THE MONUMENTAL RENAISSANCE
Autumn term 2020/2021
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MODULE SUMMARY

The summer of 2020 has seen statues torn down or carried quietly away, and the politics of memorialisation has become an important aspect of debates about how we should re-make the world. We are all having to reckon with the material cultures of commemoration, with strategies of heritage and preservation, with who or what we as a society think should be made monumental. These monuments and these controversies have their roots in a culture of memorialisation that owes much to the Renaissance, and to a longer inheritance in the memorial cultures of ancient Greece and Rome.

In this module, we will consider the monuments that the Renaissance celebrated, made, remembered, and destroyed. We will think about how early modern writers thought and wrote about statues, objects, and the built environment; and about what happens when these objects become ruins. We will investigate how Renaissance writers conceived of writing itself as a kind of monument, and about the material and commercial circumstances that helped or hindered this process. We’ll combine close reading of literary texts and secondary criticism with attention to material culture; we’ll consider canonical and less-studied Renaissance texts, as well as some recent reimaginings of these texts; we’ll think about classical and Renaissance objects and monuments; and we’ll think about all of these things alongside the politics of statues and commemoration.

All the way through, we will ask: what makes these Renaissance texts monumental? We’ll do this by considering their critical history, thinking about how editing and scholarly trends have mainstreamed or hidden particular authors and points of view. We’ll read criticism
that challenges some long-held assumptions, and helps us to read differently. We will consider questions of canon formation and relate these to the writing you’ve read in your studies so far. We will think in particular about the recent entry of some Renaissance women writers into the canon; and about how ways of reading that are grounded in critical race theory are now, belatedly, gaining traction in early modern studies. Who chooses what we read? How do they decide? What, or who, gets to be monumental—and what gets left out? What processes and systems of power make this happen? What should we do about it?

This module aims to introduce you to the discourses of monument and ruin in early modern literature, combining close attention to literary texts with to the sources and contexts for these texts, and the material culture with which they interacted. At the same time you will reflect on and critique the processes of canon formation by which literature is made monumental. In our final session we will think about ways in which we might make the Renaissance literary canon anew.

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

Please note that this schedule is provisional and might be subject to minor changes. More details about required and suggested texts, and secondary reading, will be made available closer to the module start date.

**Week 2**  
**Monuments and writing**  
Horace, Ode 3.30; Milton, ‘On Shakespear’; Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes*; excerpts from Ovid, Virgil, Petrarch, Spenser, and others; also very recent writing from 2020 about statues and memorialisation including Vanessa Kisuule, ‘Hollow’.

**Week 3**  
**Ruins**  

**Week 4**  
**Statues, bodies, performance**  
Ben Jonson, *Sejanus His Fall* (1603; pub. 1605); Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (c.1606/7; pub. 1623).

**Week 5**  
**Shakespeare’s Sonnets**  

**Week 6**  
**Church monuments**  
George Herbert, *The Temple* (1633); John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631); epitaph poems.

**Week 7**  
**Civil wars and women’s writing**  
Poems by Hester Pultor, Katherine Philips, Lucy Hutchinson.
Week 8  Amelia Lanyer
Amelia Lanyer, *Salve Deux Rex Judaeorum* (1611)

Week 9  Remembering Amelia Lanyer; remaking the module

**TEXTS TO BUY:**

It would be useful to get copies of the following:
Sandra Newman, *The Heavens* (2019) (NB the paperback will be released on 5 November, so you might want to wait until then, though there are second-hand hardback copies available cheaply online).

**SELECTED SECONDARY READING**

Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (1993)
Andrew Hui, *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature* (2016)
Aaron Kunin, ‘Shakespeare’s Preservation Fantasy’, *PMLA* (2009)
Erin McCarthy, ‘Speculation and Multiple Dedications in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*’, *Studies in English Literature* 1500–1900 (2015)
Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture* (2020)