

EDITORIAL: IMAGINING THE PAST, REMEMBERING THE FUTURE

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This issue of the *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* draws its inspiration from a colloquium, 'Memory: Recollections of the Renaissance', which took place at the University of Glasgow on November 1st 2008. Originally *JNR* was to have published the proceedings of this conference, at which Kate Chedgzoy, Michael Dobson, Ruth Evans, Andrew Gordon, Andrew Hiscock and Vicky Price gave papers on topics ranging from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* to Henry Howard, Thomas Middleton, Moll Cutpurse, and some long-forgotten performances of Shakespeare's plays by English POWs in the Second World War. Things move quickly in twenty-first century academia. Papers were accepted elsewhere, or incorporated into other projects, or set aside for revision when the pressure of work is lifted; and in the event, the only piece from the colloquium that has made it into the issue is Kate Chedgzoy's fine essay on Aemilia Lanyer. It seems worth remembering that autumn day, however, when a group of scholars came together to ponder the processes of recollection; not least because Willy Maley wrote for it a Call for Papers which has since become the stimulus behind this issue of *JNR*.

Here it is:

Under the term 'Renaissance', the early modern period has often been articulated as a process of recovery, rebirth and remembrance – words which invoke their shadowy counterparts, loss, death and forgetting. Shakespeare's plays are just one place where such processes are enacted – 'Awake remembrance of these valiant dead', 'Great thing of us forgot', 'My lord, I fear, has forgot Britain', 'Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead' – and the preoccupation with the past runs right through the culture, from notions of nationhood to ideas about the body and the self, from antiquarianism to translation as a means of recovering and storing information. The purpose of this one-day colloquium is to think through some of the uses and abuses of memory in and of the period.

Substitute 'issue' for the term 'colloquium', add a sentence reinforcing the northward orientation of this journal, and you have here the call for papers sent out to our contributors. The most striking thing about Maley's paragraph is its recognition that the act of remembering is integral to the term 'Renaissance' – a word that has come back into favour with scholars in the last decade or so, as Douglas Bruster points out in this issue, after having been supplanted for some years by the designation 'early modern'. Since *JNR* has chosen to include the term 'Renaissance' in its title, our contributors have good reason to unpick its ideological implications – as in the editorial for Issue I, which reopened the question of whether Northern Europe ever had a Renaissance, or the ambitious essay that followed it by Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson, which traced Renaissance humanist influences on Scottish culture from the late 15th to the early 17th centuries. In the present issue, Michael Bath takes up Stevenson and Davidson's narrative, disclosing new evidence that a 'renewed dialogue with antiquity' (Jeffrey Chipps-Smith's phrase, cited in the editorial for Issue 1) took place in Scotland in the first half of the sixteenth century – at least where the arts of architecture and interior design are concerned. That Gavin Douglas's great translation of the *Aeneid* should have formed part of a wider movement to transplant the ancient arts from the Mediterranean to the North makes perfect sense, and Bath's hints at a Scottish landscape before 1540 dotted with mansions built 'after the fassione... sene in France' and grotesquely decorated in imitation of the Emperor Nero's Golden Palace is a wonderfully beguiling one. Bath may not take memory as his explicit subject, but his essay demonstrates the extent to which 'recovery, rebirth and remembrance' are integral both to Renaissance culture and to the academic project of reclaiming it from obscurity.

Bath's essay is of direct interest to art historians as well as students of Scottish literature; but Bath himself comes from a background in English Studies. The colloquium 'Memory: Recollections of the Renaissance' was held in a Department of English Literature, and most of the delegates came from English departments, as do all the scholars who have contributed to this issue of *JNR*. If, then, the present editorial seems more preoccupied with 'English' than with other branches of Renaissance studies, this arises from the concerns of our contributors. It is not intended to detract from the journal's continued aim of fostering interdisciplinarity; and Bath's essay serves to indicate that scholars from other disciplines will find much absorbing material in the essays that follow, which cover topics as diverse as the tombs of Jacobean women, the eye-witness testimony of Irish massacre survivors, and Protestant attitudes to relics in post-reformation Europe. Each of these topics is, however, scrutinized from the special perspective of a scholar of English in the Renaissance; which presents us with a good opportunity to consider what that perspective seems to involve at this particular stage in the subject's evolution.

