M.Phil. in Eighteenth-Century and Romantic Studies

History and Memory

Michaelmas Term, 2016

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Overview

This course examines the relationship between literary representation and the experience of the past in the long eighteenth century. It is not concerned with the history of historical writing, narrowly conceived, but rather with the role of literary imagination in constructing and curating a sense of both individual and collective pasts. It invites a consideration of texts and objects which mediate, in various ways, between personal recollection and public history—and which consequently might lead us to question the stability of these categories. The classes are thus intended to pose recurrent questions concerning changing attitudes to the past, and their broad implications for literary practice in this period. However, the reading for the course is designedly heterogeneous, and encompasses a wide range of genres and media, including journal and diary; elegy, epitaph and monumental sculpture; epistolary narrative and verse autobiography; novel and essay. Moreover, participants are encouraged to think creatively about the way in which they wish to approach this material. The list of background reading provided below is thus deliberately eclectic, including philosophical, critical, historical, sociological, and psychoanalytic perspectives. You may wish to dip into it at any point before or during the course.

Background Reading

Thomas De Quincey, ‘The Palimpsest’ (1845)
Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852), excerpt
Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life (1874), excerpt
Susuan Stewart, On Longing (1992), excerpt
Aledia Assman, ‘Canon and Archive’ (2008), excerpt

(1) Writing the plague

This first week’s class addresses Daniel Defoe’s Journal of the Plague Year (1722), a harrowing account of the great sickness of 1665. The Journal purports to be an eye-witness account, but its historical
accuracy and generic status are notoriously unstable, raising difficult questions about representation
and verisimilitude which are further exacerbated by the extremes of human suffering of which the
*Journal* attempts to speak. Alongside Defoe's text, we'll consider alternative contemporary accounts of
the plague, and think about some of the ways in which the lived experience of 1665 was transformed
into a collective, textualized cultural memory.

(1) The principal text for discussion is Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). Both Penguin
and Oxford World's Classics paperback texts are suitable reading copies.

All other reading for the class is available for download from Moodle. It comprises:

(2) Thomas Vincent, *God's Terrible Voice in the City* (1667), extracts. ‘Upon the outbreak of the plague in
1665 Vincent was among a number of silenced nonconformists who emerged, as conforming ministers
fled the city, to attend to the congregations they left behind. Vincent preached in churches throughout
London and, undeterred by the risk of infection, ministered to the sick and dying in their homes. ‘Void of
all fear of death’ (Neal, 451), he won interdenominational respect; his sermons also accumulated a
multitudinous following, their peculiar intensity honed by the extreme circumstances. His printed
meditation on the plague, *Gods Terrible Voice in the City* (1667), ran to sixteen editions within just eight
years.’ (*ODNB*)

(3) Samuel Pepys, *Diary* (1665), extracts. Pepys was working for the Navy Board in 1665, and heavily
involved in supplying the fleet in the second Anglo-Dutch war. He spent the first few months of the
plague in London, before moving to the relative safety of Greenwich.

was closely involved in seventeenth-century church politics and his *Reliquiae*, composed at different
periods of his life and edited from manuscript after Baxter’s death, is a crucial source for historians. He
preached throughout London in the early 1660s, but was living in Acton, Middlesex, during the plague
year.

(5) Nathaneal Hodges, *Loimologia: or an Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665* (1720),
extracts. A London physician, Hodges was celebrated for his determination to remain in the City during
the plague. ‘As medical adviser to the City, directing a group of physicians serving London during the
outbreak, Hodges recommended the isolation of the sick and also, in separate accommodation, of those
who had been in contact with them.’ (*ODNB*) His account of the plague was published in Latin in 1672,
and later translated into English, with some alterations, in 1720.

(6) *The City Remembrancer* (1769). A composite text, collating and reworking a number of previous
accounts of the plague for mid-eighteenth-century audiences.

(7) Alexander Pope, ‘Sonnet said to be written by Milton upon occasion of the plague’. A hoax (probably)
by Pope, which found its way into Thomas Birch’s 1737 biography of Milton. Despite his public
scepticism, Birch was very nearly fooled.
(8) John Wilson, *City of the Plague* (1816), extracts. An historical verse drama by a leading Scottish journalist and author. A longstanding admirer of Wordsworth, Wilson was also friends with De Quincey and Coleridge.

