

# **BODIES OF STONE**

## **SUSPENDED ANIMATION IN THE MEDIA, VISUAL CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

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Greta Perletti

**THEATRE AND MEMORY:  
THE BODY-AS-STATUE IN EARLY MODERN CULTURE**

*Cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans  
formatur imago.*

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV, 178

My exploration of the cultural significance of ‘bodies of stone’ will be focused on the threshold of modernity, and in particular on the early modern stage. During that age, dominated by important epistemological changes, spectators would quite frequently find plays staging characters whose bodies temporarily or permanently experience some kind of statue-like state. Frozen in death, real or apparent, fixed in the present moment or simply unable to move or take action, these characters certainly offer a spectacular unsettling of the boundaries separating the animate from the inanimate, and the human from the non human. In this chapter I would like to relate the stone-like bodies that may be found in a number of Elizabethan and early Jacobean plays to some theories about memory and forgetting that were circulating in late sixteenth-century philosophical and medical discourses. In particular, I shall attempt to explore the contrast between the immovable and the moving statue-like body from the perspective of the different attitude towards memory that these bodies entail.

*1. Statues of Memory*

Early modern culture inherits from the Middle Ages a fascination with the power of visual *exempla* to assist the processes of remembrance. As scholars such as Frances A. Yates, Lina Bolzoni and Pietro Corsi have amply demonstrated, the so-called art of memory was a system of mnemonic techniques that, dating back to the Classical age, bloomed in the Renaissance thanks to its eminently visual power.<sup>1</sup> Central to this technique in its early modern form was the sophisticated quality of memory images. Besides being evocative of the things to be remembered, these images were also deemed to be conveniently placed in mental *loci* that could be imaginatively accessed and explored. In recent years much

work has been devoted to uncover the ramifications of the art of memory, as memory images, far from being confined to adepts of mnemonics, were widespread in early modern culture. William E. Engel's study on death and drama, for example, has shown how the proliferation of emblems, heralds and *impresa* in late sixteenth-century England may be accounted for in the light of Renaissance memory arts.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, since tombs and memorials were endowed with mnemonic power, it is not surprising to find that the flourishing of funerary art, which Philippe Ariès relates to changing attitudes toward death and its representation,<sup>3</sup> should match the contemporary revival of memory arts. From this perspective, also statues, or bodies that are turned into statues (both implicitly and in a more literal way, as we shall see) may be revealed to partake in the same cultural interest in memory and memory images.

My analysis of the relations between bodies of stone and memory will take stock of this memorial and mnemonic imagination in order to consider not just the dissemination of memory images in Elizabethan and early Jacobean theatre, but also their often problematic status. In fact, insights into early modern cultural texts will show that no matter how relevant the function of recollection, the entrenched memorial paradigms of the art of memory were being gradually eroded, partially challenged and subtly modified. According to the established paradigm, the training of memory was relevant not just to the intellectual faculties, but also, more importantly, to the human soul: a shared belief since the Middle Ages was that a disciplined cultivation of memory would be essential to the empowering of the self, since memorial skills were held to confirm the God-like and immortal nature of the soul. It is not coincidental that in the sixteenth century, the art of memory should appeal to alchemists and Neo-Platonic philosophers as well as to more controversial thinkers, such as Giordano Bruno and Robert Fludd (both very influential in Elizabethan and early Jacobean culture), who conceive of the use of mental memory images as a powerful way to attune the human mind to the divine macrocosm. As emblematically shown in Shakespeare's theatre, memory and memory images, however, can take on entirely different meanings, which foreground the painful and even destructive nature of remembrance. From this perspective, even memorial statues happen to be more dismal and dispiriting than relieving. In *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), for example, the tragedy ends with the Montagues and Capulets jointly promising they will raise statues

of Romeo and Juliet, in order to ensure that the tragedy of the young lovers will never be forgotten:

MONTAGUE:

I will raise her statue in pure gold,  
That whiles Verona by that name is known,  
There shall no figure at such rate be set  
As that of true and faithful Juliet.

