

Writing the Self: Identity and Independence: M.Phil in 18th Century and Romantic Studies, 2016-17

I can think of my self as realised in performance and in action, inextricably *social*, peculiarly open to and permeable by circumstance and environment, fluid or plural insofar as I (or it) participate(s) in a variety of roles or contexts. Or I can think of my self as a core reality that exists anterior to action, to which questions of integrity and sincerity are pertinent, readily understood as the site of consciousness or rational reflection, and defined in contradistinction to others or to my surroundings. The long eighteenth century is a period in which these two models of the self, here bluntly dichotomised, co-exist in a not easily resolved tension – as exists between, say, the novels of Fielding and Richardson – or, according to some accounts, in which the former gives way to the latter, marking a crucial phase in the establishing of a ‘modern’ sense of things. Richard Sennett, in *The Fall of Public Man* (Part Two) and Dror Wahrman, in *The Making of the Modern Self*, both speak of an *ancien régime* based on a performative, role-based view of the self; Charles Taylor charts the rise of a new ideal of inner independence or disengagement, consolidated in a certain kind of radically reflexive, first-person stance (*Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Part II: ‘Inwardness’); and *The Invention of Autonomy* is the title of J. P. Schneewind’s study of the movement in 17th and 18th century moral philosophy that culminates in Kant.

The considerations thrown up by such studies will be focused in this course on authorship and in particular on texts where authors represent some version of themselves. Literature is, from several points of view, an inescapably social practice, deeply embedded in its cultural circumstances, radically intertextual or multi-voiced, dealing always in ‘another’s words’ (Bakhtin). This is nowhere more persuasive than with regard to 18th-century literature, with its fondness for imitation and allusion, its engagement with a dynamically expanding print culture, and its general reader-facingness; that during most of this period copyright was a much contested issue has a symbolic significance here. And beyond the 18th century we have been taught how to understand any Romantic claim to transcendence as itself the product of its historical moment (Jerome McGann’s *Romantic Ideology*). Yet authorship also readily suggests agency, originality, the making of something *which is one’s own*, and insofar as it offers to express the author’s experience or achievement it allies itself with the need for self-assertion, individuality, and independence. Such a need to realise a distinct identity, or a possible sincerity, becomes understandably urgent in resistance to the pressures of falsifying social convention or a falsifying social language, what Johnson or Byron called ‘cant’.

The various ways in which those contrary demands play out in the act of writing the self is the subject of this course. The first seminar looks at works – in particular the dialogue-poems of Pope – in which the writer represents himself as in dialogue with another, and relates these to the concepts of the dialogic advanced by Shaftesbury and by Bakhtin. The second takes up the question of self-determination, and compares how the freedom (or otherwise) to shape one’s own way of living is construed and enacted in writing by Johnson, Hume and Boswell. The third looks writing by Sterne, Wollstonecraft and Hays that is obliquely autobiographical, on the cusp between the confessional and the rhetorical, looking particularly at the function of that obliquity, and at how the determining power of sensibility interacts with the gesture of free independent self-disclosure. The final seminar goes to Byron, that great Romantic performer of his own (in)famous identity, and considers the shifting relation of self-expression to audience-consciousness in his writings.

By 12 noon on the day before each class, all participants are to circulate a page or two of informal reflections and speculations on some aspect of the reading. They then come to the class having read all the other contributions and prepared to respond to at least one of them.

Reading for the seminars

Seminar 1: Dialogue

Alexander Pope, *Imitations of Horace*: 'Book II Satire I, To Mr Fortescue' and Book I Epistle I, To Lord Bolingbroke, with their Horatian counterparts; *Epilogue to the Satires*, or 1738.

Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*: 'Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author', Part I; 'Sensus communis, an essay on the freedom of wit and humour', Part I Sections 4 and 5.