As Willy Maley knew when he proposed the topic of the Glasgow colloquium to me late in 2007, memory has been a special focus of scholars of early modern English in recent years. Things move rapidly in twenty-first century academia – the theme may already be passé by the time this issue goes on line – but we should perhaps consider why it has preoccupied us so intensively in the first decade of the new millennium. No doubt an element of millenarianism is involved. With each significant anniversary we feel afresh the need to reassert the validity of our dating system by reflecting on the current state of affairs in any given discipline. But there are other contributory factors: for instance, a sense that we are currently casting about for new directions in literary studies – among which we may count the possibility of recapturing old ones. The New Historicism of the 1980s, from which much contemporary scholarship derives its initial impetus, could be accused, despite its name, of having indulged in a concerted act of forgetting. Its rejection of the theoretical naivety of earlier criticism led to a tendency among some of its followers to acknowledge only recent publications in the field, a habit reinforced by the scholar's need to name-check influential living academics in the interests of job security. At the same time, Cultural Materialism embarked on a programme of recollection and reconstruction, inviting its readers to return to the moment when university English departments were first formed, and when the terminologies and techniques of criticism were first established, in order to rethink the function of literary studies in the twentieth-century academy. In recent years the process of forgetting has continued unabated, as Douglas Bruster points out in his provocative essay review in this issue. The post-structuralist theorists who gave New Historicism what was new about its philosophy tend to drop out of sight, as we draw on simplified versions of their insights to produce identikit arguments whose relationship to what we teach in the classroom seems in danger of getting lost. That's perhaps why remembering has been foregrounded in the twenty-first century, as we seek to recall the origins both of our discipline and of its current preoccupations in order to ask ourselves, as Bruster does here, where we are now, and what strains in contemporary criticism might point the way to the discipline's future.

Bruster's topic is the field of New Globalism as defined by the book he reviews; but the issues he raises are equally applicable to Renaissance English studies as a whole, which have 'gone global' in admiring emulation of the capitalist corporations on which universities increasingly seek to model themselves (at least in the UK). Bruster's use of the term 'brand' to designate the discipline neatly draws attention to the economic context within which the academy now operates, and in adopting it Bruster shows a sceptical alertness to the implications of the enthusiastic embracing of the history of the market-place in recent scholarship which that scholarship itself doesn't always manifest. When one university 'brand' is competing against another for the limited resources of those students who still wish to study the arts instead of business, our employers seem to have decided that

we can only survive by making business our topic, and by exploiting an inept and outdated pastiche of the vocabulary of business to describe the work we do. Remembering can take us back to a time before this was thought necessary; so recollection can be seen as a form of resistance rather than conservatism; a way of recovering a range of critical discourses that made it possible to do work quite different from the work done in private limited companies, and a vocabulary which can be fruitfully deployed to pick apart the languages of commerce, management and venture capitalism wherever these are encountered.

Bruster's review of the Blackwell essay collection *A Companion to the Global Renaissance*, edited by Jyotsna Singh, applies a number of criteria to its assessment of the book's success which might be interestingly applied to the current issue of *JNR*. Do our scholars make use of archives from more than one country, and of texts in languages not their own? Do they offer compelling answers to the question of why they offer their work in the context of the English departments in which they are or have been employed? And does their analysis transcend cliché? While Bruster implies that some of the essays in the *Companion* may not meet these criteria – and he is honest enough to admit that they might not have to – the current issue of *JNR* could almost have been assembled with the objective of letting the editors answer 'yes' to each of Bruster's questions.

