Revisiting the Past through Rhetorics of Memory and Amnesia

Revisiting the Past through Rhetorics of Memory and Amnesia: Selected Papers from the 50th Meeting of the Linguistic Circle of Manitoba and North Dakota

Edited by

Dale Sullivan, Bruce Maylath
and Russel Hirst

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Revisiting the Past through Rhetorics of Memory and Amnesia:
Selected Papers from the 50th Meeting of the Linguistic Circle of Manitoba and North Dakota,
Edited by Dale Sullivan, Bruce Maylath and Russel Hirst

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2010 by Dale Sullivan, Bruce Maylath and Russel Hirst and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2555-7, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2555-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Images ix

Chapter One 1
Introduction: Sites for the Study of Memory
Dale L. Sullivan

Part One: Public Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of Place

Chapter Two 13
Remembering the Battles of Saratoga: *Ad Bellum Purificandum*
S. Michael Halloran

Chapter Three 23
In-Between: Narrating Postmodern Urban Toronto
Sally Booth

Chapter Four 35
"…Um, the Glory of Whatever": Meaning-Making, Militarism, and Ambivalence at the United States Air Force Memorial
Katherine M. Cruger

Chapter Five 59
Whitestream Modernity Meets First Nations: Cultural Amnesia and Personal Remembrance
Laura McLauchlan

Chapter Six 77
Awakening the Dead: Revitalizing the Cemetery
Kimberly K. Porter

Part Two: Memory in Literary Works

Chapter Seven 87
Poetics and Politics of Displacement in Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*
Alexander McEllistrem-Evenson

Chapter Eight 95
Mourning, Memory and Art in Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*
Monique Dumontet

Chapter Nine 105
The Negative Influence of Memory: Irish Nationalism in Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People*
Michelle Forness

Chapter Ten 111
Re-Remembered Hi(stories): Performance of Memory in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*
Sarah Himsel-Burcon

Chapter Eleven 121
Traumatic Memory as Inheritance: Remembering the Holocaust in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* and Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room*
Miriam Raethel

Chapter Twelve 133
Experience, Memory, Truth: Helping Students Make Sense with Narrative
Jaqueline McLeod Rogers

Part Three: Visual Rhetoric and Memory

Chapter Thirteen 145
Solomon Butcher and the Great White Turkey: Re/visioning Landscape in Midwestern America
Jeff Ward

Chapter Fourteen 157
What the "Body Knows" and the "Camera Shows": Death and Memory in Personal Portraiture
Alison Dean

Chapter Fifteen 171
The Rhetorical Situation of the Sacred: Exigences of the Human Body
Mary Fitzgerald and Elizabethada Wright

Part Four: Stylistics, Rhetoric, and Memory

Chapter Sixteen 183
Whose City Is It Anyway?
Carolyn D. Baker

Chapter Seventeen 191
Charismatic Terms and Cultural Amnesia in America
James J. Floyd

Chapter Eighteen 203
“Slipp’d from Oblivion”: Atavism, Archaism, and Allusion in Robert Bridges’ “Low Barometer”
Mark William Brown

Chapter Nineteen 213
The Words that Jog Our Memories—and Those That Don’t
Bruce Maylath

Chapter Twenty 221
Virtue, Brevity, and Memory
Russel Hirst

Contributors 229

Index 233

LIST OF IMAGES

Fig. 4-1 The U.S. Air Force Memorial
Fig. 4-2 Bronze honor guard at U.S. Air Force Memorial
Fig. 4-3 Missing man formation in clear glass, USAF Memorial
Fig. 6-1 James Cadham: written in pencil: “Wendigo Lodge; Antoine Vandle, our Moose Guide.”
Fig. 6-2 Swan Lake Reserve Councillor Wanda McKinney with L. McLauchlan, May 2007
Fig. 6-3 Pilot Mound, a fenced site, privately owned
Figs. 6-4 and 6-5 Bank vault on Pilot Mound
Fig. 6-6 Thunderbird House in Winnipeg surrounded by indigenous plants
Fig. 13-1 Sod house on prairie
Fig. 13-2 Bennett’s photography studio, Wisconsin Dells, WI, USA
Fig. 13-3 Butcher’s turkey
Fig. 13-4 Reconstruction of a plague of grasshoppers
Fig. 13-5 Canoeists in the Wisconsin Dells
Fig. 13-6 “Indians” in the Wisconsin Dells

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: SITES FOR THE STUDY OF MEMORY

DALE SULLIVAN

One of the five canons of rhetoric in antiquity was memory. After the orator invented arguments, arranged them, and wrote them, he then memorized the script so that he could deliver it. For rhetoricians in antiquity, therefore, the art of memory was primarily a faculty of the mind that made it possible for the orator to deliver a speech without the aid of notes. As Francis Yates (1992) has shown, this art relied heavily on association, combining words with images and physical places (44-72). Whereas discussion of memory in classical rhetoric focused on the memory of the orator, by the time of the enlightenment rhetoricians were more concerned with the memory of the audience. In the 18th century, George Campbell drew connections between the vivacity of ideas, stylistic choices, and memory. As Campbell (1969) points out in Book III of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric,* vivacity of ideas could be enhanced by a careful selection of words and by the careful crafting of sentences. In his discussion of the speaker's consideration of the hearers, Campbell says that vivid ideas are "more easily retained" (75). Thus, through this indirect route—linguistic choices affect vivacity of ideas, which affect the auditor's or reader's memory—we learn that stylistic choices affect the hearers' ability to remember.

