
The afterlives of Shakespeare and Milton on the streets of the English-speaking world

UDO O. H. JUNG

Why is Milton more popular as a name on street signs internationally than Shakespeare?

From Ben Jonson to Thomas Carlyle, from the Modern Language Association of America to the British Tourist Authority, there were and there are enthusiastic testimonies to Shakespeare's greatness, to what his oeuvre means to the inhabitants of the 'precious stone set in the silver sea' and the world at large. Only recently, at the turn of the century, listeners of BBC's Radio 4 voted him *Man of the Millennium*. On that occasion, Shakespeare ousted dignitaries like Winston Churchill and Isaac Newton, who all play leading roles in British history, from their position of power. The playwright is dearest to the memory of his countrymen. He occupies the most prominent place in the national portrait gallery, if the witnesses cited above are accepted. There are some, however, who apparently beg to differ. Their dissenting voices were discovered in the context of cultural memory studies and a concomitant attempt to introduce EFL students to some of the core elements of British collective memory.

The study of cultural memory was the craze of the last quarter of the 20th century, and it continues into the new millennium. A recent international and interdisciplinary handbook (Erl & Nünning, 2008), detailed the historical, social, political, philosophical, psychological, literary and multimedial aspects of the phenomenon, which had never been completely absent from Western thinking, but had a resurgence during the nineteen twenties, when European scholars such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, Aby Warburg and Ernst Robert Curtius brought it to the forefront again. To these thinkers literary scholars owe a vote of thanks, but without exception they all pay homage

to the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, whose 1925 *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and the posthumously published *La mémoire collective* are the holy writ of everything that has been published on the subject since.

Meanwhile, improvements of the Halbwachsean concepts have been attempted. In Germany, Aleida and Jan Assmann have split up Halbwachs's *mémoire collective* into a number of different subcategories, depending on which of their many publications (cf. for instance A. Assmann, 2008) are taken into consideration.

There is, first and foremost, a *communicative memory*, which replaces the *individual memory* Freud and Jung had meant to probe into. A solitary figure like Kaspar Hauser, it is argued, would not be able to develop memory at all. Memory, the narrative psychologist tells us, is 'dependent on cultural and social semantics as well as on linguistic or other symbolic repertoires and modes of expression' (Straub, 2008, 218). Communicative memory has a lifetime of between 80 and 100 years (three generations). After that it is replaced by a successor. *Cultural memory*, as conceived by the Assmanns,



is 'a kind of institution', and it can span long periods of time: 'In order to be able to be reembodyed in the sequence of generations, cultural memory, unlike communicative memory, exists also in disembodied form and requires institutions of preservation and reembodyment' (J. Assmann, 2008: 111).

Jan Assmann mentions monuments, museums, libraries, archives 'and other mnemonic institutions' (J. Assmann, 2008: 111). In the majority of modern and developed societies street signs are one such mnemonic institution. Unfortunately, in studies of cultural memory they have been neglected so far – with few exceptions (Alderman, 2006; Baldwin & Grimaud, 1989). They will be our cicerone to the afterlives of Shakespeare and Milton in the English-speaking world.

In an earlier study (Jung, 2007) I established that in the UK Milton was able to beat Shakespeare into fifth place of a total of 20 British poets and writers and that Milton himself ranked first, if frequency of street names is taken as the criterion of greatness. What is more, a map showing the distribution of Milton Streets across the country displayed a barrier of Milton Streets along the Glasgow/Edinburgh axis, which barred Shakespeare from entering Scotland – or most of it. Scotland is Milton territory. It is true, there are more Miltons in Scotland than Shakespeares – witness the maps on the Internet (<http://www.nationaltrustnames.org.uk>) produced by the National Trust – but it is also true that not every Milton gets a street named in his honour. In the anglophone world, which desists, as a rule, from displaying first names on street signs, one honours *the* Shakespeare and *the* Milton. How then do the two fare on the streets of the anglophone world? And how reliable a source are street names? Street names are omnipresent pointers to what a town or a country deems worthy of remembrance. In their totality they constitute a multi-tiered corpus containing the names of famous and honourable and praiseworthy individuals, which, when tapped, discloses what Aleida Assmann calls the *national* memory. It is, following the author, a potentially dangerous instrument, because it goads people into certain ways of thinking and acting, excluding others. That this is so can easily be shown in the case of dictatorships, whereas in non-dictatorial societies there is always the competition over time of opposing parties. With few exceptions, street signs preserve the various strata that national memory is constituted of. The names of writers, soldiers, adventurers, painters, architects, musicians, philosophers, scientists and politicians, to name but a few, serve as index cards to the nation's cultural

memory. They grant access to the contents of long-term storage facilities from where forgotten cultural artefacts may be recalled into active service. Their authors' names enter the daily communicative circuit set apace by taxi-drivers and their customers, by fire fighters, ambulance and postmen, not to forget the 80 million letters and postcards distributed daily in Great Britain alone. A frequency list of street names is thus an ideal starting point for a thorough search of a nation's long-term memory.

