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Monstrous Theologies
The Theme of Anti-Sacrifice in the Sci-Fi Pulps
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When human life lay groveling in all men's sight, crushed to the earth under the
dead weight of superstition whose grim features loured menacingly upon
mortals from the four quarters of the sky, a man of Greece was the first to raise
mortal eyes in defiance, first to stand erect and brave the challenge. Fables of
gods did not crush him, nor the lightning flash and the growling menace of the
sky. Rather, they quickened his manhood, so that he, first of all men, longed to
smash the constraining locks of nature's doors. (Lucretius, De rerum natura,
Book I, 29)

It is not certain whether Lucretius accurately represents Epicurus's opposition
to stellar theology when he says that it was motivated by the danger that the
gods might return to the world, the possibility of a relapse in antiquas
religiones, into the mythical consciousness of dependence on unlimited powers.
In any case Lucretius seems to stand closer than does Epicurus to the "Gnostic"
suspicion that the stars could represent powers that are ill-disposed toward man.
[For Lucretius] the cosmos is potentially the demonic . . . (Hans Blumenberg,
The Legitimacy of the Modern Age 166-67)

I

Science fiction is by widespread consensus the prose genre devoted to representing the precepts of the
physical sciences--the precepts of materialism--diegetically: standard definitions of science fiction
typically explicate the genre under the related rubrics of extrapolation and plausibility.(1)

Those seeking to understand science fiction in its generic particulars will therefore find its paradigm,
according to this received definition, in the texts of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. In confronting the
recalcitrant physicality of the ocean's depths, Verne for his part carefully imagines a device, Nemo's
submarine, which can subdue watery resistance and lay clear abyssal mysteries; the Nautilus does this,
importantly according to the consensus, without violating any known limitations of physics or
mechanics.(2) In speculating on the future of warfare, H. G. Wells for his part posits slight increases in
the dependability of traction-engines and in the versatility of dirigible airships and he then proposes, in "The Land Ironclads" (1897) and The War in the Air (1906), eminently credible scenarios of technological combat in the European near future. This branch of "hard" science fiction finds extended life, and indeed appears to become the core of the genre, in the pulp magazines of the 1930s and 40s, especially in John W. Campbell's Astounding, where Campbell himself, E. E. Smith, and Eric Frank Russell enthralled readers by describing the instrumentality of space travel, planetary conquest, and interstellar warfare. Campbell's planetary machinery might be less "plausible" than Verne's submarine or Wells's battle-tanks, but the principle of story-construction remains the same: the saga finds its purpose in the careful delineation of mechanical details and in the equally minute depiction of death and wreckage. The novels of Hal Clement continue the formula in a slightly different but still purely phenomenal way, concentrating on mechanical adaptation to extreme physical conditions: Clement is nothing if he is not factually and physically correct. For all his literary sophistication and sociological erudition, Kim Stanley Robinson differs but little from Clement. His Mars Trilogy still functions according to the Wellsian mode, is still a tale of planetary conquest, fully a century after Wells inaugurated the tradition. (3) (The difference is that Wells's The War of the Worlds is not technologically triumphalist, but cautionary.)

The representative science fiction story thus constitutes a kind of positivism, or phenomenalism, in prose. Just give us the facts, ma'am, as the hero of another genre might say. Insofar as science fiction maintains its contact with science, however, students of the genre need to remember that science itself, in both its antique and modern origins, began as a critique of theology, and to some extent as a type of substitute-theology intended to overcome an existing theology regarded as monstrous by scientific critics. Lucretius' paean to Epicurus, which I cite in my epigraph, offers a case in point, perhaps the paradigmatic one.

It is important, in fact, to assert what criticism commonly denies: namely that science fiction originates not in industrial modernity (although that is when the genre, latent for many centuries, at last fully revived) but in Late Antiquity and is cognate with the advanced forms of physical speculation of those days. (4) But Late Antique fantastic narrative (the lunar and archipelagic voyages) also partake in the spiritual developments of the time, especially in the consolidation of the mystery-cults and the proliferation of Gnostic systems. Where the speculation of a materialist like Epicurus creates a picture of the universe as a plurality of worlds, the speculation of religious thinkers like Plutarch and Valentinus creates a world-feeling deeply paranoid in its basic attitude, distrustful of a cosmic dispensation that it finds hostile, and obsessively vigilant against demonic forces. (5) In the words of Hans Jonas: "... Cosmos. thus becomes ... an emphatically negative concept, perhaps more strongly because more emotionally charged than it had been a positive concept in the [older] Greek conception" (The Gnostic Religion 250). Let me emphasize that the Epicurean and Plutarchan worlds are the same world, differentiated through divergent evaluations. Plutarch is neither so unscientific nor Epicurus (or Lucretius) so de-divinized as casual acquaintance might imply. There are religious elements in atomism and scientific elements in neo-Platonism. Plutarch, for example, contributes to astronomical speculation in his dialogue On the Face in the Moon and to itinerary fantasy (a voyage to remote islands) in the dialogue On the Decline of Oracles. (6)

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Much the same could be said of the twentieth century, technically sophisticated but spiritually and often culturally atavistic: science becomes a caricature of itself in scientism and masses of non-believers
embrace a baroque folklore little distinguishable from that of a previous age. "The fusion of fictional imagination and phenomenal obsession," writes Eric Voegelin of this aspect of modernity in *New Order and Last Orientation* (circa 1950), "was finally achieved on the occasion of Orson Welles's broadcast of the invasion from Mars. A panic broke out among the listeners because they believed the fictional invasion to be real, and they could believe it because they lived in a phenomenal world in which invasions from Mars are something to be expected in the same manner as the appearance of a demon with claws and a tail was something to be expected in the world of a medieval demonologist" (191). The banishment of gods by a view of the world that denies the supernatural nevertheless shades over into an expectation of demons. The world might have become *all* phenomenon with no supernatural exterior, neither heaven nor hell, but the demons, in the form of naturalistic entities, remain rampant even so. In *The Ecumenic Age* (1965), Voegelin argues again for the homology of antique demonism and modern scientific fantasy: "In fairness to the ancients one must say that they were not more indulgent in this respect than the moderns are in their comparably structured state of existential disorientation, for, ever since the plurality of worlds has been introduced again to the general public through Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1688), Western society has descended to the vulgarian grotesque of flying saucers, an invasion from Mars, investment of public funds in listening to signals from other worlds, a wave of excitement that pulsar emissions could be such signals, and the industry of science fiction that is based on this conceit" (81). Plutarch's demonic ontology in his Delphic dialogues is thus as detailed, as scientific in appearance, as Epicurus' atomistic ontology in the famous *Letter to Heraclitus*; and the modern "industry of science fiction," in Voegelin's term, is generally as baroque and as paranoid as either of its precursors. The demonic vision and the atomistic one communicate with one another at a deep level even while seeming to be different to the point of incompatibility.

In respect to science fiction, then, the ancient precursors can help to illuminate the modern practitioners of the genre; they can help us to see science fiction as something other than narratives of phenomenalism. Allow me to speak, then, of that Latin-speaking Epicurean Lucretius and of another writer of Late Antiquity, Lucian of Samosata, the true originators of science fiction. With a word about early Christian narrative, I will then pass onward to the cases of Catherine L. Moore (1911-1982), Henry Kuttner (1914-1957), and Leigh Brackett (1915-1978). Perhaps surprisingly, we shall find in their seemingly strictly commercial work many of the themes that are essential to Late Antique speculation and fantasy--to an ecumenic world in a state of prolonged religious crisis.

Lucretius' explanation of the universe constitutes, as is well known, a rigorous materialism. Taking the doctrine of the atoms from his philosophical precursor Epicurus, Lucretius describes a world fully explicable in terms of primary physical causation. According to ancient sources, Epicurus' own poem concluded with a fully worked out theology, but that poem has not survived. Lucretius' theology very probably falls short of Epicurus' in its scope, but what Lucretius does tell us, primarily in *De rerum natura*, Book V, but also in Books I and VI, merits attention. The term *superstitio*, in its modern usage, derives from Lucretius, who intended by it a kind of false consciousness centered on erroneous ideas about "the gods." Lucretius' materialism leads him not to an atheism, in which one no longer thinks the concept of the divine, but rather to a cosmology that subordinates both humanity and divinity to a purely natural scheme, while significantly retaining the gods under a modified notion. Thus, according to Lucretius, while one "must not suppose that the holy dwelling-places of the gods are anywhere within the limits of the [familiar, human] world," (175) one must still grant their existence in one of the *other*, plural worlds. The gods consist of matter, just like human beings, but constituted of rarer atoms than those of the earthly realm and therefore "elusive to the touch and pressure of our hands" and having "no contact
with anything tangible to us" (175). Yet still the gods exist, even though they have been demoted. While the gods' "dwelling-places," as Lucretius says, "must be unlike ours" (175) because they must correspond to the other matter in virtue of which divinities differ qualitatively from mortal creatures, yet these divine dwelling places also exist. Lucretius consigns divinity to remote interstices among the plural worlds that constitute the inexhaustible universe in toto; he places them, that is to say, safely distant from terrestrial humanity. But under what philosophical (or other) motive must the gods be thus banished, held distant from humanity so that humanity is made safe from them?

As Blumenberg has suggested, it is because Lucretius fears a return of the gods, a resurgence of stellar worship, a lapsus in antiquas religiones. In ancient times, Lucretius says in Book I, false beliefs concerning the gods (that they mixed with humanity and put demands on it) led to the institution of human sacrifice, instantiated most famously and terribly by the immolation of Iphigenia at Aulis. In Book I, where the reference to Iphigenia appears, Lucretius describes Epicurus in Promethean terms as the one whose scientific vision liberated humanity from superstition: "When human life lay groveling in all men's sight, crushed to the earth under the dead weight of superstition whose grim features glowered menacingly upon mortals from the four quarters of the sky, a man of Greece was the first to raise mortal eyes in defiance, first to stand erect and brave the challenge. Fables of gods did not crush him, nor the lightning flash and the growling menace of the sky" (29). Lucretius thereby directly links the insights of science to the refinement of religion through the illumination and overthrow of gross and epistemologically inadequate beliefs and practices. Jonas cites the importance of the Prometheus-figure to the Late Antique, specifically to the Gnostic, theological vision. As in Lucretius' Epicureanism, Prometheus becomes the "challenger" of a malign, this-worldly god, and acts on behalf of a humanity oppressed by that god, or by the concept; thus "the victim of the older mythology becomes the bearer of the Gospel in the new" (96). Human obtuseness might yet neutralize the attempted assistance by such a liberator. Thus, in Book VI of his treatise, Lucretius worries that the Epicurean noetic liberation might grow weak or even dissolve, leading precisely to a religious atavism in which the newly benighted would saddle themselves again with "cruel masters whom they believe to be all-powerful" (219) and revive obscene practices like human sacrifice. Lucretius develops a similar insight in Book III:

As for Cerberus and the Furies and the pitchy darkness and the jaws of Hell belching abominable fumes, these are not and cannot be anywhere at all. But life is darkened by the fear of retribution for our misdeeds, a fear enormous in proportion to their enormity, and by the penalties imposed for crime--imprisonment and ghastly precipitation from Tarpeia's Crag, the lash, the block, the rack, the boiling pitch, the firebrand and the branding iron. Even though these horrors are not physically present, yet the conscience-ridden mind in terrified anticipation torments itself with its own goads and whips. It does not see what term there can be to its suffering nor where its punishment can have an end. It is afraid that death may serve merely to intensify pain. So at length the life of misguided mortals becomes a Hell on earth. (127)

In Book V, finally, Lucretius describes how "mankind is perpetually the victim of a pointless and futile martyrdom" and how the failure to see reality clearly has inveterately "stirred up from the depths the surging tumultuous tides of war" (215). Error and violence go in tandem in Lucretius' thought.
Superstition is thus false, in Lucretius' view, but it is effective. Under the delusion of the divinity as a "cruel master," fathers will surely let the blood of their daughters in macabre offerings. Lucretius' theology amounts, then, to a secularism which admits the gods but banishes them to a safe distance and then emphatically denies that they place any sacrificial requirement on the human race. A rational order will prevail as long as the displacement and the denial remain in force. Yet seductions exist that tempt people back into the embrace of outmoded and, objectively speaking, disgusting customs and forms. Reason can fall prey to its opposite and nothing guarantees that the distorted practices of earlier times will not enjoy a revival.(9)

Just this vision--of an ardously stabilized ecumene threatened from without by eruptions of superstitious unreason--appears to structure the plot of Lucian of Samosata's notorious Vera Historia or "True History" of the mid-second-century A.D. I say "notorious" since theoreticians of science fiction have expended much ink in denying that the Vera Historia really is a science fiction story.(10) Even by the criteria of "hard" science fiction, however, Lucian's tale of interplanetary warfare seems to qualify for admittance to the genre. No critic of the tale known to me has noticed, for example, that in the prologue Lucian's narrator explicitly relates how, in preparing for his journey beyond the Pillars of Hercules, he carefully reconstructed his sailing vessel, making modifications calculated to help the craft resist the devastating storms reputed to blow in the unexplored ocean-sea. Tekhne (Lucian's term) forms a theme in these passages. Lucian's discussion of these modifications indeed resembles, in embryo, the obligatory engineering digression in a Campbell story. Voyaging beyond the Pillars of Hercules will subject a vessel to extraordinary strains; such a vessel must therefore be constructed according to exacting specifications and of the most durable materials. It must be well provisioned. Those who crew it must expect to endure harsh conditions at length. Lucian's description of the interplanetary arsenals employed during the solar-lunar war prefigures the arsenal-catalogues of Campbellian science fiction, and is again technistic in its tone.

The real significance of the Vera Historia for my argument, however, lies in its depiction of a realm outside the settled world. To describe this world as demonic is to link it to the paranoid world of the Gnostics, the one beset by powers who compete with humanity and remain hostile toward it. While Lucian's hero relishes his adventures, the events that befall him and his crew boast a horrific quality. The Lucianic cosmos is basically an inhuman place, made cozily domestic only in the restricted region where a proper independence of orderly humanity has been tenuously achieved. The tornado that whisks the hero and his companions to the moon resembles that great vortex of atoms under the image of which Lucretius presents his universe of inconscient matter, of an infinite number of infinitesimal particles combining and recombining without aim. The superlunary realm turns out to be one of continuous and colossal polemos. But the earth itself, outside the administrative nomos of the Empire, resembles a chamber of horrors. The satiric tone of the tale tends to mask this horror, but the horror lurks in the background nevertheless. In the Lucianic world, "apparent change for the better [is] only the prelude to something worse" (264). After the narrator and his crew return from the moon, for example, they find themselves in an ocean-sea crowded with: a bottomless chasm which seems to be swallowing up the universe; an island inside a gargantuan whale where fish-men and lobster-men ("an ugly pack of brutes" who "live on raw meat and are very aggressive" [265]) harry the small community of human beings, who eventually turn upon and slaughter them; a matriarchy which is monogeneric because the women have systematically slaughtered the men (a situation borrowed from Apollonius of Rhodes); and a sacred grove where the bewitching trees transform men into cypresses and pines. Incidentally, Lucian's protagonist also discovers that the gods now live on an island far out in the ocean-sea, at home in their
isolation, rather like the gods of Lucretius. They do not much like human beings and urge visitors to be gone after a stipulated period of sociable welcome. In the last sentence of the tale, the ship goes to pieces "against [a] rocky coast and completely br[eaks] up" (294). Satire turns to pessimism.

Early Christian narrative--Augustine's *Confessions*, Athanasius' *Life of Saint Anthony*, the saga of Saint George or the voyages of Saint Brendan--occupies the same booby-trapped world as the one described by Lucian, but the point is now not merely to report on the nastiness of the powers and cults; the point is to exorcise the powers and cults, by revealing the falsity of local beliefs and replacing them with the new, true, non-bloodthirsty ethos. Augustine's intellectual battle with the Manichaeans and Anthony's victory after a siege by devils offer two illustrative cases. Anthony's victory is especially interesting since, for Athanasius, the devils that throng the saint are real, but they can be banished by mental concentration. It is my contention that much of twentieth century science fiction conforms to this pattern of the Promethean (if pagan) or Saintly (if Christian) revelation and its attendant exorcism of the demons and suppression of ritual murder. Later, I will introduce the idea of Paraceltic narrative. For now, I content myself with introducing the term. The bridge between the early Christian narrative and the modern scientific-fantastic tale is probably the medieval Märchen-genre, in which, when one leaves the comfort of the Christian hearth, one soon enough encounters cannibal-witches, ogres, trolls, and other devouring remnants of the superseded heathen order. My exemplars are not the philosophically sophisticated narratives of the literary deans of the SF genre, Wells or Stapledon or Lem, but a bevy of stories by three representatives of pulpdom.

The three sets of texts are: Catherine L. Moore's "Northwest Smith" Stories, Henry Kuttner's novellas of decadent futures, and Leigh Brackett's explorations of pagan Mars. It is precisely because these narratives do not aim at erudition of any kind that their incorporation of the theological themes is of such interest.

II

4

Insight into the casual philosophical origins of C. L. Moore's fiction can be gleaned from a reading of the letters that H. P. Lovecraft sent to her in the late 1930s. As Lovecraft responds systematically to Moore's own arguments, it is possible to understand Moore's thinking even in the absence of her side of the exchange. Lovecraft takes issue, for example, with Moore's left-leaning politics of the time, arguing that doctrinaire Marxism was little more than a secular substitute for religion and myth. Marxism, in other words, even though it pretends to be a materialism, lacks an understanding of religion and can offer no genuine advance upon it; as a type of pseudo-scientific mystique, Marxism indeed amounts to no more than a cult decked out in political rhetoric. More important to human beings than the idea of God, Lovecraft argues, are the ideas of order and ethics. Humanity discovers order in the cosmos and applies the pattern of order in its social existence, which becomes more orderly as the system of ethics is rationalized through observation of the human character. In the Lucretian scheme, men attribute their dependence on blood-rites to a demand made by the gods, but once they discover that the gods are not the bloodthirsty creatures of myth and that the demand for violent propitiation originates with a human proclivity, then men can consciously alter their behavior and reorganize society in reasoned and non-violent, or non-sacrificial, ways. The new order might also be attributed to divinity, but in this case the divinity will be an emblem for something conscious and elevated rather than the reflection of superstitious fear. For Lovecraft, godhead reflects the ethical level of a community, and ethics of the
highest type "is simply a condition--like the existence of the atmosphere" (Selected Letters 242), as he put it to a mutual acquaintance of his and Moore's. (That statement, about godhead as the ethical "condition" of developed society, is, by the way, a fair definition of secularity: morality, which once had a direct relation to religion, gradually detaches itself.) Whether Lovecraft succeeded in persuading Moore or not--the evidence suggests that he indeed made an impression--Moore's own considerable body of fiction shows an obsession with the remote origins of the God-concept and of religion, so much so that she becomes a kind of speculator who investigates how the present managed to become what it is by transforming itself from its primordial opposite.

What is striking about Moore's stories is their conviction that this origin, this primordial noetic opposite of the present, is sacrificial, and that the niceties of myth and metaphysics conceal the requirement of an immolation. In Moore's stories, moreover, the sacrificial cult always stands opposed by an explicitly anti-sacrificial ethos that corresponds both to Lovecraft's Epicurean idea of a universal enlightened condition and to a secularization of the basic Judaeo-Christian ethics. There is no explicit mention of Christianity, however, which, in Moore's speculative future, has receded entirely into the ethical background. Of course, the thrill of Lovecraft's own stories, equally non-Christian, lies in their revelation that the very complacency of post-religious society courts catastrophe, and that the tenuous human happiness might be shattered at any time by an eruption of primitive forces. Says the narrator of Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu": "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents" (The Dunwich Horror and Others 130). It is not so different in Moore. The world teems with invisible devils ready to pounce. The difference is that Moore's protagonist insists on correlating the contents. Let us examine, briefly, a first example, Earth's Last Citadel (1943), written with her husband Henry Kuttner. This tale deals with a far-futural earth dominated by a race of vampiric interlopers who manifest themselves as gods, and who are taken by the survivors of the human race to be gods. The result is a disaster for the deluded faithful. In The Well of the Worlds (1952), ostensibly by Kuttner but in the writing of which one suspects that Moore must have had a considerable hand, the human race again suffers under interlopers who claim to be gods.

Moore's most famous character, Northwest Smith, is a semi-criminal, semi-heroic denizen of low establishments on Mars and Venus, who in the course of his many adventures among the plurality of worlds encounters a series of power-drunk beings who, having set themselves up as gods in one circumstance or another, demand sacrifice and terrorize their captives. There is the vampiric Manga, on Venus, in "Black Thirst" (1934); the psychic parasite in "The Cold Gray God" (1935); and the sapient but altogether mad plant-carnivore in "The Tree of Life" (1936). In each case, Smith confronts the being, reveals its non-supernatural character, engages in a struggle of wills which is also a fight against temptation, and defeats the thing. In doing so, he invariably saves humanity from the depredations of an insatiable and corrupting force. He preserves, in other words, the existing condition (to borrow Lovecraft's term) of normative, non-sacrificial social organization against a resurgence of sacrifice. Notice how, even in the simplified context of a popular narrative, the epistemological gesture accompanies the physical casting-out of the obnoxious agency. The intellectual demonstration (see, it isn't divine or supernatural, it's just a creature) does not spring from any necessity intrinsic to the narrative; Smith could simply defeat the evil being and deliver the oppressed. But it is important, as Moore sees it, to establish that the "gods" are simply monsters and that the victims have been deluded as well as oppressed. In "The Tree of Life" (1936), the entity's victims, including Smith, experience a "calling" (100) that plunges them into a "hypnotized" (101) state full of "unreasoning terror" (101) which then overwhelms the "sane part" (101) of the mind. Moore thus opposes the unreason of the cult against
the sanity of the normative mind. In their deluded state, people offer themselves to the entity as "dusky sacrifices" (101).

The paradigm of Moore's anti-sacrificial narrative occurs in the fifth of her Northwest Smith stories, "The Dust of the Gods" (1934). Let me preface my discussion of it with a word about Northwest Smith, the true precursor of Spielberg's Indiana Jones: Smith is himself a savior-figure, as so many pulp-heroes crudely are, always ready to stand in for the very society that shuns him, which he nevertheless values for integral reasons of his own. It is a paradox of secularity that it, too, like its foil religion, stipulates the necessity of salvation, and indeed offers itself in substitute for superstition as a form of salvation.

In "The Dust of the Gods," a stranger bargains with Smith and Yarol to recover a certain substance from a remote polar location on Mars. The buyer of Smith's services proves to be an aficionado of an ancient sacrificial order wishing to revive its thoroughly nasty god, "Black Pharol," as he is called. This name, as is typical in science fiction of the period, has a slightly Egyptian character (it sounds like pharaoh); Egypt has always provided SF writers with the basic pattern for archaic, hierophantic cultures dominated by intracosmic gods, as exemplified in Stanley G. Weinbaum's classic "A Martian Odyssey" and its direct sequel "The Valley of Dreams" (1934). In Moore's tale: "Pharol, today, means unmentionable rites to an ancient no-god of utter darkness" (141), the stranger says, but it once had a more specific significance. The stranger then offers this précis of Martian--or rather cosmic--theological history:

There were gods who were old when Mars was a green planet, and a verdant moon circled an Earth blue with steaming seas . . . Another world circled in space then, between Mars and Jupiter where its fragments, the planetoids, are now . . . It was a mighty world, rich and beautiful, peopled by the ancestors of mankind. And on that world dwelt a mighty Three in a temple of crystal, served by strange slaves and worshipped by a world. They were not wholly abstract, as most modern gods have become. (140)

5

Mars has long since devolved into a desert planet and the moon, too, is airless and dead. The Three, as Moore calls them, antedate all other gods, who are, therefore, mere "echoes of them" (140). The Christian idea of the Trinity would be one such distant echo, but thoroughly transformed from the original, and one which, through the agency of Smith, will soon oppose and neutralize its ancient and intolerable prototype. Two of the primordial gods eventually died--the story-teller does not say how--while the third and mightiest lived, his name now a curse referring vaguely to "fearful things" (141). Pharol could apparently "incarnate [him]self in a material body" so as to "touch" his worshippers (141), and of course consume the offerings made to him. According to Smith's commissioner, the dust of Pharol still exists--in the ruins of an immemorial temple--and he will pay handsomely for its recovery. Moore, like Epicurus-Lucretius, reduces the divine to a substance ("dust") that has different properties from terrestrial substance but still belongs to a universe in which all phenomena are compounded of atoms. In "The Black God," the "dust" of the divinity can be reactivated, and it therefore constitutes a persistent threat to the more or less peaceful and rational order of the established nomos. The antique "god" would pose a danger not only because he is powerful and voracious, but because people are willing to yield to antique notions, embrace the godhead of false gods, and take up hoary practices once again.

