

# Introduction

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**T**he Letter. Both a thing written on paper bordering on obsolescence and a material mark—an a, b, c—now more than ever shot through by the electronic, the two-fold letter lives on. With its strange capacity to travel through time and across distances, it would seem that the essential impulse of the letter is to connect people, histories, and worlds. But as the essays in this issue of *Mosaic* suggest, these lines of transmission and connection are far more fraught than we would like to think.

The *Letters* issue was conceived by Dr. Dawne McCance, who has served as Editor of *Mosaic* for 18 years and who now hands over the editorship to me. Over the course of Dawne's tenure the journal has grown into one of the most respected critical forums in academic publishing. As the new Editor of *Mosaic* I would not only like to acknowledge Dawne's tremendous legacy, but also hope to further it in some small way. At this juncture the only way forward I see is to follow in what I imagine to be Dawne's footsteps. Combing the prairie grasses and forest floor for her trace will be the crux. With the *Letters* issue before me now I see a kind of path that is both a map and at one and the same time an analytic of sorts.

In these pages I recognize the letter as that thing we write on paper to another person, the record of a working collaboration, or, as in the case of Keats, a space where the writer is at liberty to admit their failings and uncertainties. I note a real

preference for the love letter, which provides so many of the authors a kind of heuristic for thinking outside of ontology. I recognize deconstruction's attempt to isolate the materiality of the letter. Thematically this letter is pushed toward metonymy. In two cases it is a foreign thing written in a foreign tongue that may or may not be translatable. For D.H. Lawrence the letter is still wet and dripping with primeval soup and for A.C. Swinburne it is as sharp and painful as the mark made by a birch switch. At its most extreme (in the case of John P. Leavey's contribution) the letter becomes an absolutely intransigent category that lies beyond any horizon of readability. His recurrent question devolves upon how the letter is to be read. Apparently, even a mimetico-critical act of writing can only hope to convey what remains blind.

A final thing I notice is that the letter blurs at every turn into the literary form of the epistolary tradition. We learn that at its height the genre provided the means of disseminating moral and behavioural codes for polite society. In the case of Cy Twombly, the letter shares this history but also feeds off the pictoriality of the drawn line and more often than not is happy to slip into careless scribbles. For Franz Kafka, letter-writing functions as the most curious prosthetic; the letter received being nothing less than an extension of his own body that serves as a kind of main artery pumping blood directly from the body of the other. Lastly, I note the letter takes shape as a completely dysfunctional operation that goes nowhere but arrives nevertheless—always out-living, out-performing, and existing beyond its author, never without postal problems, as Derrida would have it—securing some basic form of telecommunication by virtue of teleo-poiesis. Herein lies what I imagine to be the future for *Mosaic*. I will follow it to the letter. It is already written as an allegorical act to be repeated.