

Introduction

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A serious thinker is a generous person. David Farrell Krell recounts his own experience of this in the following interview; in working with him, I learned that it is true. Something else I learned anew and might add, since with this issue we are opening a new volume and a new year of *Mosaic*: from generous to gentle is not far. In part, I refer here to the kind of reading that Krell suggests might accompany the *willful*, “tool-oriented manipulation of texts” demanded by today’s scholarly enterprise, reading as “gentle *gleaning*. To glean slowly, with gentle fingers and eyes, as Nietzsche says, and also with pleasure; to taste the fruit as you go along, to eat half of it before you get home.” A “crossing” of the willful with the gentle, then, and not unrelated to this, I am referring as well to the “tenderness” that Krell discusses in the “Crossings” interview and in the essay that follows it: tenderness, not as sentimentality, but as, again, the mark of a serious thinker such as Hannah Arendt; what gives tenderness its serious centre, Krell says, “is that when it goes missing people get killed.”

This would be one of the lessons of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which brings tenderness and tragedy together. For Aristotle, Krell notes, tenderness is so much of the essence and of the essence of the family, that when it degenerates, tragedy ensues. Friedrich Hölderlin says as much in the “Notes” to his translations of Sophocles’s *Oedipus the Tyrant* and *Antigone*, where “the more tender relations” are those that in Greek tragedy go awry. In these ancient stories, when tenderness, the essence of kinship love, suddenly goes missing, misery is the result: “Murder, incest, and cannibalism, the most horrendous crimes that we can envisage, occur.” Although such horrors befall “only a small number of houses,” tragic stories speak in universals, Krell points out, using the word “serious” again: “tragedy is more serious and more philosophical than any scholarly inquiry, says Aristotle, because it shows us what may be the case for all of us.” It follows that, like tragedy, tenderness “is of the universe.” As much today as in antiquity, to lose tenderness “is to live again through the crisis that every tragic household lives through.”

Perhaps you will not be surprised to discover that in his search for tenderness—the essence of the family and of the family gone wrong—Krell turns decisively to Freud (“By ‘theoreticians of tenderness’ I mean above all the psychoanalysts”). Yet, you may be startled, as I was, by Krell’s reading in this section of the “Tenderness” essay. For in these violent days, we are inclined to consult Freud for an account of the human propensity to destroy, the “lust for aggression and destruction” (Freud, “Why War?” 210) that Derrida in “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul” analyses as the “cruelty drive.” It might be another matter altogether, it seems to me now after reading Krell, to approach what Freud calls “lust” for his theorizing of a sensuality from which all tenderness has been excised. It might be here, on tenderness and on what happens when it goes missing, that Freud stands “as a prophet of our times and our world.”

I have not the space to say more about the many serious issues that are introduced by David Farrell Krell’s tender essay on “Tenderness.” Nor have I the space to address, as I would like, each of the remaining eight essays in this issue, with the myriad themes they embrace: poetry, music, memory, medicine, memoir, autobiography, dramaturgy, topography, pathology, iteration, the sacrificial, and the sacramental. I can only say that, in keeping with the theme of generosity, the issue is full. Fittingly, it is abundant.

WORKS CITED

- Derrida, Jacques. “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul: The Impossible Beyond of a Sovereign Cruelty.” *Without Alibi*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002. 238–80.
- Freud, Sigmund. “Why War?” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. and Ed. James Strachey. Vol. 22. London: Hogarth Press, 1964. 203–15.