The descriptive detail that says that Pharol could "touch" his worshippers also deserves attention: A being who can "touch" other beings is (again) necessarily a material, that is to say a natural rather than a
supernatural being. Pharol's predatory nature threatens a more or less settled world. Smith, although an outlaw, implicitly values the settled nature of the existing, civilized, universe. One of the defining characteristics of the civic cosmos is that it has freed itself from the brutal practices of benighted antiquity. In the very first Northwest Smith story, "Shambleau" (1934), Moore's protagonist gets into trouble by rescuing what appears to be a young woman from a Martian lynch-mob: his sense of the dignity of the persecuted victim leads him to put himself in danger by opposing the witch-hunters. (Later, ironically, Smith has to be rescued from the young woman, who turns out to be a monster in disguise; victimhood can be a disguise.) In the final Northwest Smith story, "Song in a Minor Key" (1957), this idea--of the normative as the empirically optimal condition of existence--takes the specific form of "familiar voices indoors . . . a girl with hair like poured honey hesitating just inside the door, lifting her eyes to him" (296). This adds up, in a few words, to marriage and society. Smith indeed deplores the flaw his own propensity for violence--the very propensity that catapulted him away from the idyll while he was still young. Yet even in criminal exile, he has striven to defend what he has catastrophically forfeited. Smith's actions in "The Dust of the Gods" typify such a defense.

There is a Lucianic counterpart to this dispensation. If the world, as depicted in Vera Historia, is a chamber of horrors, there remains a refuge from it in the psychic orderliness of devotion, of the sort the details of which Lucian sets forth in The Syrian Goddess, his major work of theology. Devotion to the goddess brings peace to the worshipper, no matter the turbulence of the actual world. But back to C. L. Moore: with his Venusian friend Yarol, Smith travels to the Martian North Polar region where lies, as legend says, the ruined city where the gods of the Lost Planet "had been saved from the wreckage [of their world] and spirited across the void to a dwelling-place . . . that is not even a memory today" (147). The adjective megalithic, with its archaic and sacrificial connotations, perhaps best describes the city when, after traversing a subterranean labyrinth, the explorers at length come upon it: "Here and there, buried in the debris of ages, lay huge six-foot blocks of hewn stone, the only reminder that here had stood Mars' holiest city, once, very long ago" (152). They open a way into another subterranean passage decorated with "unheard-of frescoes limned in dim colors under the glaze" (154), reminiscent, as so often in the science fiction text, of some ancient hieratic style. They locate a sealed chamber whose door boasts the archaic insignia of Black Pharol. Smith's Venusian companion recalls that he "saw it once carved in the rock of an asteroid . . . just a bare little fragment of dead stone whirling around and around through space," from which he concludes that "the Lost Planet must really have existed . . . and [the asteroid] must have been a part of it, with the god's name cut so deep that even the explosion of a world couldn't wipe it out" (155). When they break the seal, a preternatural light dazzles them which is "like no light they had ever known before," for "tangibly it poured past them down the corridor in hurrying waves that lapped one another and piled up and flowed as a gas might have done" (156).

This is the pent-up atmosphere of the god, a kind of ether. Yarol deduces that the chamber of light is actually the interior of an asteroid: "A fragment of [the shattered] planet, enclosing a room, possibly where the gods' images stood, [which] was somehow detached from the Lost planet and hurled across space to Mars. It must have buried itself in the ground here, and the people of this city tunneled in to it and built a temple over the spot" (156).

Plunging deeper into the mountain-embedded asteroid, which is the chamber of "The Three," Smith and Yarol penetrate to the inner sanctum, "a vast crystal room" at whose center rises "a crystal throne [that] had been fashioned for no human occupant" (159). On this the elder deities once sat, to be propitiated by those whom they enslaved. Smith and Yarol judge from the contours of the throne that the Three must have possessed a material shape entirely "outside modern comprehension" (159); but they were
nevertheless quite material. Although the flanking pedestals remain empty, the middle one, that of Pharol, contains a pile of mysterious dust, "all that was left of a god--the greatest of antiquity's deities" (160). With a mounting sense of alarm, they decide not to recover the dust for their commissioner, for "what man, with a god to do his bidding, would stop short of dominion over the worlds of space?" (160). Or what ravenous "god" would be content to do the bidding of a mere man, once revived? It is thus determinedly to prevent a lapsus in antiquas religiones, with its cultic and sacrificial implications, that Smith and Yarol now act. But how to dispose of a god's deactivated remains?

Moore finds a marvelously ironic method whose metaphoric value is high. Making use of that SF cliché the blaster, Smith sets the dust afire. His "eyes were riveted on the clear, burning flame that was once a god. It burned with a fierce, pale light flickering with nameless evanescent colors--the dust that had been Pharol of the utter darkness burning slowly away in a flame of utter light" (164). Notice how Smith fills the Epicurean role as defined by Lucretius: In purifying the world of superstition he opens the way for a secular existence free from the perversions that inevitably accompany the false belief in predatory contractual gods. (Such beliefs are "false," not because the entities towards which the worshipers direct their devotion do not exist but because the contract is invariably one-sided and fraudulent and entails the humiliation of the cultists and everyone else.) The verb "to purify" comes from the same root as the Greek pur, or "fire." In the opening passages of De rerum natura, it will be recalled, Lucretius represents Epicurus as a kind of secular Prometheus delivering the world from benightedness by bringing back from the heavens the flame of knowledge (scientia as opposed to superstitio). As the ancient gods had demanded propitiation through burnt offerings on their altar (or at any rate as men had imagined that they did), so does science demand the immolation of the gods themselves in a final catharsis that will put an end to sacrificial terror. Smith, too, like Epicurus in the Lucretian text, takes on the Promethean aspect when he carries out his exorcism of the demons. Yet no such exorcism is ever definitive; fortune remains ill-disposed to men, and such incursions by ravenous predators can occur again at any time. Let us remember what Voegelin says about the public reaction to the Wells radio-hoax. People could believe that Martians had invaded because they lived in expectation of such things, not specifically, but generically. This was the case despite the triumph of the scientific view in modern society. That triumph did not banish the sacred, but merely cloaked the sacred in the terms of a pervasive phenomenalism.

By the period of Late Antiquity, the idea of hungry gods waiting in heaven for the smoke of the hecatomb to provide their dinner had become absurd enough that Lucian could satirize it in his short treatise On Sacrifice. And yet, beneath the satire, a certain unease makes itself felt: one ridicules the thing to keep it at bay. Moreover, Lucian's satire is contemporaneous with many a demonology and Gnostic tract. Lucian could smile (or maybe grimace), but many were afraid. Like the hungry gods that crowd around the smoking pyre in Lucian's sketch, Smith (although inadvertently) inhales the miasma: he suddenly has a reeling vision of "the history of a dead and forgotten world [which] flared by him in the dark" (165); Smith sees "man-formed beings [that] lay face down in worshipping wind-rows around a great triple pedestal" (165-66), the very image of degradation. This is the same "groveling" deplored by Lucretius and from which, according to him, Epicurus in his Promethean role delivered humanity.

Modern people in North America could all at once ridicule outmoded ideas like ghosts and witches and desert their churches for the affable doctrine of how to make friends and influence people and be galvanized by their certainty that Martians had invaded New Jersey. Millions of people in the year 2000 believe that they or their fellow human beings are regularly kidnapped and tortured by aliens, after all.
Recoiling from the violence and disgust of their experience, Smith and Yarol find their way out of the cavern. In a Nietzschean "Twilight of the Idols," Moore offers as the final image "the pale Martian day . . . darkening over the mountains" (166) where man has just by premeditation killed a god.

In the fourth Northwest Smith story, "The Scarlet Dream" (1934), Moore's hero operates in a less active mode, which is why I wanted to examine "The Dust of the Gods" first. The action in "The Scarlet Dream" begins with the discovery of a magical talisman in the form of a blood-red shawl, rescued from a derelict spaceship in the asteroid belt and quickly discarded by a series of alarmed owners. As Smith shoulders his way through the bazaar in the Lakkmanda Markets of Mars, "a flash of that peculiar geranium scarlet that seemed to lift itself bodily from its background and smite the eye with an all but physical violence" abruptly compels his attention:

Smith felt sure that it was woven from the hair of some beast rather than from vegetable fiber, for the electrical clenching of it sparkled with life. And the crazy pattern of it dazzled him with its strangeness. Unlike any pattern he had seen in all the years of his far wanderings, the wild, leaping scarlet threaded its nameless design in one continuous, tangled line through the twilight blue of the background. (Northwest Smith 110)

The shawl has a metonymic, a sparagmatic, relation to its origin, for it is the hair of an animal perhaps long dead (a part abstracted from the whole); it even preserves some of the animation of its source, "spark[l]ing with life" and constitutes a remnant of antique violence. Such violence generates an allure. The shawl's hematic coloration indeed dazzles the onlooker. But the shawl's origin belongs to the unknown. According to the man who sells it to Smith, the previous owner "found it in a derelict ship floating around in the asteroids . . . a very early model . . . probably one of the first space-ships, made before the identification symbols were adopted" (111). This links the shawl to the predatory outer-world from which Black Pharol comes in "The Black God." Smith's Venusian friend had once seen Pharol's seal on a remote asteroid. Once again, the Lucretian dispensation is in evidence: the gods, who exercised a baleful influence on prehistoric humanity, have fled to the edges of the universe. It were best for humanity that the gods remain where they have flown. Yet fragments of the banished bad old days repeatedly penetrate the inner, settled world of the enlightened order, like the dust of a god or a luminous shawl. Smith can have the shawl for a single cris, or dirt cheap; the seller, moreover, anxiously wants to rid himself of it since it "gives [him] a headache to look at the thing" (110). (Notice that this manifestation of the primitive does not fit comfortably in the market.) Though large ("six foot square"), the shawl easily fits into Smith's palm when he folds it up; it can be carried like a talisman. Antique, mysterious, fascinating, the shawl nags at Smith's consciousness. In his quarters he takes it from his pocket and shakes it open, producing "a sudden wild writhing of scarlet patterns over walls and floor and ceiling" (112). Spreading it out on his table, Smith traces the intricate pattern with his finger: "The more he stared the more irritatingly clear it became to him that there must be a purpose in that swirl of color" (112). As Smith falls into dream, the threaded design becomes "a labyrinthine path down which he stumbled blindly" (112).

The shawl's dazzling exterior thus beckons both eye and mind to enter a complex interior in which the explorer runs the risk of losing himself fatally; it is a kind of temptation which would not have been unfamiliar, say, to Theban Anthony, fighting off demonic temptations in the Egyptian desert. Power and
beauty alluringly combine. The shawl's magical interior corresponds to a violence partly concealed by
the exterior. The Lovecraft connection is obviously important. The Moore-Kuttner universe shares a
great deal, in fact, with the Lovecraft universe, both being chock-full of ancient, bloodthirsty gods who,
in an opportunistic manner, await the moment when they can emerge from hiding to reestablish
themselves at the center of a sacrificial cult. Beauty turns out to be one of the attributes of violence, to
result, indeed, from an originary violence that humanity has long since suppressed and which, therefore,
it has all but forgotten, like some minotaur in an ages-untired maze. Passing through sleep, Smith
awakens in a sinister dream world where "the sky [is] a great shawl threaded with scarlet lightning" (112)
and finds himself "mounting a long flight of steps" under what is now a "lovely twilight [where] the air
was suffused with colored mists, and no wind blew" (113). Smith slowly becomes cognizant of "a
stirring in the dimness, and a girl came flying down the stairs in headlong, stumbling terror. He could see
the shadow of it on her face, and her long, bright-colored hair streamed out behind her, and from head to
foot she was dabbed with blood" (113).

This incident confirms the natural inferences one wants to make about the shawl on the basis of Moore's
initial description, particularly with respect to its scarlet hue, for red is inevitably associated with blood,
even more so with violent blood-letting. The architecture "contained" within the shawl must be a
sacred architecture, so that meeting a blood-bedaubed victim is perhaps not surprising, but entirely to be
expected, nor does it astonish that the girl is in flight from something that she finds difficult to name:
"It--it has her! Let me go! . . . It has her--oh, my sister!" (114), she cries. The repeated "it" functions here
as does the substitute for the holy name in many an ancient cult: The pronoun refers, blankly, to
something protected by an unimaginably strong taboo. "My sister . . . It caught her in the hall--caught her
before my eyes spattered me with her blood" (116). It--the thing is the god of the twilight world into
which Smith has unluckily fallen and where he is marooned along with others who have blundered
through the "gate" constituted by the pattern woven monstrously into the shawl. (As such, "the thing"
resembles the voracious alien in Earth's Last Citadel, but it likewise resembles any sacrificial deity from
Dionysus to Kukulkan.) The girl explains that the pattern represents a "Word" that opens the gate, but
that the gate opens only one way. The architectural space where Smith encounters the girl is, of course, a
"Temple."

It is better not to look out the windows of this place . . . For from outside the
Temple looks strange enough, but from the inside, looking out, one is liable to
see things it is better not to see . . . What that blue space is, on which this
gallery opens, I do not know--I have no wish to know. There are windows here
opening on stranger things than this--but we turn our eyes away when we pass
them. You will learn . . . (118)

Outside the Temple, Smith discovers a somber idyll, a world of gentle rolling hills covered with grass
and sparsely populated by those unfortunates who have been sucked into it through the esthetic seduction
of the "gate." The girl lives in a "tiny, shrine-like building of creamy stone, its walls no more than a
series of arches open to the blue, translucent day" (120), situated on the shores of a lake. In the distance,
mountains loom in a thickening mist. "Rather tiresome" (120), Smith thinks, when the girl describes her
life: "[I] swim in the lake, sleep and rest and wander through the woods" (120). The people live in
isolation from one another because "it is best not to collect in crowds" which "seem to draw--it" (120).
This life is not only physically indolent; it also qualifies as intellectually hampered. The girl explains it
this way to Smith: "Those who wonder--those who investigate--die . . . Life is bearable only if we do not
look too closely" (128). Smith's response is "Damn your beliefs!" (128). Here again Moore opposes
investigation, a trait associated with reason, against belief, which passively accepts the cultic reality and interdicts intellectual curiosity. A sentence from Vera Historia, where Lucian describes life inside the whale, is appropriate to Moore's story: "We were like prisoners . . . where the regulations allowed one to do exactly what one liked, except escape" (269).

All of this occurs, fantastically enough, inside the woven texture of the shawl. Thus the hideous events that take place while Smith dwells in the sacrificial tableau constitute the inward principle of the shawl's outward form; the shawl as work of art emerges from the propitiatory rites associated with a deity whose existence springs from the crowd. "Crowds . . . seem to draw it." The shawl incorporates its own origin in a demand for blood-offerings and recreates that origin in an endless cycle of ritual closure. Moore's labyrinthine encosmos neatly if rather ominously articulates itself around a structuring principle, the "Word" referred to by the girl, which designates the founding murder. This verbum, when spoken aloud, reproduces the violence wreaked by the thing:

   It is death to pronounce the Word. Literally. I do not know it now, could not speak it if I would. But in the Temple there is one room where the Word is graven in scarlet on the wall, and its power is so great that the echoes of it ring ever round and round that room . . . It is a word from some tongue so alien . . . that the spoken sound of it, echoing in the throat of a living man, is disrupting enough to rip the very fibers of the human body apart . . . to destroy body and mind as utterly as if they had never been. (123)

This magical prohibition against the pronunciation of the "Word" reproduces the sacrificial tabu against investigating the state of things and therefore against understanding the situation in which one is caught. It is also the case that the "Word" offers the one exit from the sacrificial encosmos where Smith finds himself caught. Smith thus confronts a non-negotiable ethical cul-de-sac: if he goes to the room of the "Word" and pronounces the phonemes, it will kill him; and while standing near someone else who pronounces them--as the girl suggests--might enable him to escape, to ask her to help in this way would mean asking her to commit suicide. The escapee would be complicit in a homicide. It is in the very nature of the "Word" to keep everything within the scarlet dreamland in stasis, with those on whom the thing preys, like the girl's sister, being replaced by inadvertent newcomers such as Smith. Smith substitutes for the dead sibling, arriving in the moment when she dies and filling her niche by becoming the survivor's companion. The speech that Moore gives to the girl echoes the ancient idea of word-magic, by which language itself is thought to have the power to affect the world directly. The notion that the name of God is too powerful or dangerous to invoke audibly is familiar from the Hebrews, among whom historically the public terms Elohim and Adonai substituted for the sacrosanct Yahweh. The onomastic ban points to a primitive phase indeed in the development of the Biblical God: precisely the pre-Biblical, or sacrificial, phase. The ban upholds the nescience requisite to sacrificial closure.

Smith escapes from the Scarlet Dream in which he is stranded when the girl decides to sacrifice herself for him: she agrees to go with Smith to the particular room in the temple where the "Word" echoes and to pronounce it, opening an egress by which he can return to his world even while she dies. Smith does not know of the self-immolating part of her plan. He merely thinks that she is going to make sure that he does not get lost in the labyrinth. In "the Scarlet Dream," then, Smith himself submits to salvation from an otherwise fatal cycle. In this sense, "The Scarlet Dream" and "The Dust of the Gods" form an
The salvific overtones of the girl's self-immolating act support my claim that the protagonist's role in Moore's stories is, essentially, that of a Christian hero, sometimes a martyr. In "The Scarlet Dream," Smith benefits from the selflessness of the girl; elsewhere he is more active in suppressing the old ways. He thus resembles the demon-expelling saint, but in the secular guise, increasingly demanded by the twentieth century, of an existential loner at odds with the bourgeois society that expels him. In another of Moore's short-story cycles, the one devoted to the medieval heroine Jirel of Joiry, we find many of the same motifs and themes as in the Northwest Smith cycle. Jirel, like Smith, blunders into sacrificial precincts and does battle with the demons. Not quite a member of Christendom, she nevertheless defends its mores against those of the atavistic and bloodthirsty cults.

III

Henry Kuttner's "The Vintage Season" (1946) deals with the creation of a work of art by an artist of the future who visits the earth in the immediate post-World War Two present, when the story was written.(12) But this act of creation is also an act of sacrifice, and the work of art that stems from the event has the character of an immolatory token. In fact, because "The Vintage Season" is a time-travel story involving the usual paradox, it resists any straightforward rehearsal. The basic elements of the narrative are, nevertheless, these: Oliver Wilson owns a house that three eccentric "vacationers" who call themselves the Sanciscos want to rent; to one of them, a woman named Kleph, Wilson feels considerable attraction, and he therefore lets the house despite the fact that he might garner a windfall from it if he sold it outright to a buyer who has been pressing. Wilson's fiancée Sue pesters him to renege on the deal and to sell, but Oliver refuses. The interest in this detail lies in Kuttner's opposition of the market to the Bohemian group. The group represents culture and seems to promise something superior to the bourgeois world of exchange. Moore's Smith regrets leaving the comforts of marriage and participation in the nomos. Kuttner's Wilson, vulnerable to the temptations of art, cult, and difference, regrets his prior immersion in what strikes him now as the tediously normative. He is an alienated bourgeois taking the usual route of opposition to the market for the mere sake of opposition. If resentment is the sacred, as Girard so often intimates, then Wilson's alienation renders him particularly vulnerable to the Bohemianism of the foreigners. Estranged from Sue, Wilson remains in the rented house, even though the renters openly resent it, hoping to encounter Kleph. The name "Kleph" has a musical connotation, of course, but Kuttner appears to be playing on the Greek word for "thief," as in "kleptomaniac." Kleph has come to take something. Kuttner will portray artistic endeavor as a form of radical--that is to say sacrificial--expropriation. Here again, something pre-political and essentially barbaric stands opposed to the orderliness of the market-oriented society.

The Sanciscos behave like Wildean esthetes: "There was an elegance about the way [their] garments fitted them which even to Oliver looked strikingly unusual" (No Boundaries 2); "the feeling of luxury which his first glance at them has evoked was confirmed by the richness of the hangings they had apparently brought with them" (7); Kleph's coiffure strikes Wilson as perfectly sculpted, "as if it had been painted on, though the breeze from the window stirred now and then among the softly shining strands" (12).(13) From such behavior, Wilson infers that their depth of culture radically exceeds his own, an inference sustainable, as it turns out, in esthetic terms only and not in any ethical sense. As in the case of the magic shawl in the Northwest Smith story, phenomenal beauty guarantees nothing about ethical acceptability. A certain type of intense beauty indeed radiates from a certain type of archaic
violence, which the beauty tactically conceals. Kleph shows some reciprocal though ultimately condescending interest in Wilson, who visits her in her room one afternoon while the others are away. The foreign accouterments of Kleph's room include a peculiar "picture of blue water" hung above her bed the marvels of which entrance Wilson. Describing Wilson's response to this, Kuttner represents the esthetic state known as fascination: "The waves there were moving. More than that, the point of vision moved. Slowly the seascape drifted past, moving with the waves, following them toward the shore" (14). The images compel Wilson's attention; he cannot peel his eyes from them. Smith has the same problem when he gazes too intently at the weird shawl, in Moore's story.

Superimposed on the seascape, a man appears, singing: "He held an oddly archaic musical instrument, lute-shaped, its body striped light and dark like a melon and its long neck bent over its shoulder" (15). The tune is vaguely familiar, until Wilson recognizes it as "Make Believe" from the Jerome Kern musical Showboat, but treated to subtle and far-reaching variation that removes it from banality and gives it an air of the sublimely mysterious. Kleph says of the technique: "We call it kyling" (15). Then a "clown" replaces the singer and launches into a monologue "full of allusions that made Kleph smile, but were utterly unintelligible to Oliver" (15). The phantasmagoric quality of the display is amplified by the effects of a slightly hallucinogenic beverage that Wilson joins Kleph in drinking. Kleph herself dances "a formalized sort of dance" (16). Fascinated by Kleph's unfathomable but undeniable beauty, Wilson fails to notice that she is mocking him in the way that some sadistic explorer might mock a bewildered aborigine. Eric Gans, in his discussion of modern art in *Originary Thinking* (1993), refers to "the terrorizing effect of modern newness" and the "sometimes terroristic intentions of the artist" (194). The incomprehensible mockery in Kleph's seascape, with its opaque "allusions" and mocking "clown," already point to such a terrorism. "The scandalizing of the bourgeois is an aggressive act quite different from the withdrawal into the 'ivory tower' that characterizes the latter part of the romantic era . . . Resentment of the bourgeoisie is resentment of the market, and the market includes everyone" (197), Gans says.