In modern rhetoric, social, and literary studies, the study of memory has expanded to include more than the orator's or the audience's memory. Recent memory studies have considered the political dimensions of public memory (Biesecker 2002) and have drawn distinctions between history as a single objective and authoritative account of the past and memories as multiple and mutable accounts (Phillips 2004), between an individual's memories and a group's collective memories (Halbwachs 1992), between writing (inscription) and performance (incorporation) as ways of handing on memories from generation to generation (Connerton 1989), and between the ways in which personal and collective memories contribute to forming identity (Zelizer 1995). To better understand how our identities are shaped, scholars in the humanities and social sciences study how commemorative practices (Connerton 1989), memorials (Blair and Michel 2000), literature (Parkin-Gounelas 2004), and images (Zelizer 2004) impact memory and participate in ideological struggles to define the present by defining the past. Whereas literary studies tend to focus on the psychology of individual characters working out their identities as they come to terms with their past, rhetorical and social studies of memory tend to focus on collective memory, exploring how memories are selected, contested, negotiated, and made part of a culture's identity.

The essays in this collection draw on all of these approaches. They were selected from the 50th meeting of the Linguistic Circle of Manitoba and North Dakota[1], which met in Fargo, North Dakota, USA, in September 2007. The theme for the conference was memory, memorial, and amnesia, and the conference drew participants from coast to coast across Canada and the United States. Participants represented several disciplines, including history, literature, linguistics, sociology, and rhetoric. The book's organization is not intended to highlight disciplinary differences; instead, it is divided into four parts, each based on a different focus. In the first section, we have collected essays that focus on public rhetoric and/or place. This section contains studies of monuments, memorials, walking tours, and cemeteries. The second section collects studies of literary works, showing how individuals establish their identity by coming to terms with memories of the past. The third section contains essays that focus on the relationship between memory and images or other visual media. The fourth section focuses on how memory is stimulated, invoked, or enhanced through the orator's or author's linguistic and stylistic choices. We believe this collection of essays is a useful contribution to the growing body of literature broadly defined as memory studies.

Part I: Public Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of Place

The first section, Public Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of Place, collects a handful of essays that demonstrate the importance of place to memory. Of these, four explore ideological contestations of space. Michael Halloran's "Remembering the Battles of Saratoga: *Ad Bellum Purificandum*," the keynote address of the conference, traces two accounts of why General

---

[1] In 2009, the LCMND changed its name to the Language and Culture Circle of Manitoba and North Dakota.

Daniel Morgan, field commander of the American revolutionaries, commanded his men to shoot British General Simon Fraser at the Battle of Saratoga. Halloran argues that the more probable account, long forgotten and buried in archives, failed to become part of American collective memory because it depicted Morgan as an uncultivated man, who broke rules of engagement when he ordered his men to aim at Fraser. Instead, a counter-narrative, which appears on a granite monument on the Saratoga Battlefield and suggests that Morgan, as a true gentleman, reluctantly ordered the shooting, has become part of our nation's collective memory.

Sally Booth's "In-Between: Narrating Postmodern Urban Toronto," Katherine M. Cruger's " '…Um, the Glory of Whatever': Meaning-Making, Militarism, and Ambivalence at the United States Air Force Memorial," and Laura McLauchlan's "Whitestream Modernity Meets First Nations: Cultural Amnesia and Personal Remembrance" continue the study of contested spaces. Booth's description of walking tours in downtown Toronto shows how past development of the area, which displaced minorities and underprivileged groups, is passed over in an intentional act of amnesia. The resulting liminal space, stripped of its former identity, is associated with a nostalgic story that creates a false identity between historical downtown Toronto and the global companies that have colonized it.

Cruger studies the United States Air Force Memorial located west of the Pentagon and just east of the Navy Annex in Arlington, Virginia. Her chapter documents the Air Force's controversies with the Navy and other branches of the military over the memorial's placement and contrasts official and vernacular interpretations of it. These contrasting readings, argues Cruger, stem from the monument's essential ambiguity in regard to ambivalence toward war and toward technology in the future.

