

"Faithful to the Place of Bones"

Just after I turned fifty, I broke my neck in a cycling accident. In the rehab hospital and for months afterwards, as my body tried to recover from the shock to my central nervous system, I suffered terrible neurological pain that baffled the pharmacologist's effort to diminish it. Drawing on theories of melancholia, on literary readings, and on understandings of loss, I make an argument in "Faithful to the Place of Bones" for how the feeling of chronic pain or the temporal dislocations of grief opens a way forward, one that must remember what has irretrievably happened in the hopes of making a transformative future. I write about how my difficulty in representing loss is two-fold, because I have lost not a beloved person but my body, and, in so far as body and mind are inseparable, can feel that I've lost my sense of self. To theorize these events and remain true to suffering and grief, I consider the psychoanalytic understanding of melancholy, then turn to the famously melancholic critic of modernity, Walter Benjamin. In his theses on the philosophy of history he writes against the forgetting that is predetermined by a belief in history as progress, and warns that "not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious." The critique of racial melancholy developed by Black scholars concurs with this understanding, so I sketch a tradition of thought that represents the virtues of keeping faith with past dispossession as a way to go forward without betraying what has been lost. Scholars of disability studies are beginning to approach these questions, as well, to refute the deeply annoying assumption that, disabled as we are, we will of course tell a story of progressive triumph over incapacity. I will not, because as I

Capsule biography:

Christina Crosby, Professor of English and Feminist Gender and Sexuality Studies at Wesleyan University, is the author two books. The first, *The Ends of History: Victorians and "The Woman Question"* (Routledge, 1990), focuses on the high value Victorian intellectuals accorded to the concept of history and the correspondingly low value accorded the category of women in Victorian novels. The second, *A Body, Undone: Living on After Great Pain* (New York University Press, 2016), "to make something of an otherwise compounded life" was written in the wake of spinal cord injury, paralysis, and pain. That book drew on disability studies, queer studies, and feminist studies, and she continues to ask – how might interminable mourning afford new ways to think about disability? How does exploring grief affirm a commitment to living on?