

Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction 1810-1870

Memory, nostalgia, and the self are powerful themes that have long fascinated writers throughout history. In the context of British fiction between 1810 and 1870, these themes took on a unique significance that reflected both societal changes and the evolving understanding of the human experience. This article explores the interplay of amnesiac selves, nostalgia, and forgetting in British literature during this era.

Understanding the Amnesiac Selves

In the early 19th century, there was a growing fascination with amnesia and its effects on the individual's sense of self. British writers of the time recognized the deep psychological impact of memory loss and explored the themes of identity and self-discovery in great depth. Novels like *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë offer rich examples of characters grappling with the loss of memory and its consequences on their identities.

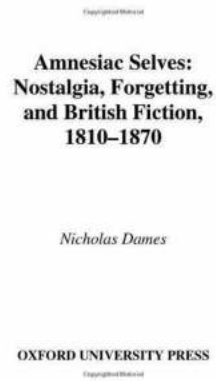
The amnesiac self became a literary trope that allowed authors to reflect on the fragile nature of human memory and highlight the complexities of individual experiences in a rapidly changing world. By exploring the fragmented and disjointed nature of memory, writers aimed to capture the essence of the human condition and the transient nature of personal history.

Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870

by Nicholas Dames (1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Nostalgia and the Longing for a Forgotten Past

In addition to amnesia, nostalgia emerged as a prominent theme in British fiction during this period. The Industrial Revolution and the consequent urbanization had led to significant social and cultural changes. Many individuals found themselves longing for a simpler and more idealized past.

Novels such as *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens convey a sense of nostalgia for an imagined past, where British society was perceived as more stable, harmonious, and rooted in tradition. Characters in these works often yearn for a sense of belonging and seek solace in memories of a forgotten time.

Forgetting and the Construction of New Identities

While nostalgia and amnesia seem contradictory, they are intrinsically linked. In the face of a rapidly changing society, forgetting the past became a means of constructing new identities. British fiction of the time explores the act of forgetting as a way to break free from the constraints of tradition and embrace new possibilities.

Novels such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde and *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens exemplify this theme. The characters in these works embark on journeys of self-discovery and reinvention, shedding their pasts and embracing new identities. Forgetting becomes a transformative process that allows individuals to challenge societal norms and forge their own paths.

Amnesiac selves, nostalgia, and forgetting were integral elements of British fiction between 1810 and 1870. These themes allowed writers to reflect on the complexities of memory, the longing for a lost past, and the construction of new identities. By exploring these concepts, authors of the era captured the essence of the human experience and offered profound insights into the changing social and cultural dynamics of the time.

British literature from this period continues to resonate with readers today, as it sheds light on universal truths about human nature and the enduring power of memory and identity.

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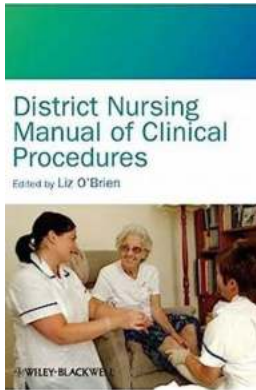
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With Joyce, Proust, and Faulkner in mind, we have come to understand the novel as a form with intimate ties to the impulses and processes of memory. This study contends that this common perception is an anachronism that distorts our view of the novel. Based on an investigation of representative novels, *Amnesiac Selves* shows that the Victorian novel bears no such secure relation to memory, and, in fact, it tries to hide, evade, and eliminate remembering. Dames argues that the notable scarcity and distinct unease of representations of remembrance in the nineteenth-century British novel signal an art form struggling to define and construct new concepts of memory. By placing nineteenth-century British fiction from Jane Austen to Wilkie Collins alongside a wide variety of Victorian psychologies and theories of mind, Nicholas Dames evokes a novelistic world, and a culture, before modern memory--one dedicated to a nostalgic evasion of detailed recollection which our time has largely forgotten.



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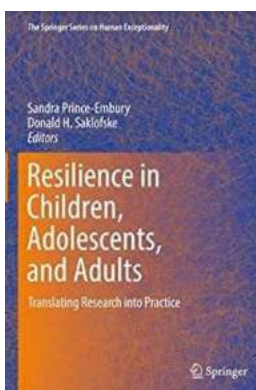
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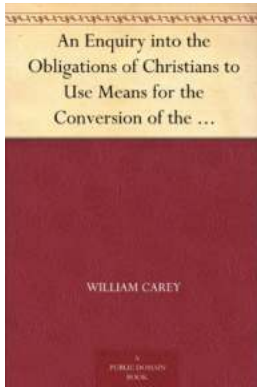
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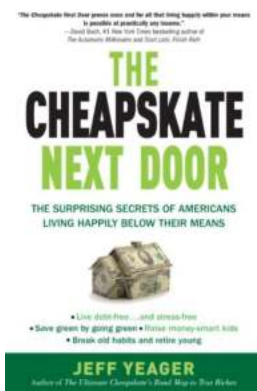
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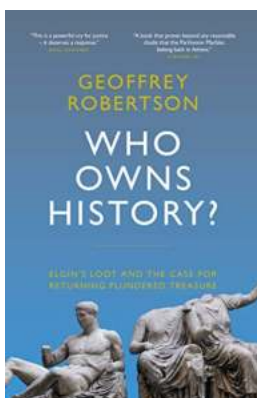
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