

Foreword

“Memory takes a lot of poetic license,” wrote Tennessee Williams in the stage directions to *The Glass Menagerie*. “It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart.”

This issue of the *Bellevue Literary Review* is devoted to the theme of memory. It is entitled “Reconstructions: The Art of Memory” because, as Williams points out, memory is based in the heart. Our brains—and our pens—take poetic license freely as the stories of our lives are reconstructed into the “facts” by which we define ourselves.

These memories, however poetically refashioned, create our identity. Without them, we would wake up each day in the *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*—the movie in which unwanted memories can be medically erased. Luckily, our memories remain far from spotless. Their very messiness is the fodder from which many a harrowing novel or poem have arisen.

Often these memories are invoked by particular places. We are thrilled that the cover of the *BLR* features the work of David Heald, the noted architectural photographer, and the director of photography at the Guggenheim Museum. His photographs of the twelfth-century Pontigny Abbey are particularly evocative of memory and contemplation. (More details on the copyright page.)

Francine Prose offers an introduction to this special issue with “The Library of Forgetting,” her vivid essay about facing down her endless shelves of books. “There was a time,” writes Prose, “...when I would become first disbelieving, then amazed, then shocked, then depressed to think that I could have read so much and remembered so little.” This may hit a little too close to home for many of us, but she reminds us that, ultimately, “books safeguard our memories for us.”

Sometimes memories are safeguarded against our will. In the story “Et Tu?” by Cambron Henderson, an English professor, now saddled with aphasia and hemi-paresis from a stroke, is tormented by the memories of his prior linguistic and romantic abilities.

His determination to convey his emotions to the young hospital volunteer who visits with her dog is nothing short of heroic.

Heroism and determination are taken to extremes in the story “When Her Father Was an Island” by Sara Batkie, in which a Japanese soldier sets out to fight for the emperor and remains fixed in his patriotic duty, even as the world moves on. His daughter must navigate her way forward despite the many unsettled strands of history.

“Memory without yearning/” writes Nicholas Samaras in his poem, “The Nature of Memory,” “isn’t nostalgic, isn’t / any memory that makes us, / but is only what we tolerate or suffer through.” Ellen Collins draws together these threads in her rhapsodic story, “Song of Memory.” Almost a prose poem, the story is an elegy to our faltering memories. Collins skillfully interweaves both the universal and the specific in a way that elicits both empathy and mortal panic.

In the poem “Accounting,” by Deborah Golub, two women compare their sexual exploits of the 1970s. But things get a little confusing: “How much is lost when we add / things up? Except, after that, I just stopped / telling, and Ruth, by now, has forgotten it all.”

Toni Mirosevich, in her essay “As High,” knits together memories as she walks along an ocean promenade. “A story grows long and leggy,” she writes. “The distance grows from what we remember...” Pamela Schmid feels that same poignant pull. “The details slip away even now,” she writes about her sister in the essay, “Good Measure,” “like water through clenched fingers.”

In the poem “Revision,” Jennifer Molnar offers a memory of an August afternoon in a room with a slanted roof, leaves brushing against the window. But then she stops: “I want to say I am not making up these details. I want to say I remember your name.” When it comes to creating a memory, she recognizes that she “couldn’t yet know what would take hold.”

We hope you enjoy this issue and that these stories, poems and essays take hold in your own memory. What are our current experiences, after all, if not seeds of our future memories?

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