The first criterion – that you should consult international archives and texts in several languages before claiming that your subject is international – would seem to apply better to a collection on 'New Globalism' than to a journal issue addressing memory; but *JNR*'s name implies a concern with matters beyond England, and the contributors to this issue have gone far to address this concern. Naomi McAreevey has consulted the archives in Dublin (where she works) to find the witnesses of female dismemberment at the hands of Protestants in mid-seventeenth century Ireland – witnesses whose words inadvertently became part of the ongoing dialogue between England and Ireland. Marion Wynne Davies has travelled to the Hutchinson library to trace the dealings between an English husband and his agent in Italy as he seeks out a suitable monument to commemorate his dead wife. Elizabeth Elliott draws on Sebastiaan Verweij's work in the Scottish archives to uncover a potential dialogue between the poet William Fowler and the Italian memory specialist Giordano Bruno. And Michael Bath has travelled all over Europe and the United States in a lifetime of detective work, tracking down sources and analogues for the decorative designs he has catalogued in Scotland, and in the process revealing a busy cultural interchange between Stirling, Edinburgh, Antwerp, Paris, Rome and Piedmont which brought a long-forgotten Renaissance in the visual arts to the Northernmost part of the Western Archipelago in the early sixteenth century. Not all of us have time or resources to visit archives overseas, but most of the other essays in this issue trace links between texts that originate in different languages and regions, illuminating as

they do so different segments of a variegated map of artistic and literary cross-fertilization between North-West Europe and the world beyond.

The second of Bruster's criteria for a good essay collection – that it address the question of how and why literature should be used as the medium by which to address historical questions, and what it is that literary-critical techniques have to offer that historical methods do not – constitutes the topic of Donald Jellerson's fine essay on 'The Spectral Historiopoetics of the *Mirror for Magistrates*'. Here Jellerson seeks to identify the qualities that made William Baldwin's edited collection of historical poems, the *Mirror for Magistrates*, the most successful literary miscellany in Tudor England; and he finds it in the work's intransigent refusal to make a monologic statement – to become a monument – in sharp contradistinction to another great Tudor work of recollection, the *Acts and Monuments* (Foxe's Book of Martyrs). As poetry, the *Mirror's* imaginative retelling of history through the mouths of spectres enables it to prevent its audience – whether the notional audience that listens to the poems in the text or the actual Tudor readers of the early editions – from carrying away a fixed idea of the moral 'lessons' they should gather from the ghost-written stories unfolding before them. Each tale is told in the first person by the ghost of its protagonist, and the investment of these tale-bearing spirits in the narrative renders it unreliable; and each is analysed afterwards by a roomful of opinionated listeners; so that we are quickly disabused of the illusion that this particular set of histories will testify in favour of any entrenched contemporary policy or doctrine. The poems and their prose commentaries emphasize the contingent and the debatable, thus exemplifying Sidney's view in the *Apology for Poetry* (a text that strongly recommends the *Mirror for Magistrates* as a model for poets, as Jellerson reminds us) that fiction may range freely through the zodiac of human invention, without the need to kowtow to the authorities as chroniclers do. For Sidney, historians must always be mindful of the interests of their patrons, whereas poets operate without regard for patronage. In fact, however, both poets and historians could fall foul of authority, as Sidney knew very well. What Jellerson doesn't remind us is that both the *Mirror* and the history on which it is based, Hall's chronicle, were censored in the reign of Mary Tudor – showing that governments could feel as unsettled by the high-flying liberty of the poet as by the partisan politics of the early modern chronicler. Sidney was not so much stating a fact as making a point about the possibilities for radical, liberated poetry opened up by a text like the *Mirror for Magistrates*, whose freedom from ideological subservience is give a new dimension by Jellerson's essay.

