Introduction: Shakespeare and the Cultures of Commemoration*

Ton Hoenselaars and Clara Calvo

Abstract

This 'Introduction' argues a case for extending memory studies with the study of commemoration, or of 'historical remembrance' (Jay Winter). Memory and commemoration play a vital role not only in the work of Shakespeare, but also in the process that has made him a world author. There is no single approach to the phenomenon of commemoration, as it occurs on many levels, has a long history, and is highly unpredictable in its manifestations. A serious study of commemorative practices involving Shakespeare – preferably with an international focus, and comparative in scope to include the afterlives of other artists – is likely to enhance our appreciation of the dynamics of authorship, literary fame, and afterlives in its broader socio-historical contexts.

Over the past few decades, much attention has been devoted to the theme of 'memory' in the plays and poems of Shakespeare. Surprisingly little, however, has been written about the ways in which this 'memory' cult interrelates with the 'cultures of commemoration' involving the playwright and poet. 'Cultures of commemoration' – by which we mean a series of more or less conscious or active attempts to rehearse Shakespeare in the present, as well as efforts to guarantee the remembrance of Shakespearean things past and present in the future – may be identified within Shakespeare's plays and poems, in his biography, as well as in the joint afterlives of the man and his work. The Sonnets famously envisage the act of narration as one of vital

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commemoration, and like Hamlet's father who tells his son, 'Remember me', so Hamlet the son wishes to be remembered in Horatio's account of him.¹ Cultures of commemoration abound in the Histories, which, as Emily Shortslef in our collection argues, have an epitaphic tradition of their own. Shortslef's contribution explores the epitaph's cultural significance and its commemorative force in Shakespeare's Histories, arguing that they really subvert the expectations of the genre; from a site of memory, the epitaph turns into a catalyst that unsettles the memory cult, critiques and challenges it.

The play most explicitly occupied with traditions of history and memory is *Henry V*, and perhaps this concern is never more apparent than when King Henry – to use Jay Winter's phrase to distinguish conscious historical acts of commemoration from what he terms 'passive memory'² – projects the 'historical remembrance' of a battle yet unfought:

This story shall the good man teach his son,
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by
From this day to the ending of the world
But we in it shall be remembered.³

In Shakespeare, such explicit constructions of posthumous remembrance often seem possible only by means of an act of forgetting. Both in *Henry V* and in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the glorious account of the war dead provides us with a glimpse of its wry reality. *Henry V*, who before the Battle of Agincourt had democratically argued that the fight would 'gentle' the condition of his 'band of brothers', has no qualms later about reverting to a social hierarchy in death, and of commemorating by name those of high rank only.⁴ A similar tendency may be discerned in the dialogue between Leonato and the Messenger in the opening scene of *Much Ado About Nothing*:

Leonato: How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?
Messenger: But few of any sort, and none of name.⁵

As Thomas Laqueur has argued with reference to these two instances in Shakespeare, they really show up a device, operative from ancient times until the First World War, 'to efface the overwhelming majority of dead soldiers from public memory'.⁶ In broader historical and cultural terms, the strategy also copies Benedict Anderson's observation about national identity, and the apparent tendency, when establishing a collective memory on the basis of some events, also to relegate others to oblivion.⁷

These and other complex cultures of commemoration do not only occur in the work of Shakespeare; also the man Shakespeare and his work have become part of a ritual of commemoration across the centuries. In the case of Shakespeare, David Garrick's 'Great Shakespeare Jubilee' in Stratford (1769) started a trend and became the predecessor of the hundreds of festivals that have followed in its wake to commemorate the master, like the Royal Gala of 1830, discussed by Robert Sawyer in his contribution to this journal issue.⁸ In his essay, Sawyer shows how the 1769 Jubilee and the 1830 Gala promoted a particular kind of social memory in relation to Shakespeare, as, together, they paved the way for a combination of tourism and theatre on which the Stratford Shakespeare industry still relies today. With the help of Paul Connerton's analysis of how societies remember, Sawyer's contribution argues that celebrations in honour of Shakespeare soon became an 'invented tradition' in Eric Hobsbawm's sense of the phrase, showing that western cultures of commemoration, and Shakespeare's in particular, thrive on ritualistic practices.⁹ Acts of remembrance like those discussed by Sawyer have been performed in Britain and abroad, in times of peace, notably in 1864, but also in times of war, like the tercentenary of the playwright's death in 1916.¹⁰ They have been celebrated on a relatively small scale – like the annual birthday celebrations in Stratford-upon-Avon, which, in their regularity, resemble the April meetings of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft – and on a worldwide scale, like the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1964, whose historical proximity may well account for the fact that its grandeur still stands in no proportion current to the academic interest in the phenomenon. As an event, the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's birth is likely to be surpassed, in terms of ambition as well as scope, by the impending 450th celebration of the playwright's birth in 2014, and perhaps even further by the commemoration of the quatercentenary of his death, two years later, in 2016.