McLauchlan, like Booth, explores intentional amnesia. She tells a story of her own awakening to the amnesia created by European white immigrants who settled the plains of Manitoba with little or no regard for sacred Native American sites, denying indigenous claims to access and erasing interpretations of these places. Each of these places is a site imbued with collective memories. Downtown Toronto and the Indian mounds of Manitoba are places where collective memories have been forgotten: they are places of amnesia. The United States Air Force Museum, conversely, is an ambiguous space, where vernacular interpretations fall short of the lofty intentions of the monument's designers and sponsors.

The final essay in this section, Kimberly Porter's "Awakening the Dead: Revitalizing the Cemetery," argues that revisiting places is an effective way of awakening an individual's latent memories. This essay, like those by Halloran, Booth, and MacLauchlan, discusses the association of place with memory, but in this case the subject is individual memory, not collective memory. Porter describes her attempt in graduate school to complete an assignment to do primary research on the Civil War. Her early archival work proving less than satisfactory, she decided to interview relatives, whose memories seemed to have little to offer. However, upon visiting a cemetery with her father and grandfather on separate occasions, she discovered that memory was awakened as stories unavailable elsewhere came to mind as they wandered the cemetery.

Part II: Memory in Literary Works

In the second section of this collection, Memory in Literary Works, five essays explore the representation of memory in literature, and a sixth describes how the author uses a memoir to elicit student responses in a writing class. Alex McEllistrem-Evenson's "Poetics and Politics of Displacement in Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*" shares with several of the essays from Part I a focus on place; however, it is a literary study of Stegner's account in *Wolf Willow* of his return to his childhood home, which becomes an occasion for his critique of modernity, objectivity, and the frontier mentality. McEllistrem-Evenson traces the instability of memories associated with place in the book's first section, the arbitrary boundary setting of the frontier mentality in the second, and the subjective nature of observation and memory in the third.

The next four essays are studies of literary characters' struggles with the past, exploring the process of mourning, intentional amnesia, preservation of memories of traumatic events, and the recovery of the past. Monique Dumontet, in "Mourning, Memory and Art in Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*," takes issue with Paul Fussell's claim that memories of the First World War privilege irony. Using Freud's model of grief and recovery, she argues that Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*—which tells the story of a bereaved woman, Klara, working through the loss of her lover in World War I while she works on the Vimy sculpture—can be read "as a personal story of melancholy turned into mourning, but also as an allegory about the possibilities of healing through art." Klara's success at working through her grief to authentic mourning is contrasted in the novel with Walter Allward's (the creator of the monument) inability to find healing. The distinction, between Klara's art and Allward's art, according to Dumontet, is the distinction between the art of mourning and the art of melancholy.

Michelle Forness's "The Negative Influence of Memory: Irish Nationalism in Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People,*" contrasts two characters' attitudes toward memory and the past. In *The Speckled People*, an Irish memoir focusing on the author's upbringing, the father, a nationalist, attempts to erase all traces of British influence in his children, forbidding them, among other things, to speak English. Whereas the father wishes to create a new national identity and therefore forces an unnatural amnesia on the family, the German mother, who believes that her past has made her what she is, gathers memories, writing journals and collecting photos and other keepsakes, even the painful memories of sexual abuse by her boss in Germany.

Sarah Himsel-Burcon, in "Re-Remembered Hi(stories): Performance of Memory in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," uses Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory to show how passing on memories of oppression can be used in political struggles to change social conditions. Just as Hamilton's mother in *The Speckled People* is a memory keeper, Ursa, in Gayl Jones's 1975 novel *Corregidora*, perpetuates a family memory of a slave owners' rape handed down from mother to daughter through story telling. Ursa, however, is without child and therefore passes on the story through the blues songs she writes and performs.

In "Traumatic Memory as Inheritance: Remembering the Holocaust in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* and Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room*," Miriam Raethel analyzes two apparently contrasting novels about memory and the Holocaust, the first of which focuses on the victim's perspective, the second on the perpetrator's perspective. In both cases, characters attempt to recover the truth about their grandparents' experience during World War II; in both cases as well, the recovery of the past forces characters either to come to terms with their family's past through acknowledgement or to continue to repress memories. Thus, these four studies focus on the processes of preserving and recovering memories of traumatic experiences.

In the final essay in Part II, "Experience, Memory, Truth: Helping Students Make Sense with Narrative," Jaqueline McLeod Rogers focuses on a Holocaust narrative, as Raethel does, but in this case with Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* as the object. McLeod Rogers describes the way in which she uses this memoir, as Wiesenthal tells the story of a German soldier who, on his deathbed, sends for Wiesenthal in prison, confesses his role in atrocities, and requests forgiveness. She asks students to write a response to a question posed by Wiesenthal, "What would you have done?" However, before students write their responses, McLeod Rogers assigns them to read and reflect on any five of the 53 responses, written by experts across fields, which appear in a symposium after Wiesenthal's memoir. By engaging Wiesenthal's question and several of the responses in the symposium, students learn that making an ethical decision is a social and subjective experience.