"The Vintage Season" surely qualifies as one of Kuttner's best efforts and one of the most admirable things about it is the way in which he succeeds in indicating the Sansico's malign strangeness. Kuttner's futurians strike the reader as genuinely clandestine and malicious. They do and say things that make no sense in a familiar context. This is a difficult effect to pull off, and much SF that tries it, fails. It should be added immediately that Kuttner also superbly records the exclusionary power of artistic devotion when transformed by atavism into a cult of mystic connoisseurship; or, in slightly different words, the sacrificial power of snobbery. A work of art creates a community through being understood by those who attend to or contemplate it; but Wilson cannot understand what he experiences in Kleph's holo-kinetic "picture," and Kleph herself makes no effort to enlighten him. The impasse of understanding effectively excludes him from the community. The others act in an openly hostile manner, clearly regarding Wilson as a barbaric intruder on their affairs. While the Sansiscos make a deliberate effort to suggest to Wilson that they are including him, they are in fact casting him in the role of the victim: Wilson is being carefully set up; he will become the subject matter of one of the vacationers' all-too-scrutable esthetic projects--and entirely at his own expense.

Newly arriving compatriots gift Kleph with a red leather box, a new work by the artist Cenbe, "his latest" (23), but unfinished. Kleph inquiring "what period" the piece represents, the messenger explains: "From November, 1664 . . . London, of course, though I think there may be some counterpoint from the
November 1347" (23). The box is a kind of music box. When Kleph later plays it and Wilson overhears, he comprehends that it "was music, in a way. But much more than music. And it was a terrible sound, the sounds of calamity and of all human reaction to calamity, everything from hysteria to heartbreak, from irrational joy to rationalized acceptance" (25). Says Walter F. Otto in Dionysus: Myth and Cult (1933): "The terrors of destruction, which make all of life tremble, belong also, as a horrible desire, to the kingdom of Dionysus" (113). Walter Burkert refers to the "terror, bliss, and recognition of an absolute authority, mysterium tremendum, fascination, and augustum" that inhabit the "holy," and remarks that "the most thrilling and impressive combination of these elements occurs in sacrificial ritual: the shock of the deadly blow and flowing blood, the bodily and spiritual rapture of festive eating, the strict order surrounding the whole process--these are sacra par excellence" (Homo Necans 40). The Sansiscos are Bacchants, devotees of a cult of primitive violence, no matter that Kuttner assigns it to a distant human future. Although they never kill directly, they nevertheless fasten parasitically upon occasions that they know in advance will entail wholesale suffering and death, and they do nothing to stop it. It is as if they were killers. Here then is a perfect example of the lapsus in antiquas religiones from Lucretius.

Pushing open Kleph's door, Wilson confronts a "mist spinning with motion and sound" for which "he had no words" (25): "Basically, this was the attempt of a master composer to correlate every essential aspect of a vast human experience into something that could be conveyed in a few moments to every sense at once" (26). The experience evokes, among other distressing responses, the memory of "secret things long ago walled off [behind] mental scar tissue" (26). A certain distorted face constitutes a "recurring motif, always more tortured, more helpless than before" (27). The effect of it all is anything but cathartic--the point seems to be the prolongation of distress without any promise of deliverance--and the unrelieved sadism of it emphasizes the violent otherness of Cenbe's "dreadful symphony" (27). Kleph confides that she should never have played it while there was any chance that Wilson, or any other human of the present day, might overhear. "I forgot what the effect might be on one who had never heard Cenbe's symphonies before" (28), a statement whose proleptic irony Kuttner's narrative will more than bear out.

Cenbe himself will soon arrive, along with increasing numbers of the decadent foreigners, and it presently becomes clear that they are in the city--in Wilson's house--to witness some upcoming event of which they, being from the future, have in context exclusive knowledge. The dates provide a clue: Plague struck London in both years, 1347 and 1664. What strikes the city in which Kuttner sets "The Vintage Season" is a meteorite. It turns out that Wilson's living room affords the best possible vantage for viewing the wholesale destruction. In his description, from Wilson's stunned viewpoint as influenced by the Sansicos, Kuttner estheticizes the holocaust (readers are to understand that what to us would be a horror is to the futurians a source of profound artistic satisfaction): "On the far skyline fire was already a solid mass, painting the low clouds crimson. That sulphurous light reflected back from the sky upon the city made clear the rows upon rows of flattened houses with flame beginning to lick up among them, and farther out the formless rubble of what had been houses a few moments ago and was now nothing at all" (41). One might be reminded of the remarks invariably made about the twentieth century's avatars of destruction, especially Hitler and Stalin, that they took pleasure in the esthetic element of devastation. Hitler, for example, is said to have enjoyed newsreels of the carnage wrought by his armies in their Blitzkrieg campaigns; and Stalin's sadism is well documented. Kuttner is hardly making something up. It has, in effect, been done.

The clamor of pained voices and the wail of sirens become "a terrible symphony that had, in its way, a strange, inhuman beauty" (42). Wilson has, to this extent at least, become an initiate of the cult. Cenbe, who alone remains when the others, sated by the spectacle, have left, tells Oliver frankly that "I need -
Oliver himself lies sick in bed--the meteor has brought with it a new disease, "the blue plague," and Wilson is its first victim--while Cenbe explains: "I am a composer . . . I happen to be interested in interpreting certain forms of disaster into my own terms" (46). Dying, Wilson comprehends that "the whole world of now" simply "is not quite real to Cenbe" (48); the creation of his symphony requires him to negate the reality of the other--to sacrifice his subjects so that they become nothing more than esthetic material. Cenbe might be analyzed as one of those thematically modern artists whose ideology consists of an attack against humanism. Is the human being the noble creature that the bourgeoisie claims it to be? Are we to believe all this posturing and declamation? Is not the human being merely another animal, explicable by the laws of matter and, like all other matter, the potential substance of infinite technical and esthetic manipulations? Cenbe is also and more simply a murderer.

Thus when Kuttner shifts the viewpoint and provides a straightforward account of Cenbe's masterpiece situated in Cenbe's own cultural framework, the effect is even more chilling than what has gone before; it is a review of the premiere:

Cenbe's new symphonia was a crowning triumph . . . and the applause was an ovation. History itself, of course, was the artist . opening with the meteor that forecast the great plagues of the fourteenth century and closing with the climax Cenbe had caught on the threshold of modern times. But only Cenbe could have interpreted it with such subtle power. (49)

In Moore's stories, sacrifice is the vestige of an ancient order waiting to be revived; Northwest Smith, like Lucian's voyager or the early saints, encounters these vestiges in remote outposts of the ecumene from which, however, they nevertheless unremittingly threaten to overwhelm the whole with their "subtle power." In Kuttner's "The Vintage Season," as in his novellas Earth's Last Citadel and The Well of the Worlds, sacrifice is the order into which a decadent society slips when Judaeo-Christian Revelation no longer tempers innate viciousness and no longer clarifies the human tendency to create social unity out of the invidious and lethal unanimity of a sacrificial ritual. Rarified notions of the beautiful can serve as a Lucretian "cruel master" just as well as an atavistic notion of godhead. Cenbe's esthetic society is just this type of primitive polity, its refined elegance, artistic sensitivity, and intolerable hauteur notwithstanding. These are not really esthetic in a genuinely modern sense; they are hieratic. In "The Vintage Season," Kleph, Cenbe, and the others, behave as though they themselves were gods, with the immeasurable rights accruing thereto. Cenbe's "Symphonia" is the ensign of their own projected godhead.

IV

Leigh Brackett belonged to the same story-telling generation as Moore and Kuttner; she was married, in fact, to another science fiction writer, Edmond Hamilton, just as Moore was married to Kuttner. The four lived in and around Santa Monica in the 1930s through the 1950s and knew each other well. Responding, as Moore did, to Lovecraft's opening of antique vistas and to Stanley G. Weinbaum's opening of the solar system, Brackett wrote a series of tales involving the antiquated cultures of Mercury, Venus, Mars, and the Asteroids under the ecumenical dominion of a Terran Empire in its brash ascendancy. Brackett's Martian stories parallel Bradbury's, but are more brutal than his, granting a greater degree of robustness to the colonized Martians. Brackett nevertheless, like Moore and Kuttner, ever apologizes for the normative, and this means that she defines the difference between the ethically acceptable and the ethically unacceptable according to the absence or presence of sacrifice. It is
significant that, in one of the few explanations that she offered of her interest in the popular forms, she said the following: "The so-called space opera is the folk-tale, the hero-tale, of our particular niche in history" (Preface to The Best of Planet Stories 2-3). "The Beast-Jewel of Mars" (1948) is explicitly devoted to an examination of sacrifice and provocatively links sacrifice to the politics of resentment.

"The Beast-Jewel of Mars" revolves around Shanga, translatable as "the return" or "the going-back" (The Coming of the Terrans 8), a cult "forbidden centuries ago by the city-states of Mars" (9), which has reappeared with the arrival of the earthmen. The cult thus corresponds to a Lucretian lapsus in antiquas religiones. The sacred objects of the cult, the Jewels of Shanga, date back reputedly to "a half a million years ago" (14) when the priests of Caer Dhu carved them by a science now lost. The scheme resembles that in "The Dust of the Gods" by Moore, where a fragment of demonic Pharol's vanished world turns up in the deep rubble of the polar mountains of Mars. Certain plotters, as we have seen, want artifacts from the anomaly, the ones that Smith and Yarol refuse to export but, rather, destroy in situ. In Brackett's story, a Martian named Kor Hal tells protagonist Burk Winters that, despite having inaugurated Shanga as an escape from war and violence, the people of Caer Dhu quickly "perished" and "in one generation . . . vanished from the face of Mars." Brackett gives us a sketch of the Lucretian notion of how the ennui of long-standing security makes the beneficiaries of earlier demonic banishments vulnerable to cultic revival. Only a continuously upheld psychic vigilance can keep such atavistic deformations at bay.

Because Shanga exerts an addictive attraction on those who indulge it, however, shame attaches to the habit. Winters himself seeks in Shanga an escape from romantic tragedy, namely, from the death of his fiancée, who herself frequented the cult. Shanga addicts, like all addicts, crave their drug in ever stronger doses; no longer satisfied with the Shanga experience offered to urbane weaklings, Winters inquires about "the real thing" (9). The price turns out to be much higher than expected. Winters finds himself abducted by Kor Hal to Valkis, "very evil, but not tired" (13), one of the ancient Martian cities where earthmen do not come. The rays of the Jewels affect people in a particular way: They induce atavism, on the mental level at first, but then on the physical level; Shanga releases its subjects from neurosis by releasing them from the modernity of their minds, dragging them back to the animal level. In its most potent form, the Jewels catalyze physical regression, from human to ape and beyond. Exposed to "the real thing," people quickly degenerate into animal helplessness. Stripped of much of his intellect, Winters appears in confusion before Kor Hal and certain other Martians.

"Captain Burk Winters," said Kor Hal. "Man of the tribe of Terra - lords of the spaceways, builders of the Trade Cities, masters of greed and rapine.

"Look at him, Oh men of Valkis!" cried Kor Hal. "He is our master now. His government kings it over the City-States of Mars. Our pride is stripped, our wealth is gone. What have we left, oh children of a dying world?"

The answer that rang from the walls of Valkis was soft and wordless, the opening chord of a hymn written in hell. Someone threw a stone. (19-20)

Winters suddenly becomes the object of a classic lapidation and of other noticeably pharmakotic indignities. As does Moore in "The Scarlet Dream," Brackett associates the demonic with crowds. But the Valkisians postpone killing their victim, the better to prolong his humiliation, just as Cenbe, in Kuttner's "The Vintage Season," lingers over the prolonged misery of those on whose misery he makes his art. The cultists herd Winters into the chora of an immensely old amphitheater where they have confined other addicts of Shanga who at last foolishly asked for "the real thing." Nightly, the Valkisians

expose these unfortunates to further baths of the Shanga radiation, causing ever further degeneration.

While Brackett's text is not quite as dense with invention as Moore's or Kuttner's, she nevertheless grasps the basic function of sacrifice in a more schematically clear way than Moore or Kuttner. Sacrifice supplies the means whereby a threatened group vents its resentment against real or imaginary enemies and resolidifies itself in the face of imminent dissolution. Such consolidations anew are never more than temporary, however, which is why, in historical societies based on sacrifice, the rituals become increasingly grandiose and bloodthirsty. The Mesoamerican societies overthrown by the Spaniards offer the outstanding example. Fand, the queen and high priestess of Valkis, explains the Valkisian motive to Winters this way during one of his carefully planned lucid episodes: The earthmen, says Fand, made of Mars "a world that could not even die in decency and honor, because the carrion birds came flying to pick its bones, and the greedy rats suck away the last of its blood and pride" (34-35). Shanga is private retribution. Winters calls Fand a "fanatic" and says that she goes "even beyond fanaticism" (49). The whole of Valkis does seem bloodthirstily mad, as symbolized by Fand's mother, a shriveled old woman with wild hair who chants in tongues like some mindless sibyl. Winters somewhat improbably contrives to kidnap Fand herself into the pit where, exposed to the radiation, she instantaneously reverts to the ancestral protomorph of the Martians. In the mêlée that follows, Winters escapes.

Sacrifice is the secret shame of Brackett's Mars, deplored even by most Martians. In the late and luridly titled "Purple Priestess of the Mad Moon" (1964), an earthman named Bentham and a Martian named Firs Mak try to enlist the help of a young official of the Colonial government, Harvey Selden, to expose and abrogate the secret of the Mad Moon cult. Bentham, Mak, and their confederates must overcome the problem that no one believes in the existence of sacrifice. Selden, who has been schooled on earth in Martian history and culture, rehearses the textbook statement that the imputation of blood rites was merely a case of mistaken interpretation on the part of early explorers who did not correctly grasp the metaphorical content of certain Martian tales: "The early accounts," Selden says, "resulted from distortions of folklore, misinterpretation of local customs, pure ignorance [and] in some cases . . . downright lies. . . . We don't believe in the Rites of the Purple Priestess and all that nonsense" (146). Selden continues:

"The men who did the serious research, the anthropologists and sociologists who came after the . . . uh . . . adventurers, were far better qualified to evaluate the data. They completely demolished the idea that the rites involved human sacrifice, and then of course the monstrous Dark Lord [whom] the priestess was supposed to serve was merely the memory of an ancient Earth-god . . . Mars-god, I should say, but you know what I mean, a primitive nature-thing, like sky or wind. [There was a rite] but the experts proved that it was purely vestigial, like, well . . . like our children dancing around the May-pole." (147)

Selden goes so far as to denounce the first phases of humanity on Mars as "strictly piratical" (146), to which Firs Mak poses an unexpected rejoinder: "Why is it that all you young Earthmen are so ready to cry down the things your people have done?" (147). Like Winters in "The Beast-Jewel of Mars," Selden finds himself kidnapped, but not by someone bent on sacrificing him to assuage envy; rather, by Mak and by another earthman, Altman (Mak's brother-in-law), who, at great risk to themselves, wish to prove to their captive that the rumors of human sacrifice in the cult of the Mad Moon stem from fact, not from any "distortions of folklore." Mak represents the faction of Mars that prefers the orderliness of secular,
rationally administered, bourgeois society to the "iniquity" (148) of archaic culture. As long as the old cults persist, as Mak and Altman see it, just so long does the danger of a planetary lapsus in antiquas religiones persist along with it. Notice Brackett's doubling of the Lucretian superstition-science dichotomy. At the first level, there is the Mad Moon Cult itself, a repulsive phenomenon of archaic times, superseded by a rational and non-violent order; at the second level, there is the scientistic superstition that denies the presence, in past ages, of sacrificial practice, a position opposed by the genuine knowledge that such practices did indeed exist and can enjoy a resurgence. Helpful to such a resurgence is the idea that such things do not now and never did exist. Brackett's too-sophisticated fictional world has its own version of Rousseauism: the savages cannot have been savages, Selden says in effect, but must have been noble; there are signs, vestiges, of sacrifice, but no actual sacrifice exists behind these misleading tokens. It is a form of deconstructive nescience ensconced among the bureaucracy and an attitude remarked by Girard in Violence and the Sacred when he writes that:

The failure of modern man to grasp the nature of religion has served to perpetuate its effects. Our lack of belief serves the same function in our society that religion serves in societies more directly exposed to essential violence. We persist in disregarding the power of violence in human societies; that is why we are reluctant to admit that violence and the sacred are one and the same thing.

(262)

Let us credit Brackett, our commercial writer and participant in what Voegelin calls "the industry" of science fiction with having had just this Girardian insight. I admit that, occasionally, while writing about these stories, I have had the thought that my commentary is too sophisticated for the material. But the conformance of Brackett's characterization of Selden with Girard's theoretical formulation makes me see that my writers really are on to something. They have an insight and it is consistent.

In Jekkara, one of the forbidden cities, Mak and Altman smuggle Selden into the nocturnal rites. Brackett does a creditable job of garbing a Dionysian rout, culminating with a troglodyte sparagmos, in exotic Martian detail. A chorus laments and harps strum manic rhythms as Deimos, known in Martian as Denderon, appears in the night sky above Jekkara's central square. One might call this, borrowing a phrase from "the Vintage Season," "a dreadful symphony." But worse is to come. The revelers march off to a Jekkaran cavern, the disguised interlopers following discreetly. Like Northwest Smith, Selden senses the pull of the very thing that frightens and disgusts him: "A strange and rather terrible eagerness began to stir in him, and this he could not explain at all" (157). We can explain it, of course, as mimesis. When the choral singing stops, Selden sees six revelers cull themselves submissively from the crowd, as if hypnotized or drugged, and stand with a priestess on a dais in the remotest depth of the cave. A monstrous cyclopean form manifests itself in the gloom; the six victims vanish in a manner which Selden either does not see or immediately forgets. Selden reluctantly understands that his kidnappers want him to "tell the Bureau about . . . about that" (159). Altman confirms the inference. Mak gives the case as he sees it:

"This is a burden. We have borne it, Selden. We even take pride in bearing it."
He nodded toward the unseen hills. "That has the power of destruction. Jekkara certainly, and Valkis probably, and Barrakesh, and all the people who depend on this canal for their existence. It can destroy. We know. This is a Martian affair and most of us do not wish to have outsiders brought into it. But Altman is my brother and I must have some care for his people, and I tell you that the
priestess prefers to choose her offerings from among strangers . . . " (159)

Back in the safety of civilized Mars, however, Selden reverts to the pure bureaucrat and skeptic. He cannot bear to contradict the textbook lesson that declares the blood-rites to be an ethnocentric slur on a foreign and subject people. Disturbed, he nevertheless keeps his peace and gradually comes to believe what the psychiatrists tell him when he complains of ineradicable anxiety rooted in his recent official posting on the Red Planet: "The whole affair had been a sex fantasy induced by drugs with the priestess and mother-image. The eye which looked at him then and which still peered unwinking out of his recurring dreams was symbolic of the female generative principle, and the feeling of horror that it aroused in him was due to the guilt complex he had because he was a latent homosexual. Selden was enormously comforted" (162). Of the two strands of Martian culture--the one that consists of rites like Shanga and the Mad Moon and the one that, as we read in "The Beast Jewel of Mars," deliberately suppressed such Dionysianisms--Selden sides effectively with the former. Notice that, as Brackett explains in "The Beast-Jewel of Mars," it was the City-States that banned sacrifice. Brackett thus defines her Martian civilization according to the same anti-sacrificial criterion which appears in the stories of Moore and Kuttner. In the polis, the elders have banned ritual violence and the Furies have become the Supplicants, as they have also in Aeschylus. Selden petulantly refuses to fill the Promethean role, ascribed by Lucretius to Epicurus, of a deliverer-from-superstition; in this, he is the opposite type of Northwest Smith. Yet the point of the story remains the same.

In a sequence of planetary romances, Brackett's character John Eric Stark plays the role of deliverer-from-false-gods. In the best of these, The People of the Talisman, the false gods are simply technically sophisticated sado-masochists who lure outsiders into their realm on the basis of a tantalizing legend. In the course of the action, Stark is crucified and scourged, seeks revenge, exposes the mendacity of the false gods, renounces revenge against the character who ordered his torture in the earlier episode, and vanquishes the sado-masochists. It is perhaps a coincidence that Stark's initials are J-E-S; then again, perhaps it is not.

V

René Girard reminds us, in The Scapegoat (1981), that Christianity is an explicitly anti-sacrificial religion, and that the whole of the Passion and its aftermath serve the purpose of laying clear the hitherto repressed facts about persecution and victimage so as to deliver humanity from the vicious cycle. This impulse was not, as the case of Lucretius shows, unique to Christianity, which, in any case, owed its critique of the pagan cults to Judaism; the revelation of sacrifice had been gathering force since the Prophets. But the Gospels do seem to crystallize the insight in a dramatic and cogent way. The name Satan, Girard remarks, means "persecutor." Satan is also a slanderer (this is the meaning of the Greek Diabolos) and a tempter, whom the Gospels consistently associate with crowds. The collocation persecutor-slanderer-tempter is appropriate and telling because persecution requires vilification and is an almost unavoidable temptation for human beings. The crowds in the Old Testament are invariably lynch-mobs, as they are in the rites of Dionysus in Heraclitus' anti-sacrificial polemic:

Paraders by night, magicians, Bacchantes, leapers to the flute and drum,
initiates in the Mysteries--what men call the Mysteries are unholy disturbances
of the peace. (Fragment 76)
And Dionysus, through whom they go into a trance and speak in tongues and for whom they beat the drum, do they realize that he is the same god as Hades, Lord of the Dead? (Fragment 77)

They cleanse themselves with blood: as if a man fallen into the pigsty should wash himself with slop. To one who does not know what's happening, the religious man at his rites seems to be a man who has lost his mind. (Fragment 78)

Both Moore and Brackett likewise, by pure intuition it seems, associate ritual violence and bloodletting with crowds. Neither seems to have been a particularly religious person, yet both, in their role as story-tellers, thought a good deal about what makes the primitive, primitive. Both wanted to make their tales exotic by exhibiting something authentically primitive at the narrative cynosure. The same can be said of Kuttner in "The Vintage Season." Kuttner implicitly defines evil as that which delights the crowd by sacrificing someone to it. Neither Moore, nor Kuttner, nor Brackett needs to have been doctrinally a Christian to have been a theoretician, in his or her way, of the difference between a modern ethos and a primitive one. After all, this distinction is pre-Christian, going back at least to Heraclitus, finding only a more systematic articulation in Epicurus. Nevertheless, the West owes to Christianity, to the Gospels, its definitive summation of the problem. Christianity opposes to the Persecutor-Slanderer-Tempter the Paraclete, a word which can be translated as "advocate" and "protector." The Paraclete stands for the continuity and dispersion of Revelation, in this case, the Revelation of sacrifice as a tragic form of eternal recurrence involving the murder of arbitrarily selected victims, and a way of life which closes off all nobler possibilities. Moore's Northwest Smith and Brackett's Burk Winters are, in their minor, pulp-fiction way, Paracletic heroes. Harvey Selden, by contrast, is conspicuously complicit with the persecution of victims and is, in essence, "anti-Paracletic." But Brackett's story unequivocally condemns Selden, so that the story itself can be called Paracletic. One could say the same of Kuttner's "The Vintage Season." In the stories under discussion, Christianity never becomes a theme, but it constitutes, I would argue, the background condition (to borrow that Lovecraftian term) of the narrative. Smith and Winters meet sacrifice on its home ground and oppose it on behalf of its victims.

But is science fiction generically Paracletic? Have I not carefully selected the handful of stories that fit my limited and prejudicial thesis?