A not dissimilar meditation on the degree of imaginative liberty afforded by poetry underlies Kate Chedgzoy's essay on Aemilia Lanyer's verse miscellany *Salve deus rex judaeorum*. In the first half of the piece, Chedgzoy demonstrates how the miscellany builds up the picture of a utopian community of women by forging a collective 'counter-memory' from what Gerald Hammond (discussing a range of

seventeenth-century poetry) calls 'fleeting things': the author's possibly tenuous relationship with the group of women to whom she dedicates her volume; her rewriting of the story of *Paradise Lost* using the voice of a marginal figure in the Bible, Pilate's wife; and her temporary stay with Margaret Clifford in Cookham, a place which comes to stand for the possibility of breaching class divisions and establishing a new female collective based on mutual affection and intellectual and artistic compatibility. In this miscellany, Chedgzoy argues, 'the transformation of cultural memory and historical narrative is what is at stake', and women's 'Libertie' the prize, much as the male poet's liberty was the prize in the *Mirror for Magistrates*. And the essay closes with a lyrical meditation on the question of how best to pursue the feminist project of restoring women to a central place in literary history: a project that has been both helped and hindered by the tendency of scholars to situate female writers in relationship to 'great men' – as Aemilia Lanyer has been situated, first in the guise of Shakespeare's Dark Lady and more recently as a possible influence on Milton. Can this androcentric way of locating Lanyer help us to construct an independent role for her as an integral element in the unfolding narrative of English literature? Bruster would perhaps identify her recent prominence in university classrooms as proof that it can.

For many scholars of English, the Renaissance Arts of Memory were first revealed in all their richness in the pioneering work of Frances Yates. Chedgzoy notes how Lanyer makes use of these arts in the construction of her verse collection, and two more scholars in this issue find that they afford a convenient entry point into close readings of literary and theatrical texts, although only one refers to Yates's work. Elizabeth Elliott locates a sonnet sequence written by the Scottish poet William Fowler in a contemporary debate among Protestants over the use of visual imagery – above all, of *erotic* visual imagery – to stimulate the process of recollection. Placing his sequence *Tarantula* within this debate, which saw the image-based memory systems favoured by Italian Catholics such as Petrarch, Castiglione and Bruno pitted against the verbal mnemonics of the French Protestant Ramus, enables Elliott to produce a nuanced reading of Fowler's verse narrative, in which the sophisticated Scottish taste for the decorative arts as attested by Michael Bath comes into conflict with the iconophobic impulses of Scottish Calvinism, giving the sequence an atmosphere of heightened moral and psychological tension. Rebecca Warren-Heys, meanwhile, examines in detail the rhetorical techniques by which Shakespeare's Henry V seeks to shape his subjects' memories of war with France. In doing so she identifies once again a clear distinction between literary techniques and the techniques of the historian. The play's Chorus renders the process of remembering problematic, acknowledging the potential for the same event to be recalled in 'fractured and various' ways even as he forges a persuasive myth of Agincourt that takes firm root in the minds of his English audience. The link with the *Mirror's* and Aemilia Lanyer's poetic challenges to the methods of chroniclers is obvious, and taken together these three

essays offer formidable testimony of the ambitious scale of the Renaissance poet's project of writing new versions of England to compete with the versions sponsored by the nation's past and present governments.

On the evidence of this issue, literary historians take special pleasure in spying out the ghosts of forgotten or half-remembered pasts, or the spectral tracks of paths not travelled, peering out from between the lines of a play or poem. In the speeches of the Chorus in *Henry V*, as Warren-Heys shows us, the ghost of events described in the English chronicles complicates the spectator's response to what unfolds on stage, and the Chorus seems unnervingly keen to remind us of the difference between what we're seeing and what we may previously have read. We've already noted how Jellerson's essay considers the spectral speakers of the poems in *The Mirror for Magistrates* as rendering responses to those poems problematic; how Bath's essay is haunted by the ghosts of lost Scottish houses (and it's worth recalling here that the working title for Stevenson and Davidson's essay in Issue 1, to which Bath responds, was 'Ghost Renaissances'); and how the spectral presence of a forgotten quarrel over memory glimmers through a sonnet sequence in Elliott's article. Naomi McAreavey's essay, meanwhile, culminates in the sighting of an actual ghost; not the literary spectres of the *Mirror* but an apparition witnessed by real historical figures, in a location that can still be visited, as the witnesses visited it, for the purpose of tracing the geographical contours of a past atrocity.

