EDITORIAL

To say that the concept of memory has raised much debate in academia over the few last decades is to say nothing. It would be in fact nothing short of a serious intellectual challenge to identify another topic that has gained such critical attention and has attracted so vast a spectrum of scientific disciplines. These, including linguistics, literary theory, cultural theory, philosophy, history, sociology, trauma studies, psychobiology and neuroscience among many others, have addressed in their own respect the multiplicity of workings performed on/by memory, such as the acts of remembering, forgetting, commemorating or confabulating. It thus comes as no surprise that the leading scholars in the field are unanimous in claiming that memory has become a discursive construct. Evolving a long way from the ancient understanding of the term as "a repository of sensible and mental impressions … complemented by recollection – the process of recovering the content of past thoughts and perceptions" (Nikulin) through the Romantic thought as being constitutive for the contemporary perspectives on consciousness, the self and the discussed concept (Kilbourn, Ty, 5), memory studies have reached a stage whose focus "rests, precisely, not on the 'past as it really was,' but on the 'past as a human construct'" (Erll, 5).

Accordingly, what is now considered an essential prerequisite to gaining a better understanding of this construct is the need of a truly interdisciplinary approach; as it is observed by Kilbourn and Ty, "whatever 'truth' of memory we might discern can only be located in the interstices, the interfaces between and among discourses, disciplines, areas and realms of thought, whether scientific, humanist, deconstructive, or other" (5). Further preconditions for a successful insight into the subject matter come with the global character of the subject area, which well reflects the globalized world. Never before have memory studies been more of a collective and transnational effort resulting in the burgeoning number of study centers, journals, book series, and degree programs, all of which engage scholarly perspectives from all around the world (Erll, 2). Thus, investigating into the area of memory is worthwhile and meaningful since "'memory' has become a truly transnational phenomenon" (Erll, 4).

If, as further suggested by Erll, "[t]he heterogeneity of the concepts and disciplinary approaches to possibly identical objects of research represents one of the most important challenges of contemporary memory studies" (6), then the papers comprising the present issue of *Crossroads* journal responds to such a critical call with notable success. The authors of the seven articles collected in the volume attest to the phenomenon of memory as being located at the intersections of various disciplines, times and cultures and requiring a wide array of critical approaches. What seems to lie beneath all these various perspectives and approaches might be a perception of memory as "a dynamic, constructive process that reflects the goals and biases of individuals and groups, rather than a static or literal reproduction of past experiences" (Schacter, Welker, 241). It is also in this

broad sense that the authors of the articles in this volume understand the notion of memory. Seen as metaphorical crossroads between remembering and forgetting and relying on the interplay between past, present and future, memory becomes a dynamic (re)construction of individual and collective past that might be subject to the processes of alteration, re-evaluation, invention, fabrication, manipulation, and negation.

The volume opens with **Bożena Kucała's** essay that aims to analyse the representation of houses in selected novels and autobiographical narratives by Penelope Lively. Seen as specific junction of space and time, houses are not only physical locations evocative of the past but also constructs built within the space of memory. In Lively's fiction and non-fiction they function as ‚sites of memory', allowing individuals to create and maintain meaningful connections with their past and thus become particularly significant for their identity. However, apart from silently witnessing the experiences of individuals, Kucała argues, houses are also important as sites of collective memory, reflecting social and historical changes.

The concept of a house can be metaphorically extended to encompass the notion of one's homeland whose history, often turbulent, is inseparably intertwined with individual past. Such a connection comes to the fore in the three succeeding articles. **Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk** proposes to read Michael Crummey's *River Thieves* through the prism of ‚rescue history', a recently developed concept that is concerned with local, potential, existential and affirmative history whose goal is to rescue the future. Broadly categorized as historical fiction, the novel is set in Newfoundland and based on historical accounts of Captain David Buchan's expedition to Red Indian Lake, whose aim to encourage cooperation and put an end to hostilities between English settlers and Beothuks was never achieved. In her reading of the novel, Feldman-Kołodziejuk argues that Crummey's fiction revisits the chronicled events and restores agency to the marginalized groups, implying that all of us are able to influence history.

