EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

William E. Engel, Rory Loughnane, and Grant Williams, eds. *Memory and Mortality in Renaissance England* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). Pp. 311. $99.99 (hardback).

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Striking for a book with its title and topic, *Memory and Mortality in Renaissance England* is a pleasure. Editors William E. Engel, Rory Loughnane, and Grant Williams have assembled a methodologically diverse roster of scholars to approach the intersection of two knotty *topoi* in early modern literary studies; in doing so, they've produced a collection of essays that seems necessary and contributes meaningfully to ongoing and longstanding conversations around death and memory in early modern culture. The collection is also better built than most comparable collections, with each of its three main sections preceded by a brief orienting essay — 'The Arts of Remembering Death,' 'Grounding Remembrance of the Dead,' and 'The Ends of Commemoration' — that highlights the various connections between essays and sections while tying the collection to longstanding critical conversations, yoking current work to scholarship on memory and death from Ludwig Volkmann through to Frances Yates and to a variety of the most significant scholarship dealing with this material today. These framing introductions help to produce the volume's coherence, and help it to establish itself as a work at the centre of the field it helps to develop further.

That the book seems necessary isn't surprising, coming as it does from the three editors who produced both *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England* and *The Death Arts in Renaissance England*. The book's necessity is also clear in the usefully orienting introduction, where the editors historicize the relationship of the *ars moriendi* and *ars memoriae* in the years between the Reformation and the Revolution, pointing up the 'intense friction and collaboration' between the spheres (p. 3). Theology — predictably —

is a central mediator in this relationship between memory and mortality and the collection frequently foregrounds the crises in commemoration that the abolition of purgatory inspired: in a familiar story, when purgatory disappears, and when the living can no longer intercede via prayer in the lives of the dead, then memory and memorial — literary, funereal, sculptural — become the final, unsteady media in which the dead might linger among the living. *Memory and Mortality in Renaissance England* takes this observation and fleshes it out, showing both how Reformed accounts of death disrupted early modern practices of mourning, and also how early modern poets, thinkers, nobles, and philosophers responded to this crisis, establishing a variety of mnemonic practices to preserve whatever they might. Perhaps most valuably, the collection shows how this potted historical narrative about the abolition of purgatory was far from the only story to tell about memory and death in the period, and that the dead were frequently felt and thought to be closer to the living than Calvin, for instance, might suggest in the *Institutes* (5.6-9)

Rebecca Helfer's opening essay is capacious in intellectual historical terms, and offers an inventive, convincing reading of Donne's *Holy Sonnets* and Marlowe's *Faustus*. In Helfer's telling, neither the speaker in Donne's *Holy Sonnets* nor the characters in *Faustus* have a particularly easy time when it comes to the demands of faith, always finding vexation and struggle when human finitude runs into infinite obligation. To frame this difficulty, Helfer turns to Augustine — who also had a hard time of it — and limns a counter tradition at the intersection of memory and death, where forgetting seems a less painful, more satisfying option than the heavy lifting of memory. The strength of Helfer's chapter here is the strength of her *Spenser's Ruins and the Art of Recollection*: both historically and theoretically sophisticated, the dreams of lethe she identifies emerge most clearly in her subtle, expansive close readings of Donne, Augustine, and Marlowe. It's from these close readings that we get astute accounts of three writers who require particularly careful attention, including an account of *Faustus* in which Faustus's damnation is a matter not of desire for knowledge but of mnemonic failure, or a more complex 'desire to forget the soul' (p. 30).

Like Helfer's essay, Jonathan Baldo's essay on the language of debt in Shakespeare's sonnets and plays concerns soteriological worry and the work of forgetting in the shadow of Reformed theology; also like Helfer's essay, Baldo's finds resistance to various religious compulsions. Operating around a series of quibbles in the plays and *The Sonnets*, Baldo explores the links between debt and its (near?) homophone in death. Baldo teases out in this nexus a variety of intellectual and historical forces that make the link between debt and

death particularly fraught: in the wake of the reformation, salvation by grace obviates the efforts and obligations implied by 'spiritual debt' in a pre-Reformed tradition, but novel extra-theological discourses of accountancy preserve and complicate the metaphor. Building on Grahame Thompson's claims that the introduction of double-entry bookkeeping to England 'bore epistemological as well as theological implications' (in Baldo, p. 55), metaphors of accountancy in Shakespeare become tools through which one might consider debt and death in less rigidly theological ways, moving from 'the language of heavy indebtedness that for nearly everyone in England had once been an essential part of the rites of mourning' toward 'mercantile language of double-entry book keeping to represent death as a way of evening accounts, of balancing the books' (p. 55). Shakespeare's eagerness to emulate and explore languages from a variety of worlds ultimately provides a more nuanced account of the relationship between death and memory than we might find when focused exclusively on the theological. Salvation may be by faith alone, but accountancy speaks to a residual economic calculation made around sin

