

Introduction

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*This is how one pictures the angel of history.
His face is turned toward the past. Where
we perceive a chain of events, he sees one
single catastrophe which keeps piling wreck-
age upon wreckage and hurls it in front of
his feet. The angel would like to stay,
awaken the dead, and make whole what has
been smashed. But a storm is blowing from
Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with
such violence that the angel can no longer
close them. —Walter Benjamin, Theses on
the Philosophy of History*

Mosaic issue in which I've been involved, however, the idea presents itself not unambiguously and not without critical force, which is only one reason that literature and art matter at a time like this.

Take, for example, the essay with which this issue opens, Jon Kertzer's "Life Plus Ninety-Nine Years: W.S. Gilbert and the Fantasy of Justice." By drawing on the Savoy operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, Kertzer investigates how an imperial system of justice, in this case British justice, "works" in literature. Justice, national justice, may seek to transcendentalize itself in an ideal, but, in literature at least, "the unruly discourses of legality," Kertzer says, "are guilty of the very crimes they mean to correct." The critical space that these operas open is that between fiction and fact. In Kelli Lyon Johnson's "Both Sides of the Massacre: Collective Memory and Narrative on Hispaniola," this very space becomes the site of new narrative. What is at issue in this essay cannot be far removed from the situation today in Iraq: how do Haitians and Dominicans negotiate race, nation, and identity—how do they remember—after the

I write this on the day after what the media is now heralding as the "collapse" of Saddam Hussein's regime, an event signalled by the toppling of Saddam statues, the burning of his images, and, not the least, by chaos in the streets of Baghdad—widespread looting and a sort of United States-military-supervised anarchy. It's a difficult day on which to swallow an imperial discourse of "liberation" couched in the American idea of nationhood. And yet, as I turn to this *Mosaic* issue, this is the idea that first jumps out at me. As is the case with every

reign of Generalísimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, and his massacre of thousands of Haitians living on the border in the Dominican Republic? Again, it is literature, in this case the writing of Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat, that creates an enabling space, “between history and memory, the vernacular and the official, fiction and fact.” At the hands of these two writers, the novel becomes “a new, literary space in which collective memory expresses a national identity that includes members of the memory community previously excluded from historical discourse because of racial, class, sexual, or national identity.”

How do we comport ourselves in relation to otherness? In Miriam Nichols’s “Spilling the Names of God: Robin Blaser’s *The Last Supper*,” where opera is again considered, this question is, paradoxically, tied up with both poststructuralist critique and a Christian-based “sacred poetics.” There are more surprising juxtapositions in Géraldine Chouard’s “Patchwork, or the ‘Pile-Up of Possibles,’ in *How To Make an American Quilt*,” which is, indeed, all about juxtapositions: the mixing and matching of quiltwork, as well as the fitting together of Deleuze and Guattari with ideas of national identity in the United States. Latham Hunter, in “*Under the Ribs of Death: Immigrant Narratives of Masculinity and Nationality*,” situates the narrative of nation in Canadian context, asking, by way of Marlyn’s book, to what extent the immigrant is allowed to participate in the making of that narrative. For Juniper Ellis, in “Niugini i Bekim Tok: Creolizing Global English in Papua New Guinean Literature,” the critical question turns on the claim that, wherever it goes, English stamps out other languages. In this essay, the title phrase, “Niugini i Bekim Tok,” taken from the Tok Pisin language of Papua New Guinea, suggests that, to counter this claim, “Papua New Guinea talks back.”

In “Walking the Web in the Lost London of *Mrs. Dalloway*,” Andelys Wood examines the interweaving of place and time in *Mrs. Dalloway*’s walks, arguing that, for Woolf in this novel, time is not always clock time, and place is not always referentially bound to 1920s London. Amy Blau takes us to the 1920s Paris and Gertrude Stein. In “The Artist in Word and Image in Gertrude Stein’s *Dix portraits*,” Blau suggests that the little-studied *Dix portraits* “has a great deal to say not only about the interdisciplinary relations of the portrait in text and in image but also about Stein’s understanding of the role of the modern artist and her self-presentation with respect to the other artists in the select gallery of this portrait collection. Ostensibly without picturing Stein, it concerns itself very much with her image as a writer.” With James Gifford, and “Durrell’s *The Revolt of Aphrodite: Nietzschean Influences*,” we move to Lawrence Durrell’s 1970 work as informed decisively by Friedrich Nietzsche and as having significant “critical value as a literary exploration of postmodern concepts.” The *post* is

taken up differently in Burt Kimmelman's study of Oppen's philosophy and poetics in "George Oppen's Silence and the Role of Uncertainty in Post-War American Avant-Garde Poetry."

The issue is rich and, in every sense, interdisciplinary.