Part III: Visual Rhetoric and Memory

The third section features three essays that focus on visual rhetoric. Jeff Ward's "Solomon Butcher and the Great White Turkey: Re/visioning Landscape in Midwestern America" contributes to discussions about the role of early photographers in preserving American history. Were these photographers historians, who carried about a "mirror with a memory," or were they using photography subjectively? The essay contrasts the strategies of two photographers of the late 19th century, Solomon Devore Butcher and Henry Hamilton Bennett. Related to the question of the photographer's purpose is Ward's discussion of how early photographs have been appropriated and redeployed by others. He concludes that the meaning of these "historical" images is a scholarly construction made by locating them in a system of discourses that may or may not be reflected in the optical content of the image.

The other two essays in this section explore memorialization of the dead through visual representation. They are set in contrast with each other. Alison Dean, in "What the 'Body Knows' and the 'Camera Shows': Death and Memory in Personal Portraiture," describes how intimacy affects photographers' gaze when they photograph loved ones who have died or are about to die. Her study comments on Annie Leibovitz's images of Susan Sontag in *A Photographer's Life* and Nan Goldin's *Cookie Mueller* portfolio. This essay can be read as a companion piece with Monique Dumontet's "Mourning, Memory and Art in Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*" (in Part II of this volume), for both integrate the artist's work with the process of mourning.

Mary Fitzgerald and Elizabethada Wright delve into the differences between memorializing the dead and displaying the dead for scientific purposes in "The Rhetorical Situation of the Sacred: Exigences of the Human Body." They ask, what rhetorical exigence is posed by the presence of a dead human body? They respond by describing contrasting situations: the discovery in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, of a colonial-period African American cemetery; and the opening of Gunther von Hagens' *Body Worlds* in the United States. When street construction `workers discovered bodies in Portsmouth, they recognized the bones as remains of individuals and responded to the rhetorical exigence appropriately. The city rallied to treat them with honor by creating a memorial site. Von Hagens' *Body Worlds*, a touring museum exhibit, displays human bodies that have been plasticized. Although these are the bodies of real people who donated their bodies, the exhibit makes no reference to their names or individual lives. They are not memorialized as individuals. The essay, therefore, raises several questions about visual rhetoric, the status of the human body, and the nature of memory.

Part IV: Stylistics, Rhetoric, and Memory

The final section of the book collects five essays that share an interest in how language choices contribute to rhetorical effectiveness, readability, and retention. Whereas the earlier sections represent the proliferation of approaches to memory studies in rhetoric, literary and social studies, these final essays represent a continuation of the rhetorical tradition's interest in the rhetorical canons of style and memory.

The first two chapters use Richard Weaver's (1985) discussion of "charismatic terms" to explore how orators elicit positive audience responses based on the terms' attributed meaning and currency in collective consciousness. Carolyn D. Baker's "Whose City is it Anyway?" traces several American orators' use of the phrase "city on a hill." These include John Winthrop's speech onboard the *Arabella*; John F. Kennedy's address to The Big Brothers of America, June 1961; Lyndon Johnson's "Remarks in Boston at Post Office Square," October 1964; Ronald Reagan's final speech; Michael Dukakis's acceptance of the Democratic nomination for president.

James J. Floyd, in "Charismatic Terms and Cultural Amnesia in America," documents the Bush administration's promotion of the war in Iraq by using two powerful charismatic terms, "freedom" and "democracy." Floyd shows how the use of these terms created the image of a battle of liberation promoting democratic values despite the war's essential violation of both concepts.

The last three essays in the volume—Mark William Brown's "'Slipp'd from Oblivion': Atavism, Archaism, and Allusion in Robert Bridges' 'Low Barometer'"; Bruce Maylath's "The Words that Jog Our Memories and Those That Don't"; and Russel K. Hirst's "Virtue, Brevity, and Memory"—share an interest in stylistics. Brown and Maylath focus on words, Hirst on the stylistic virtue of brevity.

Brown's essay launches from Robert Bridges' words as recorded in Ezra Pound's *The Pisan Cantos*:

> “forloyn” said Mr Bridges (Robert)
> “we’ll git ’em all back”
> meaning archaic words . . . (80.489-491)

By discussing Bridges’ use of words like “herits,” “unhouseled,” and “kens,” Brown shows that words slip into oblivion as the social structures cultural practices disappear.

Maylath is also concerned with words: his essay is a study of the mnemonic power of English words rooted in either Germanic or Greco-Latinate languages. In “The Words that Jog Our Memories and Those That Don’t,” he reports the results of research that show that words are stored in memory according to their stems and that a person’s sense of which words are difficult and which are easy depends on early language acquisition. Students who have had exposure to Greco-Latinate derivatives find them easy to learn, whereas students not introduced to them before secondary school find them difficult.