But the Shakespeare industry does not focus on 23 April only to put on exhibitions, erect statues, mount plaques, or build theatre replicas. Given Shakespeare's historical association with England and that ever so intangible notion of Englishness, he is often a welcome guest at official commemorative gatherings that really concern the nation. This partly explains why, as Anita Hagermann demonstrates in her fine essay, the Histories appeared as cycles at the Festival of Britain in 1951, which itself commemorated the Great Exhibition of 1851. However, as she astutely points out in her

analysis of Barry Jackson's *Histories* at the Birmingham Rep and Anthony Quayle's at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, the theatre makers would appear to have been less interested in commemorating Britain or Shakespeare, than in demonstrating their unusual skill in handling the complexity of the *Histories*, and ambitiously asserting a new artistic creed on this occasion. Both productions really sought to advance their own agendas by capitalising on nostalgia and the longing for a firmer sense of national identity at a time when a post-war, post-Empire, Austerity Britain was forced to redefine its role in international politics and world culture.

Considerably less complex was the appearance of 'Shakespeare' at the inauguration of the Channel Tunnel on 6 May 1994.¹¹ On the occasion of this historic event, the Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne – in collaboration with the Royal Shakespeare Company – appropriately staged Ambroise Thomas' opera about Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth I, entitled *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* (Opéra-Comique, Paris, 20 April 1850). Also, it soon turned out that the production could serve more than just a single commemorative purpose, because on 22 November 2003 the film version of the Compiègne production of *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* – following a short trip on the Eurostar train – was screened at London's Covent Garden (Lindbury Studio Theatre), to commemorate the quatercentenary of Elizabeth's death.

There are many modes of active commemoration other than those specifically grafted onto the playwright's biography like saints' or holy days in the church calendar. The production of the First Folio in 1623 was still an act of remembrance undertaken to 'out-liue', as Leonard Digges put it in the first dedicatory poem there, Shakespeare's 'Stratford Monument'. This gesture, however, was to generate a response that emphatically meant to counter the hero worship of Shakespeare: the erection in 1896 of a statue in London for John Heminge and Henry Condell, Shakespeare's colleagues who took the initiative to publish his plays, as Graham Holderness demonstrates in his contribution to this issue of *Critical Survey*. Several decades later, though, it was the First Folio itself that held centre stage at the celebration of its tercentenary in 1923.¹² It is along similar lines that we witness events like the celebration of 400 years of the Sonnets (2009), or the joint initiative of the German Shakespeare Society and the European Shakespeare Research Association to devote a conference to 400 years of *The Tempest* (2011).¹³

Instances of commemorating the writer, the plays, and the poems, inevitably enhance our appreciation of the functions of authorship, the transmission of the text, and dynamics of literary fame. However, on the whole the cultures of commemoration also tend to be complex in social and political terms, thus providing the scholar with an unusually rich and interdisciplinary site for Shakespearean research. Acts of commemoration, identified as historically specific manifestations of social memory and group attitudes may shed new light on academic and popular Shakespeare, on amateur and professional appropriations of Shakespeare, or serve as an occasion to express the ways in which social groups – like the American women’s Shakespeare clubs during the early decades of the twentieth century, here rescued from oblivion and discussed by Katherine Scheil – seek to formulate and express their views on what binds the group, or how it should move forward. In her essay, Scheil shows that women’s clubs all over the U.S. generated a commemorative culture of their own by enlisting Shakespeare to help in their civic programmes to advance education, women’s suffrage, or community care, and in doing so transformed domestic practices into acts of commemoration. Even if at times their agenda aimed beyond the plays and poems, as Scheil argues, the commemorative acts conducted by these women’s clubs help us to account for the pervasiveness of Shakespeare in American culture today.