(9) William Wordsworth, ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge’. To be read alongside Wilson’s *City of the Plague*.

(2) **Commemorative practice and the literary past**

The reading and discussion for this week’s class is in three parts. We’ll begin by tracing changing attitudes to the remembrance of the dead, from Addison’s *Spectator* to Wordsworth’s ‘Essays upon Epitaphs’. Debate on the nature and purpose of commemorative practice in this period exposes fascinating tensions between, e.g., public commemoration and private remembrance; secular fame and religious devotion; stoic virtue and sentimental bereavement. Such issues may be further illuminated by the changing nature of eighteenth-century monumental statuary; to this end, we’ll look at a range of images, including a number of literary monuments. Finally, we’ll consider how these larger contexts might bear on a series of poems commemorating poets, ranging from Dryden’s ‘To the Memory of Mr Oldham’ to Shelley’s *Adonais*.

**All the materials for the class are available for download from Moodle.** They comprise:

**Cultures of Commemoration**

(1.01) Joseph Addison, *Spectator* no. 26 (30 Mar. 1711)
(1.02) Aaron Hill, *Plain Dealer* no. 42 (14 Aug. 1724)
(1.03) Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Bathurst: Of the Use of Riches* (1733), ll. 249–298
(1.04) James Hervey, *Meditations among the Tombs* (1746), extracts. Hervey was a prominent evangelical minister, who sought in the *Meditations* ‘to bait the Gospel-Hook, agreeably to the prevailing Taste’—with great success.
(1.06) William Godwin, *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), extracts
(1.07) William Wordsworth, ‘Essays upon Epitaphs’ (1809–10), extracts
(1.08) William Wordsworth, *The Excursion* (1814), VII, 395–481

**Eighteenth-Century Funerary Monuments**

(2.01) Attrib. Edward Pierce, Monument to Lady Warburton, St John’s Chester (1760)
(2.02) Grinling Gibbons, Monument to Sir Cloudesly Shovel, Westminster Abbey (1707)
(2.03) Michael Rysbrack, after a design by James Gibbs, Monument to Matthew Prior, Westminster Abbey (1722)
(2.04) Giovanni Battista Guelfi, Monument to James Craggs, Westminster Abbey (1727)
(2.05) Michael Rysbrack, Monument to the first Earl Harborough, St Mary Magdalen Staplefore, Leicestershire (c. 1730-4)
(2.06) Peter Scheemakers, after a design by William Kent, Monument to William Shakespeare, Westminster Abbey (1740)
(2.07) John Michael Rysbrack, Monument to Nicholas Rowe, Westminster Abbey (c. 1743)
(2.08) Louis François Roubiliac, Monument to General William Hargrave, Westminster Abbey (1757)
(2.09) Louis François Roubiliac, Monument to Admiral Sir Peter Warren, Westminster Abbey (1757)
(2.10) Louis François Roubiliac, Monument to Lady Elizabeth Nightingale, Westminster Abbey (1760)
(2.11) Agostino Carlini, Monument to Lady Milton, Milton Abbas, Dorset (1775)
(2.12) ‘Poets’ Corner’, Westminster Abbey, south transept, east aisle
(2.13) ‘Poets’ Corner’, Westminster Abbey, south transept, west aisle

Memorial verse from Dryden to Shelley

(3.01) John Dryden, ‘To the Memory of Mr. Oldham’ (1684)
(3.02) Alexander Pope, ‘Epitaph Intended for Mr. Rowe’ (1720); ‘Epitaph Designed for Mr. Dryden’s Monument’ (1726); ‘Epitaph on Mr. Rowe’ (1743)
(3.03) Elizabeth Tollet, ‘In Memory of the Countess of Winchelsea’ (1724). Anne Finch, countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720), was a successful and versatile poet, best known for *The Spleen* (1801).
(3.04) William Collins, *Ode Occasion’d by the Death of Mr Thomson* (1749)
(3.05) Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard* (1751)
(3.06) Richard Bentley, engraved frontispiece to Gray’s *Elegy* (1753)
(3.07) Ann Yearsley, ‘Elegy, on Mr Chatterton’ (1787)
(3.08) William Wordsworth, ‘Remembrance of Collins Composed upon the Thames near Richmond’ (1798)
(3.09) George Gordon, Lord Byron, ‘Churchill’s Grave’ (1816)
(3.10) Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Adonais* (1821)