John S. Garrison and Scott Newstok each offer chapters here that develop on their previous work: for Garrison, *Sexuality and Memory in Early Modern England* and for Newstok *How to Think Like Shakespeare*. In these essays, the volume's methodological heterogeneity is perhaps clearest with Garrison's careful close reading and attention to form ultimately leading to a convincing account of memory work Shakespeare's *Sonnets*; there, Garrison finds a lover who looks to memory as a curiously proleptic site in which 'present, past, and future collapse into each other' in the name of pleasure and fantasy rather than (or perhaps alongside) preservation and commemoration (p. 67). Newstok, on the other hand, moves largely away from this sort of close reading and provides a broader view of the period akin to the sort of breadth that characterizes his *How to Think*. Here, we find an account of dying-as-craft that runs swiftly over huge swaths of early modern material in order to offer a striking counter-narrative to many stories told about the arts of death in England: finding examples that treat dying as an art to practice rather than knowledge to learn, he moves away from Montaigne's claim that to *philosophize* is to learn how to die and towards a more practical account of what one must *do* to die well.

The book's second major section — 'Grounding the Remembrance of the Dead' — moves away from ideas about death, focusing instead on monumentality and the practices of commemoration that 'secure the permanence of the dead in the memory oft individual and his or her community' (p. 98). Patricia Phillippy's 'Memory, Climate, and Mortality: The Dudley Women Among the Fields' captures this move towards materiality most obviously

where it expands on her work in *Women, Death, and Literature in Post-Reformation England* and *Shaping Remembrance from Shakespeare to Milton*, both of which have significantly shaped the current critical conversations around death and commemoration. In this essay, Philippy offers an excitingly fresh account of early modern memorial practices where she considers a pair of memorials to two Dudley women in terms of global climate. As is the case in *Remembrance of Shakespeare to Milton*, Philippy's scholarship here glows when dealing with the historical, legal, and material details surrounding the monuments — one to Frances Kniveton at St. Giles in the Fields and one to Alice, Duchess Dudley, at St. Mary the Virgin's, Stoneleigh — but its broadest intellectual payoff comes in its recognition that the two memorials are profoundly shaped by the climate crisis known as the Little Ice Age. This much, much, broader context for thinking through memorial practices reminds us in crucial ways that even the most intimate aspects of death, dying, and commemoration are imbricated in system that spans the planet: bequests change, for instance, as local parishioners' needs change due to climate disruption, and commemorative images — even among the wealthy Dudleys — were 'influenced by the changing conditions of marriage and maternity that affected poor and middling women living through climate change' (p. 115).

Strong essays from Phillip Schwyzer, Brian Chalk, Claire Preston fill out this section of *Memory and Mortality*, pointing to the occasionally anxious, occasionally enthusiastic preservation of iconophilia among presumably Reformed writers. The altars may have been stripped during the Reformation and martyr worship may have become a purely textual practice rather than a specific orientation toward human remains but the impulse to find a material connection to the dead remained alive. For Milton, as Schwyzer argues, this preservation of a reliquary impulse is a problem to be corrected, but only corrected so far: while a Reformed Milton isn't keen to indulge the images of relic worship, Schwyzer detects in his poems and in the poetry of other Reformed poets a recognition that the scattered bones of the dead remain 'things of power, capable of soliciting both human and supernatural action' (p. 126). For Thomas Browne, Preston argues, the concern with remains moves in the opposite direction to find the dead within the living rather than finding persistent life among the dead. While unsurprising that Thomas Browne — author of *Hydriotaphia, or Urn Burial* — would be interested in the material stuff of death, Preston turns to Browne's *A Letter to a Friend* — written around the same time as *Hydriotaphia* — to find a curious expansion of the *memento mori* when he looks at life as the sickness unto death: what if we don't need to look at a skull to imagine death because, even living, we're already a little bit dead, reflecting the earth from which we're built? In

this ‘medical eschatology of ultimate destruction,’ Preston argues, ‘bodies, and the earth from which they emerge and to which they retreat’ are ‘finally the same thing’ (p. 160). Chalk’s contribution here fits curiously among the other essays, but offers a necessary and refreshing turn from the funereal to think of monuments in Middleton’s 1624 *Game at Chess* as a matter of *secular* concern. Unlike another writer who had been made monumental in print the year before, Middleton’s reputation had yet to be established monumentally, and this controversial play would be the last he wrote for the public stage, making it a poignant occasion for his mediation on time, change, and disappearance. Chalk’s inventive reading considers Middleton against more secular accounts of commemoration that see its value in didactic and community-building terms. In this register, King James, allegorized as the White King in *A Game at Chess*, becomes a monumentalist, while Middleton himself is skeptical: trading primarily in the ephemeral stuff of the stage, Middleton’s play ‘travest[ies] the idea that we can control and manipulate our posthumous reputations’ (p. 145).