Acts of Shakespearean commemoration performed in wartime – like those in the First World War – may show up unexpected modes of allegiance, as Monika Smialkowska demonstrates with reference to several regional masques in the U.S. which sought to unite all Americans (marginally including Native Americans) behind Shakespeare, but wryly seem to have excluded the African Americans. Smialkowska’s contribution shows some remarkable new research opportunities regarding the 1916 tercentenary, as she shows how the considerable attention granted to Percy MacKaye’s New York masque *Caliban by the Yellow Sands* has led to a blurred representation of the real nature of the festivities in North America. After her study of three pageants in Georgia, Massachusetts, and North Dakota, the tercentenary in the U.S. turns out to have been less a top-down affair than has long been assumed. The variety and scope of the celebrations effectively challenge a view of the tercentenary as the product of the cultural hegemony of dominant social groups. Monika Smialkowska’s essay reminds us that cultures of commemoration are not exclusively metropolitan in nature and often

generate powerful local cults promoting civic pride and regional interests; for certain social groups, they may provide a measure of cultural legitimation.

Celebrations in wartime also have a tendency to polarise political views, and even to alienate the Bard. In fact, the First World War, as Adrian Poole demonstrates, proved an occasion for some, like the poet David Jones in *In Parenthesis* (1937), to embark on what can perhaps best be described as a negative commemorative trajectory, an attempt to decentre Shakespeare. Poole examines how Jones, a survivor of the Somme, recreated his earliest memories of the Western Front in the tercentenary year partially through a memorialisation of Shakespeare. *Henry V*, for Jones the trench soldier, provided a quasi-shorthand language to encode experience in a fractured, fragmentary, intertextual modernist collage of verse and prose. *In Parenthesis*, however, as Poole shows, offers an alternative view of English literary history and of commemoration practice which – by decentring Shakespeare – critically contrasts with the aims behind Israel Gollancz's monumental *A Book of Homage* (1916).¹⁴

Cultures of commemoration are unstable processes. They are no guarantee for any permanence in the individual's afterlife, not even Shakespeare's. In other words, some memories are not automatically performed 'until the ending of the world', as Henry V seems to believe.¹⁵ Sonnet 55 alerts us to this as well, as it captures how, in the course of time, 'marble' and 'gilded monuments / Of princes' are bound to lose their original gloss, and will gather dirt that no-one seems inclined to remove. When sonnet 55 also alerts us to 'wasteful war [that] shall statues overturn', it effectively captures the fate of Paul Fournier's Shakespeare statue in Paris, which was erected in 1888, a week after the unveiling of the Gower Monument in Stratford-upon-Avon during what was obviously the climax of French statuemanía.¹⁶ The Gower Monument is still on display in Shakespeare's hometown and even though, to the annoyance of some, it is no longer in the place where it originally stood, nor in the configuration that the sculptor devised, its counterpart object in Paris no longer exists.¹⁷ The Paris Shakespeare statue has vanished because on 11 October 1941 the Vichy government issued an act for the removal across France of most bronze statues, in view of the metal they would yield. In the course of the months and years that followed, statues were removed from public places across the country, and melted down for the war effort. And 'Shakespeare' did not survive

the terror now known as ‘The Death of the Statues’. The Fournier statue was removed on 13 December 1941.¹⁸

Fortunately, this did not signal the end of Shakespeare’s career in France, and the playwright is more popular there than ever before. Also, the Paris Shakespeare statue has since been replaced by a garden and an open air theatre in the Bois de Boulogne (‘Jardin Shakespeare’), and attempts are even under way to have a street or a square in the capital named after ‘le grand Will’.¹⁹ Yet, there are some real lessons that cultures of commemoration research may learn from the complex ‘Death of the Statues’ episode involving the Paul Fournier statue in Paris.

The statue in Paris shows that ‘Shakespeare’ is a worldwide phenomenon. It inevitably alerts us to the fact that studying the cultures of commemoration involving Shakespeare, we must be prepared to cross regional, national, continental, and linguistic borders, continually reminding ourselves of the very plurality of the cultures we study. The now absent Paris statue further shows that the cultures of commemoration are really processes which need to be studied diachronically, with an ever careful eye for their proper historical and cultural contexts and traditions.