CAPULET:

As rich shall Romeo's by his lady lie,  
Poor sacrifices of our enmity! (5.3.315-20)<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to what happens in Shakespeare's sources for this play – where the bodies of the two lovers are buried together in one private tomb, thereby sealing their eternal union in death<sup>5</sup> – here we are left with two separate memorial statues, which supplant displaced bodies. Despite its dazzling power, the 'pure gold' of these memorials fails to dispel the darkness which lingers on in the 'glooming peace' (5.3.321) at the end of the play, in fact leaving intact the pattern of rivalry that has led to the tragic epilogue.

As well known, Shakespeare's work repeatedly stages the memorial ineffectuality of stone. A famous case in point is Sonnet 55, since here the sonnet (or the sonnet collection) itself – 'this powerful rhyme' (v. 2) – is set against 'marble' and 'gilded monuments' (v. 1), which time will deface into 'unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time'.<sup>6</sup> Against 'wasteful war [which] shall statues overturn' (v. 5), 'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity' (v. 9), only poetry stands, granting the beloved fair friend, if not immortality itself, at least some time-bound fame: 'So, till the judgement that yourself arise / You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes' (vv. 13-14).

The fact that words may be triggers and carriers of memory more effectively than monuments and statues might provide a clue also to interpret the dumb show which precedes the Mousetrap in *Hamlet* (1603). As Hester Lee Jeffries suggests,<sup>7</sup> Hamlet may well have intended the dumb show as a real memory image concocted with the statue-like bodies of the actors and possibly including some of the items proposed in the *Ad Herennium* (still one of the key texts for the Renaissance art of memory). Contrary to Hamlet's expectations, Claudius's conscience does not stir here, in response to the show. The King's vehement reaction, albeit with no public disclosure of the guilt, comes only later, as a follow up to the verbal action to be found in the actual play in the play. Shakespeare thus exposes as ineffective the image constructed in the dumb show, which

Engel includes in his survey of the ‘emblematic spectacles’ widely employed in early modern drama as a form of memory art.<sup>8</sup> In much the same way, although the *Sonnets* may be intended as a way of building a visual-verbal memory image of the loved friend, ‘like a Ficinian painting or a Brunian seal, [...] a jewel in black ink’ that is set in contrast to more conventional images,<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare partakes in a larger cultural trend that increasingly undermines the strong paradigm associated to the art of memory, according to which images (painted, sculpted or simply imagined) could provide a lasting and safe means for preserving and training memory.

In addition to such devaluation of the mnemonic power attributed to monuments, statues, and statue-like bodies, the early modern concern with memory also includes investigations into the ways memory images can induce a statue-like state in living bodies. This aspect is fascinatingly explored in Christopher Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), a dramatic refashioning of Books I, II, and IV of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.<sup>10</sup> Upon arriving at Carthage, Aeneas is confronted with a statue of Priam’s, which prompts his painful memory of the defeat of Troy (2.1.15-21).<sup>11</sup> As many scholars have noted, this is a significant departure from Virgil’s poem, where the hero describes scenes of the fall of Troy which he – to his surprise – can see painted on the walls of Juno’s temple, built by Dido and the Carthaginians. No matter how painful, the ekphrastic description to be found in the *Aeneid* functions as a cathartic device for Virgil’s Aeneas, not only confirming to him how far the fame of Troy and his family has travelled, but also spurring him to action: first via his narrative to Dido, and then by indirectly convincing him to pursue his mission as the founder of a new, powerful city.

In Marlowe’s *Dido*, instead, the replacement of the mural paintings with Priam’s statue seems to complicate the relation between painful memory and action. Priam’s statue confronts Aeneas with a visual reminder of his past that, instead of conferring renewed strength and inspiration to the hero, actually freezes him into hallucination and despair:

AENEAS

Achates, though mine eyes say this is stone,  
Yet thinks my mind that this is Priamus;  
[...]  
Achates, see, king Priam wags his hand!  
He is alive; Troy is not overcome!

