

REDEMPTION THROUGH COLLECTING OR INVISIBILITY? THE BOUNDARIES OF BEING OF ELISABETH GUNDOLF AND GRETHA SCHELLWORTH

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»Collecting, a fight, a lost battle against time; a desire for unity, against dissipation and dispersion, ending with the death of the collector; a utopic triumph of the will.«¹

In 1938 Friedrich Gundolf's papers and books and the library of Aby Warburg left Hamburg on board of two freight ships. The *Bibliotheca Gundolfiana* consisted of 7500 books and an archival collection. Elisabeth Gundolf oversaw the removal of her husband's library to England and dedicated her remaining years to the advocacy of his legacy, which included approaching Gretha Schellworth for copies of love letters from her husband. Gretha, a physician, had been part of the Gundolf circle during her Heidelberg years, alongside Edgar Salin, Emil Henk and Theodor Haubach with whom she remained in touch for the rest of her life. Gretha appears to have chosen to disappear, to fade from view.

According to Walter Benjamin collectors act with the responsibility that only heirs can have towards things that are handed down to them from tradition. Elisabeth's fetishistic engagement with her husband's legacy illustrates what Benjamin called the struggle against dispersion and diaspora. We surmise that Gretha's behaviour presents a contrast to this quasi-mythical process of attachment: the traces of her life are scattered, scanty and sparse. Her life was dedicated to saving lives and her courageous actions during the Nazi saved the lives of many, among them Gertrud Jaspers, yet she appears to be ahead of the poststructuralist obliteration of the self by disappearing, self-exiling to her childhood home in South America.

For both women dispersion and diaspora are linked, and we would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on the contrasting approaches.

¹ Paul Holdengraber, *Between the Profane and the Redemptive: The Collector as Possessor in Walter Benjamin's "Passagen-Werk"*, 1992, 112