The final essay in the collection, Russel K. Hirst’s “Virtue, Brevity, and Memory,” traces rhetorical theorists’ teachings about brevity. Aristotle lauded clarity of style, and Quintilian associated brevity with clarity, “manliness,” and virtue. Furthermore, a brief speech has been thought to be more memorable than a longer one. Hirst pays special attention to Austin Phelps, Fifth Bartlet Professor of Sacred Oratory at Andover Theological Seminary in Andover, Massachusetts, showing clearly how brevity and manliness were firmly associated with each other in 19th-century homiletic theory.

The four sections of this book show the diversity of approaches to studying memory. None, with the possible exceptions of the last two chapters, focus primarily on theory; instead, each takes up a particular case, novel, or practice, placing it in the context of relevant theory. Therefore, these essays provide an excellent entry into the field of memory studies. Not only do they add to the growing body of literature in the field; they also introduce those beginning their study of memory to current literature. As the chapters taken together reveal, there are several clusters of scholars at work in the field. These essays display not only a wide range of subjects but also the many approaches taken to analyzing them. We hope that this essay encourages readers to join one of these groups and add to the harvest.

References

Biesecker, Barbara. 2002. "Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric and Politics of National Commemoration at the Turn of the 21st Century." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88: 393–409.

Blair, Carol, and Neil Michel. 2000. "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances of the Civil Rights Memorial." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30, no. 2: 31–55.

Campbell, George. 1969 (1776). *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Ed. L. F. Bitzer. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Trans. and ed. L. A. Coser. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Parkin-Gounelas, Ruth. 2004. "'What Isn't There' in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*: The Psychoanalysis of Duplicity." *Modern Fiction Studies* 50: 681–700.

Phillips, Kendall R. 2004. "Introduction." Pp. 1–14 in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

Yates, Frances A. 1992. *The Art of Memory*. London: Pimlico. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

Weaver, Richard M. 1985 (1953). *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press.

Zelizer, Barbie. 1995. "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12: 214–39.

—. 2004. "The Voice of Visual Memory." Pp. 157–186 in *Framing Public Memory,* ed. K. R. Phillips. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press.

PART I

PUBLIC RHETORIC AND THE RHETORIC OF PLACE

CHAPTER TWO

REMEMBERING THE BATTLES OF SARATOGA: *AD BELLUM PURIFICANDUM*

S. MICHAEL HALLORAN

In a 1958 snapshot, seven 19-year olds stand sweating and weary-looking in front of a Quonset hut, dressed in ill-fitting Marine fatigues. The short, skinny one at the right holds a sodden boot in one hand and stares into it. That's me. A few days earlier we had been instructed in several methods of killing a man with one's bare hands. Some of us had taken a try at negotiating the obstacle course, with varying degrees of success. Evenings we spent at the base officers' club, drinking gin and tonics and singing bawdy songs. We were the ROTC midshipmen of Holy Cross College, assigned to Little Creek, Virginia, for three sweltering weeks of Marine Corps indoctrination and training. On the day when that photograph was taken we had conducted a mock amphibious landing, charging down the ramp of a landing craft, struggling through deep surf and across a sandy beach into thickets of coarse grass and stunted pines, where we wandered aimlessly for a few hours under a baking July sun that would have dried our sopping uniforms, were it not for the humidity and our profuse outpourings of sweat. The boot I stare into in the photo was gritty inside and out with quantities of wet sand I had picked up while struggling across the beach, sand that had rubbed my poor foot raw.

The photo was taken by a classmate who, several years later, became my brother-in-law. Over the intervening half century we have reminisced now and again about our adventure in amphibious warfare, usually over a glass of something or other that invariably prompts what the old-time rhetoricians called *copia verborum*—artful variation and embroidery on whatever facts we can dredge up. The story has become for us a sort of comic *Iliad*, and though both of us were first-hand participants, we have embellished the story so often and enthusiastically that neither of us can say for sure where fact leaves off and imagination begins. I'm fairly certain that I was indeed one of the first to step off the ramp of the landing craft when it dropped into the surf, but who can say for sure how far out from the beach we actually were and how deep the water I stepped into really was? In my mind's eye, the surf stretches for two hundred yards, five hundred yards, sometimes more, and the water into which I stepped was over my helmet-laden head. As I recall myself struggling desperately to breathe, a sadistic (and possibly imaginary) sergeant yells at me from the security of the landing craft to "keep that weapon dry, mister!" The "weapon" was a World War I vintage rifle, lacking firing pin and ammunition lest we injure ourselves or one of our instructors.

My subject in this chapter is the commemoration of a real and quite serious battle that took place nearly two centuries before my farcical adventure at Little Creek. I begin with the tale of my own boozy commemorations of that late-adolescent episode as a reminder of how malleable the past can be and what purposes may be served in the reshaping of it. What actually happened on that beach at Little Creek, Virginia, has been transformed over the years by the fundamental human desire for a good story. Actual persons have become *dramatis personae*, and the happenstance of real events has taken on the shape of a plot. In its broad outlines, this story is a familiar one of male bonding, of aging men reliving a youthful adventure in which their interlocking identities are formed. Our occasional rehearsals of the Little Creek story are as much expressions of who my brother-in-law and I have become to each other over the course of 50 years as they are recollections of what may or may not have actually happened on a specific day in July 1958. The shape we have given to the story of that day in Little Creek is a significant part of whom we have turned ourselves into over the years since.

