
Abstracts

Phillip Novak, “Circles and Circles of Sorrow”: In the Wake of Morrison’s *Sula* 184

Toni Morrison’s *Sula* develops out of and centers on images of violence and violation, proffering itself as a catalog of traumatic experiences, of literal and figurative deaths. Such traumas almost invariably register as watched, the novel thus functioning, by means of its characters, as an act of bearing witness. Inasmuch as the story *Sula* tells is framed by passages mourning the loss of the world the novel imagines, the narrative structurally articulates an absence. Together these elements—*Sula*’s thematic preoccupation with witnessed dying and its insistence that the narrative mark loss—locate the novel’s center of interest in grieving. Folding the history of loss it narrates within a recursive structure, *Sula* pitches itself against the conventional notion that mourning must be worked through: indeed, the novel implicitly argues for—and persistently works to effect—a sustaining of grief. To move beyond mourning in the context of continuing cultural fragility, the novel suggests, may well constitute a surrender to the processes of cultural absorption and dispersal *Sula* describes toward its conclusion. (PN)

Victoria L. Smith, A Story beside(s) Itself: The Language of Loss in Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* 194

Djuna Barnes’s experimental text *Nightwood* offers a difficult narrative shaped around a sense of loss. Barnes outlines a loss of access to history, to language, and to representation in general for those consigned to the margins of culture. By using a torrential and Byzantine language—a language of indirection—Barnes creates a lexicon of loss that acts as a strategy for recuperating what has been unspeakable, particularly the culturally disempowered: in this text, Jews, women, and homosexuals. Her psychic and textual strategies work through analogy to recover unrecorded history and to show the unrepresented. Barnes reconfigures the culturally privileged discourse of melancholia and in doing so articulates a structure of loss for those whose histories have been effaced. (VLS)

Bella Brodzki, History, Cultural Memory, and the Tasks of Translation in T. Obinkaram Echewa’s *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire* 207

Across a range of disciplines and discourses, translation has become a central concern for many scholars working in the humanities. Indeed, the notion of translation has begun to inflect the most compelling and consequential debates on meaning and representation. My essay gives attention to Walter Benjamin’s redemptive and generative notion of translation as survival and to postmodern currents in translation studies alongside a contemporary Nigerian diasporic novel written in English, *I Saw the Sky Catch Fire*. Framed by a passing on of the story of the Women’s War (the Igbo women’s tax revolt against the British in 1929), Echewa’s narrative critiques the complicitous practices of translation, colonialism, and anthropology. In this exemplary instance of a type of hybrid postcolonial textuality, processes of intergenerational and intercultural transmission, conceived as both acts of translation and instruments of historical consciousness, perform as well as disrupt the work of cultural memory. (BB)