

Introduction

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Writing, in *A Berlin Chronicle*, about his years in that city, Walter Benjamin suggests that reminiscence and autobiography are not one and the same, at least not if autobiography “has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life.” While autobiography may be considered a narrative form, remembering is wholly different from this: “Here I am talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities” (612). It is as if, for Benjamin, the more the fan of memory is opened, the more time is dispersed from its continuous present, the more self-presence is exposed as a ruse. With neither stabilization nor self-recovery as memory’s outcome, no wonder that Benjamin was, as Susan Sontag put it, “born under the sign of Saturn.”

We remain, as was Benjamin, fascinated with the workings of memory. Indeed, according to Nouri Gana, remembering “has now forcefully become a cult ethics of post-holocaust, post-apartheid, and post-colonial studies.” The prominence of the topic is evident in this issue, as is memory’s link, through Freud, to melancholia and/or mourning’s self-recovery. According to Leah White, it is the latter, self-recovery, or more precisely, self-preservation, that is the accomplishment of *Life? Or Theatre?* an autobiography written by the German-Jewish woman Charlotte Salomon, during the height of the Nazi occupation. In “Autobiography, Visual Representations, and the Preservation of Self,” White reads Salomon’s text as, at once, “a tool for healing” and “a powerful statement of resistance against oppressive forces.” In quite a different take, Nouri Gana’s “Remembering Forbidding Mourning: Repetition, Indifference, Melanxiety, Hamlet,” makes a start at “laying to rest the clinical myth of curative remembering,” and it does so by reflecting on “the remembering forbidding mourning—the mournfilling remembering, in which the wedge is opened up for melancholia and compulsion repetition to take control of the psychic apparatus.” For Julie Rak in “Pain and Painting: William Kurelek and Autobiography as Mourning,” the work of

mourning in Kurelek “involves a surmounting of loss,” such that “what is remembered must be made to fit a success discourse that forgets the continuing existence of xenophobia and racism in Canada.” She reads mourning and multiculturalism together, arguing that Kurelek’s autobiographical painting “shows how multiculturalism itself is based on highly selective readings of identity that leave out what might not fit its own discourse of immigrant success.”

Cultural translation, at stake in Julie Rak’s study, is central to several other essays in this issue. David Porter, in “Beyond the Bounds of Truth: Cultural Translation and William Chambers’s Chinese Garden,” considers the “cognitive dissonance” that is involved in the moment of cross-cultural encounter. This dissonance may be experienced as “surprise, self-alienation, perplexity, or delight, but it seems safe to assume that its effects deeply colour enduring memories of that moment and leave their traces upon its subsequent representation.” Porter’s essay raises the question of “how the artifacts of encounter—the products of translation—are themselves mediated by the cognitive and affective dislocation implicit in any confrontation with radical otherness. How does the elemental experience of foreignness itself, in other words, figure in the naturalization of the foreign?” For Roxanne Harde in “‘The Savage Inscription’: Abolitionist Writers and the Reinscription of Slavery,” the question is how, in the encounter of white abolitionist writer and slave, racial binaries are reinscribed—on the slave’s suffering body. For example, “in the negation of the Africans’ ability to suffer and to articulate that suffering, the black body is established as inherently savage or bestial; because of that savagery, African culture is negated and power is reinvested in the dominant culture. Even as they represent the tortured slave body, white abolitionist and anti-slavery writers reproduce the savage body—marked or remarked as a beast of burden.”

Charlotte Salomon’s autobiography is a liminal text, Leah White maintains: a blend of word and image, it occupies a narrative threshold between drama and visual representation. Michael F. Leruth, in “From Aesthetics to Liminality: The Web Art of Fred Forest,” reads Forest’s online art, particularly his projects for the annual French Internet Festival, as problematizing another kind of threshold, that between the “real world” and cyberspace. Forest’s works “avoid the fallacy that cyberculture could, or should, exist apart from the material world and are more consistent with the process of liminality, which does not invent new cultural forms from scratch, as it were, but begins by inflecting, or troping, existing ones,” Leruth writes. “This anthropological approach does not exactly lend itself well to leaving behind collectible masterpieces and is unlikely to bring about profound changes in the social and cultural order, but, if it helps break the spell of spectacle that veils one’s perception of the space

of communication that is such an integral part of the postmodern habitat, then it should surely be considered a worthy path for an 'art of the present' to explore." Birgitta Fröjdendahl's "Passion in Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept: The Sacred and the Profane*," forges liminal, intertextual, links between theology and literature, and it does so by examining "sacred" and "profane" aspects of passion in Smart's text. For Pilar Alonso, the limen to be explored is that between narrative texts and a mode of analysis called the "conceptual integration network model." Itself a "blended reality" model, conceptual integration network analysis "can be used to untangle the intricacies encountered" in such narratives as John Updike's story "The Wallet" and, as a result, "can illuminate the traditional controversy surrounding" this and other narrative works.

Perhaps Robert Brazeau's "Troubling Language: Avant-Garde Strategies in the Poetry of Medbh McGuckian" offers another exploration of liminality, but, in this case, boundaries themselves, especially those that delimit the role of women in contemporary Northern Ireland, are thrown into radical question. In Brazeau's reading, McGuckian's poetry evinces a strong social engagement, and, as avant-garde, it "is ideally positioned to draw critical attention toward the fundamental interconnectedness of signifying systems and social practices in the production of meaning and reality effects."

Such is, overall, the task of each *Mosaic* issue. Enjoy reading this one.

WORKS CITED

- Benjamin, Walter. *A Berlin Chronicle*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*. Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge, MA.: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1999. 595–637.
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