The case of the missing Paul Fournier statue also makes us see that as we acknowledge the historical dimension of the cultures of commemoration, we must be prepared for the fact that certain cultures and landmarks may have all but faded out of existence, may have become invisible, just as other modes of commemoration (like those currently developing in new media, like Facebook) are seeking to define alternative approaches to remembrance, to commemoration.

Finally, for the diehard Shakespearean, it might be worth remembering that the Fournier ‘Shakespeare’ was not the only statue in France to be melted down by the Vichy government. As ‘Shakespeare’ was taken off his pedestal and temporarily dumped in a Paris scrap-yard, he found himself in the company of other artists including Hector Berlioz, Victor Hugo, Jean De la Fontaine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Victorien Sardou, François Villon, Voltaire, and Emile Zola.²⁰ This situation brings into focus that still rarely explored avenue of comparative commemoration research.

Were not the earliest cultures of commemoration involving Shakespeare part of a larger cult sweeping through Europe and beyond, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, and was it not already some time before Shakespeare that the German-born composer Georg

Friedrich Handel was appropriated by the British and turned into a national hero, with a statue in Vauxhall Gardens erected in his own lifetime by popular subscription?²¹ Garrick's historic 1769 Jubilee taking place no less than five years after the two-hundredth anniversary of the playwright's birth was really an afterthought. Yet, the Shakespeare cult was clearly emerging. As it got under way, it may well have eclipsed the fame of some writers, but it also triggered new events, like the centenary celebrations for Robert Burns in 1859.

Transversal connections are still waiting to be explored between the burgeoning Shakespeare cult of commemoration and the cult of European writers including Dante, Racine, Voltaire, Molière, Calderón, Cervantes, Goethe, and Schiller, who were all appropriated by the secular cult of hero-as-poet worship in the nineteenth century, so well envisioned by Thomas Carlyle.²² Comparative work on the unique phenomenon of Shakespeare as the third German classic alongside Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller shows what kind of fascinating results this may yield.²³ Naturally, in our open-ended field, such comparative research would soon provide an occasion for a number of interdisciplinary sorties, to include the commemorative fate of painters and composers, their work, their afterlives.

Despite the obvious richness of this research area, it has long continued to suffer neglect, even in recent years. Shakespeareans have predictably, perhaps, tended to concentrate on the conspicuous key dates, and done occasional research around the time of these key dates, but many plaques and statues and festivals and other occasions on which Shakespeare and his work are commemorated have no immediate basis in biographical or bibliographical fact. This should enhance their interest, since the literary gods employ strange means to bring their will to be. As we are approaching the years 2014 and 2016, it seems valuable and even vital, in addition to devising new ways to celebrate the Bard, also to reflect on past practices and future research strategies into the dynamics of Shakespeare's memory.

Notes

1. *Hamlet*, 1.5.91. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Shakespeare's plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

2. Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 9.

