Introduction: planting oblivion

In Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," Venus is overcome with a desire whose effects are depicted in terms of forgetting:

> And careless lust stirs up a desperate courage,
> Planting oblivion, beating reason back,
> Forgetting shame's pure blush and honor's wrack.[1]

By "planting oblivion," Venus abandons herself to a lust that overrides modesty and honor. Her self-abandonment is prompted by the strong passion of sexual desire, which "stirs up a desperate courage." But how precisely is Venus's giving herself over to lust an act of forgetting? Does Venus (or, more broadly, anyone driven by desire) literally fail to recollect the demands of shame and honor? It makes more sense to understand the forgetting of shame and honor as encompassing not just cognition but the entire body's operations. Shame and honor prescribe a bodily comportment; they are the end result of a disciplining process that produces a certain type of (honorable, modest) subject and helps to shape that subject's interactions with the world.[2] To "forget" shame and honor, then, is to live in the world in terms different from those specified by that process, to act in terms of a different set of desires and imperatives, to become a different person. In this example, "forgetting" modesty and honor entails less a failure of memory than a transformation of self.

These three lines from "Venus and Adonis" describe the staking of a territorial claim: lust-driven courage beats reason back and plants its standard (oblivion), thereby announcing passion's victory. Or one can read this passage as reworking the familiar metaphor of the reason-regulated body as a well-tended garden. Venus's passionate courage plants the seeds of oblivion and, in the process of doing so, beats back the weeds of reason.[3] In either case, the passage reveals something important about forgetting in early modern literature and culture, that it is frequently associated with resistance to or the retooling of normative models for behavior. The lines from the poem also introduce other major topics of this book: the conceptualization of forgetting as a fully somatic, rather

than a narrowly cognitive, activity; the significance of humoral physiology (gestured toward here in the discussion of the passions) for that conceptualization; the relationship of forgetting (and memory) to bodily discipline; and forgetting's importance to the representation of selfhood in the work of early modern writers, primarily Shakespeare, Marlowe and Webster. All of these topics advance a simple but crucial point: that forgetting is historical. This study's central texts are dramatic ones from the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, but the book also considers memory and forgetting in a range of (literary and non-literary) discourses. Its ambition is to show that forgetting both undergirds the representation of specific somatic states and modes of action, and is central to the dramatic depiction of subjectivity. Although this book recognizes that forgetting cannot be construed outside of memory – indeed, discussion of the one can quickly turn into discussion of the other – it insists that we see forgetting as more than a mere failure of memory.[4] While seeking to do justice to the place of memory in a variety of early modern texts, the book's aim is to "plant oblivion" squarely amidst ongoing critical conversations about subjectivity, embodiment and early modern drama.

This chapter, which is divided into five sections, introduces the reader to the complex relations among memory, forgetting, identity and subjectivity that are a major emphasis of this book. The first section considers the significance of memory to early modern culture. The second begins to define the terms and the terrain of the book's analysis; it takes up three components of memory labeled memoria, recollection and remembering. The third focuses on connections between forgetting and subjectivity after first distinguishing between forgetting* and forgetfulness. (I have placed an asterisk after the word forgetting whenever it is used in the narrow sense described in the taxonomy outlined below. Without the asterisk, the word describes the broader category of which the defined element is a part. I usually do not use the asterisk when discussing other writers' texts.) The fourth section gives two examples of dramatic self-forgetting, while the fifth offers an overview of the book. Throughout, early modern conceptions of memory and forgetting are considered in relation to specific moments in period texts, including Richard Mulcaster's account of Elizabeth I's royal entry, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great, Pt. 1*.

The subject of memory and the remembering subject

In recent years, memory has become a crucial category for early modern studies. Historians have examined the state's attempt to eradicate one site of collective memory through the modification of the sacred calendar of

saint's days; similarly, they have argued that the Reformation changed the relationship between the living and the dead by altering the ways in which the former remembered the latter.[5] Studies such as these have impacted criticism of the early modern stage, as in the recent work of Huston Diehl, who discusses remembrance and revenge in light of eucharistic controversies and the reformed last supper.[6] While these works focus on "crises" of memory, the centrality of memory to early modern culture is easily seen. Understood as the "Renaissance," this period experienced a rebirth predicated upon the rediscovery of ancient texts that had putatively been forgotten in the middle ages; the re-collection of classical texts was crucial not only to the humanist project but to the intellectual self-definition of those scholars engaged in it. Printed and circulated widely in the Renaissance, such texts (in the terms of a classical commonplace that achieved currency in this period) triumphed over oblivion by re-entering both memory and history.[7]

