

Lina Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), ISBN: 9780512764551, £55.

The Renaissance obsession with memory has been expounded by numerous scholars, mainly focusing on fields such as memorials, the *memento mori* tradition, materials of memory and the art of memory. Since Frances A. Yates's ground-breaking book *The Art of Memory* (1966), the prescriptive order of the art of memory in studies of early modern memory, as some scholars including Lina Perkins Wilder, Garrett A. Sullivan and Evelyn B. Tribble realise, has been overemphasised. Although Wilder still broods on the subject she does not merely focus on the art of memory alone. Wilder also examines memory of different aspects covering materials of memory and theatre, the outcome of which is her exhilarating publication *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character* (2010).

At the very beginning of the book Wilder puts forward her idea that '[T]he materials of theatre are, for Shakespeare, the materials of memory' (p.1). Shakespeare's theatre is regarded as a 'remembrance environment' (p.1) where all of the physical and social properties of the theatre, including the props, the players and the physical space of the stage itself are the materials for a mnemonic dramaturgy contributing to mnemonic instruction and recollection. Some of the properties are present on the stage as physicalised reminders or mnemonic *res* and others are physically absent yet rhetorically present to evoke memory. The offstage space with absent props and characters extends the remembrance environment of the stage beyond its physical boundary and evokes the memory retained among the audience on the stage and off the stage in a theatrical community.

All of the properties not only function as mnemonic reminders and evokers, as Wilder points out, but also provide the vocabulary of Shakespeare's memory theatre. Female bodies, present on the stage both as space and objects, are theatrical and rhetorical artifice to stimulate players' memories. By illustrating some important words such as *locus*, *belly (venter)*, *dilation*, *noting* and *nothing*, Wilder indicates that female bodies also provide the vocabulary for understanding remembering. Corresponding to the theory that male form gave shape to female matter in the womb, the indiscipline of the female body, which is a threat, calls for male bodily discipline, which is fundamental to the art of memory. Considering John Sutton's emphasis on the impact of the art of memory on bodily confusion and Sullivan's highlighting the importance of corporeal and psychic discipline and orderliness in terms of the art of memory, Wilder argues that 'many educated males in Shakespeare's plays (including Romeo, Hamlet and Prospero) show signs of having been trained in the art of memory' (p.8). However, their art and masculinity are often intruded on by women's unordered and wandering recollection. When Wilder examines dilatory memory and the art of memory, she provides an excellent interpretation of female fluidity and masculine intention of localisation and the manipulation of it. The tension between fluid memory and stability of memory, which is prevalent in Shakespearean plays both on the page and on the stage but neglected by most scholars, is noted and interpreted by Wilder in her fascinating narrative.

The first chapter of Wilder's book examines the cultural history of memory, especially the crisis of memory in early modern Britain. A place-based memory system, non-purpose recollection and mnemonic discipline, forgetting and memory, liquidity of memory and stability of memory are also clarified by Wilder in this chapter. In chapter two Wilder talks about dilating memory, which evokes a dramatic past in remembrance environment, by analysing the Apothecary scene and the Nurse's recollection of Juliet's

weaning. Whereas Romeo and the Nurse construct absent memory theatres with words, in the third chapter Hal and Falstaff inhabit real stages, the tavern and the court. Falstaff's body, figured as food and costume, is a mnemonic object which is gradually removed from the stage as well as the sight of Henry V, who exploits memory and wastes memory as if 'memory itself is also disposable' (p.85). Wilder's interpretation of Henry V's attitude towards memory from the perspective of economics and her usage of 'the mnemonic economy' (p.84) is innovative and in doing so it has captured the essence of memory in *Henry V*.

The fourth chapter is devoted to *Hamlet* (1599-1601), where the engendering of memory causes anxiety and trouble to Hamlet. In the following chapter about *Othello* (1603) the false past causes problems and, Wilder believes, leads to the ultimate tragedy. *Macbeth* (1603-1607) is a play flooded with fragmentary memories, and *The Tempest* (1610-1611) – the subject of the final chapter – is a mnemonic structure of Shakespeare's memory theatre. In Wilder's examination of these four tragedies, fluidity of memory, falseness of memory, fragmentation of memory and usurpation of memory are respectively analysed, and these characteristics of memory to some extent lead to the anxiety and contribute to the tragic ending.

Throughout the book, Wilder demonstrates her comprehensive knowledge of memory and especially Shakespearean memory on the page and on the stage. Her detailed analysis of memory in each play is systematic and wide-ranging, resulting in this fascinating book. However, in *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre* almost every material, absent and present, is given a mnemonic function by Wilder. The mnemonic functions of various properties can be overemphasised. Although Shakespeare's theatre is to some extent a 'remembrance environment' (p.1), it does not necessarily mean that every property within

it functions as a mnemonic reminder. Wilder's book is both informative and inspiring for researchers interested in the art of memory, theatrical memory and the early modern period more generally.

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