

Introduction

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Even the title, “Still for Sale: Love Songs and Prostitutes from *La Traviata* to *Moulin Rouge*,” suggests that thought of “the gift” in Grace Kehler’s essay will involve some duality. Not just an offering, an expression of generosity, the gift, says Kehler in her reading of Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge*, also entails commodification and exchange, particularly of women by men. While Luhrmann portrays giving in the latter terms, “including scenes in which Satine is exchanged and evaluated by men,” and while “the musical at times appears to endorse these evaluations,” Kehler yet maintains that Luhrmann’s “narrative views of Satine and of romantic love as imperative form the structural basis for the movie.” Such complexity where theories and portrayals—and readings—of violence are concerned is, I would say, a mark of the current *Mosaic* issue. Consider Deanna A. Kreisel’s “What Maxie Knew: The Gift and Oedipus in *What Maisie Knew* and *Rushmore*,” which asks how a particular kind of narrative conflates violence and gift-giving, and how the gift betrays a failure precisely through its affinity with violence. In Amelia DeFalco’s “Jungle Creatures and Dancing Apes: Modern Primitivism and Nella Larson’s *Quicksand*,” primitivism, like the gift, is bound up with fantasies of primordially and purity, and so with violent denials and substitutions, “the black body is articulated as opposite to the repressive effect of civilization as theorized by Freud.” For Barbara Schapiro in “Trauma and Sadomasochistic Narrative: Mary Gaitskill’s ‘The Dentist,’” psychoanalysis enables a reading that, paradoxically, transforms trauma into art. Similarly, in Laurie Vickroy’s “Seeking Symbolic Immortality: Visualizing Trauma in *Cat’s Eye*,” trauma touches art, and the artistic process grants insight into trauma. This is in part what I mean by the “complexity” of the essays in this issue, interruptive in their conjoining of what we might, too simply, hold apart: the gift and violence, giving and fantasies of the same, trauma and art.

There is another complexity brought by the issue’s interdisciplinarity: for example, Caryl K. Sills in “Patterns of Victimization in *Light in August*,” reads victim/victimizer

transformations through a lens formed by psychology, theology, education, the field of victimology, and Homi Bhabha's negotiation theory. Laima Kardokas, in "The Twilight Zone of Experience Uncannily Shared by Mark Strand and Edward Hopper," brings together and develops a correspondence between Strand's poetry and Hopper's visual art, "offering an explanation of the Freudian as well as the ekphrastic nature of this correspondence." By applying Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory to *The Inhabited Woman*, Hélène de Fays, in "The Revolutionary Empowerment of Nature in Gioconda Belli's *The Inhabited Woman*," considers how "Belli empowers nature as a speaking subject and restores the important relationship between society and the natural world." Todd F. Davis, also working with nature in "Writing Back through the Body: Flesh and Spirit in the Work of Mary Swander," makes connections-correspondences the theme of his essay: "Swander's concern for the coils of life—body and soul, soil and culture, one wrapped around another and then another." And in "Primacy, Technology, and Nationalism in Agnes Deans Cameron's *The New North*," Wendy Roy reads Cameron's claims of discovery and primacy as bolstered by the early-twentieth-century technologies she carried on her travels: Cameron "used her cameras and typewriter, along with her map, to consolidate and expand upon the traveller's conventional claim to be first, a claim that she enlarged to include the sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory categories of gender, geography, ethnography, and nationalism."

Ten provocative essays: read into their complexity.