The answer is no. An astonishingly large number of the best science fiction stories in fact fit into the category of Paracletic narrative. One could even begin with one of the works that I cited in the opening paragraph as an example of "hard" science fiction, Verne's Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea. Captain Nemo, I submit, partially fits the profile of a Paracletic hero. He explains very clearly to Monsieur Arronax that he regards war as an irrational spasm endemic among the nations and that his mission, utilizing the Nautilus, is to make an end of war. Robur, in Robur the Conqueror, makes the same claim in regard to his self-appointed mission. Both Nemo and Robur are deluded and commit acts which tragically contradict their stated mission, but in part they fulfill the Promethean role first set out by Lucretius in his great poem to the scientific spirit, De rerum natura. Quite a few of Wells's protagonists are also deliverers-from-superstition, like the anonymous narrator of The War of the Worlds or the anonymous protagonist of The Time Machine. It might be significant that Wells's childhood was religious--specifically Methodist--and that a certain metanoiac fervor characterized him lifelong.
Olaf Stapledon's two great science fiction epics, *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*, are so thoroughly imbued with Epicureanism--leavened unexpectedly by a Platonic idea of God as the demiurge--that I cite them almost with embarrassment as being very nearly too good for my argument; it is further the case that in both of those colossal narratives, sacrifice, anti-sacrifice, and *Christianity-as-anti-sacrifice*, are explicit themes. There are serial Christs in *Last and First Men* and a section of *Star Maker* deals with "the Christs of the many worlds." (I am quoting the phrase from memory.) I need only mention Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, especially the second part. And Cordwainer Smith deals with sacrifice in "The Dead Lady of Clown Town," "Under Old Earth," "The Ballad of Lost C'mell," and "A Planet Named Shayol," stories which I would place in the top rank of the genre. But even a story like Edgar Rice Burroughs's *The Gods of Mars*, which critics might place in the lower ranks, meets the criteria for inclusion into the Paracletic subgenre--if subgenre it is--of science fiction.

The real definition of science fiction, it strikes me, is not as the genre that deals with the social consequences of physical science, but *the genre that deals with theological questions in an age which, officially, has little use for theology*. While finding Voegelin's interesting comments on the genre useful, I nevertheless differ from him in thinking that the modern fantastic story, while clearly expressing the intellectual and spiritual confusion of the times, also occasionally arrives at unexpected clarity.

Science fiction writers have apparently intuited something that our friend Eric L. Gans makes clear in a succinct passage in his *Originary Thinking* (1994), namely, that God is the name for everything that is problematic about human beings, especially the deadly threat that they pose to themselves, and that atheism can never be more than a derivative position:

> Doctrinal atheism in the modern sense only occurs in conjunction with the rise of a rationalized market economy in the early modern era. But what concerns us here is a far broader notion of unbelief that is independent of any assertion of this unbelief or even of any possibility of such an assertion. What is in question is the possibility of the subsistence within an individual of the scene of representation and its associated phenomena--language, desire, the esthetic, and so forth--in the absence of the idea of God. But once the scene has been established through the originary revelation, then, strictly speaking, this idea is no longer necessary for the individual, even if it may remain indispensable to the communal functioning of the scene without which the individual could not subsist. We retain the idea of God without necessarily believing in it because of the indispensable persistence of the communal ground of the scene independently of the individual members of the community. (42)

God, in other words, is the condition (Lovecraft's term again) of social existence. But this condition is itself subject to historical alteration. Girard argues that all archeological and historical cults before Judaism and Christianity were sacrificial, based on the scapegoating mechanism and requiring serial victims; Judaism and Christianity reveal the scapegoating mechanism as the background of the social structure and reveal, at the same time, its arbitrary and murderous nature. This revelation demands the discarding of the sacrificial "condition" in favor of a new, non-sacrificial "condition." Late antique narrative--from the Plato's *Apology* through Lucretius' casting of Epicurus in the Promethean role to Augustine's biography and Athanasius' hagiography--focuses obsessively on the pressing need for this transformation. Blumenberg, whom I cite in my epigraph for other reasons, argues that the assertion of historical parallelism--the claim that Late Antiquity and Modernity are homologous--is an error. Yet it
It seems to me that the overcoming of Gnosticism, the intellectual task which properly characterizes Late Antiquity according to Blumenberg, recurs in the twentieth century, just as Voegelin argues. I would only stipulate that Gnosis is a variant of the old sacrificial mentality, a doctrine of crisis which seeks victims, as it is essentially exclusionary. (Flaubert portrays it this way in La tentation de Saint Antoine.)

The twentieth century is, after all, full of prophecy and revelation most of which requires the massacre of whole groups of people deemed to be impeding history or preventing the establishment of justice or utopia. The Nazi crimes are universally known and are sufficiently horrific by themselves. Yet they do not stand unmatched. A perusal of Courtois' The Black Book of Communism (2000) reveals not only that the twentieth century has been a colossally sacrificial century, but that rationalizing intellectuals, like Brackett's Selden, have persistently refused to recognize that the insurgent regime is based on a continuing massacre of the anathematized. Courtois arrives at a formulation that parallels that of Girard cited earlier about the modern denial of violence. With respect to the one hundred million Communist victims, Courtois says, a certain "silence" has "managed to win out over the sporadic moments of self-awareness resulting from . . . new analytical work . . . or an irreproachable eyewitness account" (26). Courtois refers to the "widespread reluctance to confront the issue" (26). Related to this political denial of violence is an equally widespread cultural denial, as in the case of the apologetics for the Mesoamerican cults and the persistent attempt to de-link tragedy from sacrifice. (15) Yet such contradictions of a nagging suspicion always feel inauthentic. In The Scapegoat, Girard argues that:

The failure of mythological genesis, in the case of the martyrs, makes it possible for historians to understand in a rational light for the first time and on a large scale the representations of persecution and their corresponding acts of violence. We come upon crowds in their course of their mythopoeic activity, and it is not a pretty a sight as our theoreticians of myth and literature imagine. Fortunately for anti-Christian humanism, it is still possible to deny the presence of the process that gives birth to mythology in every other context. (200)

14

Girard also permits us to understand the limit of the Epicurean or Lucretian epistemology: "The invention of science is not the reason that there are no longer witch-hunts, but the fact that there are no longer witch-hunts is the reason that science has been invented" (204). Epicurus could invent the scientific view of the world because he followed a line of thinkers stretching back to Heraclitus who had performed a massive critique of the Greek sacred. Yet Lucretius remains correct in his assumption that the return of the sacrificial idea of the gods would in effect mean the banishment of the rational order.

I have argued, in a series of articles on modern poetry, that modern poets return to the problem of the ethical condition of modernity again and again and find it appallingly atavistic. Science fiction writers enact the very same gesture. Since the only alternative that can be posed against a sacrificial "condition" is an "anti-sacrificial" one, modern poets--Eliot, Stevens, Williams--more or less inevitably espouse a version of Biblical ethics. Science fiction writers can only do the same, and have done the same. Not all of them, of course, but the best of them, including even the pulp writers that I have dealt with in this essay.
Works Cited


Notes

1. Virtually all of the definitions sampled by John Clute and Peter Nicholls in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* rework this basic idea: A science fiction story "is a narrative of an imaginary invention or discovery" (J.O. Bailey); or it is "speculative fiction . . . which makes use of the 'scientific method'" (Merril); or it is "an awareness of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures, and the insights of the past century of science are accepted as fictional points of departure" (Scholes). But Clute and Nicholls quote Brain Aldiss as defining the genre as "a search for the definition of man," and David Ketterer as calling it a genre that deals in insights that "put humanity in a radically new perspective." The Aldiss citation comes from *The Trillion Year Spree*; the Ketterer from *New Worlds for Old*. Neither work pursues the tentatively "anthropological" definition very deeply. (back)

2. Indeed, crude submersibles had already reached the prototype stage decades before Verne wrote his novel; Robert Fulton built one for Napoleon as early as 1802. (back)

3. I do not wish to do any injustice to Robinson's remarkable imagination: the *Mars* trilogy is intricately plotted, epic in scale, scientifically punctilious, and audaciously inventive; it is even superficially anthropological, in the sense that its shows the adaptation of different terrestrial people (Europeans, Russians, Arabs, Chinese) to the conditions that they find on the Red Planet, and plays with the development of new-age cults in the novel environment. But Robinson is ultimately no more anthropological than Campbell or Clement, in whose tales the machinery forms the center of interest and the characters are strictly props. I still highly recommend Robinson as a great read. (back)

4. In the entry under "History of SF" in Clute and Nicholls' *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1995), Nicholls argues that "a cognitive, scientific way of viewing the world did not emerge until the 17th century" and that, since "SF proper requires a consciousness of the scientific outlook," it cannot have existed in any "meaningful" way until then. Nicholls remains unaware of how rich the scientific heritage was in Antiquity, from Ionian speculation all the way through to Hellenistic mathematics. It also assumes (naturally, one might say) that the essential matter of science fiction is the "cognitive, scientific way of viewing the world." This is precisely what I wish to call into doubt. (back)

5. Plutarch's cosmos is as teeming with demonic entities as Epicurus' is with the primordial atoms. It is this *teeming* character that gives even those serene moments of Plutarch's text, as in *De Iside et Osiride* when he contemplates the salvific powers of the deity, the sense of a permanent and ineradicable crisis. (back)

6. The latter includes a description, by one of the interlocutors, of an exploratory voyage to the north of Britain, where the narrator of the tale discovers an island on whose shores he hears a great choral lament. The clamor, he explains, was the folk of the island crying out in sorrow over the death of their god, said to have been Pan. (back)

7. This not Heraclitus of Ephesus, the Ionian logos-philosopher, but a friend and contemporary of Epicurus in the Third Century B.C. (back)

8. Lucretius takes over from Epicurus (who took it from Anaximander) the concept of the plurality of worlds. When Lucretius says that the gods do not belong to *this world*, he means that they belong to one
of the other worlds. The definition of the term "world" (*mundus*) is: a phenomenal system as visible to its inhabitants; the totality of what our senses comprehend as the world is repeated infinitely, in the Epicurean conception, to other cognizing subjects elsewhere. (back)

9. Episodes that we regard as recursions to sacrifice, such as the witch-mania of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were understood in their own terms as struggles against recrudescences of pre-Christian cults. The Puritan witch-hunters, for example, attempted to link witchcraft with the old Aztec rites suppressed (but not entirely, it appears) by the conquistadors. (back)

10. Clute contributes the entry on Lucian in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. He gives Lucian to the category of "proto science fiction" and acknowledges *The True History* as providing a kind of tenuous ancestry to the modern genre of the fantastic voyage. But he is still reluctant to grant that Lucian full admission to the genealogy of the genre. (back)

11. The abduction-theme in ufology is noteworthy in the present context: those who believe that they have been abducted, and those who, at second hand, believe the stories, invest in a tale of tribulation with obvious sacrificial overtones. The bizarre ordeals that the aliens inflict on their captives make no sense from any human perspective, but they invariably take the form of a gaggle of demonic creatures unified through their concentration on someone who, in his subjective sense of the exercise, is a victim. The "abductees" invariably feel misfitted to society after their experience and tend to be lonely and neurotic (as perhaps they were well before their subjective experience). For the "abductees," as for the denizens of the Gnostic universe, reality is an unpredictable place fraught with demonic pitfalls. The image of this radical contingency is that of someone being made the object of an immolation. (back)

12. Some dispute exists over whether Kuttner is the sole author of this story; the anthology, *The Best of C. L. Moore* (1975), edited by Lester del Rey, attributes "The Vintage Season" to her. It originally appeared, however, under Kuttner's by-line. (back)

13. I have often suspected, but cannot confirm, the influence of late-romantic and symbolist poetry on writers like Moore, Kuttner, and perhaps even Brackett. The delectation in luxury, which is part of the environment in which characters like Northwest Smith move, resembles a similar phenomenon in mid- and late-nineteenth century literature. It might be Swinburne, who was widely read among English-speakers in the first of the twentieth century, who supplies the influence. (back)

14. Brackett is the most accomplished of my trio. In addition to her pulp fiction in the planetary romance and detective genres, she also wrote screenplays for Hollywood, including a writerly collaboration with William Faulkner on *The Big Sleep*, and did much work as the wordwright for Howard Hawks and John Wayne, including *Rio Bravo, El Dorado*, and *Rio Lobo*. Her last completed literary project was the screenplay for George Lucas's *The Empire Strikes Back*. (back)

15. The Aztecs, claims Marvin Harris, needed the meat. So it was okay. About the defense of tragedy against the contamination of violence, consider this: After Eric Gans gave his talk on the genetics of tragedy at a scholarly conference, the moderator of the session broke every rule of such occasions by expatiating for ten minutes on the pristine, *i.e.*, putatively non-violent origins of Greek tragedy, and denounced the opposing view as unworthy of consideration. It was a remarkable spectacle. As for my dragging-in of contemporary politics, it is not so arbitrary or tendentious as it might seem. Remember that Lovecraft, in writing to Moore in the 1930s, cautioned her about her then devotion to Marxism,
which he described as a kind of religion. (back)
Fear, Pity, and the Master: Rousseau and the Status of Mimetic Structures

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- Lorsque j'emploie un mot, MOI, dit Dodu Mafflu d'un ton plutôt méprisant, il dit juste ce que j'ai décidé de lui faire dire, ni plus ni moins.
- La question est de savoir, dit Alice, si vous avez le pouvoir de faire dire aux mots tant de choses équidistantes, multiples et bourriglumpies de variantes infinies.
- La question est, dit Dodu Mafflu, de savoir qui est le Maître, et c'est tout.

Alice au pays de merveilles (translation: Antonin Artaud)

You call me "teacher" and "master," and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. (John 13:13-17)

Chance often provides for great discoveries, and simplicity is indispensable for their organization. Mankind adores classifying and categorizing, making meaningful connections à la Karl Jaspers, but how to do so in a so-called postmodern historicity full of fads? Are we doomed to eternal deconstruction? Although a complete comprehension of the being we are ourselves remains forever out of the reach of fallible man, it is no less true that by trying to understand and by articulating the means of understanding, one can contribute at least something to general knowledge, which is not the prerogative of zòon or ònthos, but of ânthropos strictly speaking. The task is worth the pleasure. This essay inserts itself into this perspective, which takes as its departure point some works by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Faithful to the call of Tzvetan Todorov, there will be here no "privilege accorded to the unconscious over consciousness, to sensation over the concept, to the crude material over the elaborated product." (1) It would be preferable to follow the path of those who attempt "what is more difficult than it appears, to think along with the author." (2) Of course, as any reader of Rousseau knows, trying to take his entire oeuvre into consideration is tantamount to abandoning oneself to an enterprise which, though it be agreeable, would only be exhaustive after a lifetime of labor. A first restriction must be made, since it is necessary to concentrate on some texts at the expense of others by isolating a clearly defined and
legitimate Ansatzpunkt. Too many critics have a tendency to spoil Rousseauian thought when they renounce the principle of parsimony: the simplest answer is usually the correct one.

Wanting thus to consider only the essential as much as possible, let us firstly propose as a problematic a subject Rousseau treats theoretically and ardently: the relation between self and other within society. This problem is for Rousseau a concern that not only colors his texts but his life as well, for the eternal exile never stops insisting on the singularity of his state with respect to the social body as a whole. It is also known that the founding work of René Girard, precisely because of the simplicity with which it translates the nature of human relations, offers a means both helpful and efficient to seize Rousseau's intentions. Relations between individuals stand at the core of the human experience, and are therefore the best foundation upon which to lay Rousseau's thought. Beginning with the Lettre à d'Alembert in which the stakes of an eventual mimetic crisis threatening to explode and ultimately destroy Geneva are at work, we will pass to Emile to study the unique relationship between master and slave, then to the ninth promenade of the Rêveries. This promenade, often swept aside by modern critics, bears witness to the actual personal life of Rousseau and demonstrates the fashion in which he tries to mediate, with all the wisdom he acquired in the world, human passions excited by the increasing desire to appropriate. It is hopeful that this investigation will offer some insight as to how Rousseau exploits the sentiment of pity, although definite conclusions may prove more elusive; this paper represents only a preliminary effort to work through aspects of Rousseau's writings. Through pity he draws what constitutes for him the ideal state of man who can never return to the lost paradise of the noble savage. Communally shared compassion but never exclusionary and elitist commiseration: such is the basis of the society sketched by Rousseau.

2

The Lettre à d'Alembert: Freezing Mimetic Desire

The Lettre à d'Alembert remains perhaps the best illustration of the Rousseauian attitude against the dangers of mimetic violence in a social context very dear to the philosopher's heart. Too often cited as a denunciation in extenso of the theatre itself and retained in the collective memory of modern readers due to its treatment of Molière's plays, the Lettre shows itself to be, after a careful reading, something more: a work whose complexity should rightly prohibit its being cast aside into the domain of the so-called anti-theatrical ecclesiastical writings popular in the period. Rousseau's intention in the text is definitively linked to his ideal conception of the republican state, as the English language translation well testifies.

It is crucial to remember that the Lettre is a response having nothing to do with spectacles as such; as a work of epistolary polemics, it is destined to refute d'Alembert's suggestion that Geneva would profit from a national theatre. In this sense, Rousseau writes in defense of his beloved native city, and although he often recriminates against the negative social effects of the theatre, the citizen of Geneva makes every effort to make a clear distinction between the nature of the theatre and the utility of mimesis in a given civil order, notably in what was formerly the Republic of Geneva. It will be seen that the analysis of the spectacle as a scene of representation has only secondary importance in the Lettre; the notion of mimetic art is subordinated to a greater question: the primacy of the relationship between government and citizen, which itself operates in a mimetic manner. These two separate issues must remain apart in order to grasp the extent of the social consequences that Rousseau believes will inevitably result from the establishment of a national theatre.

"L'homme," writes Rousseau, "devient si différent de lui-même qu'il ne faut plus chercher parmi nous ce
qui est bon aux hommes en général, mais ce qui leur est bon dans tel tems ou dans tel pays" (OC. V: 16)(5) [Man . . . becomes so different from himself that one ought not to seek among us for what is good for men in general, but only what is good for them in this time or that country.] It is precisely upon this statement that the logic of Rousseau's argument reposes. Unlike those of his contemporaries who theorize mimetic representation in a metaphysically positivist manner, Rousseau claims to be able to demonstrate that the utility and even the necessity of the spectacle depend on a synchronically normative study of a given society and the manner in which it uses the spectacle. If he offers any concrete example that confirms the correct use of the theatre, it is assuredly the privilege accorded to the Greeks. These latter are an exception to what Rousseau calls the universal prejudices inherent in the actor's profession. He cites six reasons for which the actor in Greek tragedy succeeded in moving the spectators through appeals to both honor and glory, of which several, their validity notwithstanding, seem outside the scope of this discussion. There are, however, two that give pause:

2°. Comme la Tragédie avoit quelque chose de sacré dans son origine, d'abord ses acteurs furent plutôt regardés comme des Prêtres que comme des Baladins.

4°. Ce Peuple, enthousiaste de sa liberté, jusqu'à croire que les Grecs étoient les seuls hommes libres par nature, se rappelloit avec un vif sentiment de plaisir ses anciens malheurs et les crimes de ses Maitres. Ces grands tableaux l'instruisoient sans cesse, et il ne pouvoit se défendre d'un peu de respect pour les organes de cette instruction. (OC. V: 71)

[2. Since tragedy had something sacred in its origin, at first its actors were regarded as priests rather than buffoons.

4. This people, so enthusiastic about its liberty as to believe that the Greeks were the only men free by nature, recalled with a vivid sentiment of pleasure its former misfortunes and the crimes of its masters. These great depictions ceaselessly instructed the people, which could not prevent itself from feeling some respect for the organs of this instruction.]

The statement that there was "something sacred" in the theatre of ancient Greece, which is to say in the scene of representation, has been elaborated by post-Girardian works on the historical implications of the violence of mimetic rivalry. The Greeks, being able to recall the crimes of the past, certainly realized that confidence in an enduring social order was not something to be tenaciously held. The notion of the spectacle as a pedagogical tool for the Greeks is in fact derived from the anthropological vision of the cultural (although Rousseau himself does not elaborate this point) insofar as the spectators' identification with the tragic victim takes place at the moment at which they are no longer able to believe in the stability of the social order as a means to defer the violence of necessary social differences. As Eric Gans has pointed out, "yet such a loss of confidence [in the permanence of the social order] is a necessary consequence of generalized resentment, which inspires in the members of advanced societies a wholesale critique of such differences."(6) Tyranny, one of those "former misfortunes" to which Rousseau alludes, "signifies the submission of the entire social hierarchy--with the significant exception of the barrier between citizen and slave--to the critique of resentment."(7) Everyone being subjugated equally before the tyrant, differences between particulars evaporate and each is subject to resentment on the same terms.

If the Greeks could profit from the tragic spectacle, it is precisely because they could see in it, through the portrait of the tyrannical protagonist, the consequences resulting from an individual desire to occupy
the central social space of victimization around which all others are situated without having first acquired the approbation of the collectivity. It is thus understandable that for the Greeks tragedy taught not to desire the usurpation of the sacrificial mechanism through an attempt to make oneself a victim since such an action would incontestably result in failure. It is inadvisable to maintain that Rousseau himself conceived the spectacle in like terms, but by isolating the respect, or at least the tolerance, that the Greeks had for their theatre in facts drawn from their collective past, he possessed the intuitive knowledge of the sacred significance of tragedy, that which was unique for a given people at a given time, exactly the reason for which Greek actors were considered something approximating priests. The deferral of violence in the tragedy operating according to the anthropological model confirms that tragic representation served a specifically useful purpose for the Greeks: tragedy was able to preserve the communal agreement against the explosion of mimetic violence omnipresent amid the undifferentiated masses under tyrannical regimes. Given the exception made for Hellenic theatre in the Lettre, Rousseau does not contend that spectacles as such lack social value; mimetic representation cannot be divorced from the social structure in which it exists.

If the Greeks of old enjoyed a sacred theatre, the Genevans of the XVIIIth century have no more need of it. Once again, it is important to specify that which makes Geneva a privileged refuge in Rousseau's mind. "Dans une grande ville," he writes, "la police ne sauroit trop multiplier les plaisirs permis, ni trop s'appliquer à les rendre agréables, pour ôter aux particuliers la tentation d'en chercher de plus dangereux" (OC. V: 54) [In a big city . . . the police can never increase too much the number of pleasures permitted or apply itself too much to making them agreeable in order to deprive individuals of the temptation of seeking more dangerous ones.] This denunciation is of course directed at Paris, meeting place for the Enlightenment philosophes, domicile of M. d'Alembert, and the requisite second element in the dichotomy within which Geneva will be defined. Sloth and avarice run rampant where the number of inhabitants increases to such an extent that the sheer size of the collectivity surpasses the available supply of labor. One's thoughts turn to the Roman wisdom of panem et circenses: whether or not the spectacle instructs, it is better that the people gather together for a while in a place where the real threat of violence between individuals does not normally exist. "Geneva does not have twenty-four thousand souls,"(8) writes Rousseau. It is a little city whose relatively small population merits a different sort of consideration. It is about Geneva that d'Alembert wrote; it is in defense of Geneva that Rousseau responds. The Lettre remains in the final analysis an epistle and plea for the Republic.