Ancient texts provided early modern readers with exemplars, and, as George Puttenham (among others) recognized, the logic of exemplarity depends upon the operations of memory:

> no kinde of argument in all the Oratorie craft, doth better perswade and more universally satisifie then example, which is but the representation of old memories, and like successes happened in times past. . .No one thing in the world with more delectation reviving our spirits then to behold as it were in a glasse the lively image of our deare forefathers, their noble and vertuous maner of life, with other things autentike, which because we are not able otherwise to attaine to the knowledge of, by any of our sences, we apprehend them by memory.[8]

These "old memories" not only ornament successful arguments, they engender physiological effects by "reviving our spirits." They also provoke our emulation of "a noble and vertuous maner."

In terms that will be particularly important for the third chapter's discussion of Donne, Marlowe and spiritual self-forgetting, Lina Bolzoni elucidates the crucial significance of memory to Christianity:

> The memory question. . .has. . .a central importance in the Christian religion: it infuses the Mass, the liturgy, and the individual life of the Christian. To remember (and keep alive) Christ's sacrifice, to remember the awful sufferings of Hell and the delights of Paradise, to remember one's own sins to confess, to remember at least a few prayers and the essential contents of the faith – all this is essential, and it is on all this that salvation or eternal damnation depends. As formerly for the classical orator, the art of memory becomes an indispensable technique for the Christian preacher's profession, a technique, moreover, filled with all the importance and meaning claimed for it. When we think that for centuries the preacher speaks to a public of which the overwhelming majority is

illiterate, we can see that there is a clear need not only to remember the things to be said, but also to cause them to be remembered, to imprint them in a lasting way on the listeners' minds.[9]

Of course, the uses and significance of memory are different for Roman Catholicism than for Protestantism. Memory informed a host of Catholic practices, such as the founding of chantries in which the dead would be remembered through prayer:

Sacred stories, prayers, and images could also be understood to remind the saints of the devotee's presence so that they would intercede for that person's soul in heaven. Faith in the efficacy of prayers for the souls of the deceased encouraged strenuous and expensive attempts by individuals to keep their memory alive in the minds of the living, who it was believed could give them spiritual aid after their death.[10]

To remember the dead was to enact a series of social performances – from funeral processions and feasts to requiem masses to daily prayer to the production of monuments for the deceased – that served both as an ongoing engagement with the dead (who were understood to be in close proximity to the world of the living in a way that Calvinism did not allow) and as intercessionary acts designed to help hasten their passage to heaven. To forget the dead was to extend their stay in purgatory – the reason why pre-Reformation wills routinely stipulated that the living continue to remember the dead through prayer. The rise of English Protestantism, then, offers one example of how the meanings and uses of memory can change; funerary rituals still commemorated the loss of loved ones, but under Protestantism, and with Henry VIII's abolition of purgatory, "the dead were forcibly alienated from the community of the living. . .and gradually forgotten."[11]

Above, Bolzoni glancingly refers to the Ciceronian tradition, which construed memory as one of the five key elements of oratory.[12] The Christianizing of that tradition, along with the Aristotelian one (with Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus combining elements of both), led to increasing emphasis on memory's relation to prudence; memory becomes integral to moral judgment.[13] In early modern discussions of faculty psychology, memory is also necessary to the construction of the rational subject. As Edward Reynoldes puts it, memory is "a joynt-worker in the operations of Reason."[14] As we shall see, memory is integral to various valorized models of selfhood.

