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Book Review, Issue 2

Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans

Summer 2004

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This article seeks to contribute to contemporary discussions on the workings of cultural memory and examines in particular the way in which literary texts can function as a social framework for memory. Through a detailed study of the genesis, composition, and long-term reception of Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* (1982 [1818]), I argue that literary texts play a variety of roles in the formation of cultural memory and that these roles are linked to their status as public discourse, to their fictional and poetical qualities, and to their longevity. This analysis of the multiple roles of literary texts in what I call “memorial dynamics” sheds light on the complex communicative processes by which images of the past are formed and transformed over time. It indicates the need to consider discontinuity as a feature of memorial dynamics and to recognize, for better or for worse, that fictionality and poeticity are an integral and not merely “inauthentic” feature of cultural memory.

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