Rousseau draws from d'Alembert's article two points against which he argues: prior to the project to establish a theatre at Geneva, the Lettre first aims at the insinuation that "[p]lusieurs Pasteurs de Genève n'ont . . . qu'un Socinianisme parfait" (OC. V: 10) [many pastors of Geneva have . . . only a complete Socinianism.] Rousseau treats the Genevan ministers quite briefly, but the fact that he begins his reply by defending them is revealing. The role of the ministers constitutes the central point around which Rousseau's "theory of Geneva" turns. What he wishes to protect is not the official Calvinism; rather, it is what the religious authority represents symbolically: the ministers are defendable to the extent that they publicly fulfill their task of incarnating the unity of the official dogma.(10) The pastor, his faith notwithstanding, has only the function of representing that in which he believes: "il ne représente que lui-même, il ne fait que son propre rolle" (OC. V: 74) [he represents only himself, he fills only his own role.] In other words, he has a socially recognized role unique to him that he must, in a sense, "act." Of course, the ministers are not alone in possessing such established modes of behavior, but their belonging to the religious sphere easily dictates the nature of the persona.
With respect to the other constituents of Genevan society, they must be ordered as well so that each ends up with an individual part of the collective whole, a civic role within the community. To accomplish this, Geneva has recourse to its sumptuary laws. "Il me semble que ce qui doit d'abord frapper tout étranger entrant dans Genève," he writes, "c'est l'air de vie et d'activité qu'il y voit régner" (OC . V: 85) [It seems to me that what ought first strike every foreigner coming to Geneva is the air of life and activity which prevails there.] The city gives the impression that it is alive, it appears in a certain fashion that defines it, and other larger cities cannot present such a spectacle. Each quarter of the city that Rousseau describes possesses a unique aspect through which the entire municipality thrives as a living spectacle. The sumptuary laws not only aim to regulate consumption during periods of possible shortages, they also ensure that each citizen visibly manifests the requisite appearances (le paraître) (11) worn over that which is his true natural being (l'être). In other words, the laws make everyone into a social actor within the living spectacle that is life in Geneva. Due to the importance Rousseau accords to the role of the ministers, it should not be argued, as some critics do, that he opposes the existence of appearances as such. His conception of society is that of a kind of marriage between being and appearances in a fixed theatrum mundi. In this respect, Rousseau's attitude is rooted in the defense of the ministers and extends from them to incorporate all the other members of the community. His goal consists in the theorizing of social existence in which natural being joined with appearances form a mask which grafts itself onto each citizen's face, defining him as a social entity. Obviously, such an approach would never bear fruit in a large city, but Geneva's size permits the possibility of envisaging some success for the enterprise. Rousseau admits (and desires) that a certain so-called civic theatricality reigns in what he believes to be the stable republic, on the condition that this social spectacle is grounded in a contract between citizens who understand and accept it. Yet there is little here to motivate someone to acquiesce to such a system, except the simple desire to preserve the status quo.

4

What can be used to bind the people together? To what noble aspiration can the hearts of the people be drawn so that one would be happy to live in Geneva? For Rousseau, it is through a foundation of communally shared pity that the affective bonds of a people can succeed in creating national unity; in this way, the importance of mores (12) surpasses that of reason, (13) and places him squarely against, most notably, John Locke. Pity, elaborated many different ways in Rousseau's work, here holds a generalized definition, dialectically defining itself against reason. It signifies the non-reasonable sentiments linking man to man; its sense is natural and heartfelt, never logical or empirically definable. Now it follows from the sumptuary laws that there are in Geneva "plus d'esprits originaux, plus d'industrie inventive, plus de choses vraiment neuves; parce qu'on y est moins imitateur, qu'ayant peu de modèles, chacun tire plus de lui-même . . ." (OC. V: 55) [more original spirits, more inventive industry, more really new things because one is less imitative, having few models, each draws more from himself . . .] With this sentence the anthropological model can be employed to formulate the vision of the state that Rousseau sketches in the Lettre. He knows that, in the classical spectacle, the purging of the passions that "are opposed to the propriety that triumphs in the end" (14) would strip the Genevans of the very (passionate) affective bonds upon which their civic identification depends. Further, "these passions are specific; the disorder that they create is only such according to a given social order." (15)

Given the nature of the government put forward by Rousseau, the threat of the theatre becomes clear. Its cathartic function expels the necessary passionate element and these passions, regulated within tightly ordered Genevan society, are good. Rousseau makes every effort to eliminate the conditions of the
possibility of mimetic violence, for each citizen has already a role to play which the strength of the sumptuary laws maintains and, consequently, the probability of a violent crisis resulting from imitative rivalry diminishes. The origin of any appropriative gesture would not ideally be found in a freely desiring subject; the desire to possess would be instilled into the individual as a function of his appropriate social role. Such was not of course the active reality in Geneva at the time, yet it would seem less probable that a people who "n'a le necessaire qu'autant qu'il se refuse tout superflu" (OC. V: 85) [has what is necessary only insofar as it denies itself every excess] would suffer excessive violent crises if it were content to see only the strict utility of those exterior objects which belong to it by right. There is thus small risk that, for example, the baker would covet the luxurious trappings of the banker because what one desires differs essentially from the other. The individualism of each person ensures that each would almost naturally want to resist comparing himself to and through others.

This idealized vision, truthfully, appears practically as an impossibility. All the same, it explains the displeasure Rousseau feels for the classic spectacle performed in XVIIIth century Europe whose stagings exhibit new desirable objects as well as conflicting sentiments linked to a foreign social order in situations that the Genevans would not recognize: "[i]l ne s'agit que de piquer la curiosité du peuple" (OC. V: 25) [the only object is to excite the curiosity of the public.] As soon as curiosity enflames the imagination and pushes it to desire something new, the desires of many will inevitably converge on the same object. It might be a new or rare object, or even a common one whose acquisition had hitherto interested only those who had the habit of owning it, but following the theatrical production in which the object (or sentiment) takes on an uncommon importance, the entire stability of the mimetic system destabilizes and degenerates. For Rousseau, the classic spectacle rivals the civic spectacle, and the former would be for Geneva the worst manifestation of imitation that one could imagine. If the republic is to survive, it must insist on obedience: the role one receives is without exception the best. Further, the communal pity that unites the Genevans and constitutes the basis of their nation would be threatened by the arrival of a troop of actors. The city depends on the compassion that its citizens feel for each other and this process only works if civic identification is made according to sentiment. One desires to be that which one is while desiring also to respect that which the other is. Thus it would be difficult for one to grow angry with another because of possessions, even if the other possessed more, for the affective bonds of each reinforce compliance to established mores which, writes Rousseau, have made Genevan society possible.

**Emile's Tutor: The Manipulative Transparent Master**

*Emile* remains a masterpiece: the author himself, Madame Germaine de Staël, Immanuel Kant, all considered it his best work, and Robespierre had the habit of waving it before the constituent assemblies while crying out in appeals to the authority of the citizen of Geneva. Although its full title is *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (*Emile, or On Education*) and it presents itself as a manual on education destined for the instruction of the young, it exists only as a novel replete with literary mechanisms that make it more than a treatise or mere practical guide.(16) The characters enjoy a life as real as possible in the universe of the novel; moreover, the celebrated profession of faith of the Savoyard vicar transmits Rousseau's weighty views on religion and God. As Michel Launay points out, Rousseau had compelled himself not to make his book a treatise on education or a pedagogical manual.(17) The relationship between tutor and pupil functions according to Rousseau's model of transparent identification, described in the text by the authorial voice in Book II:
... c'est [un art] de gouverner sans preceptes et de tout faire en ne faisant rien. . . Dans les éducations les plus soignées le maitre commande et croit gouverner; c'est en effet l'enfant qui gouverne. Il se sert de ce que vous exigez de lui pour obtenir de vous ce qu'il lui plait . . . qu'il croye toujours être le maitre et que ce soit toujours vous qui le soyez. Il n'y a point d'assujetissement si parfait que celui qui garde l'apparence de la liberté . . . Ses travaux, ses jeux, ses plaisirs, ses peines, tout n'est-il pas dans vos mains sans qu'il le sache? Sans doute, il ne doit faire que ce qu'il veut; mais il ne doit vouloir que ce que vous voulez qu'il fasse; il ne doit pas faire un pas que vous ne l'ayez prévu, il ne doit pas ouvrir la bouche que vous ne sachiez ce qu'il va dire. (OC IV: 362-363)

[. . . It is [an art] of governing without precepts and doing everything by doing nothing . . . In the most careful educations, the master commands and believes he governs. It is actually the child who governs. He uses what you exact from him to obtain from you what pleases him . . . Let him always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom . . . Are not his labors, his games, his pleasures, his pains, all in your hands without his knowing it? Doubtless he ought to do only what he wants; but he ought to want only what you want him to do. He ought not to make a step without your having foreseen it; he ought not to open his mouth without your knowing what he is going to say.]

5

All the conditions for the possibility of mimetic rivalry are in place. The reader would thus expect that some tension will develop between the disciple and his model, but the tutor's methodology reposes on an illusion insofar as he is supposed to evaporate before Emile in such a manner that the child will not view him as a master. No external mediation is permitted; he who is the more aware must dupe the child so that the latter will grow up believing himself to be the king of all he surveys. It is precisely this "appearance of freedom" that must be preserved; Emile must never see the hand of the master raised against him. Thus, neither resentment nor rivalry could stop the development of what Rousseau calls "mon élève, ou plutôt celui de la nature" (OC IV: 361) [my pupil, or rather nature's]. The transparency of the superior player ensures for the moment that the possible violence between him and his charge cannot materialize. If, as Girard has pointed out, it is true that "the passive obstacle that the possession [of the object of rivalry] constitutes would not appear as a gesture of calculated contempt . . . if the rival were not respected," Rousseau's genius consists in effacing the rivalry so that it cannot "exasperate the mediation"; he truly understood intuitively the inherent danger of mimetic violence. (18) The tutor appropriates nothing: Emile acts always for himself without realizing the mastery the other holds over him.

If the master hides his intentions behind a mask that betrays nothing, Girard's master/slave dialectique romanesque nicely interprets the dyad formed by the two personages. The tutor remains the mediator of Emile's desires, but the object of these desires does not appear to the child. The tutor's advantage is his ability to exploit Emile's youth who, raised outside the social sphere, cannot yet distinguish what would be a desirable object. "L'enfant élevé selon son âge est seul. Il ne conoit d'attachements que ceux de l'habitude; il aime sa soeur comme sa montre, et son ami comme son chien" (OC IV: 500). [The child raised according to his age is alone. He knows no attachments other than those of habit; he loves his
sister as he loves his watch, and his friend as his dog.] Being outside society, Emile is sheltered from worldly prejudices, unable to differentiate between the value of a human being and that of a thing. As Girard has pointed out: "The secret of success, in both business and pleasure, is dissimulation. On must dissimulate the desire one feels and simulate the desire one does not feel. One must lie."(19) In a sense then, the tutor lies by training Emile's eye not to see objects as things that one desires to appropriate. Whereas indifference "is never pure absence of desire,"(20) that of the tutor has as its cause the desire to ensure that Emile does not desire.

It is only at the end of the book when the two part that the tutor reveals the extent of his power: "[j]usqu'ici tu n'étois libre qu'en apparence; tu n'avois que la liberté précaire d'un esclave à qui l'on n'a rien commandé. Maintenant sois libre en effet; apprends à devenir ton propre maitre . . . (OC. V: 818). [Up to now you were only apparently free; you had only the precarious freedom of a slave to whom nothing has been commanded. Now be really free; learn to become your own master.] Thomas Kavanagh's important Girardian reading of Emile highlights the importance of this last sentence, insisting that individual liberty must, according to Rousseau, "depend on, and dialectically define itself against, a prior and primordial perception of the self as slave and of the other as master."(21) This is the kind of personal perception Emile had of himself (unbeknownst to him, of course) that he will not admit until he feels threatened by his nascent sexual passions. Up to the beginning of adolescence, "Emile n'a que des connoissances naturelles et purement physiques . . . Emile est laborieux, tempérant, patient, ferme, plein de courage" (OC. IV: 487) [Emile has only natural and purely physical knowledge . . . Emile is laborious, temperate, patient, firm, and full of courage]. But near his fifteenth birthday, the situation changes: "Comme le mugissement de la mer précède de loin la tempête, cette orageuse révolution s'annonce par le murmure des passions naissantes: une fermentation sourde avertit de l'approche du danger" (OC. IV: 489-490). [As the roaring of the sea precedes a tempest from afar, this stormy revolution is proclaimed by the murmur of the nascent passions: a mute fermentation warns of danger's approach.] The facility with which the tutor had been able to dissimulate the truth of his transparent mastery will no longer be sufficient to suspend the violence resulting from Emile's eventual realization that there are objects of desire exterior to the self to which his passions call him. Rousseau terms this the "second birth" when "l'homme nait véritablement à la vie et que rien d'humain n'est étranger à lui" (OC. IV: 490) [man is truly born to life and nothing human is foreign to him]. But thanks to Emile's careful education, Rousseau

ne doute pas un instant . . . qu'il ne vienne de lui-même au point où je veux le conduire, qu'il ne se mette avec empréssemment sous ma sauvegarde, et qu'il ne me dise avec toute la chaleur de son âge, frappé des dangers dont il se voit environné: O mon ami, mon protecteur, mon maitre! reprenez l'autorité que vous voulez déposer au moment qu'il m'impose le plus qu'elle vous reste; vous ne l'aviez jusqu'ici que par ma foiblesse, vous l'aurez maintenant par ma volonté, et elle m'en sera plus sacrée. Défendez-moi de tous les ennemis qui m'assiégent . . . Je veux obéir à vos lois, je le veux toujours . . . rendez-moi libre en me protégeant contre mes passions qui me font violence; empêchez-moi d'être leur esclave et forcez-moi d'être mon propre maitre en n'obéissant point à mes sens, mais à ma raison. (OC. IV: 651-652)

[does not doubt for an instant . . . that he will come by himself to the point where I want to lead him, that he will eagerly put himself in my safekeeping, that he will be struck by the dangers with which he sees himself surrounded,
and will say to me with all the warmth of his age: "O my friend, my protector, my master! Take back the authority you want to give up at the very moment that it is most important for me that you retain it. You had this authority up to this time only due to my weakness; now you shall have it due to my will, and it shall be all the more sacred to me. Defend me from all the enemies who besiege me . . . I want to obey your laws; I want to do so always . . . Make me free by protecting me against those of my passions which do violence to me. Prevent me from being their slave and force me to be my own master by obeying my reason and not my senses."

6

The slave reveals the violence of his desires; Emile realizes he has been the junior partner in his relationship with his tutor. Yet instead of manifesting resentment for him who dominated, Emile accepts the necessity of the tutor's role as protector; in other words, he feels not desire but disgust for the exterior sexual object, the cause of the crisis. He calls himself slave by the revelation of his desire not to desire. Rousseau believes this declaration to be the logical result of his system. He goes so far as to say that if this end is not reached, it is the tutor's fault (OC. IV: 652). It follows from this process that Emile sees himself as his tutor's slave, understanding that the tutor acts as a positive mediator for him. This is accomplished by the devaluation of the object of desire that appears to the child only as the source of his ruin. Remember that Emile is supposed to feel this naturally; one could say that the unusual formation he has undergone guarantees that he fears what others desire.

Even if the child wishes to be protected from the passions that threaten him, by what means could the tutor succeed in helping him? It is important first to specify what Rousseau means by "passion."(22) Although he uses the term in varying ways, it is here essentially an affective response between the subject and something or someone exterior to the self. "La source de nos passions, l'origine et le principe de toutes les autres, la seule qui nait avec l'homme et ne le quitte jamais tant qu'il vit est l'amour de soi" (OC. IV: 491). [The source of our passions, the origin and the principle of all the others, the only one born with man and which never leaves him as long as he lives is self-love.] He admits that the source is natural, which implies that all passions are natural. But self-love, being the founding passion, is also the most limited because it consists only in self-preservation: "il faut donc que nous nous aimions pour nous conserver, et par une suite immédiate du même sentiment nous aimons ce qui nous conserve" (OC. IV: 492). [Therefore, we have to love ourselves to preserve ourselves, and it follows immediately from the same sentiment that we love what preserves us.] Such is the rule that nature dictates to us; the first passion remains both the most individual and useful. It is opposed to its vicious counterpart, a passion born from "ces modifications [qui] ont des causes étrangères" (OC. IV: 491) [those modifications [that] have alien causes,] amour-propre.(23) The distinction Rousseau makes between these two forms of self-love is crucial:

les passions douces et affectueuses naissent de l'amour de soi [qui] est content quand nos vrais besoins sont satisfaits . . . [mais] les passions haineuses et irascibles naissent de l'amour-propre [qui] se compare, n'est jamais content et ne saurait l'être . . . ce qui rend l'homme essentiellement bon est d'avoir peu de besoins et de peu se comparer aux autres (OC. IV: 493)

[The gentle and affectionate passions are born of self-love [that] is contented when are true
needs are satisfied . . . [but] the hateful and irascible passions are born from amour-propre
[that] makes comparisons, is never content and never could be . . . Thus what makes man
essentially good is to have few needs and to compare himself little to others.]

Rousseau thus avoids mimetic violence between Emile and the tutor by limiting desirable objects to
immediate needs, as was the case with the sumptuary laws in the Lettre. Comparisons take place within
society, so keeping the child from society stops the violence that the appetite of community passions
engender. Having no contact with the passions of the collectivity, Emile does not know what unnatural
desire is. All the same, the problem of sexuality continues to threaten Emile, and to combat it, the tutor
has a responsibility to sublimate it through appeals to the sensibility of the child. Emile "s'émeut sur les
peines de ses semblables . . . il est sensible à la honte de déplaire, au regret d'avoir offensé" (OC. IV:
502) [is moved by the sufferings of his fellows . . . he is sensitive to the shame of displeasing, to the
regret of having offended], which is to say that he pities others. Once again, the education proceeds
negatively: Emile moves away from rivalry out of a fear of sorrow and pain. The subtlety of the
suggestions ends up encouraging the cultivation of the "good" passions which, having no external source
to which they can compare themselves, cannot contribute to violent mimesis.

The tutor does his best to steer the child clear of the path leading to dangerous passions by the
description of often unpleasant images that satisfy the budding desire. (24) The slave prays the master to
save him from the dangers surrounding him; if he can feel any joy at his success, it is because he wishes
voluntarily to be exempt from the pains of others. (25) By way of pity, Emile can resist a bit longer the
inexorable passion that never ceases to push him toward the inevitable contact with other desiring
subjects. By identifying with the unpleasantness that others feel, Emile learns to resist identifying with
the other as such, thus avoiding the creation within him of what Rousseau terms the moi relatif (relative
self). (26) The relative self, realm of amour-propre, makes comparisons with others. By concentrating on
undesirable feelings, Emile's pity does not thoroughly attach itself to another person; rather, it draws
more from his own experiences with pain and sorrow. As these feelings intensify, Emile will delay
making direct identifications. Rousseau's pity is thus at first more of a personal sentiment, since it does
not incite the subject to act. Only after Emile's sense of pity is fully developed can he begin to attach
himself to others through the more complete compassionate affective bonds at work in the Geneva of the
Lettre.

7

The Rêveries: Mimetic Desire Manipulated to Defer Violence

Many studies of the Rêveries take as a target the fifth promenade, in which Rousseau best illustrates the
singularity of his enterprise to cut himself off, ultimate victim, from society. He manages to make
himself the center of a conspiracy organized by the human race making him and him alone the
marginalized victim par excellence. An important consequence of the ethic announced by the esthetic of
the Rêveries is Rousseau's effort to balance his personal victimization by putting into place an active
center as a subject of representation that he will occupy alone. (27) Although it will not be necessary to
extract from the text the multiple examples on which a like understanding of the book reposes, the notion
of a central self remains useful since the promenades testify to a singularly experienced reality. There
are, however, some scenes that indicate a true sociability on the part of Rousseau: some of these reveal
the pity the exile can sense for others in society, without abandoning the privileged central position he
has prepared for himself. For Rousseau, the self is sufficient for the self without needing to depend on any external mediation: the scenes evoked in the *Rêveries* are for the most part either descriptions or memories, both of which emanate from the author's consciousness. Yet, there are times when the social factor enters into consideration. Consider the event in the ninth promenade when, one Sunday, after having dined at Maillot in the Bois de Boulogne, Rousseau and his wife Thérèse Levasseur sit in the shade of a large tree. As this episode is not among the best known, it is necessary to cite the text at length:

[A group of about twenty little girls escorted by a sort of nun came and settled themselves quite close to us, some sitting down and others frolicking about. While they were playing, a wafer-seller came by with his drum and his wheel looking for customers to try their luck. I could see that the little girls were looking longingly at the wafers, and two or three of them, who apparently had some coins, asked if they could buy a ticket. While their governess was hesitating and arguing with them, I called the man over and told him, "Let all these young ladies draw tickets in turn and I will pay for the lot." These words filled the whole company with a joy which would have been worth more than all the money in my purse, if it had cost me so much. Seeing that they were rushing up in some disorder, I obtained their governess' permission to make them all line up on one side and then go over to the other side one by one as they drew their tickets. Although there were no blank tickets so that everyone had at least one wafer and no one could be completely disappointed, I wanted to make things even more festive and secretly told the man to use his customary skill in a different way than usual and make as many lucky numbers come up as he could, promising to make it worth his while. Thanks to this stratagem nearly a hundred wafers were distributed, even though none of the girls drew more than one ticket, for in this respect I was inexorable, not wanting to give rise to abuses or show any favoritism which might cause discontent. My wife got the
lucky ones to share with the others so that almost everyone received the same number and there was general rejoicing.

This scene represents a praxis of Rousseau's egalitarian politics. From the moment the wafer-seller appears, it is clear that the goods he has to offer are going to generate what Girard terms "the desire to distinguish oneself"[28] for those girls who have some money at the expense of the others who do not. Rousseau notices the threat that is already taking place before the nun, that is, that the wish of the few to play would certainly create animosity in those who cannot participate, and in the rivalry that would follow, the wafers would be forgotten in the violence of the dispute among them all. Rousseau wants to put a stop to this potential violence. Taking the initiative to resolve the crisis, he puts himself into the position of mediator and, by not participating in the game, he prevents the girls from recognizing the role he is playing. He himself has no appropriative desires to dissimulate for he does not covet the wafers; he does not even touch them. In this scene, he enjoys a complete indifference to the wafers because what he desires is "a desire for the absence of any desire that elects an object outside the self"[29]; he wants to regulate the desire of others in order to feel the secret joy of having done so. The entire project of the "inexorable" master turns around this axis. By increasing the number of wafers won, the simple multiplicity of desirable objects prohibits the girls from becoming envious and effectively erases the very element of desirability the wafers had when the seller appeared. After the sharing suggested by Thérèse, there is a near state of equality within the group which was moments before at the threshold of mimetic violence. The nun herself will be invited to play, which she does, and for which Rousseau admits owing her much gratitude. It is important that she participates, for if she did not, she might manifest an indifference that would rival that of the veritable master. Rousseau himself has restored order and averted the crisis. He makes himself the solution of the dispute by the control he exerts on both the desiring subjects and the desirable object. As for the girls, they all receive an equal number of wafers without feeling resentment or being subjected to violence. The "general rejoicing" in the scene results from Rousseau's good intentions; in a similar situation, another could easily manipulate the circumstances to favor a particular participant. It therefore seems unlikely that Rousseau here gives his approbation to manipulative intervention as such, for it will always be a question of the good intentions of the mediator.

