

Teaching Guide to 'Verse Epitaphs and the Memorialisation of Women'

Further Reading

Cheap print has become a popular subject for study both among historians and literary scholars in recent years. My article features the sort of ephemeral literature which was the focus of Margaret Spufford's seminal text *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Methuen, 1981) and despite its age, this remains a good introductory text. Building on Spufford's work, Tessa Watt investigated the representation of religion in a variety of popular print, including ballads and epitaphs, in *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Ballads, however, were inherently musical, and this is an aspect which is often neglected. This is an oversight, because the catchy melodies that they utilised were part of what made them memorable and, in turn, helped their messages to spread. While we cannot be sure that the verse epitaphs included in my article were intended to be sung, we cannot rule it out either. Even if the verse epitaphs were not sung, their rhyme and rhythm would have helped people to remember them. Christopher Marsh's *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) attempts to redress the balance between lyrics and music, while Una McIlvenna's work on seventeenth-century ballads usually highlights their musical settings (see, for example, 'The Rich Merchant Man, or, What the Punishment of Greed Sounded Like in Early Modern English Ballads', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 79:2 279-299 (2016)). Likewise, it is something on which I hope to publish my own monograph in the near future. On the use of broadside ballads within major literary works, see Simone Chess's article 'Shakespeare's Plays and Broadside Ballads' (*Literature Compass*, 7: 773-785 (2010)). Ross Duffin's *Shakespeare's Songbook* (W. W. Norton & Company: 2004) provides the text and a short analysis of 155 songs referenced in Shakespeare's plays.

For those with an interest in popular religious belief, Christopher Marsh's *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) is an accessible introduction. Turning to works on the culture of remembrance, one useful volume which had not been published at the time of writing my article is Elizabeth Tingle and Jonathan Willis's edited collection, *Dying, Death, Burial and Commemoration in Reformation Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). It contains several interesting chapters, including those on Catholic burial practises in Protestant England (Halloran and Spicer); prayers for the dead (Cleugh); and on the musical commemoration of the deceased (Kim). Lucinda Becker's *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) concludes that the ideals of feminine perfection portrayed by the type of literature examined in my article were made deliberately unachievable. Nevertheless, she also argues that the existence of these posthumous paragons of womanhood in 'recorded lives' and epitaphs shows that these items fulfilled a deep-seated need in early-modern society. She also makes the important point that the female voice of the early modern woman's death is heard through the pen of a man.

Useful links:

This article might be used alongside the BBC Radio 4 *In Our Time* discussion of death, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00546ry> (broadcast 4 May 2000).

Early English Books Online (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>) provides a wealth of literature that might be used to investigate attitudes to female piety and the memorialisation of women. Although EEBO requires an institutional login, some of the texts are freely available via the EEBO Text Creation Partnership website (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup/>). There are two freely available digital collections of ballads: the English Broadside Ballad Archive from the University of California, Santa Barbara (<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>), and the University of Oxford's Allegro collection (<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ballads/>).

Syllabi

This article would be useful for any course on Renaissance literature and/or Shakespeare, as it would help students to understand the cultural changes brought about by the English Reformation which are reflected in many of these works. During the Reformation, certain words became politically loaded, while, as my article shows, the sorts of actions that pious women were expected to carry out had different cultural implications. It would also, therefore, be useful for courses on femininity in literature and for history courses on death and memorialisation. Students could be encouraged to recognise the different contexts of the writing that they study, not only by looking at the memorialisation of women from before and after the Reformation, but also by comparing it to post-Reformation Catholic writing.

Many of the themes relating to the nature of popular religious belief would also apply to courses on popular literature. Here, my article could be used as a starting point to explore wider religious themes, for example, in ballads. It is difficult during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to divorce religion from politics because the monarch controlled the official church. This means that many religious songs are inherently political, and vice versa. This becomes particularly the case during the early to mid-seventeenth century in the run up to the English Civil War. This article should help students break down the barriers between politics and religion, and to identify the sometimes subtle relationship between a text and the beliefs it represents.