The final section of the collection — ‘The Ends of Commemoration’ — explores the practical implications for commemorative practice in the shadow of Reformed theology, describing the gradual transformation in the focus of memorial art away from the needs of the dead and towards the needs of the living. The first two essays in this section, by Peter Sherlock and Anita Gilman Sherman, point to the political work that commemoration performs and the various ways that extra-religious discourses might inform the practice of commemoration. In Sherlock’s eye-opening and frequently surprising account of the famous Unton Portrait — an anonymous portrait of Sir Henry Unton — we see there not only a story of an Elizabethan knight’s life, but an example of the anxieties that follow from Reformed thought. Pointing to the tripartite structure of the painting, Sherlock notes that a third is dedicated to the dead knight’s life, a third to ‘the elaborate funerary rituals that took place following Unton’s death in France’ (p. 184), and a third to his attempt to preserve a secular memory of himself through a church monument in his home parish. That a commemorative portrait includes this self-conscious treatment of aesthetic commemoration and material self-preservation suggests just how significant these more practical and secular gestures become as those destined to die work to preserve a connection to life in the last way available to them. Sherman’s contribution looks to a similar intersection of secular and devotional concerns by turning to Marvell and the influence of ‘taste’ — an historically novel concept — in the *ars moriendi*. The question of taste in death and dying maps readily for Marvell against a distinction between Catholic and Reformed habits, with the alleged effeminacy and gaudiness of Catholic

commemoration contrasted with the austere, tasteful, masculinity of Protestant 'styles' of dying, poetic form, and memorial. Illuminating throughout, particularly where it explores Marvell's thinking on taste and death, the essay's conclusion most clearly frames the stakes of the conversation where it explores Marvell's oddly 'Catholic' aesthetics in 'The Loyal Scot' and 'The Unfortunate Lover,' finding in these poems a struggle of questionable success to Reform features of Catholic devotion that he learned from Jesuits as a student at Cambridge. For Sherman, 'Marvell's revisions of the *ars moriendi* reveal not the experimental forays of a man of taste, but enquiries into the incommensurability of the orders of grace and nature' (p. 210).

The closing chapters in the collection from Andrew Hiscock and Michael Neill each work to serve a closural role, tying together many of the volume's key themes and pointing directions to further research. Turning partially away from the state-sanctioned or broadly 'official' accounts of Elizabeth's life, death, and legacy, Hiscock finds an ambivalent account of the queen coming from Recusants and continental Catholics, noting frequent unflattering comparisons with other sovereigns from writers with an international focus. In a particularly sharp and convincing turn, Hiscock's essay subsequently offers a fascinating account of how Elizabeth's death spoke to contemporary conversations about English nationhood. Considering how closely Elizabeth had been associated with newer forms of English nationalism, and considering how James would move to produce the United Kingdom as a more meaningfully integrated political unit, Hiscock's account of changing political climates on the commemoration of a previous sovereign inform how that sovereign was mourned. As readers see throughout the volume, Hiscock here recognizes the decidedly earthly and secular work that public mourning and acts of commemoration perform. In a similar vein, Neill considers early modern political culture to discuss *The Duchess of Malfi*, a play closely tied to stories of death and political upheaval through its oblique ties to the Overbury affair. Closing the collection on an appropriately melancholy note, Neill's effective and creative close reading of Webster's play looks at the tomb — promised by Bosola disguised as a 'tomb-maker' — that never arrives. In this image of a missing tomb or forgotten memorialization, Neill finds Webster outlining the real stakes of memorial practice and death, as well as offering a sympathetic account of the recently deceased Prince Henry, whose loss (per his most ardent Protestant supporters) was never adequately marked because he offered a more robust image of a Protestant nation than his still-reigning father. Here, commemoration is less about a soul's salvation or a community's collective project of memorialization and more about the needs of the future to build the past it always hoped was there.

By engaging the links between cynical current needs and the spiritual or psychic demands for commemoration, *Memory and Mortality* establishes in this closing section a final frame to comprehend the overdetermined work of mourning in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England. Usefully refusing to square the circle — political imperatives and demands of the soul coexist and refuse to be reduced — the volume ultimately closes by reminding readers of the complexity of the topic that its contributors treat capaciously, and it suggests just how much further work remains to be done, even after this impressive collection. As early modern literary studies faces a potentially bleak future, such a reminder is both heartening and poignant.