McAreavey takes as her subject a historical archive often frequented by the historian, and subjects it to a self-consciously literary reading as a specimen of the literature of trauma. Her chosen texts are depositions by female survivors of a massacre of Protestant women and children in the Irish Rising of 1641; and McAreavey's purpose in analysing these testimonies is to snatch them from the usual contexts in which they've been examined – as part of a male Protestant narrative of Irish Catholic atrocities, or more recently as evidence of the false accusations levelled against Irish Catholics by Protestant propaganda – and place them in a new, non-judgmental narrative which might make it possible, conjecturally at least, to reconstruct the psychological motives of the witnesses, as they told and retold the story of the horrors they had seen or heard of. For the female deponents, McAreavey suggests, their testimonies may have served the therapeutic purpose of confirming that they had indeed survived the suffering they related. She skilfully demonstrates the porosity of the women's accounts, showing how intensely conscious the speakers were of how close they had come to sharing the fates that overwhelmed their relatives and friends; and she shows too how their accounts of those fates represent a kind of triumph over them – a triumph finally embodied in the description of a phantom woman who appeared at a ford where one of the massacres had been committed. Visited in grieving pilgrimage by women who had lost family members at that spot, the ford delivered to the pilgrims a visual emblem both of their grief and of their enduring vitality, an apparition that

possessed the power to terrorize the massacre's perpetrators (the locals fled from the vicinity when they heard the ghost's wailing) and protect its survivors. Whether or not the apparition really existed, or was imagined by the community of female mourners, the pilgrims' narration of its appearance enabled them to ventriloquize their rage and sorrow and begin the process of 're-memberment', reclaiming their minds and bodies from the passive victimhood to which Catholics and Protestants alike seemed determined to reduce them.

The two essays I have not yet discussed are concerned not so much with spirits (though ghosts occur in one of them) as with the material embodiment of the past in the present; a present that defines itself by its difference from what came before, and especially from the religious and social orders that governed the lives and deaths of our ancestors. Lucy Razzall's magical essay on post-reformation recollections of the culture of relics reveals the extent to which Protestant writers found themselves repeatedly reactivating the idea of the relic as the living, material continuation of a holy person or event in the here and now. Books and libraries in particular, she suggests, attract to themselves the vocabulary once attached to relics, most famously in Milton's description of the text as the 'pretious life-blood of a master-spirit', a warm and throbbing crimson river that taps directly into the veins of its long-dead author. While reading Razzall's discussion we might wryly recall the laments penned by Protestant antiquaries, such as Bale and Leland, for the cavalier treatment of the great religious libraries of England at the dissolution of the monasteries. If books were the Protestant equivalent of relics, there is a rich irony to the fact that the Catholics had preserved them with reverence alongside the remains of the saints, and that this life-blood of the past was in danger of being spilled along with the sacred body-parts and fluids flung to the ground from vials and shattered jewel-encrusted caskets by the agents of the reformation. Razzall's essay highlights, in fact, like several essays here, the complex dialogue between Protestant and Catholic culture that continued throughout the Renaissance period despite the entrenched positions of hostility adopted by the more radical adherents of each faith. A close analysis of language, such as literary criticism revels in, can do much to recover the psychological transformations being undergone in Europe as old orders metamorphosed into new and new orders mutated under pressure from the old.

Finally, Marion Wynne-Davies's essay gives a fine example of how the application of analytical techniques from literary studies can lend new warmth and urgency to texts not usually considered literary: in this case, inscriptions on the tombs of two eminent seventeenth-century sisters, Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cavendish (Lady Jane Cheyne). In conjunction with the writings of the tombs' occupants, elegies lamenting their deaths, accounts of their passing away and the visual statements made by the monuments, these inscriptions serve to give an enduring vitality to the women who inspired them. The difference between the inscriptions encourages us to conclude that the women's husbands had radically