Events of far greater moment transpired along the shores of the Hudson River in September and October of 1777. British historian Edward Creasy places the battles of Saratoga, the so-called turning point of the American Revolution, in a class with Marathon and Waterloo for their effects in shaping world history. And over the course of more than two centuries, those events have been distilled in processes not unlike those that have produced my own comic tale of Little Creek, yielding The Story of The Battles of Saratoga. Historians with a professional commitment to finding out what actually happened in the past have striven to keep the story anchored in verifiable facts, and in important ways they have succeeded. But the past, as everyone knows, is too important to be left to historians. It tells us who we are, how we are related to each other, whom we should trust, whom we should be wary of. It identifies and anchors the communities we call our own and sets the boundaries within which we live our collective lives. And if the historical facts are not adequate to this high task, well, so much the worse for the facts.

My larger purpose is to explore the distillation process that has yielded The Story of the Battles of Saratoga over the course of more than two centuries (though this chapter will consider just one small episode). I am not uninterested in what actually happened in 1777; historians are storytellers too, though more cautious than most in dealing with facts, even boring and inconvenient facts. But I am much more interested in how those events were transformed by succeeding generations into good stories that helped them to articulate who they were becoming as citizens of a nation whose political independence was assured by those events, a nation whose conflicted and changing self-understanding was both reflected and inflected by those stories.

My subtitle is the Latin epigraph to Kenneth Burke's *A Grammar of Motives* (1969) and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969)—in English, "toward the purification of war." For Burke, the phrase gives expression to a grand theme, on which my own project is a minor variation. Burke saw that humans are imbued with an inclination toward conflict that all too frequently erupts as warfare, but that can be transformed—"purified"—into literature, rhetoric, ritual, and other forms of symbolic action.

In an analysis of John Milton's *Samson Agonistes,* for example, Burke considers the possibility of reading the poem as "a structure of internally related parts" in the manner of the New Criticism that prevailed in the 1930s and 40s, when he was working on the *Grammar* and *Rhetoric.* But Burke prefers to understand the poem as the displaced expression of Milton's frustrated rage over the defeat of the Cromwellian republic. On Burke's reading of the epic retelling of the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah, Milton identifies himself with the blind Samson, and Samson's Philistine captors with the Royalists who had ousted the Puritans and re-established a corrupt reign. "In saying … that a blind Biblical hero *did* conquer, the poet is 'substantially' saying that he in his blindness *will* conquer" (*Rhetoric* 1969, 5).

When he published the *Grammar* and *Rhetoric,* Kenneth Burke could look back on a half century marked by massive genocides and two world wars. In response, he sought to understand how the warlike impulse might be purified. He hoped for a better world in which people would be disposed to enact their differences by means of symbolic action—language—rather than fists and swords and guns and bombs. *Samson Agonistes* was for him a paradigm of the rhetorical process by which the bellicose impulse could be transformed into symbolic action. He went so far as to claim that by following a chain of identifications like the one exemplified in his analysis of *Samson,* "we can treat 'war' as a '*special case of peace'*—not as a primary motive in itself, not as *essentially* real, put purely as a *derivative* condition, a *perversion."* (*Rhetoric* 1969, 20)

Kenneth Burke is brilliant, inspiring, and—like many brilliant and inspiring scholars—deeply puzzling. How he moves from reading Milton to the idea that war should be regarded as nothing more than an unreal derivation of peace is, for me at least, neither clear nor compelling. He neglects to say that war must also be acknowledged as *essentially* real. It kills and maims actual people, and it devastates specific lands. It can and perhaps should be treated as *essentially* senseless brutality. But in memorial storytelling, wars are typically distilled into something else: into divine retribution, as in Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address; into ennobling acts of sacrifice, as in Benjamin West's painting of "The Death of General Wolfe"; into patient heroism, as in Stephen Spielberg's film "Saving Private Ryan"; into farcical comedy, as in the hit movie and TV series *M.A.S.H.* These can be understood as *purifications* of war, distillations of something that could be seen as senseless brutality into something with meaning and value. And viewed from this perspective, these processes of purifying war may produce an antithesis to Burke's thesis: *peace* becomes a special case of war—not a primary motive in itself, not *essentially* real, but a purely derivative condition; if not an actual perversion, then a weak tincture of the authentic brew that constitutes the "real" human experience of warfare. If those who fought in World War II are, as Tom Brokaw calls them, "the greatest generation," what does this say about those of us in the generations to follow? When my brother-in-law and I engage in our periodic celebrations of the invasion of Little Creek, are we motivated at some level by the frustration of never being able to achieve the greatness of that generation?