Restoring agency to the repressed is also an important theme in the article by **Anna Maria Karczewska,** who demonstrates the ways in which Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* offers insight into Dominican history and creates a voice for victims of political violence and terror. The novel, classified here as a relatively new for Latin American literature genre of *testimonio,* tells the story and describes enduring legacy of the Mirabal sisters, who opposed the regime of Rafael Trujillo and became symbols of popular and feminist resistance, their brutal deaths serving as a catalyst for change. Emphasizing interdependence of personal and collective experiences, Karczewska sees the narrative as a symbolic substitute for the truth and justice that was never granted to the victims in the aftermath of Trujillismo.

Paweł Kaptur revisits the history of the Restoration of Charles II Stuart in 1660, examining his treatment of Cromwellians who inspired and executed his father's deposition, in this way violating the irrefutable divine right of kings. The ruler's decision to punish or pardon them for their involvement in the regicide can be metaphorically perceived in terms of ‚remembering' and ‚forgetting', which are transposed from a personal level onto a wider plane of royal policy. While Charles II showed mercy and oblivion understood as an act of amnesty to those who only sided

with Cromwell and Parliament against his father but did not contribute to his death directly, he did not hesitate to take firm-handed actions in order to prevent further rebellions or plots in the future, and to strengthen the position of the monarchy.

Being perhaps the most obsessively recurring memories, the images of childhood and adolescence play a considerable role in giving shape to one's sense of identity and belonging. As claimed by **Stefan Kubiak,** this seems to be the case for Philip Roth and the bulk of his first-person narrated novels persistently set in his home town. Investigating into Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint, The Plot Against America,* and *American Pastoral,* the author argues that the writer's tireless literary return to the Jewish quarter of Newark, New Jersey, is a repeated endeavor to understand the reality of his homeland community, as well as the means to determine his complex sense of American Jewish identity.

Keeping the Jews of North America within the scope of interest, **Aleksandra Kamińska's** paper is a contribution exploring Bernice Eisenstein's 2006 graphic memoir *I Was A Child of Holocaust Survivors,* a hard-to-categorize, hybrid account of being a second generation survivor. Dwelling on the concept of postmemory as well as trauma studies, Kamińska takes a particular focus on Eisenstein's relationship with her father to demonstrate the ways in which the former portrays and commemorates the latter with the blend of words and images in her work. Eisenstein's idea behind her memoir, as the author argues, was to create a basis for changing the unintelligible traumas of the Holocaust into an understandable and meaningful story.

Katarzyna Więckowska, whose paper concludes the volume, delves into a new strain of novel dubbed as Alzheimer's fiction to demonstrate the challenges it poses to the established understanding of memory, identity and narrative. Offering a reading of Lisa Genova's *Still Alice,* Stefan Merrill Block's *The Story of Forgetting,* and Matthew Thomas's *We Are Not Ourselves,* she presents mechanisms which redefine and reconfigure our ways of thinking about the relations between identity, memory, literature and science. Not least significant aspect of Więckowska's article comes with making use of an entirely new critical idiom which arises in face of the writers' growing focus on neurological conditions and whose most immediate critical response gets reflected in the concepts of syndrome literature and neuronovel.

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The articles collected in this issue demonstrate that literature can be seen as a medium in which memory can be 'stored' and through which it can be conveyed, becoming an important tool for the representation of individual experiences, collective past, and national history. Literary texts, therefore, act as specific tools of memory-making, contributing significantly to the ways in which the past is construed. And yet, since every act of remembrance, whether at individual or collective level, is selective, "memories are small islands in a sea of forgetting" (Erll, 9). Private memoirs, autobiographies, novels, and historical narratives all construe, to a greater or lesser extent, such small narrative islands of memory amidst 'a sea of forgetting.' Even if, or maybe because, these islands

cannot be truly objective or perspective-free, they are worth critical attention as they do perform many functions, including "the imaginative creation of past life-words, the transmission of images of history, the negotiation of competing memories, and the reflection about processes and problems of cultural memory" (Erll,144). Relying on similar processes of selecting, organizing and arranging individual elements to form a coherent narrative, memory, history and literature as well as the intersections between them constituted the central organizing theme of this issue. Representing various critical perspectives, the authors who collaborated in this project engage in a meaningful dialogue, which, we hope, offers a valuable contribution to the field of memory studies.

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