different reactions to the loss of their spouses. Of course it's hardly fair to Jane Cavendish's husband to infer that because the sculpture he ordered for his wife's tomb is somewhat tasteless and overbearing, and because he couldn't think of appropriate words to set on the monument beyond a few banal references to her rank and connections, he must therefore have suffered from her death less fiercely than his brother-in-law, whose tender words on Elizabeth Brackley's tomb speak his grief with such eloquence. After all, in McAreavey's account of the traumatized female victims of the Irish Rising inarticulacy is accepted as a sign of inexpressible horror and bereavement. But Wynne-Davies rightly points out the emotional impact of the loving inscription on Elizabeth's tomb, and suggests that it brings to life, as Jane's grandiose monument does not, the motive that led to its construction: not self-promotion, religious fervour or social ostentation but 'quite simply' that of love. What literary studies can do better than most branches of scholarship is to locate a fleeting thing like love among the more conspicuous 'human and artistic practices' of a given period, to awaken our recognition of the quotidian joys and griefs that get variously expressed in different epochs, as well as of those emotional, intellectual and artistic reactions of the past that seem alien to us now. Sidney said poetry takes for its subject the things that move us, and has the ability to move us afresh each time we read. Good criticism, it seems to me, can move us too, by drawing our attention to moving moments and techniques at work in literature and the arts that we might previously have overlooked or misinterpreted. In this issue of *JNR*, an unusual number of essays engage the emotions as well as the intellects of their readers, and in doing so demonstrate the robust strength of Renaissance studies at the end of the first decade of the new millennium.

Douglas Bruster's last criterion for a good essay collection is that it avoid cliché. I couldn't see much in the way of cliché in the essays here, in part perhaps because the subjects they treat are so various, their methodology so diverse; none of them manifests the need to invoke catch-phrases or key words in order to align themselves with a particular literary-critical faction (not that such alignment is a bad thing – it only becomes so when it's the *raison d'être* of a discussion). The topic of the issue – memory – has as many different manifestations here as there are articles. One thing that all these pieces *do* have in common, however, is a preoccupation with the workings of the imagination. The 'fantasy' McAreavey sees being worked out in the depositions of her female survivors; the imaginative refashioning of the selves of dead women and their commemorators being enacted by Wynne-Davies's tombs; the self-conscious fictionalizing of history in *The Mirror for Magistrates* and *Henry V*; the reinvention of Scotland as successor to ancient Rome achieved through a fanciful style of interior decoration; the fusion of early modern books with the bodies of the persons who wrote them; the anxiety conjured up by mental images in a sixteenth-century sonnet sequence; the envisioning of a feminist utopia – all these topics are as much concerned with the

reordering of the material supplied by the past into new and different contours as they are with the various processes of summoning it up.

To avoid cliché we must always be moving on (hopefully moving our readers as we do so); and it seems to me that one direction we might consider moving in at this point is to think with greater precision about the imagination in early modern Europe. What did people think the imagination was and did? What were the specific functions of fiction, fantasy and fancy in and beyond the early modern arts? Sidney said that imaginative fictions – verbal artefacts that deliberately transmute or traduce what we remember – could generate ‘forms such as never were in Nature’, shaping golden worlds and ideal commonwealths and drawing the mind into enraptured engagement with these new spaces ‘more effectually than any other art doth’. To speak of memory is in some sense safe; we can pit it against the record of what ‘really’ happened, and reach a consensus about the course of history. But we have not yet fully risen to Sidney’s challenge – in this generation at least – and traced the evidence of how the Renaissance imagination could be said to have shaped the *future*, both by the challenge it posed to the cultural dominance of ‘authoritative’ representations of the past and by the seductive blueprints it offered of people and places that had not yet come into existence. As a project, the drawing of a map of the Renaissance imagination – that perilous region of our forebears’ heads where dragons brooded – would seem to be the next logical (or challengingly less-than-logical) step after the mapping of the early modern memory. And one can think of no better way of addressing the urgent question of where we are going in literary studies than adopting this as our new topic.

But that’s another issue – even if it seems to have infiltrated this one, in which our contributors grapple with the task of recollecting the Northern Renaissance.

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