

Introduction

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Introducing a general issue is a particularly daunting task. The singular subjects broached, the fragmentary nature of the many parts, and the range of theoretical presuppositions put into play all resist the demands of an introduction. *Mosaic* 51.2 is no different. With topics ranging from the origins of Romantic lyric, bibliotherapy, and the aging body in Marguerite Duras on to genre theory, the afflictions of Wallace Thurman, *psychopomp* in James Joyce, the manipulative gaze of war representation, and the ethics of film adaption, we encounter an acutely divergent set of topics. This “melancholy spectacle” of non-coherence—a description Paul de Man once used to characterize a collection of his own writings (viii)—demands thought.

A sort of Ariadne’s thread connects these essays. A set of consistent claims about language centres things. Here, this centre turns on a variety of tactics to out-manoeuvre meaning and emphasize instead modalities of meaning-making. To frame this in terms of the largest theoretical questions that implicate us all, we might say that philosophy no longer provides the high road to interdisciplinary critical thinking. But neither is it merely a case of travelling the low road with the poets, say, the Rimbaud of “Ma Bohème,” “les poings dans [ses] poches crevées” (1). Inverting the relationship between poet and philosopher will always prove insufficient and a temptation to be overcome. Rather, the figure of the poet “sous le ciel” (3) is irrevocable and acknowledging they listen “assis au bord des routes” (9) the crux.

In this issue the tension between *poietics* and hermeneutics assumes many forms. Taken as a whole, these various types comprise a kind of hypo-analytic of poetic praxis, which we can only begin the work of parsing here. Take three examples. The first of these might be profitably caricatured in the adage “Be kind to animals,” sayeth the Poet. “Kill them,” says the Philosopher who knows better. Thus in Onno Oerlemans’s “Sing and Be Heard” and within animal studies generally—as much as when this morning I slowly awoke to the delights of birdsong—the human finds a curious kind of identity keyed to the model of the animal but played out as mimesis on the level of *poiesis*.

A second variant hinges upon the mind/body problem, which, of course, the figure of poet and philosopher cannot escape. Thus in the case of Gina Stamm’s “Embodiment and Aging in *Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein*” we encounter Durassian desire narrated by the body as opposed to desire dictated by the eye. Finally, in Jessie Miller’s “Medicines of the Soul” and John Richardson’s “Sentimental Witnesses,” we encounter two unique examples of character as performed in the context of theatre and interpersonal relations. Here, pressure on the reader or beholder as subject equals or is greater than that pressure placed on the object: the upshot being we discover the poet in ourselves. Or, as Ralph Waldo Emerson puts it, “That book is good / Which puts me in a working mood.”

Enjoy. . . .

WORKS CITED

- de Man, Paul. Preface. *Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia UP, 1984. vii-iv. Print.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. “Ma Bohème.” *Œuvres complètes*. Ed. André Guyaux and Aurélia Cervoni. Paris: Gallimard, 2009. 106. Print.