

Cultural Memory in the Early Roman Empire

Latin literary scholarship today has painted itself into a hermeneutic corner. Virtually any conference paper on Latin literature will conclude that an author expresses adherence to Hellenistic poetics and awareness of the burden of the past through multiple layers of intertextuality. This approach has borne plenty of fruit and yielded exquisite contributions on the poetics of allusion and the shadow of Callimachus down to Virgil's epic successors that have altered the way we now think about literature. There is, however, a case to be made that the time is ripe for introducing new methodologies to the tool box of literary studies - not so much to supplant but to complement intertextuality. We therefore encourage avowedly methodological approaches that take into account the recent upsurge in research on memory.

Building on Halbwach's concept of collective memory and Nora's *lieux und milieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) Jan Assmann distinguishes two types of memory: communicative memory, related to the diffuse transmission of memories in everyday life through orality, and cultural memory referring to objectified and institutionalized memories, that can be stored, transferred and reincorporated throughout generations through focused speech.

Cultural memory is formed by symbolic heritage embodied in texts, rites, monuments, celebrations, objects, sacred scriptures and other media that serve as mnemonic triggers to initiate meanings associated with what has happened. It brings us back to the time of mythical origins, crystallizes collective experiences of the past and often endures for millennia. Therefore it relies on knowledge restricted to initiates.

Communicative memory, on the other hand, is limited to the recent past, evokes personal and often autobiographical memories, and is characterized by a short term (80 to 110 years), from three to four generations. Due to its informal character, it does not require expertise on the part of those who transmit it.

Seen from this perspective cultural memory allows us to build a narrative picture of the past and through this process develop an image and an identity for ourselves. Therefore, cultural memory preserves the symbolic institutionalized heritage to which individuals resort to build their own identities and to affirm themselves as part of a group. This is possible because the act of remembering involves normative aspects, so that 'if you want to belong to a community, you must follow the rules of how and what to remember' (Assmann).

By working as a collective unifying force, cultural memory is considered a hazard by some who aim to make culture a blank slate that makes it possible to start afresh. Others cherish even a traumatic memory as it may help to glue together a group of survivors either by creating a heroic memory or by giving space to the memory of the victims.

The umbrella of cultural memory, however, encompasses and interacts with multiple memories such as individual memory (a person remembers his/her past), social memory (memory spoken aloud by a group member and influenced by that member's place within it), and oikotype (a standardized version of the past adopted by the community) as well as undercurrents such as popular memory (popular retellings modify the original story so that what people believed took place in the past was often quite different from what actually occurred) and vernacular memory (the memory of fringe groups or minorities as opposed to official memory).

The aim of this project is to place cultural memory centre stage when examining Latin Literature and Culture.