ACHATES

Thy mind, Aeneas, that would have it so,  
Deludes thy eyesight; Priamus is dead. (1.2.24-32)

As Anthony B. Dawson puts it, in his translation from epic to drama, ‘beside shortening the Virgilian passage, Marlowe has psychologized it, and in a way trivialized it’.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the epic hero, the protagonist of Marlowe’s tragedy is unable to use the visual image of his past in a creative and masterly way. Rather, the cathartic experience is replaced by a traumatic reaction, as Aeneas’s delusion and amazement freeze him in the past, thus preventing him from distinguishing between actual perception and mental projections. The contrast with Virgil’s Aeneas, who appears tearful but also proud and ready to take up his mission, could not be more striking: although the protagonist of Marlowe’s play evokes Pygmalion – ‘would my prayers (as Pygmalion did) / Could give it life’ (2.1.16-17) – his encounter with the statue of the great Trojan king paradoxically reverses Pygmalion’s power to infuse life into inanimate matter. On the contrary, Priam’s statue seems to drain life from Marlowe’s Aeneas, virtually transforming the hero into a body of stone: not only does he appear paralysed, but he also, tellingly, describes his own pain by evoking Niobe, the Theban mother who ‘dry with grief, was turn’d into a stone’ (2.1.5).

Aeneas’s hallucinating is not unlike Hamlet’s despair at his inability to revenge his father, the wronged king murdered by Hamlet’s uncle, Claudius, and forgotten too hastily by Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude. Hamlet too is thrown into statue-like inaction after his encounter with the fully armed ghost of his father, a striking image of his painful past. What both Aeneas and Hamlet are confronted with is the failure to live up to the stronger memory paradigm of the classical, pre-modern past. While the art of memory, with its emphasis on the careful construction of the images to be remembered and on the strict rules to be followed when visiting the mental *loci*, shapes a cultural imaginary where memory is associated with self-regulation and discipline, for Hamlet, as for Aeneas, recollection brings about disorder and emasculation. *Hamlet* is crowded with memory images that, like the father’s ghost and Yorick’s skull, seem designed to remind the Prince of Denmark of the desultory and trivial quality of recollection. Hamlet struggles in vain to train his mind to comply with the Ghost’s famous injunction ‘Remember me’ (1.5.91),<sup>13</sup> and to be ‘apt’ (1.5.32) to the revenge project that is supposed to ensue from regulated memory. In one of his most famous soliloquies, Hamlet sternly engages with recollection by attempting to control and discipline his memory:



Remember thee?  
Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past  
That youth and observation copied there.  
And thy commandment alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmix'd with baser matter. (1.5.96-105)

Although Hamlet acknowledges the memorial paradigm that couples memory with discipline and even though he sets out to behave accordingly, the technology he resorts to is bound to fail. The 'table' to be written upon contemplates the co-existence of memory and forgetting, and possibly even the dependence of the former on the latter. As Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, John Franklin Mowery and Heather Wolfe argue in a seminal essay on Renaissance technologies of writing, Shakespeare's references to the tables of memory in all of his work invariably entail oblivion, since the very act of writing on the table requires that all previous imprints – be they things or images (for Hamlet, the 'baser matter') – should be erased.<sup>14</sup> Arguably, the problem with Hamlet lies in the failure to come to terms with a new way of conceiving of memory, one that, against the oblivion vs recollection view entrenched in the old paradigm, envisaged oblivion and recollection as one compound.

Much of Hamlet's despair comes from his repulsion at the contamination of 'godlike Reason' (4.4.37) with 'bestial oblivion' (4.4.39): in line with the art of memory paradigm, for Hamlet forgetting entails the emasculating lack of discipline that results in his 'dull revenge' (4.4.32), a form of 'somatic slackness' that, as Garrett Sullivan's study has amply illustrated, is associated with the debasing humoral ailment known as 'lethargy'.<sup>15</sup> While Marlowe's Aeneas is paralysed by the pain evoked by the memory image of Priam's statue, Hamlet's body remains statue-like and dull of action because he fails to acknowledge the ductility of the wax tables, which appear simultaneously firm and malleable, retentive and oblivious, hard as rocks and yet prone to change their shape. And yet the conflation of memory and forgetting, which was unsettling the ideological and aesthetic values of the art of memory paradigm, will gain increasing prominence in early modern discourses about memory. As we shall see, in his late work and in the context of the new *genre* of the *romance*, Shakespeare will try out the theatrical

productiveness of the entanglement of remembrance and oblivion by bringing about movement and animation in the statue-like body. In the story of Niobe as recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a source significantly unmentioned by Marlowe's Aeneas) the mourning mother has been transformed into a marble stone that perpetually sheds tears,<sup>16</sup> as a rivulet of water springs from the immovable rock. In a similar way, early modern theories of forgetting introduce movement and liquidity in the discourses on memory, with fruitful consequences for the imagination linked to bodies of stone.