3. *Henry V*, 4.3.56–59.
4. *Henry V*, resp. 4.3.60–63 and 4.8.97–100.
5. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1.1.5–6.
6. Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Memory and Naming in the Great War', in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 150–67 (p. 150).
7. On similar instances of historical ellipsis see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (London: Verso, 1999), 199–201.
8. On the earliest festivals, see also Péter Dávidházi, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare: Literary Reception in an Anthropological Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Christian Deelman, *The Great Shakespeare Jubilee* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964); Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); M.W. England, *Garrick's Jubilee* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1964); I. R. Mann, 'The Garrick Jubilee at Stratford-Upon-Avon', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 1 (1950), 128–34, and *ibid.*, 'The Royal Gala of 1830', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963), 263–66; Johanne M. Stockholm, *Garrick's Folly: The Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769 at Stratford and Drury Lane* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964).
9. See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
10. Recent studies of the 1864 tercentenary include Richard Foulkes, *The Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1864* (Bath: Society for Theatre Research, 1984); *ibid.* "Every Good Gift From Above" Archbishop Trench's Tercentenary Sermon', *Shakespeare Survey* 54 (2001), 80–88; and Antony Taylor 'Shakespeare and Radicalism: The Uses and Abuses of Shakespeare in "Nineteenth-Century Popular Politics"', *The Historical Journal* 45 (2002), 357–79. For material on the Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1916 see Clara Calvo, 'Shakespeare and Spain in 1916: Shakespearean Biography and Spanish Neutrality in the Great War', *Shakespeare and Spain* (The Shakespeare Yearbook 13), ed. J.M. González and Holger Klein (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 58–76; Clara Calvo, 'Shakespeare and Cervantes in 1916: The Politics of Language', *Shifting the Scene: Shakespeare in European Culture*, ed. Balz Engler and Ladina Bezzola (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 78–94; Thomas Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (London: Routledge, 1999); Balz Engler, 'Shakespeare in the Trenches', *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1991), 105–111; Richard Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Werner Habicht, 'Shakespeare Celebrations in Times of War', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001), 441–55; Coppélia Kahn, 'Remembering Shakespeare Imperially: The 1916 Tercentenary', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001), 456–78; and Luke McKernan, "'A Complete and Fully Satisfying Art on Its Own Account": Cinema and the Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1916', *Shakespeare* 3 (2007), 337–51.
11. See Ton Hoenselaars and Clara Calvo, 'Shakespeare Eurostar: Calais, the Continent, and the Operatic Fortunes of Ambroise Thomas', in *Shakespeare and Englishness*, ed. Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau (London: Continuum, 2010), 143–60.
12. The annual Shakespeare lecture at The British Academy was devoted to the 'Tercentenary of the First Folio' with A.W. Pollard's *The Foundations of Shakespeare's Text* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).

13. *William Shakespeare's Sonnets for the First Time Globally Reprinted. A Quatercentenary Anthology, 1609–2009*, ed. Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch (Dozwil TG Schweiz: Edition SIGNAThUR, 2009). For the conference devoted to 'Shakespeare's Shipwrecks: Theatres of Maritime Adventure', see <www.um.es/shakespeare/esra/> and <www.shakespeare-gesellschaft.de/en.html>.

14. For an indispensable analysis of Gollancz's *A Book of Homage*, see Coppélia Kahn, 'Remembering Shakespeare Imperially'.

15. Notable examples of the quickly expanding body of literature devoted to the 'destruction of memory' include Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); and Kirrily Freeman, "'Pedestals Dedicated to Absence": The Symbolic Impact of the Wartime Destruction of French Bronze Statuary' in *France and Its Spaces of War: Experience, Memory, Image*, ed. Patricia M.E. Lorcin and Daniel Brewer (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 163–77.

16. Michael Kimberley, *Lord Ronald Gower's Monument to Shakespeare* (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Stratford-upon-Avon Society, 1989).

17. Michael Rosenthal, 'Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford: Bardolatry Reconsidered' in *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory*, ed. Harald Hendrix (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 31–44.

18. Kirrily Freeman, *Bronzes to Bullets: Vichy and the Destruction of French Public Statuary, 1941–1944* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Elizabeth Campbell Karlsgodt, 'Recycling French Heroes: The Destruction of Bronze Statues under the Vichy Regime', *French Historical Studies* 29:1 (Winter 2006), 143–81.

19. For the history of the 'Jardin Shakespeare', see *Shakespeare Companies and Festivals: An International Guide*, ed. Ron Engle, Felicia Hardison Londré, and Daniel J. Water Meier (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 414–17.

20. For further examples, consult the Paris statues catalogue in Jacques Lanfranchi, *Les Statues des grands hommes à Paris* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 205–64. See also Jean Cocteau, *La Mort des statues*. Photographies de Pierre Jahan. Préface de Pascal Ory (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Amateur, 2008).

21. See William Weber, 'The 1784 Handel Commemoration as Political Ritual', *The Journal of British Studies* 28 (1989): 43–69; and Suzanne Aspden, "'Fam'd Handel Breathing, tho' Transformed to Stone": The Composer as Monument', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 55 (2002), 39–90.

22. For a general discussion, see Ronald Quinault, 'The Cult of the Centenary, c. 1784–1914', *Historical Research* 71:176 (1998), 303–23. For individual authors, see a.o. Albert Schinz, 'The Racine Tercentenary in France', *The French Review* 13 (1940), 199–210; and Stephen Bird, *Reinventing Voltaire: The Politics of Commemoration in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000).

23. See *Shakespeare–Goethe–Schiller*, theme issue of *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* 141 (2005).