More than any other topic, it is the arts of memory that have dominated the study of individual memory in the early modern period.[15] The underlying structure of the memory arts is described by Mary Carruthers:

The fundamental principle is to "divide" the material to be remembered into pieces short enough to be recalled in single units and to key these into some sort of rigid, easily reconstructable order. This provides one with a "random-access" memory system, by means of which one can immediately and securely find a particular bit of information, rather than having to start from the beginning each time in order laboriously to reconstruct the whole system.[16]

While the arts of memory are important for chapter 2, this study attempts to correct a critical overemphasis on artificial memory evident since at least the groundbreaking work of Frances Yates.[17] That being said, there is an additional, simpler reason for this book's emphases: the plays taken up here are not terribly interested in the arts of memory.[18] What Jonas Barish says of Shakespeare holds for the texts by Marlowe and Webster discussed in this book: "Shakespeare shows no interest in pigeonholing [memory] or classifying it as a separable psychological datum, nor does he show any curiosity about the so-called *artes memorativae*, that weird melange of mnemotechnics and occultism that dazzled so many Renaissance philosophers and scientists. He is, however, keenly interested in the dynamics of memory, in how it weaves itself into the intimate texture of our lives."[19]

The interest of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Webster in memory may be partly bred of its centrality to the theatrical enterprise: actors need to memorize lines in order to perform their roles. Put differently, for playwrights to emphasize memory and forgetting is for them to reflect upon the conditions of dramatic representation. At the same time, such emphasis opens up certain kinds of possibilities. Recall Shakespeare's frequent representation of characters – most prominently, Hotspur, Polonius and Cleopatra – forgetting what they are about to say.[20] These moments are metatheatrical, as they tease us with the prospect of an actor forgetting his lines. At the same time, they are representations of a character's interiority: to see someone in the act of forgetting is also to witness the staging of a thought process. Even in brief episodes such as these, Shakespeare explores relations among memory, forgetting, dramatic subjectivity and the conditions of theatrical representation. More broadly, insofar as each of these three playwrights – along with numerous other early modern dramatists – concerns himself with subjective experience and its representation, memory and forgetting are inevitable objects of dramatic inquiry.

Of course, there are additional ways in which memory is important to the early modern theatre. In the 1960s, Yates described possible connections between the structure of early modern English playhouses, specifically the Globe, and that of the memory theatre of Robert Fludd. Since then, others have linked the theatre and memory in a variety of ways,

suggesting everything from the theatre's utilization of the iconography of the art of memory to its status as a powerful locus for the formation of national memory.[21] Defenders of the theatre such as Thomas Heywood argue that plays shaped the behavior of audience members for the better by providing positive exemplars – which, as we have seen, are "old memories" that provoke physiological change.[22] However, Shakespeare, Marlowe and Webster are suspicious or even scornful of the logic of exemplarity. We see this in *Dr. Faustus*, which simultaneously develops and overturns the model of exemplarity so obviously on offer in plays like *Everyman*. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the figure her brothers ask the Duchess to emulate is compared to a funerary sculpture, an unattainable and undesirable ideal. And *Hamlet* is the story of a prince who cannot sustain the model of vengeance promulgated by the Ghost. In these texts, possible exemplars are on offer to protagonists and audience, and memory is central to their operation. But Shakespeare, Marlowe and Webster not only stage failures of exemplarity, they stress the inadequacies, and in some cases the perniciousness, of that model. In rejecting (or at least interrogating the terms of) exemplarity, these playwrights turn from memory to forgetting (as well as its cousins, lethargy and sleep) to construe differently relations between the subject and his social world.

Finally, one must stress that if memory is important for the drama and culture of early modern England, it is also a category whose capaciousness both lends to its utility and generates specific conceptual problems. Not all of the examples of memory discussed in this section describe the same kind of (cognitive, somatic or social) operation. Different critical understandings of memory can be placed along the following continuum: at one end, "memory" is an internal, cognitive operation (as in "the art of memory"), and at the other, it describes a set of material practices with an indeterminate relationship to that operation (as in rituals that are the expression of "collective" or "social" memory).[23] This book does not attempt to consider memory in all its manifestations. Instead, both memory and forgetting are discussed as interfaces between the individual subject and the social world, as patterns of behavior as well as cognitive events. The book will account for certain key aspects of both somatic activity and social practice, but from the perspective of the individual, and not the collective, subject.