## 2. *'Amid the waves, a mighty rock doth stand'. Memory images and forgetting in early modern culture*

As we have seen, classical and medieval memory arts were strewn with visions of order and regulation, supposedly resulting from the disciplined use of imagination and memory. In contrast to this, recent contributions in the field of memory studies have taken great pains to illustrate how Renaissance texts tend to represent memory as a potential source of chaos and confusion.<sup>17</sup> While as early as in St. Augustine's *Confessions* memory had been imagined to be stored in 'secret and unimaginable caverns',<sup>18</sup> early modern authors emphasise the difficulty – or the impossibility – to move about in the overcrowded imaginary mental place hosting memory. In Book II of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), for example, where the castle of Alma is designed as an allegory of the human body, memory is represented as a chaotic library, situated in one of the three chambers (corresponding to imagination, understanding and memory) of the high turret.<sup>19</sup> As Bruce Smith notes, '[d]espite its vital activity, there is an unsettled and unsettling disorder' in the chamber of memory,<sup>20</sup> which is ruled by Eumnestes, an 'old man, halfe blind, / And all decrepit in his feeble corse' (II.IX.55.5-6), who has to rely on the young Anamnestes to fetch books and scrolls. Similarly, in his *Passions of the Minde* (1601) Thomas Wright laments the incessant proliferation of the 'forms' of memory, which threatens to confuse the whole process of recollection.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas in the traditional paradigm of the art of memory adepts could explore the *loci* by imaginatively walking in systematic and often pre-arranged ways, now the movement of memory shifts from the remembering self to the innumerable forms and items of memory. Actually, early modern authors seem to be particularly puzzled even by the memory images on which the art of memory itself was relying. As Bolzoni notes, the

elaborate care taken to construct Renaissance memory images accounts for their 'resilience and vitality':<sup>22</sup> indeed, some images seem so vivid that they, as it were, acquire a life of their own, which makes the process of removing them from the mind increasingly complex. While the classical art of memory granted special power to *imagines agentes* (or 'moving images') because of their animation, now the movement of images seems to elude the controlling agency of the self because of its unpredictability. It comes as no surprise that, parallel to these reflections, mnemonics should also be devalued. We may date the process of separating mnemonic processes from 'higher' mental faculties back to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century: Michel de Montaigne is usually credited with being the first to undermine the validity of mnemonics and indeed of memory itself,<sup>23</sup> but also the Spanish physician John Huarte Navarro, whose work on the mind was translated into English in 1594, claimed the impossibility of enjoying both good memory and good understanding, as the two faculties are envisaged as 'powers opposit (*sic*) and contrary'.<sup>24</sup>

While memory loses its importance for the mental as well as the physical well being of man, forgetting starts to receive new attention: thus for the first time John Willis's popular *Mnemonic* (1618) implements the traditional art of memory by devoting a section to the important practice of 'deposition', or 'discharging Things connected to the Mind', while Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) admits that love-sickness may only be cured when the patient is able to discard the haunting image of the beloved.<sup>25</sup> An important consequence of such changes in the representation of oblivion is the thinning out of the dichotomy between memory and forgetting. As Sullivan reminds us, the uncontrollable 'shuffling up' of memory images was indeed perceived as being akin to forgetting,<sup>26</sup> sharing the same discursive reference to the lack of discipline and mastery over the mind.

The shifting nature of memory finds its counterpart in the increasingly liquid memory that are deployed to represent it, and that were formerly ascribed especially to forgetting, traditionally associated to the river Lethe of classical mythology. As Lisa Perkins Wilder shows in her work on Shakespeare and early modern conceptions of memory, recollection seems somehow inseparable from the liquid 'ventricles' in which it was believed to be situated, 'awash with animal spirits that carry information through and from the brain'.<sup>27</sup> Together with the movement of memory images, watery metaphors highlight the fact that memory sits uneasily among other intellectual faculties in Elizabethan and early Jacobean