8

The former episode contrasts sharply with the one that follows. It is a story from a point in Rousseau's life when "faufilé parmi les riches et les gens de lettres j'étois quelquefois reduit à partager leurs tristes plaisirs" (OC. I: 1092) [mingling with the rich and men of letters I was sometimes reduced to taking part in their sad pleasures.] Present at an amicable gathering at La Chevrette, Rousseau relates how, as the guests danced:

On vendoit là des pains d'épices. Un jeune homme de la compagnie s'avisa d'en acheter pour les lancer l'un après l'autre au milieu de la foule, et l'on prit tant de plaisir à voir tous ces manans se précipiter, se battre, se renverser pour en avoir que tout le monde voulut se donner le meme plaisir. Et pains d'épice de voler à droite et à gauche et filles et garçons de courir, s'entasser et s'estroper; cela paroissoit charmant à tout le monde. Je fis comme les autres par mauvaise honte quoiqu'en dedans je ne m'amusasse pas autant qu'eux. Mais bientot ennuyé de vider ma bourse pour faire écraser les gens, je laissai là la bonne compagnie et je fus me promener seul dans la foire. (OC. I: 1092)
Gingerbread was being sold. A young man in the company had the idea of buying some and throwing the pieces one by one into the thick of the crowd, and everyone was so pleased to see the yokels rushing, fighting, and knocking one another down so as to get hold of a piece that they all wanted to join in the fun. So pieces of gingerbread went flying in all directions, and girls and boys rushed about, piling on top of one another and crippling themselves; everyone thought it a quite charming sight. Out of embarrassment I did the same as all the rest, although inwardly I did not find it as amusing as they did. But soon, growing weary of emptying my purse to have people crushed, I abandoned the fine company and went walking by myself through the fair.

Contrary to the preceding scene, the former "general rejoicing" gives way to selective happiness, notably that of the rich who at the expense of the less fortunate abuse their financial resources to manipulate the crowd. The observers’ declared charm is linked to the ferocity with which the rivals in the crowd fight to possess an object whose value is admittedly reduced when it touches the ground. An amusement that depends on the humiliation of some is shown to be a source of displeasure for Rousseau, particularly because a single man tried to encourage violent mimetic activity when it was for the moment suspended: in the dance, "les messieurs daignèrent danser avec les paysannes" (OC I: 1092) [the gentlemen condescended to dance with the peasant girls] before the introduction of the gingerbread. The happiness of the briefly united community is shattered by the gingerbread, which is only desired by some. Encouraging violence instead of suppressing it remains for Rousseau a capital sin that he routinely condemns. Walking through the fair, he intercedes in another dispute in order to heal himself of the gingerbread affair. Seeing a girl selling apples, he notices some boys who are interested in purchasing them, but who lack the money. In his habitual manner, it is Rousseau "payant les pommes à la petite fille et les lui faisant distribuer aux petits garçons" (OC I: 1092-3) [buying the apples from the little girl and having her distribute them to the little boys]. The dissimulated presence abstains even from touching the fruit, for it holds no interest; balance is restored by the two parties themselves who receive what they desire without violence. As for the effect this experience has on Rousseau, he writes:

j’avais de plus celle [la joye] de sentir qu'elle étoit mon ouvrage. En comparant cet amusement avec ceux que je venois de quitter je sentois avec satisfaction la différence qu’il y a des gouts sains et des plaisirs naturels à ceux que fait naitre l’opulence et qui ne sont guéres que des plaisirs de moquerie et des gouts exclusifs engendrés par le mépris. Car quelle sorte de plaisir pouvoit-on prendre à voir des troupeaux d'hommes avilis par la misère, s'entasser, s'etouffer, s'estropier brutalement, pour s'arracher avidement quelques morceaux de pain d'epice foulés aux pieds et couverts de boue? (OC I: 1093)

[I had the added pleasure of feeling that I was the author of it. Comparing this entertainment with those I had just left behind, I had the satisfaction of feeling the difference which separates healthy tastes and natural pleasures from those that spring from opulence and are hardly more than pleasures of mockery and exclusive tastes founded on disdain. For what sort of pleasure could one derive from seeing herds of men degraded by poverty crowding together, suffocating and brutally crushing one another in the greedy struggle for a few pieces of gingerbread which had been trampled underfoot and covered in mud?]
Through this revelation, Rousseau demonstrates that he not only understands the nature of violence brought about by mimetic rivalry, he also admits his own desire not to desire anything outside of the self; only natural pleasures count. He works by dissimulation. The absence of interest for such and such an object is only possible for him who has withdrawn from society while placing himself inside his own sphere of victimization, where he is sheltered from the social conflicts that have expelled him. The author is once again the unacknowledged manipulator of others' desires. Rousseau writes of a joy that consists less in the consciousness of doing good than in the joy of seeing happy faces . . . Indeed this is for me a disinterested pleasure which is independent of the part I play in it, for I have always been very attracted by the pleasure of seeing cheerful faces in public rejoicing.

9

Seeing happy faces, tasting the contentment of others, that is, recognizing the absence of conflict. Perhaps it is a goal possible only in the esthetic scenes of the Rêveries, but it says much about the perspicacity with which Rousseau knew how to suppress the violence of rival passions. It is also curious to note the kind of scenes which elicit Rousseau's sense of pity, since these are frequently depictions of children and the poor, who remain among the weakest and most marginalized in XVIIIth century bourgeois society. It is a testament to Rousseau's character that, near the end of his life, his own sense of compassion fuels his desire to restrain conflict and efface resentment. The Rêveries testify to his ability to sympathize with the hostility (real or eventual) inherent in human relations, to draw attention from the exterior and back to the self in the hope of restraining outbreaks of uncontrolled desire.

Such is the brief schema outlining Rousseau's use and manipulation of mimetic structures. The denunciation of the establishment of a classic theatre in Geneva issues from the necessity to stabilize every appropriative gesture so that it cannot converge on the same object. In Emile, the presence of the invisible master ensuring the child develops without ever knowing that his desires were suggested hinders rivalry with the other. The meeting of the desiring subject with the benevolent mediator who dissimilates himself to satiate enflamed desire crowns Rousseau's literary career. In all three texts examined, the sentiment of pity plays a role in mediating desire. The affective bonds of the Genevans depend on pity; the introduction of a theatre operating to purge the passions would be a disaster in Rousseau's eyes. Pity is also the means by which the tutor deviates Emile's passions by making him think of the sufferings of others: the child's desire seeks no object of satisfaction exterior to the self. Even at the end of his life, Rousseau acts through a pity that he tries to instill in others. This dependency on pity makes the desiring subject turn his glance from the object to the desiring other, coming closer to the mediator and moving away from the object, identifying with the other's feelings, and finally returning to the self. The view is transferred from object to mediator, the true source of mimetic tension, whose influence Rousseau will try further to decrease by relying on a pity that emanates from the true human self. It is a sentiment frequently fueled by negative associations, which cause the subject to concentrate more on the feelings he shares with others and less on the others themselves, therefore avoiding direct identification and possible rivalry. Rousseau understood that mimetic rivalry remains man's worst
enemy, and on both a philosophical and practical level, he sought to tame it.

Notes


2. "... ce qui est plus difficile qu'il n'y paraît... de penser à la suite de l'auteur et avec lui." Victor Goldschmidt, quoted by Todorov, op. cit.


5. All quotations to Rousseau's work are to the edition of Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, eds, Oeuvres complètes, 5 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléïade, 1959-1995). This edition will be abbreviated OC. As for the English translations, I have generally followed those of Allan Bloom, with some minor modifications.


7. Ibid.


9. "Socinianism was a Christian sect closely allied with the development of Unitarianism. It took its name from its founder, Fausto Sozino, an Italian of the sixteenth century who lived in Poland for a long time, where his movement had great strength. It was popular throughout Europe and was accepted by many Protestant churches. Socinianism was anti-trinitarian and held that reason is the sole and final authority in the interpretation of the scripture. It further denied eternal punishments. Calvin had condemned the doctrine, so that the imputation in d'Alembert's article was both a daring interpretation of the doctrine of Geneva's pastors and one which was likely to be dangerous for them." Allan Bloom, Politics and the Arts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960) 150.


11. Coleman (30-33) argues further that Rousseau does not want the static state of the citizen to change, even if such a change would better his lot in life: if one is born poor, one should remain poor.

12. The Latin mores here is used as a translation for the French moeurs. Bloom (op. cit.) prefers the rather weighty "(morals [manners])."


16. In passing, it should be noted that several attempts were made to raise children according to *Emile*’s precepts, and all ended very badly. The children were maladjusted and, in some cases, institutionalized. See Marilyn Gaull, *English Romanticism: The Human Context* (New York: Norton, 1988) (back)

17. "Rousseau s'était efforcé de ne pas faire de son livre un 'traité d'éducation' ou un manuel de pédagogie." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *écrivain politique* (Cannes: CEL, 1972) 22. (back)


22. Globally, passion is understood by Rousseau as "an affective response on our part (with its attendant thoughts, dispositions and objectives) to the feelings, dispositions, attitudes, traits of another person particularly as these are directed towards us and incorporate an estimate [of] our standing, value or worth (in general or for that person), and/or an intent to benefit or harm us." N. J. H. Dent, *Rousseau: An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 119. (back)

23. The French amour-propre is best left untranslated. Its English equivalent is something akin to "pride" or "vanity." (back)

24. Two examples are the association of sexuality with painful urination (*OC*. IV: 499) and again with venereal diseases (*OC*. IV: 518). (back)


28. The French text gives "le désir de se distinguer." Girard, *op.cit.*, 105. (back)
29. Kavanagh, *op.cit.*, 165. (back)

30. In the *Lettre*, Rousseau names certain public spectacles as suitable amusements. These include sporting events and well organized dances at which the young make public recognition of the elderly. The contentment of those united together is what makes these events useful and desirable for society. (back)
Balzac has cost me so many labors. Perhaps it will lead science into new paths one day. If I had written a work purely for savants, it would have attracted the attention of thinkers who will not glance at it. But, if chance places the novel in their hands, they will perhaps speak of it! (Balzac, Correspondence)

The most important discoveries in the mathematical and physical sciences are always just the researched, found or guessed proof of an already known fact. Entire generations had observed the revolutions of the earth and the heavens; Newton, Kepler, Lagrange, Laplace, Arago stated, and still state, the causes; they prove in a word. The moral-physical fact that makes society move was formulated better by the wisdom of nations than by even Rousseau. The blade cuts through the sheath, say the people. Mr. Balzac writes Louis Lambert. He proves in the same fashion as scientists. We have intentionally cited the example of Louis Lambert. In it one can find in seminal form this secretly formulated science, this cruelly positive science, that will put an end, it is said, to many a philosophical discussion. (Davin/Balzac, "Introduction to the Philosophical Studies")

Does Balzac have anything "scientific" to say to his readers? If not, our inquiry can stop here. If so, (and for the sake of argument let's say he does) our first question must address this obvious paradox: why would he communicate his "discovery" in a novel rather than a scientific treatise, such as those written by the famous "hard" scientists he cites as his models? Since today we are familiar with Balzac above all as a writer of fiction and not as a philosopher or human scientist, we naturally assume these scientific claims to be a hoax and his choice of the novel obvious. Yet many of Balzac's early theoretical writings had human-scientific pretensions, and he insisted repeatedly, in the above epigraphs and elsewhere, that Louis Lambert be considered a legitimate work of science. He was also perfectly aware, as the first epigraph makes plain, that the imbrication of science and fictional narrative would pose a stumbling block both for intellectuals and ordinary readers of fiction: intellectuals, presumably, would never consider the novel a serious form of scientific mediation, and ordinary readers of novels would never comprehend the science. In the end, whatever might have been the nature of Balzac's "discovery," the
French novelist was evidently prepared to hand the proper reception of his work over to chance—to risk eternal misunderstanding rather than surrender his "unknown science" to uninitiated readers. What, we cannot help but wonder, are the stakes of such a wager?

Previous criticism has taken up Balzac's scientific challenge, but without producing entirely convincing results. The typical strategy is to conflate the identities of Balzac and the fictional scientist, Louis Lambert, and to argue that Balzac's science can be culled from the jumble of axioms and formulas contained in Lambert's "Treatise of Will" (a fragmented copy of which is presented at the end of the novel) or from the narrator's memories of the experiments and sources that led to the discovery and to the resulting treatise. Framed thematically, the scientific question thus hangs primarily on the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of Balzac's mimetic reproduction of Lambert's sources (e.g., Gall, Mesmer, Lavater, Bichat, Swedenborg) or on speculation about how to make sense of Lambert's/Balzac's treatise.

This traditional realist approach to Balzac's science is understandable since Lambert, it is claimed, makes an important discovery, and since many of the events in Lambert's life parallel events in Balzac's life, including the writing of a document called "Treatise of Will." At first glance, then, Balzac's extra-textual scientific claims appear to refer unproblematically to his fictional genius's thoughts, and the narrator's goal to reconstruct Lambert's lost science would appear to be a thin disguise for a restoration (and glorification) of Balzac's science. The narrative dilemma is, of course, that despite the narrator's intimate knowledge of the events surrounding Lambert's discovery and the composition of the treatise, his memory has (apparently) dimmed with time; and Lambert, himself, has gone mad. With nowhere to turn, the narrator must eventually renounce his reconstructive project, but he directly challenges readers more capable than himself to complete the puzzle: "Between these two fragments [of the treatise] there is an obvious correlation for those rare souls who take pleasure in plunging into such intellectual abysses" (XI 689). The stakes of a successful restoration, the narrator suggests elsewhere, are a possible advance in "les sciences humaines" (684).

A quick perusal of the treatise in question reveals that the correlation between the two fragments is far from obvious. Its incoherence combined with the irony of the narrator's challenge, in fact, only draws heightened attention to the problems attached to the traditional realist approach. First, the version of the treatise made available to readers is a severely fragmented, third-hand rewriting of the lost original. It is doubtful therefore that even the most expert readers could ever restore its contents. It would also seem problematic to view Lambert's "scientific" thoughts as Balzac's, since this assumes Balzac incapable of distinguishing between the hard sciences of Newton and Kepler, mentioned in his extra-textual claims, and the pseudo-sciences of Mesmer, Gall, and others, thematized within the novel. Balzac's scientific claims, though apparently absurd, are far more radical. Since Balzac is clearly aware of his provocation, we might do better to confront it head on. Finally, given that the absent object to which Lambert's treatise potentially refers has strategically been made absent within a work of fiction, Balzac has guaranteed in advance that his readers can, at best, approach it only asymptotically. What he has also guaranteed is an endless production of new language as critics attempt to fill in the treatise's unbridgeable gap.

One is tempted to conclude in the wake of deconstructive theory that the narrator's failure to recapture Lambert's discovery in stable theoretical discourse demonstrates the inadequacies or limits of mimetic representation. According to this view, language's infinite play of signifiers undercuts the narrator's (and thus Balzac's) mastery over the real; or, more generously, Balzac's creation of an illusion only to punch a
hole in it displays his supreme irony and self-consciousness vis-à-vis the mimetic function of language. Chantal Massol-Bédouin makes the latter argument with respect to Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece*, but we could easily apply her claims to *Louis Lambert*:

Balzac's narratives pretend to hide a secret that they could reveal in a relation of container to contained. . . . The depth is as phony as that of Frenhofer's painting. The enigmatic text has no more "inside" than the painting has an underside. . . . The mystery thus has no other existence but textual: it is a pure production of the book that creates it. . . . *The Unknown Masterpiece* ends in a failure: seeking to defend the Artist, the text shows the impossibility of being one, and the writer has deconstructed his own myth while wishing to construct it. Balzac gets out of this situation through a pirouette: he chooses the path of conscious and avowed mystification. (54-55)

Though more sensitive to Balzacian paradox and irony than the traditional realist approach, the deconstructive approach shares its principal weakness, namely, the displacement of the scientific/referential question to which Balzac attached so much importance. However much Balzac may have wished to challenge conventional assumptions about the possibilities of capturing human experience in realist representation, the alternative to a naively mimetic notion of referentiality is not necessarily textuality. The fact that the novelist is able to produce a mimetic illusion in order to distance himself from it ironically is in itself sufficient proof of a minimal level of mimetic adequacy.

In light of the principles associated with René Girard's mimetic theory and Eric Gans's Generative Anthropology, a more productive approach to the question of Balzac's "science," without discarding either the mimetic/realist or deconstructive perspectives, may be to locate it, paradoxically, in the very deferral of referentiality. Instead of viewing the narrator's dramatic failure to reconstruct Lambert's treatise merely as a hoax or as a proto-deconstruction of representation, we may read it as part of a deeper strategy to (1) demonstrate the mimetic causes of desire (in this case, Lambert's, the narrator's and the reader's desire to theorize the will) and (2) to reveal the paradoxes inherent in attempting to mediate a theory of mimetic desire in a conventional theoretical treatise. If Lambert's "Treatise of Will" is marked by an insuperable discontinuity, this is not due to the narrator's forgetfulness; he finally admits on the last page of the novel that he could have finished it for us ("Perhaps I could have transformed these fragments of thought into a complete book." [XI 692, my emphasis]). Rather, Balzac willfully creates this textual/epistemological gap so that the desire generated in readers to search for the (non-existent) solution will lead, in a second step, to the discovery of the mimetic principle behind the original desire to search. The point of engaging us in a reconstruction of Lambert's treatise, then, is not to have us reestablish a set of quotable propositions concerning "the will" (or "desire"); it is to reveal through our interpretive failure that (mimetic) desire is itself a stumbling block or scandal to conventional scientific theorization: it is inter-subjective and thus has no objective substance or stable referentiality; it has no verifiable first cause; its effects are contagious and can themselves become the cause of further effects. And more importantly, a theory of mimetic desire, according to this reading of Balzac, cannot be mediated without interference by the mimetic desires of the theorist or his reader-disciples.

The fundamental problem that arises in the transmission of a theory of will (or desire) with universal, scientific pretensions is this: the disciple's desire to know the substance of the master-theorist's theory can never be cleanly differentiated from the imitative desire generated by the charisma of the theorist. (2)
principles of mimetic theory and a disciple who is merely enacting the principles through imitation of the language and thoughts of his master. As Balzac understood, any human science aspiring to the status of a positive science will produce in disciples either a reaction of idolatry (and therefore mystification) or rivalry and conflict (since the disciples will naturally aspire to make their own scientific and universal claims). As there can logically be only one universal theory of desire, the theorist who pronounces it is doomed from the start since idolatry will lead to fatigue and boredom, and rivalry will eventually lead to overturning and displacement. Gans says in Signs of Paradox, "To think is to liberate oneself from an idolatrous form of mimesis, never absolutely, but by replacing it with another, less pathological form" (34). If this is true (and I think it is), it must hold even in the case of the theory of mimetic desire as object of desire. At some level even the most faithful disciple must distance himself from the master-theorist through paradox or irony in order to demonstrate critical distance and independent thinking. But at this point anthropology meets literature--for what is a scientific treatise that includes irony and paradox in its strategy of communication?

Balzac's "scientific" accomplishment, then, should be understood precisely as he characterizes it: it is a novel--a novel whose anthropological insight works to scandalize readers with its mimetic effects but at the same time offers the analytical tools to grasp (and therefore transcend) the causes of the scandal. Paradoxically, if we look for science, as previous critics have, at the thematic level, we misrecognize Balzac's deeper theoretical aims. Desire becomes trapped at this level in a literally infinite, even if erudite, game of substituting and recombining the treatise's contents. Yet if we do not look for science at this initial thematic level we will never position ourselves to take the second and most crucial step. Misrecognition, then, is the necessary pre-condition for observing the demonstration of Balzac's anthropology. But recognition of our misrecognition is indispensable for perceiving the mimetic principles behind the demonstration.

What this also means, if the above claims are accepted, is that Lambert's venerable "Treatise of Will"--the treatise widely believed to express Balzac's own thoughts on "the will"--is a sham. And the narrator obviously must know this from the outset, although he pretends not to. The narrator, in fact, lies to his readers about the treatise's importance, he fakes his pious devotion to Lambert and his "discovery," he reorders the chronology of events to dramatize the rediscovery of Lambert's lost treatise, he delays to the latest possible moment the revelation of Lambert's madness--and then he quietly blows the cover on this narrative trickery. For what reason? Again, in order to more adequately mediate his own (that is, Balzac's) theory of mediated desire.(3) Having discovered the contagious effects of mimetic desire while under the thrall of Lambert's theoretical genius, the narrator attempts to recreate this mimetic experience for the reader. His aim, paradoxically, is not to state the principles of a mimetic theory of desire in an easily reproducible format, but to reveal how the mimetic impulse must be observed and discovered as a function of Time as well as why he believes mimesis cannot be mediated as a theory in any lasting way in a treatise. The narrator's double requirement to induce a mimetic illusion and to break it, to encourage a search for science and then to discourage it, explains the awkward and ambiguous tone that so many critics have noticed (and disliked) in this text.

3

Because the narrator produces the illusion of recounting a linear chronology of Lambert's life--from his genius origins, through his tragic collapse into madness, to the rediscovery and revelation of the treatise--we are initially led to believe that the "event" of madness (as an adult) and the "event" of scientific discovery (as a child) are unrelated and that the content of Lambert's science remains valid in
spite of this troubling news. Yet a moment's reflection reveals that the narrator's belated discovery of Lambert's madness is precisely what inspires him to reconstruct Lambert's science. Before learning (at age 30) of Lambert's fate, the narrator had in fact scarcely given Lambert's science a second thought. He cleverly papers over these details in the retelling of his findings, however, in order to keep his reader's desire for scientific knowledge intact as long as possible. If he revealed Lambert's madness too early, the fear is that readers would not be motivated to examine the evidence in the same careful way as if under the impression that it contains a valuable science. But more to the point: the evidence presented as key testimony to Lambert's scientific genius is at the same time key evidence for the causes of his madness, since the two events, scientific discovery and collapse into folly, are internally connected. In fact, the narrator's manipulative alignment of cause and effect would suggest that Lambert's discovery caused (or is) his madness, although he realizes this in a flashback only many years after the fact, at a time when the delayed symptoms become perceivable.

We can observe an example of this narrative duplicity in one of the flashbacks that immediately follows the revelation of Lambert's madness: "This illness, an abyss as deep as that of sleep, was linked to a system of proofs that Lambert had given in his 'Treatise of Will.' At the very moment Mr. Lefebvre told me about Louis's first fit, I suddenly remembered a conversation that we had had about this subject" (XI 678). On a first reading we are convinced that the narrator's flashbacks are designed to discredit the view that Lambert is mad and to save his science from oblivion. But in fact it's the other way around: Lambert's symptoms provide retrospective insight into the nature of Lambert's "scientific" activity, which, in circular fashion, exposes the deeper causes of his present symptoms. Lambert's phallocentric fantasy, his fixation on writing the ultimate theory of will, his impotence, catalepsie, and attempted self-castration can all be traced back to a fixation on his original discovery. The narrator does not openly tell us this; he quietly arranges the narrative events in a cause-effect schema and hopes that his readers will see how to connect the dots.

As it turns out, Lambert's discovery was linguistic: he believed that he had found the ideal symbol--the "towers" (tourelles) of the château de Rochambeau--to capture the essence of human desire in all its metaphysical and erotic complexity. We can deduce from scattered evidence (too difficult to reproduce here) that the phallic shape of the towers resembled a similar shape that he had recently dreamed about, which in turn resembled this shape's analog in reality--referred to in the text not so cryptically as Lambert's "organe." At the moment of discovery, Lambert declares: "'I saw that last night in a dream!' He recognized the grove of trees . . . the color of the water, the chateau's towers " (XI 620-1). Though Lambert's discovery turns out to be a Cratylist fantasy in which the phallic icon becomes co-substantial with the reality behind it (that is, his desire), the lifelong effects of his fantasy were real: it diverted his original spiritual desire into a pathological obsession to write an unfinishable treatise about desire, and it repressed out of existence his desire for conventional conjugal relations with his wife, Pauline de Villenoix. Under the illusion that his ideal symbol provided both erotic and spiritual satisfaction in advance of actual desiring, Lambert simply stopped desiring, or least he stopped desiring in any conventional fashion. Viewed from a slightly different angle, we might say that he repeated the same metaphysical desire his entire life. In the scientific realm, for example, he did not seek to exchange ideas with others; he merely accumulated analogies (pulled from texts ranging from Mesmer, Bichat and the Bible) that resembled "the mechanism" of his own a priori ideal.