Memoria, recollection and remembering

As just mentioned, memory and forgetting are taken up in this book at the level of the individual subject; they describe forms of engagement

with the physical and social worlds. Each of these forms is best understood as fully embodied; memory and forgetting prescribe particular modes of behavior and specify kinds of action. The following taxonomies aim to map the terrain of memory and forgetting as the two categories are taken up in this book. These taxonomies create artificial but heuristically important analytic distinctions between psychic, somatic and social performances that in practice are not easily distinguishable. Certain of these definitions might seem idiosyncratic, or at least at a remove from common understandings of the two categories. Nevertheless, it is through the development of this terminology that we can isolate those aspects of memory and forgetting that are of greatest importance to this study. The terms defined here will not be rigidly adhered to and differentiated between throughout the book. Instead, precise definitions of "memoria," "recollection," and "remembering" are offered in order to suggest all that can be at issue – from cognitive act to social performance – in the representations of memory taken up in this book. In such representations, the three terms (in some or all of their meanings) inform and overlap one another, and the same is true in the cases of "forgetting*" and "forgetfulness" as components of forgetting.

Memoria describes not only the faculty that stores images in the brain, but also the site of that storage (often metaphorized in the period as a treasury or a wax tablet, and occupying the hindmost ventricle in the brain); the images or traces that are stored there; and the process of their inscription or storage – here "memorization" is subsumed under the term "memoria." *Recollection* refers to the process by which memory traces are retrieved and brought into consciousness. Both memory and recollection, defined in much the same way as they are in Aristotle, might be considered purely psychological, and thus "internal," operations.[24] In fact, their fully internal nature is assumed by many influential accounts of memory in the western tradition; even St. Augustine, for whom memory is a vast space that is both limitless and the location of the divine, paradoxically understands it as at the same time fundamentally internal.[25]

Reading recollection and memoria in this way, however, raises difficulties. As suggested above, memory should be thought of as a fully embodied process that presupposes involvement with the environment. Recent work in cognitive science that stresses the notion of the embodied mind – of mind understood as a set of operations not only dispersed throughout the body, but across body and environment – has brought this point into focus.[26] Andy Clark provides two relevant examples of embodied mind that encompass what are here defined as memoria and recollection, the first being the

use of external symbolic media to offload memory onto the world. Here we simply use the artifactual world of texts, diaries, notebooks, and the like as a means of systematically storing large and often complex bodies of data. [Second, w]e may also use simple external manipulations (such as leaving a note on the mirror) to prompt the recall, from onboard biological memory, of appropriate information and intentions at the right time.[27]

In the first example, memoria exists as written texts; in the second, recollection is a response to an environment altered in order to provoke the act of recall. These examples do not represent the production of prompts for the internalized operations of memoria and recollection, but *are* components of memoria and recollection themselves. As Clark has it, memoria and recollection occur through exchange with the environment, an exchange that the mind helps create the conditions for through the note on the mirror or the notebook.[28] Insofar as this is the case, recollection in particular is often tied to and arises out of practice and place; the contents of our memories are recalled not merely through an act of will, but also through the effects of both physical locations and our own actions, habitual or otherwise, on the operations of our minds. In this regard, recollection is a performance that occurs across "inside" and "outside" and thus reveals the blurriness in praxis of any distinction drawn between the two. More broadly, mind itself can be thought of as something that extends beyond "skin and skull" – as an engagement with the environment in which that environment plays an "active role. . .in driving cognitive processes."[29]

Of course, the insights of cognitive science were not available to the early moderns, and memoria and recollection were usually described in the period as purposive internal faculties and/or activities, even if prescription or practice might suggest otherwise.[30] But what must be stressed is that such descriptions, appearing in texts devoted to physiology or faculty psychology, are the product of a narrowing of focus; they entail the segregation of a specific faculty from a broader somatic system. That is, while most accounts of memory isolate it (in the brain) in order to consider its operations, humoral physiology assumes that memory operates in conjunction with, and is affected by, a range of other somatic phenomena. The ability to recollect or imprint memory traces depends to a great extent upon age, gender and the humoral complexion of one's body, all of which affect relations with one's environment. In addition, the nature of the environment itself is important, as the still active discourses of climatic humoralism make plain.[31] It is variables such as these that partly necessitate the arts of memory, which theoretically offer protection "against both inordinate environmental pressures and the organic failures of memory intrinsic to

humoral cognition – [which is] vulnerable to environmental impressions from the outside and unruly humors within."[32] Further, as theorists of those arts have held, the affect with which a specific memory is imbued influences its memorability. Thus, both memoria and recollection, while seemingly transpiring only in the hindmost ventricle of the brain, require and assume the full involvement of the body, including the passions. In this regard, early modern conceptions of memoria and recollection would cheer those practitioners of cognitive science who have explicitly sought to undo the legacy of the Cartesian mind-body split.[33]