culture. As they foreground the entanglement of memory with forgetting and self-forgetting, they also shed light on its enmeshment with what John Sutton calls ‘the dirt added to thoughts by the body’.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, water also evokes the female body, dominated by bodily fluids such as milk and the menses, and more generally imagined as phlegmatically ‘cold and moist’.<sup>29</sup> As a result, early modern culture witnesses a profound transformation of the imagination that for centuries had separated memory from forgetting but also from mental confusion and unbecoming behaviour. Henry Peacham’s image, in his emblem book *Minerva Britannia* (1612), of the ‘Manlie Constancie of mind’ as a ‘mighty rock’ amid the waves<sup>30</sup> might well be used to describe early modern representations of memory as a faculty struggling against the action of oblivion and yet already immersed in it by way of its problematic contamination with the body and its fluids.

### 3. *Shakespeare’s late plays: ‘[A] most majestic vision’*

Shakespeare’s alertness to the multifaceted cultural discourses available in his lifetime is well known: countless critical studies have traced the extent of his engagement with (and questioning of) the paradigms of early modern philosophy as well as of medicine. As far as memory is concerned, late plays offer ample ground to explore the blurring of boundaries between memory and forgetting or the questioning of their respective values. On the one hand, as Jonathan Baldo shows, Shakespeare’s later historical plays already stage ‘creative uses of forgetting both for answering traumatic loss and for establishing a sense of national unity’.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, in the final years of his life Shakespeare was keen to experiment with the *genre* of *dramatic romance*, which he used also as a way to revisit some of his past dramatic *oeuvre*. Written after the deaths of Queen Elizabeth (1603) and of Shakespeare’s only son Hamnet (1596), these plays arguably attempt to offer a non-traumatic vision of remembrance through a refashioning of the memory images which, on account of their moving and liquid nature, appeared problematic. Shakespeare’s manipulation of the images of memory and forgetting, in turn, highlights the power that bodies of stone could embody in early modern theatre.

In *The Winter’s Tale* (1611), Shakespeare stages a story of jealousy and redemption, where a potentially tragic ending is prevented by a new approach to memory, which takes into account the changes in its early modern representation. Recollection is crucial to an

understanding of *The Winter's Tale*: while tragedies, as we have seen, display the impairing action of memory, which turns the protagonist into a statue-like body, here Shakespeare sets in motion memories from his earlier plays, which are put forward and then metamorphosed in view of a more serene outcome. Thus, while Leontes's unjust cruelty towards his wife Hermione most obviously recalls Othello's jealousy, in *The Winter's Tale* the register of tragedy is only allowed to last until the end of Act 3, after which comedy sets in and repentance takes the place of jealousy. This applies also to the play's treatment of *Hamlet*, whose echoes appear profoundly altered by the pastoral setting of Bohemia in the second part. Here the main example is provided by Perdita, Leontes's 'lost' daughter, who, Ophelia-like, hands out flowers and mentions garlands that however, this time, are imagined

like a bank for Love to lie and play on,  
Not like a corse; or if, not to be buried,  
But quick in mine arms. (4.4.130-32)<sup>32</sup>

While in *Hamlet* the garlands of flowers had indirectly occasioned Ophelia's death by drowning, here death is evoked only to be dismissed. The motionless image of the corpse (the 'corse') morphs into the animate living and moving ('quick') body of Florizel, her lover, the son of Polixenes (the king of Bohemia, former friend of Leontes and the cause of his absurd jealousy). As well known, Leontes's regeneration will not be accomplished until another animation occurs: until, in Act 5, 3, Hermione's body, believed to have been frozen in death for 16 years, appears on stage as a statue skilfully crafted only to be animated by Paulina's command 'descend: be stone no more' (5.3.99). As the statue-like queen comes back to life, the play enacts a neat reversal of Cleopatra's suicide in *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1606), where a queen turns statue-like as she enters death.<sup>33</sup> The visual impact of this scene on contemporary spectators must have been tremendously powerful. Not only does Shakespeare channel wonder away from the trite cliché of agnition (Perdita's finding is in fact just reported but not shown on stage); he also amazingly discloses a moving statue that bears resemblance to the *imagines agents* of mnemonics. As it happens, Hermione's wondrous coming to life relies on mnemonics and on the art of memory, since her re-generation is subject to the repentance of Leontes, whose memory has been suitably trained to this purpose by Paulina, the guardian of Hermione's innocence. Leontes's response to the early signs of motion in Hermione's statue-like body

is one that complies with the Neo-platonic view of memory as a mighty purifying power: 'There's magic in thy majesty, which has / My evils conjured to remembrance' (5.3.39-40).