Postal services around the world have created computer-searchable data bases to help customers find the zip codes required for fast delivery of postal matters. As a rule, the sending party knows nearly everything – name, town, street, and street number – about the addressee, but lacks the corresponding postal code, which is then provided by the system's algorithm: from the thousands of *Station Streets* in its repertoire, to give an example, it narrows down to the one Station Street of the town in question and selects the missing zip code.

Luckily, however, if system users refrain from entering the name of a particular town, they get a list of *all* the Station Streets in the data base. After elimination of double entries – some streets are so long that a second postal code is required – the true number of Station Streets can be verified. The same applies, of course, to streets named after Shakespeare or Milton.

The following pass keys allow us to tap into the zip code treasure troves of the major English-speaking countries:

Australia = http://www.street-directory.com.au/sd_new/home.cgi

Canada = <http://www.canadapost.ca/cpotools/apps/fpc/business/findByCity?execution=e4s1>

New Zealand = <http://www.linz.govt.nz/placenames/electoral-streets-places/searchstreets/index.aspx>

United Kingdom = <http://www.streetmap.co.uk>

United States = <http://www.melissadata.com/lookups/zipstreet.asp>

What we are likely to find in the case of Shakespeare and Milton is displayed in Table 1.

The results of Table 1 will be something of a disappointment for the admirers of Shakespeare. Milton beats Shakespeare into second place worldwide. The phenomenon is thus not restricted to Scotland or the UK. Is Milton, therefore (Smith, 2008), better than Shakespeare? Ask a silly question.

Nigel Smith himself, the author of the book with the misleading title just quoted, points the way to a

Table 1: Shakespeare and Milton Streets in English-speaking Countries Around the World

Frequency	Australia	Canada	New Zealand	UK	USA	Sum Total
MILTON	139	51	31	663	770	1654
SHAKESPEARE	49	19	15	255	119	457

more satisfactory explanation of the figures. Of his countrymen he says that when they hear 'Milton read aloud, they hear the American constitution, because it is Milton's prose that echoes originally in the voices of Adams and Jefferson' (Smith, 2008: 4). And more generally: '... I do maintain that there are certain ways in which Milton is more salient and important than Shakespeare because he is the poet who places liberty at the center of his vision' (Smith, 2008: xv).

More 'salient' than Shakespeare Milton certainly is, as we have seen. His name crops up on street signs around the world nearly four times more often than Shakespeare's. The aldermen and magistrates who decide independently of one another whose name will grace the street signs in their towns have read only a small amount of Milton, but even less Shakespeare, it seems. They are politicians, not literary scholars. They honour the defender of the English Republic of nearly 400 years ago.

History and politics thus play a role in this competition for primacy. The Scottish barrier, mentioned earlier, will have to be examined more closely. Presbyterians in Scotland are likely to show a decided preference for Cromwell's secretary. Further research must examine town archives to find out who moved and who seconded, and when, the move to put up Milton's name so many times more often than Shakespeare's. The results of our top-down method can be eye-openers, but they must be supplemented by bottom-up enquiries into the motives and the dates of local decision-making processes.

Or take the situation in Canada. In the English-speaking and densely populated province of Ontario one finds 19 Milton and 11 Shakespeare Streets, whereas the French-speaking province of Quebec features 14 Milton and only 2 Shakespeare Streets. What may the inhabitants of Quebec have had in mind when they honoured

Milton to the near-exclusion of Shakespeare? Milton, the champion of free speech and republicanism, recent research (Tournu, 2008; Tournu & Forsyth, 2007) has established, was a major influence during the French Revolution of 1789. The Canadian *enfants de la patrie* may well have erected the 14 rather inexpensive statues in Milton's honour to counterbalance the anglophone and royalist influence on their territory. However that may be, literary scholars as well as foreign-language teachers must take cognizance of the fact that Milton outdistances Shakespeare on the streets, and reigns supreme in the collective memory of the English-speaking world, streetwise, that is.

References

- Alderman, D. 2006. 'Naming streets for Martin Luther King jr.: no easy road.' In R. Schein (ed.), *Landscape and Race in the United States*. New York: Routledge, pp. 213–36.
- Assmann, A. 2002. 'Vier Formen des Gedächtnisses.' *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik*, 13, 239–47.
- Assmann, J. 2008. 'Communicative and cultural memory.' In A. Erll & A. Nünning (eds), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 109–18.
- Baldwin, L. & Grimaud, M. 1989. 'Washington, Montana, the Dakotas and Massachusetts: a comparative approach to street naming.' *Names*, 37, 115–38.
- Erll, A. & Nünning, A. (eds) 2008. *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Jung, U. O. H. 2007. 'Shakespeare, Milton und ein Kanon von der Straße.' *AAA-Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 32, 285–99.
- Smith, N. 2008. *Is Milton Better Than Shakespeare?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Straub, J. 2008. 'Psychology, narrative, and cultural memory.' In A. Erll & A. Nünning (eds), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 215–28.
- Tournu, C. (ed.) 2008. *Milton in France*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Tournu, C. & Forsyth, N. (eds) 2007. *Milton, Rights and Liberties*. Bern: Peter Lang.