And in matters of love, too, Lambert's interest was above all linguistic. A close reading of his letters to Pauline, for example, shows that his desire for her was never sexual in a conventional sense; he was
inspired above all by the signifying potential of the towers of her château de Villenoix. As evidence, he says such things as: "Oh, if you only knew how much the shape of the towers makes my heart palpitate" (XI 669); or: "I stayed all morning seated at the edge of the road, contemplating the towers of Villenoix . . . If only you knew what I saw in my soul!" (666). As a near perfect mimesis of his earlier Rochambeau tower-symbol, Lambert believed that Pauline would be his passageway into conventional modes of communication (both linguistic and erotic), all the while maintaining the metaphysical/linguistic unity of his original discovery. Lambert's frustration comes when he discovers that Pauline might not find the same erotic satisfaction that he did in his original symbol-object ("I was afraid I can't make you happy" [666]). What is more, the spatial and temporal différance separating the two iterations (tower 1 and tower 2) reveals to Lambert that he may not have truly captured the metaphysical substance of Desire in his original symbol. This explains its untranslatability either into scientific expression (the unfinishable treatise) or into expressions of love (the eventual experience of failed metaphysical union with Pauline):

I would like another language to exist other than the one I am using in order to express the reborn delights of my love. . . . From afar, when I am in the darkness of absence, am I not forced to use human words which are too weak to express divine sensations? . . . Still, despite science and the infinity of language, I have never found anything in these expressions that could paint the delicious embrace by which my life melts into yours when I think of you. And then, by what word can I finish when I have stopped writing that will keep you in my presence? (XI 671)

Though pursuing the causes of Lambert's linguistic madness may seem unrelated to our goal of pursuing the narrator's/Balzac's anthropology, in fact the two trajectories are intertwined. It is Lambert's belief that he could exhaust his desire in a representational mimesis of desire that leads to his extreme forms of desirelessness (impotence and attempted self-castration), and it is the bizarre events caused by this belief that reveal retrospectively to the narrator the paradox of mimetic desire that produced the original event of symbolization. Though left unstated, we can surmise that the physical expression of desire required by marriage would have constituted a detachment and horizontalization of Lambert's original union of vertical desire and ideal symbol. Such a detachment was unacceptable to Lambert because his original desire, we can now see, was to control the scene of representation by designating its center with a symbol.

4

It is no accident that Balzac chose the phallic towers of a pre-Revolutionary chateau as Lambert's founding symbol of symbols since it is connected both metaphorically and metonymically to the Christian/patriarchal order to which Balzac was so profoundly attached. The phallocentrism (or phallogocentrism) implied by this choice of symbol would point to deeper social and cultural reasons for Lambert's pathological obsession: he attempts to (re-)designate the center of representation at a historical moment when this center had already been radically displaced by political revolution. From an historical and cultural point of view, Lambert's linguistic dream is thus at bottom an expression of nostalgia for the metaphysical satisfaction of desire formerly provided by Christianity. Lambert was not necessarily fully aware of the underlying forces influencing his desire, but he intuitively realized that the shift from the vertical axis to the horizontal (or from ideal desire to physical) would have internally split the original metaphysical unity he had imagined between his desire and the tower-symbol, which in turn would have undermined the foundations of his "science." At the moment of crisis, Lambert resists the pull away from
his ideal by attempting to eradicate his ideal's counterpart in material reality.

The narrator's anthropological discovery comes to him as he observes the hidden mechanism of desire governing the relation between Lambert and his wife, Pauline, which, in turn, recalls his observations of the original scene of discovery and symbolization. From direct observation and from intimate details gleaned from a cache of love letters, the narrator deduces that Pauline repeats his former role as Lambert's disciple, and that the sacred "sign" that binds them is the "tower-symbol" of Pauline's château de Villenoix. The fact that this symbol turns up in Lambert's love letters permits the narrator (and reader) to deduce with near certainty, both from its phallic iconicity and from the ostensive nature of his original act of linguistic designation ("I saw that last night . . ."), that Lambert's pathological expressions of desire as an adult are internally related to his childhood discovery. Such a connection could never be divined from the contents of Lambert's treatise because, once he begins translating his discovery into the declarative statements of a conventional treatise, he, by necessity, radically displaces the ostensive sign on which the treatise is founded. Paradoxically, the more he attempts to render his discovery present in a representational mimesis, the further he displaces the ostensive sign and the mimetic paradox that generated it—a point to which we shall return.

A visual analogy for this process can be found in Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece*, in which the genius painter, Frenhofer, adds layer upon layer of paint to his masterpiece only to further bury the object he is attempting to make present. The paradox extends even to the reader: the more we attempt to complete Lambert's treatise, the further we distance ourselves from its underlying truth. That is because at issue here is what Gans calls the paradoxical structure of language: the language (or representation) that is generated as a harmonious solution to mimetic conflict defers (and therefore conceals) the desires that generated it. Within the fictional world of *Louis Lambert*, only the narrator truly understands this paradox because he alone was present at the original scene of discovery and symbolization: he observed the content of the desire behind Lambert's first sign; and he also observed how far Lambert's treatise had displaced the original sign (and its content) over time. What intrigued him as a child, and what continues to intrigue him as an adult, is the mimetic attraction caused by Lambert's metaphysical belief. Again, it is Pauline's attachment to Lambert combined with Lambert's continued (but now hidden) attachment to his original sign-object that permits him to recall his former fascination and to find evidence for his anthropology:

> I headed toward the château de Villenoix with very strong emotions. . . . I wanted to reexperience the impressions and thoughts of my poor friend. No doubt these evening conversations . . . had initiated Mademoiselle de Villenoix into the secrets of this soul, so noble and so vast, just as I had myself been initiated several years prior. But the fact that preoccupied me the most, and which gave my pilgrimage an immense curiosity combined with the almost religious feelings that were guiding me, was this magnificent belief on the part of Mademoiselle de Villenoix . . . : had she over time contracted her lover's madness or had she entered so profoundly into his soul that she could understand even his most confused thoughts. I lost myself in this admirable problem. (XI 680-1)

The narrator's concern about Pauline's emotional state is at bottom a concern about his own because he realizes after the fact that a faithful adherence to Lambert's metaphysical ideal would have meant his own intellectual enslavement and folly. Despite the temporal distance that separates them, the narrator's fear
of Lambert's nefarious influence in fact causes him to renounce any further visits. Though implicit in the above passage, the narrator's self-conscious understanding of mimetic desire and of its unconscious "mechanism of transmission" becomes unmistakably clear below:

After seeing Lambert one last time, I left his wife and was haunted by ideas so contrary to social life that, despite my promise, I decided not to return to Villenoix. The sight of Lambert had exerted a sinister influence on me. I dreaded finding myself in this drunken atmosphere in which the ecstasy would be contagious. Anybody would have experienced, as I did, the desire to plunge into the infinite in the same manner as the soldiers who committed suicide in the sentry post in which one of their colleagues had committed suicide at the Boulogne camp. We know that Napoleon had to burn the woods down. . . . Maybe it's the same with Lambert's room? These two facts serve as proof for his idea on the transmission of the will. I felt an extraordinary stirring that surpassed even the most fantastic effects caused by tea, coffee, opium, by sleep and fever, mysterious agents whose terrible effects so often inflame our heads. (XI 691-2)

The mimetic principle that I argue grounds Balzac's anthropology, though more or less open to view in the above passages, remains for the most part secretly embedded in the majority of his narratives so that its cause-effect relations must be activated and observed by the reader to be understood. The purpose of such an embedding, as I have briefly tried to show, is to incorporate the paradox of communicating mimesis into the very structure of communication. In that way, Balzac assures in advance that the form of his texts never fully delivers the content of the principle that makes them operable--that the desire aroused by the central object can never be exhausted through appropriation. It is rather the irony of pointing to a central object and then withdrawing this object from our reach that guarantees the longevity of his theorization. In a strategy very similar to Søren Kierkegaard's notion of "indirect communication," Balzac requires a reaction from his readers to animate and identify the mimetic principle he wishes to communicate. However, as we have seen, the supreme paradox of indirect communication is that the best testimony to the power of mimetic desire is produced precisely when readers are the most unaware of its existence or operations.

If Balzac hides his mimetic principle from immediate observation, he nevertheless gives us plenty of clues to uncover it. He frequently uses the words imiter and copier (in all their variations) to describe the behavior of his characters; and he often provides theoretical aphorisms designed to put us onto the scent. In Cousine Bette, for example, he points to the rivalry and madness that can be produced by imitative desire: "[W]e don't know all of the crazy things that are attributable to the secret rivalries that drive men to imitate the model they have chosen, or to consume their life's forces in order to become the moonlight" (107). And in the analysis of the master-disciple relation between Balthazar Claës and Lemulquinier in Search for the Absolute, we find this: "By assisting Balthazar in his manipulations, [Lemulquinier] had espoused the folly of them. Either he had seized the impact of his research . . . or the innate penchant in man for imitation made him adopt the ideas of the one in whose atmosphere he lived (XI 708; my emphasis). Here Balzac clearly points to mimesis as a universal principle and he also reveals a self-conscious reflection concerning the idolatrous effects mimesis can produce in disciples.
This question concerning the nature of Lemulquinier's understanding of his master's science is the one that the narrator of *Louis Lambert* probes in his own disciple-relation to Lambert. As a third example, in fact, we might point to the narrator's open acknowledgment of the mimetic impulse behind his motivation to understand Lambert: "Louis walked in his elevated way completely detached from the things around us. *Obeying the need to imitate that dominates children,* I endeavored to shape my existence according to his" (XI 615, my emphasis). Although the narrator here appears to *will* his imitation of Lambert consciously, Balzac's point is always that mimesis operates unconsciously. His own theory of will (or desire) in fact calls into question the principle of rational voluntarism espoused by most Enlightenment philosophers and that dominated the main currents of academic philosophy in his era. Close reading shows that the narrator's childhood imitation of Lambert occurred spontaneously and naturally, to such an extent that the two were joined in a unity (referred to as a "marriage"), symbolized moreover by the singular name given to them by their classmates. (6) The narrator is able consciously to reflect on the unconscious operations of his mimetic behavior only long after Lambert's spell on him has been broken. In a flash of retrospective insight that stands as a precursor to Proustian involuntary memory, the narrator recounts how he rediscovered the unconscious cause of his former desire for Lambert's science. This memory, which finds its origin in Lambert's metaphysical/linguistic discovery, also reveals the narrator's self-conscious understanding of the desire behind Lambert's act of designation:

I went toward the château de Villenoix with great emotion. My reflections grew deeper with every step on this road that Louis had so many times taken (XI 680). . . . At the moment I perceived the castle towers, the shape of which had so many times startled poor Lambert, my heart began to palpitate heavily (681).

For a long time I ignored the poetry and the treasures hidden in the heart and under the forehead of my friend. I had to reach the age of thirty, my observations had to mature and condense, a stream of bright light had to cast these observations in a new perspective so that I could understand the scope of the phenomena to which I had been an unwitting witness. . . . I had been enthralled without being able to explain either the grandeur or the mechanism. . . . Time alone permitted me to penetrate the meaning and the facts that abound in this unknown life, as they do in so many other lives lost to science. (606-7)

* * * * *

It is quite peculiar that somebody hasn't resurrected under the name Anthropology the teaching of occult philosophy, one of the glories of the old University. In this respect, Germany, a country that is at once so great and so childlike, is ahead of France because they teach this science there, which is far more useful than all of the different PHILOSOPHIES, which are all the same. (Balzac, *Cousin Pons*)

That Balzac aspired to writing anthropological theory is hardly a revelation, especially since Balzac, himself, on occasion described his intellectual activity as "anthropological." In reference to a treatise called *The Pathology of Social Life*, he indicates for example that his aim was to analyze how "man obeys the fantasies that society plants in him" (XI 1726), "to codify the laws of external existence"
(1726), to write a "complete Anthropology" (1726). What is more, critics such as Pierre Castex have already drawn attention to the fact that anthropology constituted something of an obsession for Balzac in his early career: "To found an anthropology, to scientifically reconstitute man, to study his ideas, his language, his faculties, to write a theory of human thought that would surpass the works of Locke, Condillac, Helvétius, Cabanis and the Idéologues, this was Balzac's first great project" (1716).

What it is missing in previous discussions of Balzac's anthropological thinking, however, is the extent to which desiring mimesis plays a role in his theorizations of the human and, furthermore, to what extent Balzac's novels take over where his explicitly theoretical works leave off. Though it is true that Balzac's increasing commercial success as a novelist caused a sharp decline in his theoretical publications, we need not conclude from this that his anthropological ambitions dried up or were put on hold. Such a conclusion is expressed by Castex, for example, when he says: "If the creator of the _Human Comedy_ had not prematurely exhausted his forces, perhaps in order to crown his monument he would have added to his _Analytical Studies_ the great theoretical treatise which had been the ambition of the schoolboy at Vendôme, Louis Lambert or Honoré Balzac" (XI 1732). The implication here is that the theoretical substance of what Balzac might have expressed in the unwritten treatise was not expressed in the _Human Comedy_, whereas I would argue the opposite--that _Louis Lambert_ should be read as a self-conscious examination of the quandaries of theorizing desire in a work such as the "Treatise of Will."

6

Balzac's conception of desiring mimesis and its paradoxes could have come from several sources including Aristotle, Dante, or various Renaissance poets and humanists sensitive to the mimetic paradoxes of master-disciple relations. But an almost certain precursor was the Christian ideal of _imitatio Christi_ that Balzac appears to have picked up from Thomas à Kempis's _Imitation of Jesus Christ_. Numerous references to this book are scattered throughout the _Human Comedy_, and it plays a central role in his last novel, _The Underside of Contemporary History_. Balzac's personal cynicism aside, he admired Christianity for its social and political "utility," and more particularly, for its self-conscious harnessing of mimetic desire to a divine model. For Balzac, Christ's radical difference and his mediation of divine love sublates the vanity of human desire by yoking it to a collective and ethical (because non-conflictual) praxis:

Now, it is impossible not to be taken by _The Imitation_, which is to dogma what action is to thought. Catholicism vibrates in it, moves in it, agitates, takes on human life in hand to hand battle. . . . There is a feeling superior to all others, a soul to soul love that resembles rare flowers. . . . It's an attachment without deception, without quarrels, without vanity, without conflict, without contrasts even, so equally melded together are the moral beings. This immense, infinite feeling, born of Catholic charity, Godefroid was beginning to perceive its delights (71-72). . . These virtues were contagious; [Godefroid] was taken by the desire to imitate the unknown hero, and he wound up studying passionately the book he had at first despised (116).

Balzac, of course, has no illusions about the restoration of Christianity. The values and imitative practices described in _The Underside_, inspiring as they may be to his character, Godefroid, are supported by only a tiny secret society whose practical effect on the marketplace of ideas of 19th-century Paris is nil. The utility of _The Underside_ for our purposes, however, is that it lifts visibly to the surface the
hidden mimetic force behind the social pathologies portrayed in other novels. It thus indirectly reveals
the historical reasons for modern society's "need" for anthropology. Born at the time when Christianity's
transcendent form of knowing was being decoupled from the imitative practices grounded in it,
anthropology would serve as a diagnostics for (and corrective to) the new operations and expressions of
Christian mimesis. (9) Even if modern desire had in theory been detached from religious ideals and was
now informed by Reason, this did not mean, in Balzac's view, that it necessarily could recognize its
hidden operations or limits. On the contrary, a residual "religious" passion for the Christian infinite
would remain intact; however, it would now look for models and objects along a horizontal axis where
lasting satisfaction, by definition, cannot be found.

This explains why Lambert's impossible desire to find the final word for his "divine sensation" in a
scientific treatise leads to disaster, and it explains the pathologies of the other searchers of absolutes in
the Philosophical Studies who all mistakenly choose immanent forms of expression for their infinite
desires. Balzac, himself, in fact states quite clearly in the "Preface to the Mystical Book" that the trilogy
of The Proscribed, Louis Lambert and Seraphita "offers the clear expression of the religious thought that,
like a soul, is the foundation of this long work" (i.e., the Philosophical Studies). He goes on to say that he
admires his contemporaries who are engaged in "stretching the limits of the human sciences" (XI 502)
and that "however much he bows before the glories of mathematics and the miracles of chemistry, he
believes, if one admits the existence of spiritual worlds, that the most beautiful theorems have no utility,
that all calculations of the finite are outstripped by the infinite" (502-3). Writing within an historical
context in which faith was being overtaken by doubt, and where divine love and grace were being
supplanted by skepticism and rational analysis, where collective social values were giving way to
individualism, the questions to be raised, declares Balzac, are these: "What form will the religious feeling
assume? What will be its new expression?"

"Almost religious" were the words used earlier to describe the narrator's emotions for Lambert; but
elsewhere we can locate more explicit Christian analogies of his former, childhood attachment, such as:
"[Lambert's] system led to passive obedience, the example of which was offered by Jesus Christ" (XI 642); or: "Jesus was for [Lambert] the most beautiful example of his system: Et verbum caro factum est"
(639). Though the analogy between the narrator's devotion to Lambert and the Christian's devotion to
Christ is unmistakable, Lambert does not prove sufficiently substantive, either as model or as "Word
made flesh," to satisfy the narrator's religious desire. Lambert lacks the metaphysical grounding that
Christ had once had--a fact the narrator discovers before it's too late. However, like Christ, Lambert
predicts that after his death he will "reappear" to his disciple: "You will live, but I will die. If possible, I
will reappear to you" (638). As it turns out, Lambert does reappear in a kind of mock resurrection in the
flash of retrospective insight alluded to earlier. (10) This reappearance, however fleeting and
metaphysically ungrounded, takes on a sacred function for the narrator because it is the fortuitous
self-understanding he gains from this experience of involuntary memory that permits him to will his
detachment from Lambert and to go on to write a sober account of his lost illusions.

Though a sham, Lambert's science did teach the narrator something "scientific" after all, but only in the
most circuitous and improbable way. It taught him to observe an impulse that can both blind and provide
insight, that can both enslave and lead to the most liberating form of self-transcendence. It is as a
monument to this discovery alone that the name "Lambert" retains any importance for the narrator. In
fact, without the narrator's chronicle, which serves as a kind of liturgical ritual to his friend's unknown
but sacred spirit, Lambert's name would have remained entirely forgotten to historical memory: he is
buried under a tombstone "without name, without date" (XI 692).

Yet recalling that the narrator, Lambert, and his "Treatise of Will" are, after all, Balzac's self-conscious fictional inventions, we might eventually come to see that Lambert's sacrality is constructed offstage through an act of creative violence. The improbability of Lambert's being destroyed and buried without a communal memorializing of these events draws attention to the fact that Balzac's narrator has destroyed and un-named his own creation (XI 657). Similar, then, to the "catastrophe" of Lambert's treatise ("It was in memory of the catastrophe of Louis's book that. . . ." [634]), Lambert, too, undergoes a catastrophe: we learn in the final pages that the genius and everything associated with him are in ruins, as if suddenly destroyed by some terrible, transcendent force. His treatise, his love letters, the château de Villenoix, are all presented as remnants of a lost era, while Lambert, himself, is depicted as "a piece of debris torn from his grave," a mind "broken into pieces, like an empire too vast" (692). Even Lambert's name is at one point marked by fragmentation: "I am not taken by any love for the two syllables Lam et bert: pronounced with veneration or with nonchalance on my tomb, they will change nothing of my destiny" (655).

These discontinuities--which are too systematically marked at every level of the text (nominal, thematic, structural) to be accidental--serve as symbolic reminders of the narrator's own self-conscious violence against his "master's" memory. Is this the violence that the narrator foreshadows when he states that, like Napoleon's burning of the Boulogne forest, Lambert's room may likewise have to be destroyed? The narrator, of course, conceals his secret hand in this violence by presenting himself as the disciple of a victim of the wider community. We see obvious examples of Lambert's victim status in the hostile resentment that he generates in his classmates and teachers at the Collège de Vendôme, in the humiliating scenes of his public punishment (where the acts of violence are compared, for example, to the infamous guillotinings of the Reign of Terror) and in his social exclusion as an adult. By playing up Lambert's victimary status within his community and by downplaying his own victimizing and exclusionary gestures, the narrator's chronicle serves the dual purpose of mythologizing Lambert's sacred difference and displacing our attention away from the latent resentment and mimetic rivalry that existed between the narrator and Lambert and that ultimately erupted in the narrator's violent act.

This resentment/rivalry remains invisible for most of the novel because Lambert's "discovery," that is, his linguistic designation of the sacred center, appeared to bind their desires into a perfect and harmonious union. But, in retrospect, we can see that this act of symbolization merely deferred their rivalry until the moment when the narrator belatedly understood that Lambert's originary designation was ungrounded, and that the sacred center was held in place only by the narrator's erroneous belief in Lambert's power to hold it in place. The narrator's violence against his own fictive creation cannot be due to some (real) blind rage or deep-seated animus; it is rather a symbolic indication of his secret understanding of the mechanism by which language works to defer resentment and violence. The novel, in that sense, should be read as a scientific hypothesis about events that cannot be observed or proven in a positive, scientific manner, but that are perhaps no less real without this proof. Thus, just as the narrator originally displaced our possible resentment against Lambert-as-scientific-genius by ploughing our desire into the false infinity of his treatise, at a deeper level, he displaces his readers' resentment against himself (as master theorist) by focusing our attention on the ephemeral and unmasterable sacred space that is evoked and withdrawn with his own word: "Lambert."
In the end, then, it is Balzac/the narrator who names the sacred center, but he simultaneously un-names it in order to indicate that a sacred center cannot be named or occupied in any durable way in modern times. The reason for this is that the modern order of representation, unlike the old Christian order, lacks the transcendental authority to guarantee this central position's sacred difference and stable symbolism. The resentment and mimetic rivalries that had once been repressed or displaced through a vertical projection of desire onto "the Word" had in Balzac's time been brought back down to the level of humanity. Nobody was exempt from resentment, least of all those who claimed a transcendent knowledge of humanity. As Balzac/the narrator demonstrates through Lambert's dramatic error: any bid for transcendent or scientific knowledge of the human is simultaneously a call for the bidder's destruction--a fact that Lambert (that is, Balzac/the narrator via Lambert) admits in a moment of lucidity:

I feel strong, energetic and could become a power; I feel in me a life so luminous that it could animate a world, but I am locked up in a sort of mineral. . . . One would need to embrace all of this world, embrace it in order to remake it; but those who have embraced and remade it like this, haven't they begun by being a cog in the machine? I would be ground into bits. To Mohammed his sword, to Jesus the cross, I will suffer an obscure death. (XI 655)

Critics often talk (with resentment) about Balzac as a God over his world--the omniscient author who masters and manipulates his characters. There is obviously some truth to this, but not, I believe, in the way people customarily conceive of his divinity. If Balzac is still read and studied some 170 years after the publication of his works it is because his secret anthropological insight taught him that the way out of the modern dilemma is to conceal one's desire for the sacred center by having a fictional surrogate stand there in one's place. Balzac's sacrifice of Lambert is thus ultimately a kind of ironic self-sacrifice: he centers himself through a fictive surrogate, but then he de-centers this position via the narrator's (mock) violence; he marks this center with a "word" and then he un-marks it through erasure. And then he renames the unnamable space created by this centering/de-centering, marking/erasing process as a novel. As the modernists would discover much later, it is precisely this ironic and paradoxical verbal dance, possible only in literature, that allows Balzac to communicate his universal thoughts about the human condition and at the same time inoculate himself against any real resentment.