At the same time, however, and much like the moving memory images of early modern culture, Hermione's moving statue also points to new attitudes towards memory and forgetting and to the demystification of the art of memory paradigm. As it underwrites the healing power of remembrance, *The Winter's Tale* also acknowledges the painful and problematic aspect of memory. As noted by Lee-Jeffries, Leontes's refusal to get married, for instance, casts a sinister shadow on the beneficial role of recollection. As he stays obdurately secluded and captivated by the memory of his dead queen's innocence, Leontes does not only prove unable to forgive himself, but he also ends up 'forgetting his role as a king, and being apparently resigned to being heirless and forgotten'.<sup>34</sup> In other words, memory is inseparable from (self-)forgetting: the regenerating paradigm of the Neo-Platonic art of memory is not incompatible with the careless neglect of duty associated to Lethean oblivion.

Seen in the context of Shakespeare's *corpus*, moreover, Hermione's moving statue achieves more ominous connotations. Shakespeare's women are quite often seemingly frozen in statue-like death: Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing* (1599?), Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well* (1609), Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Imogen in *Cymbeline* (1610?) and Thaisa in *Pericles* (1608) are all cases in point. Kaara Peterson has related the Shakespearean *motif* of female apparent death to early modern theories on female pathology. Because they paralysed the body into a seemingly lifeless condition, hysterical ailments were especially deemed to blur the boundaries between life and death and were held responsible for many 'revivification narratives'<sup>35</sup> both in medical and cultural discourse. In Shakespeare's work, unlike tragedies and comedies – which undermine either the happiness that should derive from discovering that death was only apparent or the revivification itself, which was only a fake one – late *romances* like *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* stage the purifying function of women's return to life after a long absence. What happens is, in Janet Adelman's words, a 'penitential cleansing' of the impurities connected to the female body, especially after giving birth.<sup>36</sup> By coming back to life after sixteen years, Hermione's body therefore simultaneously occludes and foregrounds its problematic corporeality, thereby both forgetting and remembering, in a way, Leontes's

belief that the female organism may be akin to a 'sluiced [...] pond' (1.2.193-94). In other words, when Hermione's statue is animated on the stage, this moving image, once the highest symbol of the art of memory paradigm, appears tainted both by movement and by the underlying watery and 'slippery' (1.2.271) female body. While staging Leontes's regeneration, the play does so by highlighting the contradictory connotations memory takes on in early modern discourse, as well as its entanglement with forgetting and self-forgetting.

The use of complex images to account for the processes of recollection is amplified in *The Tempest* (1611),<sup>37</sup> which is traditionally taken to be Shakespeare's spectacular *adieu* to his audience and his last major play. While Prospero has been read as a counterpart of Shakespeare himself, *The Tempest* fascinatingly recapitulates much of Shakespeare's earlier works, from *Richard II* to *Hamlet*, and from *Anthony and Cleopatra* to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Like *The Winter's Tale*, also this play explores the extent to which the interplay between memory and forgetting may transform tragedy into comedy or romance; however, more than any other Shakespearian play, *The Tempest* also exposes the beneficial role of oblivion, without which no forgiveness could ever be possible. As Michael O'Neill argues, Shakespeare here 'suggests a way by which 'remembrance' can free us from the burden of the past into a blessed kind of oblivion'.<sup>38</sup> This process is visible in the implicit comparison between the imperative of *Hamlet's* ghost 'Remember me', requiring revengeful action from his son, and the much softer exhortation – 'I pray thee mark me' (1.2.67) – Prospero addresses to his daughter Miranda, who is allowed to sleep after the revelation of her father's real identity and of the trials they both had to undergo after her uncle's usurpation. Unlike *Hamlet's* paralysing recollection, memory in *The Tempest* appears proximate to the liquid obliviousness of sleep.

