writings, Plato's reader is reminded repeatedly that true knowledge is stimulated by meditative enquiry and recollection, rather than engagement with the material environment in which the body is compelled to exist. If, on occasions, Plato does acknowledge that the disorienting experience of temporality (which itself serves to impair the soul's powers of understanding) may engender forms of recollection, such mental reflexes are governed by the senses, and thus of a lesser order. Genuine apprehension represents engagement with a higher reality, because this faculty of memory was formed in, and belongs to, the realm of Being, or Forms. The Platonic concentration upon learning as remembrance was clearly an avenue of enquiry with which Florio's Montaigne was acquainted, even if he expressed little affection for its premisses:

> it were necessarie they [our souls] should (being yet in the body) remember the said knowledge (as Plato said) that what we learn't, was but a new remembering of that which we had knowne before: A thing that any man may by experience maintaine to be false and erronious.[23]

In a culture that was obsessively concerned with the interpretation of the past, it comes as no surprise that early modern intellectuals frequently returned to the consideration of memory as a consuming source of vigorous, if ultimately irresolvable, debate. Prospero's attempts in *The Tempest* to refresh power relationships with the resources of memory has its counterparts in a host of other textual interventions from the period. Florio's Montaigne submits (rather disingenuously) that 'it is commonly seene by experience, that excellent memories do rather accompanie weake judgements',[24] whereas his younger contemporary Francis Bacon responded, on occasions, more flexibly to the veneration with which earlier generations had greeted this most perplexing of human faculties:

> one of the moderns has ingeniously referred all the powers of the soul to motion, and remarked on the conceit and precipitancy of some of the ancients, who in too eagerly fixing their eyes and thoughts on the memory, imagination, and

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reason, have neglected the Thinking Faculty, which holds first place. For he who remembers or recollects, thinks; he who imagines, thinks; he who reasons, thinks; and in a word the spirit of man, whether prompted by sense or left to itself, whether in the functions of the intellect, or of the will and affections, dances to the tune of the thoughts.[25]

This concern with memory's role in the process of cognition would again be taken up later in the seventeenth century in an equally celebrated manner by the political theorist Thomas Hobbes with the contention that 'He that perceiues that he hath perceived, *remembers*'.[26] However, it is to the ever-changing mental landscapes of Montaigne's *Essais* (or rather John Florio's early seventeenth-century translation, *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*) that we will return most often as a constant companion in the course of this study in order to contextualise the very multifarious nature of early modern debate upon memory. It is Montaigne's willingness to respond to a whole range of different discourses that had currency during the early modern period that inevitably marks him out as an invaluable guide. His quicksilver intelligence ran in a host of often contradictory directions as his prose meditations unfolded, and nowhere is this more evident than in his investigations into memory. Interestingly, despite his alignment of the faculty with 'weake judgements' in his essay 'Of Lyers', elsewhere, in 'Of Presumption', he is disarmingly eager to affirm that

> Memorie is an instrument of great service, and without which, judgement will hardly discharge his duty, whereof I have great want … if I must remember a discourse of any consequence, be it of any length, I am driven to this vile and miserable necessitie, to learne every word I must speake, by rote; otherwise I should never doe it well or assuredly … Memorie is the receptacle and case of knowledge. Mine being so weake, I have no great cause to complaine if I know but little. I know the names of Artes in Generall and what they treate of, but nothing further. I turne and tosse over bookes, but do not studie them … The Authours, the place, the words, and other circumstances, I sodainely forget: and am so excellent in forgetting, that as much as any thing else I forget mine owne writings and compositions.[27]

At the dawn of the modern period, Sigmund Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* invited readers to consider such contentions in the light of his theories of paramnesia ('the mechanism of false recollection' and strategic forgetfulness) and psychic repression.[28] However, four centuries earlier, the very compendious nature of Montaigne's speculations meant that he not only engaged with a great variety of memorial speculations, he also unfailingly stressed for his own readers that an appreciation of

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the faculty was intimately bound up with an understanding of how their everyday selves were constructed.

MATERIAL MEMORY

In William Fulwood's *Englishing* of Gratarolo's treatise *The Castel of Memorie* (1562), the Elizabethan reader was treated to some strategic insights into the conflicted nature of memorial debate:

> Memorie is by the whiche the mynde repeateth things y^t^ are past. Or it is a stedfast perceiuyng in the mynde of the disposition of thinges and wordes. Or as (Aristotle supposeth) it is an imagination, that remaineth of such thinges as the sense had conceyued. Also by the sentence of Plato, Memorie is a sense of a safetie (or safe reteining of things): for the soule obtaineth by the office of the senses whatsoeuer thinges thaunce under the sense, and therefore it is the beginninge of an opinion.[29]

Here, readers were not only encouraged to acknowledge the legacy of Platonic thinking in this debate but asked to attend to the culturally pervasive traditions of Aristotelian thinking. The thorny problem that afflicts Shakespeare's Prospero, the parentage between memory and lack, was also of profound significance in Aristotle's thinking. Plato had promoted the analysis of memory as a focus for meditative, nay mystical, enquiry: as we have seen, in his writings memory often constitutes a precious route of retreat from the rigours of temporal existence. Nonetheless, it is clear that both Plato and Aristotle attributed to memory a pre-eminent status in their respective endeavours to define the nature of the human condition: Aristotle, for example, affirmed in *The History of Animals* that 'Many animals have memory, and are capable of instruction; but no other creature except man can recall the past at will'.[30] In *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* he stressed that memory is most commonly activated by mental visualisations of contiguous and/or antithetical images from the material world of that which is sought by the mind. Thus, the human memory, like a pictorial thesaurus, is often governed by associative laws; and, in opposition to Platonic thinking, Aristotle conceived of memory not as primarily concerned with transcendent intimations, but as structured by a psychic vocabulary of physical objects, situations and images derived from mortal experience:

> if asked, of which among the parts of the soul memory is a function, we reply: manifestly of that part to which imagination also appertains; and all objects of which there is imagination are in themselves objects of memory, which those which do not exist without imagination are objects of memory incidentally.

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