It is a truism of the loose interdisciplinary field called "memory studies" that collective memory is "usable," that every communal recollection of the past advances some present-day agenda (Zelizer 1995, 226). To put it in terms of Burke's metaphor, the distillate yielded in the purification of some past war is typically medicine for some present-day malady, real or imaginary. Politicians, idealists, and hucksters alike spin stories of the past to sell everything from commercial products to political candidacies to programs of social reform. The infamous "swift-boating" of John Kerry during the 2004 presidential election campaign is a case in point. Kerry had attempted to use the memory of his service in Vietnam to underwrite his candidacy, and the "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth" mounted a counter-campaign that inverted the meaning of Kerry's service. Unlike World War II—our last "good war"—Vietnam remains hotly contested memorial terrain, its moral valence still open to question. One might say that there is as yet no settled collective memory of Vietnam, but conflicting memories shared by conflicted groups. What will count as a "good story" of Vietnam—meaning a usable story of Vietnam, a story that applies lessons of Vietnam to advance a fixed agenda—remains uncertain.

I turn now to one bit of memorial storytelling about the Battles of Saratoga, a specific instance that I hope will illustrate how purifying stories of past wars can serve contemporary agendas. It's a story that developed over time and was told in various media. I focus first on a rather late version of this story—the inscription on a 5½-foot tall granite obelisk, which reads as follows:

> Saratoga, 1777. Here Morgan, reluctant to destroy so noble a foe, was forced by patriotic necessity to defeat and slay the gentle and gallant Fraser. To commemorate the magnanimity of Morgan's heroic nature and his stern sense of duty to his country this tablet is here inscribed by Virginia Neville Taylor, great grand daughter of General Daniel Morgan.

A similar monument a few hundred yards away reads simply, "Here Fraser Fell." These two monuments and a number of others were placed on the Saratoga Battlefield during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, in a continuation of the centennial celebration of the Revolution. Most of them were left in place when the battlefield became a national park, though the policy of the National Park Service called for razing all post-1777 structures so that the battlefield could be restored to its "original" condition.

Historians tell us that the death of General Simon Fraser was a turning point in the second and conclusive Battle of Saratoga. Fraser was one of British commanding General John Burgoyne's most trusted officers. His death demoralized Burgoyne, deprived the British army of an effective leader, and hence contributed materially to the defeat of Burgoyne's army and the frustration of his effort to end the Revolution by driving a wedge between New England and the middle Atlantic colonies (Ketchum 1997, 400 and passim). A memoir by the wife of a German mercenary general in Burgoyne's army tells a poignant story of Fraser's agonizing death that was widely read in English translation (Riedesel 2001, 119-21). Visitors to the battlefield had stopped at the house where Fraser died and looked for the site at which he was fatally wounded for decades before the monuments were placed. In the interpretive and memorial markings on the battlefield today, the death of Fraser continues to figure as a key event. In addition to the two nineteenth-century obelisks, there is an early twentieth century monument honoring Tim Murphy, the rifleman who claimed credit for pulling the trigger, and a 1970s monument to Fraser himself, placed by the Fraser clan. The hill where he is supposed to have been buried is the final stop on the tour road at the battlefield.

Virginia Neville Taylor’s 1888 monument inscription echoes a moralizing story of the shooting of Fraser that had been told and retold for decades. Here, for example, is the version in historian Benson Lossing’s 1859 *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*:

> [Fraser] was mounted upon a splendid iron-gray gelding; and, dressed in the full uniform of a field officer, he was a conspicuous object for the Americans. It was evident that the fate of the battle rested upon him, and this the keen eye and sure judgment of Morgan perceived. In an instant his purpose was conceived, and, calling a file of his best men around him, he said, as he pointed toward the British right, “That gallant officer is General Fraser. I admire and honor him, but it is necessary he should die; victory for the enemy depends upon him. Take your stations in that clump of bushes, and do your duty.” Within five minutes Fraser fell mortally wounded, and was carried to the camp by two grenadiers. Just previous to being hit by the fatal bullet, the crupper of his horse was cut by a rifle-ball, and immediately afterward another passed through the horse’s mane, a little back of his ears. The aid [*sic*] of Fraser noticed this, and said, ‘It is evident that you are marked out for particular aim; would it not be prudent for you to retire from this place?’ Fraser replied, “My duty forbids me to fly from danger,” and the next moment he fell. (1859, 1:62)

The point of the story is to rationalize the problematic fact that Morgan had instructed his men to aim at a specific officer. The contemporary European code of warfare, to which the exchange attributed to Fraser and his aide refers, held that field commanders should make themselves conspicuous on the battlefield in order to command and inspire their troops, and furthermore that an opposing army ought not to take advantage by making a special target of an officer who was simply doing his duty. The not-aiming-at-an-officer part of the code may have been as much a concession to the limitations of existing technology as it was an ethical imperative, since the smooth-bore muskets that were standard eighteenth-century infantry equipment were so inaccurate that aiming at a specific person from any significant distance would be pointless. Morgan’s tactic took advantage of the fact that his men used long-barrel hunting rifles, which were much more accurate than muskets. Morgan’s riflemen aimed at Simon Fraser because Morgan told them to, and he told them to because they could hope actually to hit what they aimed at.

