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In Pieces: An Anthology of Fragmentary Writing

Olivia Dresher
Olivia Dresher, editor
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For more than a century, being modern has been understood to mean suffering under a fragmented consciousness, unable to fully narrate experience. This anthology celebrates the fragment in a collection of pieces by thirty-seven different authors, including diary and journal entries, poetry, aphorisms, bits of prose, and short fiction. These fragments often blur traditional boundaries of genre. The pieces signal a preoccupation with a particular moment of consciousness and experience, recording impressions, dreams, memories, and places.

Many of the selections, especially the journal and diary entries, are dated at the turn of the twenty-first century, suggesting a particular relevance of the fragment for the present moment; impressions of 9/11 echo with particular force and frequency throughout the writings. The contemporary literary fragment, as it is here represented, struggles with the political, historical, and literary unknown. In a piece titled “Albedo: Fragments of Antarctic Time (Summer Notebooks, 1994-2002),” Jason Anthony writes, “but now I plan for a supposedly comfortable expedition to the world’s most alien environment. Do I pack for work, for war, for vacation? Yes.” Anthony seems to be not only writing in preparation for the Antarctic but for a new era, which embodies the familiar and the alien in all forms of experience. This sense emerges in a range of fragments, by men and women, the well-published and the obscure.

In Pieces is also a collection of writers contemplating writing. It includes pieces that are thought experiments, writing exercises, and reflections on language and sound. The editor of the collection writes in a selection from her own anthologized journal that “language is a wave that covers me and then recedes back into the sea, leaving just sand and broken shells at my feet. I walk in the sand, I pick up the broken shells. *These*.” This is precisely Dresher’s goal in anthologizing fragments: to pick up the lovely broken shells of language left behind by the tide of language. Of course, all anthologies are collections of pieces of writing, and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between Dresher’s conception of a fragment and those of the authors themselves. Dresher writes in her introduction that all the pieces are intentional ones, but most of the contributions are selections that she describes as having been extracted from book-length submissions to Impassio Press.

Dresher is the founder of Impassio Press and co-editor of the anthology *Darkness and Light: Private Writing as Art* and has published her own poetry, essays, and fragments. This anthology offers a provocative look at the writing—intentional and accidental, polished and unpolished—of a wide range of contemporary authors. Dresher’s selections invite a more serious theorizing of the fragment as not just an accident to be discarded but rather as its own intriguing form.

KEYA KRAFT (August 7, 2006)

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