The third component of memory is *remembering*, which centers not on cognitive but on social performances. There are two aspects to the term's definition: one is *the claim made on the subject that he or she remember*, while the other is *the act of remembering* performed by that subject. While in common usage "recollection" and "remembering" are largely synonymous, remembering as defined here bears no intrinsic functional relationship to recollection; it may or may not involve the recollection of specific memory traces. While supposedly working to engender recollection, the appeal to remember, which can come from without or within, actually aims to mobilize the subject to comport himself or herself in a particular way. Remembering is about praxis; it entails the arrangement of one's utterances and/or actions, even one's body as a whole, in relation to the imperatives expressed in the appeal. Remembering is the process by which the subject is urged to take up a discrete social practice or set of practices. In short, remembering, if we combine both of its aspects, is action taken in response to a call to behave in a certain (more or less precisely defined) fashion.[34] As we shall see in the case of Hamlet, however, the subject does not always respond to the appeal to remember; in order for the call to be answered, it must be experienced in conjunction with specific personal and/or societal imperatives.

"Remembering" is not a process conceptualized as such in the early modern period. In addition, the lines drawn here between "remembering," "memoria" and "recollection" are often crossed in somatic and social practice. That being said, not each of these necessitates the presence of the others; "recollection" is possible without "remembering." However, drawing distinctions as I have done brings into focus specific aspects of behavior that are not accounted for in traditional definitions of memory. An illustrative example of "remembering" is to be found in Richard Mulcaster's description of Queen Elizabeth I's royal entry into London on the eve of her coronation:

> In Cheapside, Her Grace smiled; and being thereof demanded the cause, answered, "For that she had heard one say, *Remember old King HENRY VIII*!" A

natural child! which at the very remembrance of her father's name took so great a joy; that all men may well think that as she rejoiced at his name whom this Realm doth hold of so worthy memory, so, in her doings, she will resemble the same.[35]

Elizabeth's smile not only marks her as a "natural child" (an interesting designation given longstanding Catholic claims of her illegitimacy), but also aligns her impulses with those of the people (as represented by the one who has called upon her to remember): she rejoices at the name of the man who "this Realm doth hold of so worthy memory." To be most closely attended to, however, is the notion that to remember Henry as approvingly as she does is to intimate that "in her doings, she will resemble the same." For Mulcaster, Elizabeth's remembering offers a premonition of her future, one in which her reign will echo if not model itself after an earlier one. To remember here is to emulate, and Elizabeth's smile marks her complicity with the shouted request that she "*Remember old King HENRY VIII*!"[36]

Arguably, Elizabeth's emulation of Henry VIII papers over what would be seen by some as her tenuous claim to the throne (as the illegitimate daughter of Henry). It also establishes her as one who will eschew the example of Mary I. Indeed, Mary is never even mentioned in Mulcaster's account, and Elizabeth's remembering of her father promises the return of England to Protestantism. Of course, the very recently deceased Mary should not be seen as literally forgotten by either Elizabeth or her subjects. She is, however, occluded from an event that is nevertheless largely structured in terms of her: her absence functions as a promise about the nature of Elizabeth's brand new reign. The demand to remember, then, aspires to define the present and prescribe the future. That is, Elizabeth's remembering of Henry entails not her recollection of the past – such recollections are not represented here beyond reference to her rejoicing – but her future adoption of a set of behaviors; she promises a pattern of action and a mode of being, one that places her in a specific relationship with her subjects. As such, the call to remember attempts to shape behavior: "to remember" often means "to behave in a certain way and with a certain end in mind." In Mulcaster, the call requires that Elizabeth (at least rhetorically and momentarily) align herself with the kind of rule supposedly summed up in and represented by Henry VIII's very name.[37] Here, remembering locates the monarch in relation to institutions (kingship) and ideologies (of right rule and of Reformation) as they are represented by one of her subjects.

In this example, the call to remember is actually the request that the queen perform certain actions; the call is designed to define and delimit her "doings." These actions are never precisely specified in Mulcaster, but