(3) **Wordsworth and the revolutionary past**

The primary focus for discussion in this week’s class is William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805 text), Books IX and X, together with Book VI, lines 332–425. The passage from Book VI describes Wordsworth’s passage through France in July 1790, en route to the Alps, on the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Books IX and X constitute, in large part, a recollected narrative of the poet’s experiences in revolutionary France between 1791 and 1792. We shall explore the nature of Wordsworth’s response to the revolution, with a particular emphasis on the interplay between personal memory and public history. This aspect of the *Prelude* bears closely on the central, and contested, role played by historical argument in the English controversy on the revolution, represented for our purposes by extracts from Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Paine’s *Rights of Man*. And we’ll also read Wordsworth’s poetic narrative alongside one of the *Prelude’s* source texts, Helen Maria Williams’s *Letters from France*. The relationship between history and romance offers one important point of connection between Wordsworth and Williams, and is further elucidated by William Godwin’s essay ‘Of History and Romance’.

(1) Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VI, ll. 332–425; Books IX; Book X.
There are a number of good paperback editions of *The Prelude*, some of which—such as the Norton edition ed. Wordsworth, Abrams, and Gill—offer both 1805 and 1850 texts on facing pages.

**All other reading for the class is available for download from Moodle.** It comprises:

(2) Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), extracts. The *Reflections* began as a response to the dissenting minister Richard Price’s *Discourse on the Love of our Country*, a sermon delivered to the Society for the Commemoration of the Glorious Revolution in November 1789. Price’s *Discourse* draws a favourable comparison between the ongoing French revolution and the events of a century earlier in which William of Orange had driven the English king James II from the throne. The opening pages of the *Reflections* are much concerned, as a result, with the meanings of Britain’s revolutionary past and its relevance for understanding current events in France.

(3) Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man, Part I* (1791), extracts. The most important response to Burke, Paine’s text offers a fundamental challenge to Burke’s defence of historical precedent and inherited constitutional forms.

(4) Helen Maria Williams, *Letters written in France* (1790). Williams’s epistolary narrative of the revolution in summer 1790 gives way to a narrative of her friends Thomas and Monique du Fossé. When Wordsworth travelled to France in 1791 he hoped to meet Williams and it is very likely that he had already read the *Letters*. The story of Vadracour and Julia at the end of the *Prelude*, Book IX, was influenced by Williams’s account of du Fossé. But Wordsworth’s narrative also elides the memory of his relationship with Annette Vallon, and their illegitimate child.

(5) William Godwin, ‘Of History and Romance’

(4) **Recollectio and the sense of self: Austen, Johnson, Hazlitt**

We’ll end with an extended discussion of Austen’s late (and posthumously published) masterpiece, *Persuasion* (1817), a novel that is centrally concerned with the ethics of memory. The uses and disadvantages of recollection for life (to paraphrase Nietzsche) are repeatedly tested by Austen’s text, and invite reflection on the role of memory in both the construction of character, and the temporal structuring of narrative. But *Persuasion* also asks us to situate that narrative within larger historical patterns of military conflict and social change, and thus to consider the interaction between personal and collective figurations of the past. The essays of Johnson and Hazlitt provide two rather different foils for our reading of Austen; both, however, suggest the growing importance of memory in this period as in some sense constitutive of the modern self.


**All other reading for the class is available for download from Moodle.** It comprises:
(2) Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* no. 8 (14 April 1750), ‘The thoughts to be brought under regulation; as they respect the past, present, and future’

—— *Idler* no. 44 (17 Feb. 1759), ‘Use of memory’

—— *Idler* no. 72 (1 Sept. 1759), ‘Regulation of memory’

(3) William Hazlitt, ‘Why Distant Objects Please’ (1822)

—— ‘A Farewell to Essay Writing’ (1828)

—— ‘The Letter Bell’ (1831)