

The Work and Cultural Traditions: Early Modern Encounters

In his essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), T.S. Eliot says that ‘Tradition ... involves, in the first place, the historical sense ... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer ... has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.’ In 1922 the two works in English which most intensely absorbed, questioned and, at the same time, reinvented tradition were published: Eliot’s own *The Waste Land* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The ways in which Eliot and Joyce appropriated tradition by transmuting it were diverse, but their works may be considered as manifestations of the same creative practice on the basis of Eliot’s further statement that ‘No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone’ (*ibid.*).

Tradition also means transmission, restoration and conservation, processes that involve, and are dependent on the use of technologies, which inevitably impinge upon the work itself. Every time a text is published, but also restored and conserved, it acquires a new sense for new readers and, perhaps, suggests different uses too. As Roger Chartier puts it, ‘when the “same” text is apprehended through very different mechanisms of representation, it is no longer the same. Each of its forms obeys specific conventions that mold and shape the work according to the laws of that form and connect it, in different ways, with other arts, other genres, and other texts’ (1995). Chartier thus invites us to consider the ‘double historicity’ of the written text, the first concerning such categories as ‘assignment, designation and classification’ of discourses in the time and place where the text is created, whereas the second regards the material forms through which the text is transmitted and the modalities of the transmission itself.

From the point of view of the receiving cultural mechanisms, Paul Eggert observes, in turn, that ‘works do not stand still. For one thing, the world changes around them, and for another they are not *only* physical objects. What they originally disclosed is gradually lost sight of. The later act of conceptualising them as, say, religious or artistic objects co-opts them into frames of reference or into discourses that change what, in an important sense, they are’; then, ‘how do we respect their pastness once their meaning has changed?’ (2009). How, then, do we respect the very pastness of such works as *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses* now that their very place and presence in the cultural memory has changed?

If a dialogue between the two cultural mechanisms of production on the one hand and reception-conservation-restoration on the other can be established, it is by acknowledging and examining the fact that they belong to the same cultural dialectics, that they embody different ways of being within the tradition. What artists do with, and to tradition, and what the receiving culture does with, and to artists’ works (including sanction and oblivion) live within the same mechanisms of (material) transmission and migration of cultural data and forms. It is a process which, on the one hand, transfers these data and forms from the collective memory to the artist, and, on the other, re-appropriates these data and forms by acts of recovering, restoring, securing and renovating them, to the collective cultural memory.

But *what* exactly does tradition transmit for us to recover, restore, secure, renovate and keep in (or delete from) the cultural memory? Indeed, as F.W. Bateson famously suggested, if the *Mona Lisa* is in the Louvre, where are *Hamlet* and ‘Lycidas’? Bateson’s challenging suggestion was generally understood as a way to illustrate a distinction between autographic and allographic (art) manifestations. But it also opens up an immense field for a reflection on the concept of ‘work’ and the related issues of ‘text’, ‘document’ and ‘book’, as well as on the different forms, manifestations and ways of transmission of art and on the different activities to retrieve, preserve, restore and stabilize these forms.

These complex issues are further complicated by the highly problematic relationship of ‘works’ with their ‘texts’, and by the equally problematic interrelations of both works and texts with the ‘documents’ instantiating the texts. In Hans Gabler’s words, ‘While it is simplistically often claimed that a material text “presents a work”, or even “is the work”, what properly it is and does is that it represents the work in one manifestation out of an in principle endless series of material instantiations.’ (2013). Equally knotty are the relationships of work, text and document with the physical configurations in which these are materialized, either in manuscript or in printed artefacts.

In order to celebrate the centenary of the publication of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, the 2022 issue of the *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, entitled ‘The Work and Cultural Traditions: Early Modern Encounters’, will investigate forms of transition of cultural configurations from previous to later manifestations: patterns and models of retrieval and restoration of styles, forms, genres, and so on. From the perspective of the receiving culture, we welcome contributions on the ways in which works are received, manipulated, restored, re-transmitted, collaboratively re-presented, ‘performed’ and translated into different cultural and historical formations. Keeping the focus of attention on early modern European culture(s), we also invite reflections on the notions of ‘work’, ‘text’ and ‘document’ and their relationships with practices of reading, editing, printing, publishing and ‘making meaning’; as well as investigations of particular case studies. Further, we encourage discussions of early modern texts in relation to the ideas of source, originality and imitation, quotation and borrowing, rewriting, transmuting, parody, validation by authority (the Bible, the classics ...), authentication and restoration. We welcome articles in such fields as early modern literature and (performing) arts, history, religion and other forms of cultural creation.

Main deadlines

3 October 2020: please send your proposal and working title to the editors (deidda@unica.it, donatella.pallotti@unifi.it, paola.pugliatti@gmail.com)

31 October 2020: notification of proposal acceptance.

27 February 2021: submission of articles to the editors.

Please note that articles must comply with the editorial norms and must not exceed 12,000 words, including footnotes and bibliography. Articles may include up to 10 images (for publication they need to be submitted in 600 dpi resolution and with publication permit). All articles are published in English. Please be so kind as to have your paper revised by a native speaker.