But regardless of motivation, Morgan’s tactic of having his men fire from concealment at Fraser was clearly at odds with the established practices of “civilized” warfare; it was at the very least ungentlemanly, and it has been the subject of some critical commentary. In an account of his 1819 tour of the Saratoga battlefield, Yale professor Benjamin Silliman called Morgan’s tactic “very revolting to humane feelings,” though he also acknowledged that it was a tactic commonly used by the Americans during the Revolution (Stone, 113). John Watts de Peyster, who was himself a military officer, spoke of Morgan’s “murderous purpose” and characterized the act as “savagery,” though he also recognized Morgan as one of the unqualified heroes of Saratoga (Stone 1970, 259). By portraying Morgan engaged in a sort of battlefield casuistry, weighing military necessity and duty against personal respect and honor, the story works to absolve him of guilt, to “purify” to some extent an act that would otherwise pollute his memory.

But there is another version of Morgan’s instruction to his riflemen, this one told by a British prisoner of war who claimed to have heard it directly from the mouth of Daniel Morgan. According to biographer Don Higginbotham, Captain Joseph Graham, senior officer among a group of prisoners under Morgan’s supervision, claimed to have heard the following account from Morgan himself:

> “Me and my boys” had a bad time until “I saw that they were led by an officer on a grey horse—a devilish brave fellow.” Then “says I to one of my best shots, says I, you get up into that there tree, and single out him on the…horse. Dang it, ’twas no sooner said than done. On came the British again, with the grey horseman leading; but his career was short enough this time. I jist tuck my eyes off him for a moment, and when I turned them to the place where he had been—pooh, he was gone!” (Higginbotham 1961, 170-71)

This second version of the story seems more plausible for a couple of reasons. Daniel Morgan was a rough and uneducated frontiersman. The second version of events—the “Dang it, ’twas no sooner said than done” version—sounds more like the sort of language that might have come out of his mouth. Furthermore, the exercise in moral disputation that is central to the first version—the “I admire and honor him, but it is necessary he should die” version—does not sound like the sort of colloquy any officer would be likely to have with his men in the heat of battle. And yet this highly implausible story is repeated over and over in nineteenth-century accounts of the Battles of Saratoga, while the more believable “Dang it” version lay unnoticed in archives until Don Higginbotham rediscovered it. Why?

Daniel Morgan was a prototype of the American self-made man who rose from humble beginnings to achieve and pass on to his descendants the kind of genteel position that men like Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne and Simon Fraser were born and educated to. He showed up as a young man in the early 1750s in Frederick County Virginia with “scarcely any personal belongings,” no formal education, and little to say about his parentage or birthplace. He was a brawler and a hard drinker, but despite his humble origins and a “tumultuous youth” he achieved success and respectability as a farmer. By the time the Declaration of Independence was published, he owned 255 acres and 10 slaves, and he had belatedly married the mother of his two daughters (Higginbotham 1961, 1-15). His wife, Abigail, taught him to read and write, and under her influence he hired a tutor to provide their daughters with the sort of education he never had. In the aftermath of the Revolution that he had helped to win, he constructed an elegant stone house (which he named “Saratoga”) and expanded his land holdings to some 100,000 acres in what is now West Virginia, and an additional 150,000 acres in Kentucky and the Northwest Territory. He served a single two-year term in the House of Representatives, during which he supported the Federalist program, including the Sedition Act of 1798. From humble beginnings Morgan rose to wealth and influence, and through his daughters he established something of a dynasty (Higginbotham 1961, 172-208).

So it is not difficult to understand why it was the “I admire and honor him” version of the shooting of Simon Fraser that became canonical in the memorial literature of Saratoga and was inscribed in stone by his great granddaughter. It confers on Morgan a gentility that served the purposes of his family and admirers and that purifies him of the plebian taint of his humble origins. In the privileged circles that Daniel Morgan’s wealth had opened up to his descendants, an aristocratic ancestor was preferable to a plebian one, and this underscores a paradox about who the citizens of the new United States were becoming in the early nineteenth century. Having fought and won a war against the British monarchical system of privilege and class hierarchy, Americans immediately set about establishing their own system of privilege and class hierarchy. We are, as Kenneth Burke says elsewhere, “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy” (Burke 1966, 15 ff.). The purification of Daniel Morgan’s conduct in the battles of Saratoga illustrates the insidious workings of the hierarchical principle in the early development of our national identity.

While I think it’s clear enough that the monument inscription derives from the story as told by Lossing, Silliman, and others, I want to point out something interesting that happens in the adaptation process. Versions of the story that appear on paper make a factual claim about what Morgan