Appropriating the island's 'forgetfulness' and resistance to history, Prospero shows that the petrifying potential of memory can be eluded. As proved by Prospero's maimed attempts to shape Miranda's, Ariel's and Caliban's memory, mnemonics on the island is bound to fail; moreover, the metaphors which foreground confinement– from Ariel's imprisonment in the pine to Prospero's 'old brain' in his 'beating mind' (4.1.149,153) – establish a pattern 'intimately linked to the play's overriding concerns with the nature of memory'.<sup>39</sup> Paralysis, suffocation and statue-like inaction can be avoided in this play by animating the past: that is, by setting in motion the images produced by memory.

The animation of the past is most visible, as Baldo argues, in ‘the general movement of the play forward in order to go backward’:<sup>40</sup> thus, the apparently ‘new’ characters that Miranda and the spectators encounter on stage will be shown to belong to Prospero’s past, just as the conspiracies occurring on the island will re-enact the plotting against Prospero. In this way, painful memories are displaced onto the future-oriented wonder which is characteristic of Miranda (and which is encrypted in her very name). The conversion of future into past actually operates also in the case of *The Tempest*’s collocation in the *First Folio*, with this play intended as a prologue to Shakespeare’s whole *corpus* precisely because it offers itself, as Baldo puts it, as ‘a recollection of old issues, themes, characters, and worlds’.<sup>41</sup>

What the play puts forward against the fixedness of the past is animation and the liquid dissolution of forgetfulness, which is the condition for forgiveness to occur. A striking example is Prospero’s *tableau* in Act 5, 1: as the play approaches conclusion, the audience is confronted with the sight of the characters involved in Prospero’s story of usurpation and exile. Frozen, in statue-like state, they ‘*stand charmed*’ (5.1) within the magic circle the *magus* has drawn. As Prospero speaks, it becomes clear that the stage has been temporarily transformed into his personal memory theatre: as he moves among the images of his past, he recollects the deeds of each character, from Gonzalo’s acting as his ‘true preserver’ (5.1.71), to Alonso’s cruel ‘use’ (5.1.75) of Prospero and Miranda, and to Antonio’s remorseless ambition (5.1.80). And yet, as was the case with the *imago agens* in *The Winter’s Tale*, the paradigm of the classical art of memory is evoked only to be profoundly revised. As soon as Prospero sets his memory theatre up, ‘[t]he charm dissolves apace’ (5.1.66), revealing its precarious nature: in fact Prospero’s visit to the images of his charmed *locus* runs parallel to the gradual awakening of the characters involved. The images in this strange theatre of memory appear therefore immovable but also sharing the liquidity of Prospero’s charm. ‘Melting the darkness’ (5.1.68), they set about to abandon their statue-like unconsciousness in the same way as ‘the approaching tide’ that ‘[w]ill shortly fill the reasonable shore’ (5.1.86-87). As if to dismantle the rigid view of a past that cannot be altered and re-worked and, at the same time, to confirm a more fluid conception of the different temporal levels, Prospero asks Ariel to fetch the symbols of his power, so that he will be able to be converted into a new kind of memory



image that ideally fuses together future, present and past: 'I will... myself present / As I was' (5.1.92-93).

The island itself actually seems to challenge the fixedness of encrusted beliefs, entrenched habits or preconceptions by setting them in motion or, in a way, liquefying them. When first confronted with the 'most majestic vision' (4.1.108) offered by Prospero's *masque*, Ferdinand yields to idealization:

Let me live here ever!  
So rare a wondered father and a wise  
Makes this place Paradise. (4.1.123-35)

Ferdinand was probably not alone in his feeling impressed by the visual display of the *masque*, a type of spectacle that was typically associated to the splendour of the court. However, Ferdinand's indulging in this fantasy is abruptly interrupted by Prospero's injunction to be silent and, shortly after, by Prospero's sudden recollection of Caliban's conspiracy. The dissolution of the *masque* intriguingly displays the entanglement of memory and forgetting in Prospero's mind and body: after suddenly remembering that he has been oblivious ('I had forgot' [4.1.129]), he for a moment forgets himself, as Miranda implicitly remarks: 'Never till this day / Saw I him touched with anger so distempered' (4.1.144-45). At the same time, and just like Ferdinand, the audience too is made to stop enjoying the spectacle not only because the *masque* is dismantled, but also because they realize that the 'picture' they have been contemplating is not the one they had expected. Since, as often noted, the structure of this Shakespearean *masque* reverses the usual disruption/harmony structure to be found in most early Jacobean *masques*,<sup>42</sup> the memory of contemporary audiences familiar with this popular *genre* was most likely unsettled, in line with the perplexing movement and transformation impressed to all instances of fixed past in this play.