8

Notes

1. Cf. Balzac, Oeuvres complètes XI, 1211-12. Though Davin signed this introduction, it is widely believed that Balzac dictated or wrote most of it. All translations except the first epigraph are my own. (back)

2. See François Roustang's Un destin si funeste for a psychoanalytic perspective on the mimetic paradoxes that occur in the relations between analysands and analysts and between practicing psychoanalysts and their master: Freud. Roustang uses the word transference in place of mimesis, but the operations and dilemmas are precisely the same. (back)

3. We can get a sense of this double gesture (theoretical fidelity and critical distancing) in the following passages: "I think I can offer a glimpse of Lambert's Treatise through the most important propositions that grounded it; but I will strip them, in spite of myself, of the ideas in which he couched them and that
served as their indispensable organization. Proceeding in a direction other than his, I took from his research the ideas that better served my system. I'm not sure if as his disciple I will be able to translate his thoughts after having assimilated them in a manner that gives them the color of my own" (XI 625).

4. For a more detailed discussion of the erotic and physiological content of Lambert's childhood science, see my "Balzac, archéologue de la conscience," in La Mémoire en Ruines, eds. Valérie-Angélique Deshoulières and Pascal Vacher, Clermont Ferrand: CRIMC, forthcoming 2000. This article emphasizes Balzac's imaginative use of an archaeological epistemology to speculate about how remote, childhood sexual events may influence events or cause psychopathologies in adult life. Balzac's combination of an archaeological heuristic and an emphasis on infantile eroticism anticipates Freudian psychoanalysis in a striking way. (back)

5. Here are three examples among many: "I remember that Lambert was led to believe that the collection of ideas to which we give the name feelings may just well be the spurt of some fluid that men produce more or less abundantly, depending on the way in which their organs have absorbed the 'generative substances' of their surroundings" (XI 678); "His forces seemed to shoot out of the organs made for projecting them. . . . This child . . . took me by the hand, squeezed it in his moist hand, so feverish had he become by his search for the truth" (623); "Dedicated already at a young age to a precocious activity, due no doubt to . . . the perfection of his organs, his forces could be summed up as an overproduction of fluid" (643). (back)

6. Here is an example of how Balzac characterizes their union: "I alone was permitted to penetrate this sublime, even divine, soul. What is closer to the heart of a child than God if not genius? Our brotherhood became so great that our classmates joined our two names; one was not pronounced without the other: The Poet-and-Pythagoras! Other names offered this kind of marriage" (XI 606). (back)

7. See Thomas Greene's Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry for an analysis of the mimetic paradoxes of master-disciple relations at work in Renaissance poetry. (back)

8. The authorship of this book has been in dispute for most of its history. Balzac cites Gerson (Jean Charlier de) as the author. Most contemporary experts, however, have come to the consensus that the real author is Thomas a Kempis. (back)

9. We see an example of the possible "corrective" value of anthropology in An Old Maid: "Doesn't [this story] demonstrate the necessity of a new kind of teaching? Doesn't it invoke [the need for] . . . the creation of a chair of anthropology, this science in which the Germans are ahead of us? Modern myths are even less understood than ancient myths, although we are being devoured by myths. . . . If Mademoiselle Cormon had been more literate, if there had been a professor of anthropology in the Department of Orne . . . would these horrible misfortunes in her conjugal life ever have taken place?" (IV 936) (back)

10. I say "mock" because the images Balzac uses in this resurrection scene play on Lambert's childhood sexual fantasies. If we recall that the narrator experiences his involuntary memory before the towers of the château de Villenoix, then the stream of bright/living light that is projected forth from it takes on entirely new meaning. (back)

11. The text offers ample evidence for the idea that the narrator has invented Lambert. Many of
Lambert's utterances, for example, can easily be interpreted as clues to interpret what the narrator is performing. When Lambert says, for example, "Wouldn't it be a beautiful book that told the adventures of the life of a word?" we can surmise that this is precisely what the narrator is doing with Lambert's "name." This idea is reinforced by other references to Christ-as-Word and to the fact that Balzac says that the novel, *Louis Lambert*, proves "in a word." The narrator also draws attention to the "constructed" nature of Lambert when he says such things as: "Those for whom this book has not yet fallen from their hands will understand, I hope, the events that remain to recount and that form a sort of second existence to this creature, or why shouldn't I say this creation...? (657). (back)

Works Cited


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Although he is not primarily known as a religious scholar, few thinkers have influenced our conception of the sacred as much as Emile Durkheim. In particular, Durkheim should be considered the principal theoretical ancestor of René Girard's notion of the sacred and subsequently of that embodied in the originary thinking of Generative Anthropology. Whence my interest in defining—in appropriating, if you like—Durkheim's anthropological legacy.

With the passing of the millennium, and of the twentieth century's political millennialism, the sacred, even in the strict, traditional sense of the term, seems much healthier than nearly anyone at the turn of the previous century expected it to be. It is also increasingly on the intellectual agenda on both ends of campus—at UCLA, the North and the South, the respective domains of the Humanities and the Sciences. With respect to the Humanities, this colloquium (June 2000) on "Transforming the Sacred" and its parent Consortium Seminar on "Sacred and Profane" provides one example; a conference scheduled for Fall 2000 on "The Pious and the Profane" at the University of Washington is another. One effect of the globalization of the study of culture has been to make humanists habituated to the Enlightenment dichotomy between reason and obscurantism aware of the salience of the sacred in other cultures and perhaps more tolerant, or at least more intellectually curious, of its importance in our own.

Yet I would venture to say that the general level at which the sacred is theorized among humanist intellectuals today is far lower than that obtaining in Durkheim's day, which was also that of Max Müller, James Frazer, Edward Tylor, and W. Robertson Smith, not to speak of Durkheim's own students. The attention
Durkheim's work on the sacred has received in recent years—in a colloquium on Durkheim and religion entitled "Vive Durkheim!" on the UCLA campus in 1997, in Vincent Pecora's talk on "Modernity, Religion, and the Social Imagination" in October 1999 to kick off the Mellon lecture series on "Sacred and Profane," and in a steady stream of scholarly works including a volume of essays on the Elementary Forms published by Routledge in 1998, not to speak of a number of active web sites—suggests an awareness of this lacuna and an increasing desire to fill it. As the notion of the sacred moves from the outlands to the periphery and thence toward the center of humanistic studies, the search for theoretical models leads in a privileged fashion to Durkheim as the last major scientific theorist of the sacred—a qualification that separates him from the provocative but dilettantish writers of the Collège de Sociologie such as Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois. As for Claude Lévi-Strauss, the successor to Durkheim's mantle in French anthropology, what excludes him from consideration is not that he dismisses Durkheim's association of the sacred with the social, but that he evacuates the difference between them by subsuming them under the neutral category of "structure." Lévi-Strauss qualifies the same structure found in the relations among gods, the patterns of tattoos, the village topography, or the distribution of marriage exchanges as "good to think"—and as resolving tensions within the group that we are tempted to qualify as mimetic. What he fails to consider is the specific dynamic of the sacred in the discovery/invention of the "good to think" as a means for achieving social cohesion.

On the South campus, the realm of science, the return to the sacred is real but more hesitant, and the need to redefine Durkheim's legacy therefore all the more urgent. What I believe to be of greatest significance in this area is the still controversial movement of evolutionary psychology. The ambition of this movement, as canonically expressed in Leda Cosmides and John Tooby's introduction to their 1992 collection The Adapted Mind, is to recapture the study of the human--and animal--mind from the hegemony of what the authors call the Standard Social Science Model or SSSM. In this model, the mind is conceived as a tabula rasa, an all-purpose information-processing organ whose content is entirely supplied by the environment (nihil in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu). Rejecting this model as both improbable in itself and as conducive to impressionistic descriptions of cultural phenomena rather than the formulation of...
testable hypotheses, the evolutionary psychologists propose in its place a mind composed of special-purpose modules pre-calibrated by evolutionary adaptation, in the Pleistocene era when *homo sapiens* emerged, for sensitivity to significant aspects of the human environment, including the social environment.

Durkheim and the sacred enter into this polemic in two places.

First, the human universality of the sacred and its practices give it a respectability from the evolutionary perspective that it did not have in latter-day versions of the SSSM. We have heard a great deal, following a notorious 1979 paper by Stephen Gould and Richard Lewontin, about "spandrels" or "exaptations," the contingent consequences of evolutionary adaptations, themselves unselected by evolution. Although the obvious importance of language to humanity gives this position an air of deliberate perversity, many Chomskian linguists, and Chomsky himself at certain moments, seem to have decided that the communicative aspect of human language, as opposed to its cognitive function, is such an exaptation. If human language, and the culture that depends on it, however adaptive they later proved to be, can be shown to be mere accidents of evolution, then, the implicit argument goes, we have no reason to feel superior to (or "fitter" than) other species; as Gould likes to say, "there is no progress in evolution."

Unfortunately, good science is not made with good--or, rather, falsely modest--sentiments. Evolutionary psychology, I think quite logically, considers universal, significant human traits as specific adaptations absent proof to the contrary. It suspects, again I think quite logically, that the enthusiastic adoption of Gould's para-evolutionary exaptations by "soft" scientists, not to speak of humanists, is a stalking-horse for the fashionable relativism reflected in the dominant position of the SSSM. Thus, in its attempt to understand the human mind in its emergent cultural context, evolutionary psychology considers the sacred along with every other universal feature of culture as a primary candidate for the status of adaptation. A typical example is Pascal Boyer's 1994 article "Cognitive constraints on cultural representations: Natural ontologies and religious ideas." Boyer's thesis is that when "counter-intuitive" religious beliefs are maintained in conjunction with "intuitive" or rational beliefs about natural phenomena they provide a "cognitive optimum" that attracts and maintains our attention. Whatever the limitations of Boyer's cognitivism, I read here a faint but real echo of Durkheim's central idea that sacred beliefs are always rational in
reference, not to the natural, but to the social world.

By the logic of evolutionary psychology, religion, as a universal human trait, must be treated as an adaptation on an equal footing with language. Yet there is little likelihood that we will discover the existence in the brain of a "religion module" or "religion acquisition device" to parallel the language-related structures situated in the Broca and Wernicke areas of the brain, not to speak of a "religion organ" comparable to the highly specialized human vocal apparatus. Precisely because the relation between religion and language--a subject virtually abandoned since the days of Max Müller in the second half of the 19th century--is not directly accessible to the hypotheses of biological evolution, it is a crucial subject for evolutionary thinking in a broader sense. Thus it is no coincidence that the relation between religion and language is both the focal point of Generative Anthropology and the point on which its debt to Durkheim is most apparent. I will return to this point below.

Durkheim's second and more visible role in the evolutionary polemic demonstrates even more directly than the first the necessity not merely of preserving the Durkheimian sacred but of fleshing out its anthropological abstraction with a concrete and, I would specify, evenemential or "scenic" mediation between the individual and society. For, ironically enough, from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, Durkheim is the arch-villain, the principal initiator of the SSSM. In the introductory chapter of *The Adapted Mind*, the epigraph to the section devoted to the SSSM is a paragraph from *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, described as "perhaps [this model's] most famous early expression." The authors italicize within this paragraph the following passage:

> . . . but [the] individual natures [of the members of society] are merely the indeterminate material that the social factor molds and transforms. Their contribution consists exclusively in very general attitudes, in vague and consequently plastic predispositions . . . (24-25)
Durkheim's notion of "society" as determining the cognitive operations of its members makes the individual mind wholly dependent on its social environment. However far Durkheim's unitary and functional notion of the social is from that, descriptive and pluralistic, of Clifford Geertz (archly noted by Cosmides and Tooby for his "literary ability to express the humanly familiar and intelligible as the exotic"), Durkheim and Geertz hold in common the view of the individual human mind as a blank slate dependent for all its categories of thought on its social environment, a view alleged as the foundational principle of the SSSM.

But if evolutionary psychology is justified in denouncing as unscientific anthropologies such as Geertz's that disdain the attempt to formulate general hypotheses concerning the human, this is hardly a reproach one could make of Durkheim. However excessive Durkheim's reliance on the "social factor" may be, this "factor" is never, as in Geertz, a pretext for culture-dependent "thick description," but always an element of a hypothetical model that seeks to derive the empirical diversity of the present from originary, fundamental characteristics of human communal organization. To quote from the first lines of Durkheim's essay on *Incest*:

In order to understand a practice or an institution, . . . it is necessary to trace it as nearly as possible to its origin; for between the form it now takes and what it has been, there is a rigorous relationship. (13)

But beyond claiming that the evolutionary-psychological critique of Durkheim throws out, as the Marxists used to say, the baby with the bathwater, I believe that the weaknesses this critique points out are remediable through a reformulation of Durkheimian thought precisely, but more radically, in the sense of the passage just quoted: by tracing the ensemble of social practices and institutions to their origin. If what is lacking in Durkheim is a concrete articulation between the individual mind and the community that supplies that mind with its language and its particular understanding of the sacred, the central aim of Generative Anthropology is to supply such an articulation.
If Durkheim is increasingly remembered as the author of the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* rather than the *Division of Labor* or even *Suicide*, it is because his work on religion grounds the otherwise diffuse notion of the "social" in a set of collective representations that embody a given society's self-consciousness. Durkheim's insistence that even the most apparently irrational religious ideas correspond to real needs of the social order makes use of an argument not unlike that of the evolutionists: if all societies invest a great deal of mental energy in religious ideas that convey no useful information about the natural world, these ideas must be of value, not in some nebulous "spiritual" sense, but for the very survival of the social order.

But this reduction of religion to "ideas" is the sign of a problem. For Durkheim, religious representations are a projection of a society's ideal vision of itself; to share these representations is to internalize the beliefs of this society, beliefs that could in principle be formulated as a set of propositions. Durkheim is aware that the most salient aspect of tribal religion is ritual ceremony, and Book 3 of *Elementary Forms* includes descriptions--at second-hand--of such ceremonies. In Durkheim's theoretical model, religious practice is a means to reinforce within the participants' minds the values of society as a whole over the selfish concerns of everyday life:

> On feast days . . . their thoughts are centered upon their common beliefs, their common traditions, the memory of their great ancestors, the collective ideal of which they are the incarnation; in a word, upon social things. . . . So it is society that is in the foreground of every consciousness; it dominates and directs all conduct; this is equivalent to saying that it is more living and active, and consequently more real, than in profane times. . . . The individual soul is regenerated too, by being dipped again in the source from which its life comes; consequently it feels itself stronger, more fully master of itself, less dependent upon physical necessities. (390-91)

Even when his description goes beyond "common beliefs" to "common traditions" and the "collective ideal," the sacred remains for Durkheim a set of representations that resist what he calls "the antagonistic tendencies aroused and supported by the necessities of the daily struggle." Durkheim conceives these
"antagonistic tendencies" as entropic forces that threaten to sap the vigor of sacred representations, rather than, as I believe they must be conceived, as posing the very critical danger to human survival that the sacred and its representations came into being to defer.

So long as we understand sacred representations as the equivalent of logical propositions, we risk falling into a cultural relativism that misconstrues the social as permitting any belief at all. Because someone who can learn one proposition can just as well learn another, the basis for the choice can only lie in the social group that inculcates it rather than in the individual mind itself. Durkheim certainly understands religious beliefs as selected for by social evolution if not by human evolution *stricto sensu*. But even if all societies shared a single set of beliefs, the abstract relationship of the proposition of religious belief to the individual mind still leaves the latter an undefined *tabula rasa*.

For Durkheim the educator, religion is analogous to a school in which collective representations are the subject-matter and religious rites, pedagogical techniques to insure their retention. The limit of this analogy is situated precisely at the juncture of the individual and society or "culture" that evolutionary psychology seeks to investigate. Although ritual may plausibly be explained as a technique for regenerating the beliefs of the clan, to seek the common origin of the ritual and the beliefs leads one to formulate a hypothesis concerning the genesis of human society and culture, if not of "the human" itself. For if ritual came first, what beliefs would it transmit? If beliefs came first, how were they shared and affirmed? Once we begin to follow this line of reasoning, we can no longer accept as fundamental, or, in a terminology that I prefer, as *minimal*, Durkheim's conception of the sacred as a projection of the social ideal.

5

A text that allows us a particularly sharp look at both the strengths and the weaknesses of Durkheim's sociological epistemology is *Primitive Classification (De quelques formes primitives de classification)*, written in collaboration with his nephew Marcel Mauss in 1901-02, a decade before *Elementary Forms*, and published in the *Année sociologique*. This essay, in which Australian examples are followed by Amerindian and Chinese, deserves to be called the cornerstone of French structural anthropology. What distinguishes it from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss two generations later is its conception of social causality. Where
Lévi-Strauss agnostically describes a "structure," Durkheim and Mauss insist that classificatory systems have their origin in social organization. Although they admit in their conclusion that "we still do not know what the forces were which induced men to divide things as they did between the classes," they nevertheless remain steadfast in asserting that the logical connections between the spaces and objects they allude to are "represented in the form of familial connections, or as relations of economic or political subordination, so that the same sentiments which are the basis of domestic, social, and other kinds of organization have been effective in this logical division also" (85).

We gain insight into the difficulties this doctrine poses to empirical anthropology by the Introduction to the English translation of *Primitive Classification* by the British structuralist Rodney Needham, published in 1963. It is striking that although Needham, no less than Durkheim and Geertz, falls under Cosmides and Tooby's condemnation of the SSSM, his fundamental criticism of Durkheim is nearly identical to theirs. After first reminding Durkheim à la Lévi-Strauss that mere correspondence between social and symbolic classification tells us nothing about causality, Needham continues:

The second point of general criticism is the more serious, since it shows Durkheim and Mauss's entire venture to have been misconceived. They aptly call their essay a "contribution to the study of collective representations," but their real concern throughout is to study a faculty of the human mind. They make no explicit distinction between the two topics, and indeed they argue as though there were none to be made, so that conclusions derived from a study of collective representations are taken to apply directly to cognitive operations. . . . Durkheim and Mauss are led by this ambiguous conception of mind to assert that the individual mind is incapable of classification, and their venture as they conceive it derives much of its justification from this assumption. Now no one would pretend that the individual could ever construct, without education in the categories of his society, a complex classification of collective representations such as the society has inherited from a long history. But this in no way implies that the individual mind
lacks the innate faculty of classification; and it would be
difficult to conceive, in any case, how an individual might
even apprehend a classification unless the mind were
inherently capable of the essential operations by which
classes are constituted. (xxvi-xxviii)

That is, whatever the contribution of "society," the individual mind must possess
specific faculties prior to and independent of any given social organization. The
human mind must have the capacity to process information concerning its spatial
environment and to distinguish significant objects in that environment, as well as,
in Needham's words, "an innate capacity to learn to classify." No doubt
Needham's conception of these faculties is broader and less modular than
Cosmides and Tooby's, but the conceptual point is the same.

6

Thus evolutionary psychology's critique of structural anthropology as
over-determined by the "cultural" is presaged by the critique advanced by
structural anthropology itself against Durkheim's radical attempt to derive all
human thought from the single independent variable of the "social." Because
Durkheim's hypothesis fails to articulate the relationship between the social and
the individual, it is incompatible with the empirical study of the behavior of
human individuals not merely in the context of evolutionary psychology but even
in that of the SSSM.

But if the critiques are similar, the proposed solutions are not. Where
evolutionary psychology demotes the social to the status of a cultural
environment for the adaptations of the individual mind, structural anthropology,
denying the possibility of making either the social or the psychological the
independent variable, contents itself with elucidating the "structures" that lie
behind both.

I believe an alternative solution is possible that permits us to protect Durkheim
and Mauss's essential anthropological intuition from the empiricist critique to
which, in its original form, it is all too vulnerable. By rethinking Durkheim from
the perspective of originary anthropology, we can show why, despite the abstract
treatment of the social individual that no doubt made inevitable the long
dominance of social science by the relativistic SSSM, the fundamental thrust of
Durkheim's work is not vulnerable to the reductive critique of evolutionary psychology.

The rethinking I am suggesting begins by violating Durkheim's taboo concerning the origin of the sacred representations by means of which the social is generated as a conscious human reality. Durkheim claims that "[t]here was no given moment when religion began to exist . . . Like every human institution, religion did not commence anywhere. Therefore, all speculations of this sort can be discarded" (EF 20). He wants to "get as near as possible to the origins" through the study of empirical data, but not to speculate on the origin itself. Yet as Durkheim recognized in other contexts, it is only by considering human society as a phenomenon emerging in time that we can begin to understand the fundamental benefits that its specifically human aspects--language, religion, and other forms of representation--provide to its members.

It is inconceivable that our physical and mental adaptations to human language--the lowered larynx studied by Philip Lieberman, Broca's and Wernicke's areas in the brain--evolved before the use of language itself. This use must have become adaptive before any adaptations designed to facilitate it. Durkheim is constantly concerned with collective "representations," but shows little interest in language per se, as though there were no need to explain the evolutionary genesis of the most important medium for such representations. Yet the crucial importance of these representations to the social order suggests that they were themselves the originary material of language, and that the social is dependent on the existence of language as the carrier of these representations. If this is so then we are obliged to found the empirical study of human culture, even "elementary" human culture, on a hypothesis concerning the coeval origin of language and the sacred representations constitutive of social self-consciousness.

No attempt to tell the story of the origin of language and culture can ever wholly disembarrass itself of the chicken-and-egg paradox in which the existence of the thing that originates is presupposed by the explanation of its origin; but--and this is my key contention--the minimal kernel of such narratives is by no means invalidated by this fact. Culture--language and the sacred--is in the first place deferral; the originary event of culture is a non-event of the natural world of appropriation that opens a space for a new social or cultural form of evolution that comes in turn to drive human biological evolution. By assigning to
Durkheim's social sacred functions not simply in maintaining human society against "antagonistic tendencies" but of generating this society in order to preserve the members of our species from self-destruction through these all-too-familiar "tendencies," we not only become able to defend Durkheim's social sacred from the critique of evolutionary psychology, but we make possible a genuine dialogue between a humanistic anthropology and evolutionary science.

When in 1972 René Girard formulated his generative model of the sacred in *Violence and the Sacred*, he proved himself the true successor of Durkheim in French anthropology. For Girard, the sacred is essential to the functioning of human society because it alone can protect us from self-destruction through mimetic violence. What is missing from Girard, but what becomes possible to envisage on the basis of his work, is a hypothesis concerning the origin of language and other forms of representation. If language originated as a means to defer mimetic violence, then that very freedom for general-purpose thinking that is the central intuitive basis of the SSSM itself derives from the cultural, if not in the first place genetic, adaptiveness of the origin of representation. To reason in this manner is to reject the insipid relativism of the *tabula rasa* without denying or ignoring the freedom and variability of individual human beings and their cultures. This strikes me as the best way to appropriate, and to honor, Durkheim's legacy.

**Works Cited**


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This is largely a French issue; three of our four articles deal with French subjects. Jeffrey Spisak's article on mimetic desire in Rousseau was revised from a graduate paper; Scott Sprenger's study of Balzac's anthropology is part of his book project on Balzac; and Eric Gans's text on Durkheim was his contribution to a recent colloquium on "Transfiguring the Sacred," sponsored by the UCLA Humanities Consortium (under whose auspices Scott Sprenger was chosen last year from over a hundred candidates to spend two years at UCLA on a Mellon Fellowship). For a little extra-terrestrial variety, we also include Tom Bertonneau's article on the anti-sacrificial in science fiction, our first article in a field which is one of Tom's many specialties.

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Tom Bertonneau, an original member of the GA seminar, received his Ph.D. from UCLA in Comparative Literature in 1990. His dissertation applied GA to the study of the modern epic: William Carlos Williams' Paterson and Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés..." Since then he has published and presented papers on Williams, Wallace Stevens, Charles Olson, and other American authors, as well as on theoretical topics (and science fiction). Tom has also written for Heterodoxy, Chronicles, Academic Questions, and National Review, and is well known in Michigan for his controversial writings on college English teaching.

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