

Keynote lecture

Thursday, 21 September 2017, 10.00 s.t.

Poetry and/as Polemic: Plural Conceptions of the Memorable in European Renaissance Literature

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In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, European Humanist conceptions of the memorable were tied to the postulate of a negligently forgotten or willfully distorted secular past. In contrast to medieval techniques of memory designed for the establishment and refinement of enduring, stable monumenta, Humanist approaches to the ancient past frequently aimed to overturn long-held assumptions (one thinks of the Donation of Constantine), and thus routinely positioned memory as an arm of contestation rather than as an instrument of consensus. Not surprisingly, this posture had an impact on poetry conceived as a vehicle of community memory: in an age of contested memory, memorial poetry was written not merely to preserve, but also to persuade. In this talk, I seek to underscore the degree to which the erosion of consensus about what was “memorable” shaped the rhetorical orientation of Renaissance poetry, in particular in France.