It is not surprising then that, given such a context, Gonzalo's proposal to entrust the memory of the vicissitudes described in this play to 'lasting pillars' (5.1.208) engraved with gold should be distrusted. Instead, the fading away of Prospero's art and the vanishing of the play itself into thin air in the conclusion are fully consistent with the play's fascination with the watery metaphors of oblivion. Against any rigid conception of memory – whether embodied in a monument, a painful recollection or in statue-like bodies – *The Tempest* offers itself as an island which condenses the present moment and

the present play on the background of a liquid past and future. Much like human life, which Shakespeare famously describes as ‘rounded with a sleep’ (4.1.158), our memory of the play will be animated by forgetfulness as well as by the resurfacing of its traces in unpredictable manners. What remains is, in Michael Carlson’s words, the ‘ghosting’ of *The Tempest*, namely its performative echoes.<sup>43</sup> Rather than creating bodies of stone, the kind of memory Shakespeare adumbrates in his last major play is aptly shaped to take the challenge of the ‘insubstantial pageant’ (4.1.155), and fully equipped to stride into modernity.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Yates, *The Art of Memory*; Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*; Corsi, *The Enchanted Loom*. A selection of the main texts of early modern art of memory can be found in Engel (ed.), *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England*.

<sup>2</sup> Engel, *Death and Drama in Renaissance England*.

<sup>3</sup> Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*.

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*.

<sup>5</sup> Targoff, *Love after Death in the English Renaissance*, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Shakespeare, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*.

<sup>7</sup> Lee-Jeffries, *Shakespeare and Memory*, p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> Engel, *Death and Drama*, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Sarkar, *The Magic of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, p. 259.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of Marlowe’s use of Virgil’s *Aeneid* as a source for his play see Gill, *Marlowe’s Virgil*.

<sup>11</sup> Marlowe, *The Tragedy of Dido*.

<sup>12</sup> Dawson, *Priamus dead*, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

<sup>14</sup> Stallybrass, Chartier, Mowery and Wolfe, *Hamlet’s Tables*.

<sup>15</sup> Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama*, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> This point is made by a number of studies in the thriving academic field of early modern memory studies, such as Lee-Jeffries, *Shakespeare and Memory*; Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare’s Memory Theatre*; Karremann, *The Drama of Memory in Shakespeare’s History Plays*; Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare’s Histories*; Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting*; Ivic, Williams (eds.), *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*.

<sup>18</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, pp. 325-327.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Speaking what we feel about King Lear*, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Tribble, “‘The Dark Backward and Abyss of Time’”. *The Tempest and Memory*, p. 152.

<sup>22</sup> Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, p. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Harald Weinrich considers Montaigne crucial to understanding the importance of what he terms ‘the art of forgetting’. See Weinrich, *Lethe*, pp. 43-45. On Montaigne’s views about memory’s detrimental power see Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Smith, *Speaking what we feel*, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Both Willis and Burton are discussed in Ivic, Williams, *Forgetting*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>26</sup> Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting*, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare’s Memory Theatre*, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Sutton, *Body, Mind, and Order*, p. 129.

<sup>29</sup> I dealt with this aspect more in details in Perletti, “‘A Thing like Death’”. *Medical Representations of Female Bodies in Shakespeare’s Plays*.

<sup>30</sup> Peacham, *Minerva Britanna*, p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> Baldo, *Memory in Shakespeare’s Histories*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*,

<sup>33</sup> Lyne, *Shakespeare’s Late Work*, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Lee-Jeffries, *Shakespeare and Memory*, p. 181.

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<sup>35</sup> Peterson, *Popular Medicine*, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

<sup>38</sup> O'Neill, *Remembrance and Revenge*, p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Tribble, "The Dark Backward Abyss of Time", p. 153.

<sup>40</sup> Baldo, *Exporting Oblivion*, p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> Baldo, *Exporting Oblivion*, p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> See for example Walch, "What's past is prologue". *Metatheatrical Memory and Transculturation in "The Tempest"*.

<sup>43</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, p. 95.