Mikhail Bakhtin. 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, esp. pp.275-324, i.e. 'Discourse in Poetry and Discourse in the Novel' and most of 'Heteroglossia in the Novel' (extract provided)

Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew* (extract provided)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dialogues: Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques* (extract provided)

Seminar 2: Choosing one's life

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1 Part IV Sections vi and vii, 'Of Personal Identity' and 'Conclusion'; Book 2 Part III Section iii, 'Of the Influencing Motives of the Will'

-----, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, section VIII, 'Of Liberty and Necessity'.

(This rewrites *Treatise* 2.III.i-ii, setting up 2.III.iii.)

-----, *The Life of David Hume, Esq., Written by Himself*

Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*

-----, *Prayers and Meditations* e.g. entries for the years 1776-1779

-----, *The Rambler* no. 184; *The Idler* 27, 31, 84

-----, letter to Hester Thrale, 27 October 1777

James Boswell, *The London Journal*, at least up to end of 1762

-----, 'On the Profession of a Player', *London Magazine* 1770, Essay 2

Charles Taylor, 'Locke's Punctual Self', in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*

Seminar 3: Sensibility and independence

Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*

-----, letters to Gilbert Imlay written from Scandinavia (extracts provided)

Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, ed. Eleanor Ty (good introduction and notes)

William Godwin, *Political Justice*, Book 4 ch.6, 'Of Sincerity' (Francis in Hays is based on Godwin)

Seminar 4: Byron: celebrity, personality, performance

Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto III st.92-97, 111-118.

-----, *Don Juan* canto I st.200 – canto V st.39).

-----, letters (extracts provided)

[For Byron's celebrity, *Byron: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Rutherford, is one convenient way of getting at contemporary responses; Jeffrey and Hazlitt are among the most intelligent witnesses.]

Secondary reading, optional, roughly divided by semiar

1.

Frank Stack, *Pope and Horace*, esp. the conclusion
Maynard Mack, 'The Muse of Satire', *Yale Review* 41 (1951); reprinted in *Collected in Himself*
Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England*

2.

Susan Manning, "'This philosophical melancholy": style and self in Boswell and Hume', in *New Light on Boswell*, ed. Greg Clingham
John Richetti, 'Johnson's Assertions and Concessions: Moral Irresolution and Rhetorical Performance', in *Samuel Johnson: The Arc of the Pendulum*, ed. Freya Johnston and Lynda Mugglestone
Rachel Michelle Stern, 'Fantasies of Choosing in *Rasselas*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55(3), 523-53 (2015)

3.

Christine Chaney, 'The Rhetorical Strategies of "Tumultuous Emotions": Wollstonecraft's "Letters Written in Sweden"', *Journal of Narrative Theory* 34, 277-303
Heather Keenleyside, 'The First-Person Form of Life: Locke, Sterne, and the Autobiographical Animal', *Critical Inquiry* 39, 116-41.
Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: epistemologies of emotion, Hume to Austen*, ch.1
Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self*, ch.2 'The Performance of Sensibility', esp. pp.79-86 on *A Sentimental Journey*
Louise Joy, 'Novel Feelings: Emma Courtney's Point of View', *European Romantic Review* 21: 221-234
G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, ch.7: 'Wollstonecraft and the Crisis over Sensibility in the 1790s'

4.

Vincent Newey 'Authoring the Self: *Childe Harold* III and IV', in *Byron and the Limits of Fiction*, ed. Bernard Beatty and Vincent Newey, and reprinted in Newey, *Centring the Self*
Jerome McGann, 'Private poetry, public deception' and 'Hero with a thousand faces: the rhetoric of Byronism', in *Byron and Romanticism*, ed. James Soderholm
James Treadwell, *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature 1783-1834* (includes chapter on *Childe Harold* canto 3)
Philip Martin, *Byron: a Poet before his Public*.

General

Paul John Eakin, *How our Lives become Stories: Making Selves*
Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.
Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in 18th-Century England*
Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*.
Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England*.