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In Honor of René Girard

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On the last page of his great book Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, 1979, René Girard wrote the following lines. According to Martha’s wish I will first read it in French so that René’s native tongue is heard during this memorial. I regret that I am unable to say it with his beautiful Provençal accent which he kept during all his American life:

Je crois que la vérité n’est pas un vain mot, ou un simple « effet » comme on dit aujourd’hui. Je pense que tout ce qui peut nous détourner de la folie et de la mort, désormais, a partie liée avec cette vérité. Mais je ne sais pas comment parler de ces choses-là. Seuls les textes et les institutions me paraissent abordables, et leur rapprochement me paraît lumineux sous tous les rapports.

An approximate translation could read as follows:

I do not believe that truth is a vain word, no more than a sham as many contend today. I believe that from now on everything that can divert us from madness and death is intimately linked to that truth. However I am unable to address these things properly. I am only good at reading texts and analyzing institutions, but this sheds an incredible light on our world.

It is vertiginous to consider that René has now the possibility of contemplating that truth without mediation. At least, that’s what he believed when he pondered over Saint Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians: "Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate: For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." But what do these little words: "now", "then", mean or refer to? And what truth is that?

Once René told his daughter Mary that he had managed—and that is true—to produce the first truly secular account of this fact that should be the central focus of any science of the human: all known human societies are governed by what anthropologists of the old school named the sacred—all societies save one: ours, which we call modernity. And this because our modern world is shaped by the Christian message and the latter is responsible for the de-sacralization of the world.

We know that the truth, human but revealed, that René has been searching for all his life has to do with the relationship between violence and the sacred. I cannot believe that what happened during the night of November 13th to 14th of last year was a sheer coincidence. Just a few hours before the first memorial service for René was celebrated in the church of Thomas Aquinas here in Palo Alto, Paris was struck by a series of abominable terrorist attacks. The cruel irony is that René’s hypothesis, as he liked to call his fundamental insight, provides the best account for this insane deployment of violence.

It’s neither the place nor the time to flesh out what René could have said about the wave of terrorist violence that is sweeping the world today. Only this: "They hated me without reason" says the Gospel of John that René preferred to quote in this translation. The usual version is "without a cause." But the Greek original (dôron) refers to the gratuitousness of God’s gift to the world. Isn’t it astounding that the violence Christ is victim of should be referred to by the very word that serves to designate the absence of reason that presides over God’s love for us? The terrorists’ violence certainly has a million causes that have been analyzed by as many scholarly articles. But as far as reason is concerned, this violence doesn’t go beyond murderous imbecility. In his last book, the most pessimistic of all, René Girard prophesized that this violence...
which he called "essential" was about to carry off everything in its path.

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The influence of Shakespeare's lyricism on the work of Lord Byron is undeniable, yet among the Romantic poets there is perhaps no author so derisive of his literary forbear than the author of Childe Harold and Don Juan. Byron's famous claim that he was born for opposition (Don Juan 15.22) highlights the antagonistic mimeticism that animates his ambition for literary greatness and significance as an early literary celebrity. However, Byron's celebration of his vocation for contrarian opinion and action is not without irony or self-criticism. Indeed, in his engagement with Shakespeare, Byron struggles to articulate the process of desire that alternately causes him to appropriate and repudiate the lyricism of his famous predecessor. As Jonathan Bate has argued, Byron's public derogations of Shakespeare are a pose that hides the respect he had for the playwright's powerful poetic vision, a regard which is recorded most comprehensively in the Shakespearean references of Don Juan (Bate 230-231). As Girard demonstrates in A Theatre of Envy, Shakespeare recognizes the emulous nature of desire and uses his plays and lyric poems to expose its machinations. Shakespeare's exposition of mimeticism as the true source of sacral violence is part of the wider modern shift away from ritual society, wherein religious means of mitigating desire's potentially inimical movements are supplemented with an increased reliance on market society to defer the effects of emulation and resentment. With his widely remarked upon knowledge of Shakespeare,(1) Byron's poetic vision—in its observations on the contagious nature of desire—bears traces of Shakespeare's own vivid representations of imitation as a conduit for his characters' lusts, cupidity, ambitions, and violence. Though Don Juan contains the bulk of Byron's allusions to Shakespeare's plays, in his lyric poems Byron's speakers echo conceptions of desire's interindividuality that resemble those of Shakespeare's most famous lyrics: the Sonnets.

Unlike drama, the lyric poem is typically understood as referring primarily to the individual speaker's affective and personal experience. However, the boundary between the dramatic and lyric genres is not impermeable, as both Shakespeare's Sonnets and Byron's lyrics demonstrate. While lyric poems typically present the reader with a single speaker, they often refer to other figures, who relate to the speaker along lines of reciprocal desire. Shakespeare's Sonnets figure the imitative quality of this mimetic reciprocity, as it manifests in the complex relationships between the figures of the poets, the young man, and dark lady. Helen Vendler, Eve Sedgwick, and René Girard all note the compelling nature of the drama that the Sonnets' speaker obliquely refers to in his addresses and reflections. By focusing on this drama, Sedgwick and Girard extrapolate sociopsychological insights, which are sharpened by examining the speaker's nuanced subjective analysis of his situation relative to the other figures. Simon Palfry and Tiffany Stern's recent research into the early modern practice of dividing a play into materially distinct, individual parts illuminates the continuity between the lyric and the dramatic by pointing out how Shakespeare, as a playwright and an actor, understood each role as provisionally separable from the drama as a whole. Practically speaking, these parts function as atomized lyrical reflections on a larger drama in a mode similar to both the Sonnets' and Byron's lyrics. Byron's poems echo the Sonnets' dramatization of a particular subject's intimate mimetic relationships, emotions, and thoughts as they pertain to the socius as it changes through time. Byron's refiguring of the mimetic dynamics in the Sonnets serves to tragically dramatize his own life, as it engages flows of desire operating beyond the traditional subjectivity of lyric poetry and touches the passions driving the social and political events of his day, which he understood as having world-historical import.
In Shakespeare's oeuvre there is perhaps no more explicit and concise a rendering of mimetic desire than that found in Sonnet 42:

That thou hast her, is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;
That she hath thee is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:
Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her,
And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,
Suff'ring my friend for my sake to approve her.
If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss:
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake lay on me this cross.
    But here's the joy: my friend and I are one.
Sweet flattery! Then she loves but me alone.

Here, the imitative nature of desire appears in the context of a familiar triangle of sexual rivalry. The poet speaks to his young male lover regarding his longing, which is directed towards both the poem's intended auditor and the dark lady of whom it speaks. The pair have formed a bond that excludes the speaker, but—because of the imitated desire that links him to both figures—he forgives their betrayal. The young man "dost love her because [he] know'st I love her," while she accepts the young man's favour "for my sake," or—in other words—because she knows how strong the poet's desire for the young man is. Thus, desire circulates between the three figures by way of their reciprocal imitation. This realization is the sonnet's concluding claim, towards which the poet moves over the course of the lyric as he discards unacceptable notions of his and his two lovers' autonomous desire. The differences between the three figures are effaced in the final couplet, which nevertheless—in its use of the personal pronoun and assertion of singularity—hints at the maudlin instability of the poet's self-consoling resolution. The resolution is provisional however, as the mimetic drama of this love triangle—which in the Sonnets is only described by one unanswered voice at a time—cannot ultimately have a conclusion, as the imitative desire the lyrics describe circulates endlessly.

The Sonnets' reflections on the nature of mimetic desire are manifold and showcase the multiplicity of the phenomenon's emotional and symbolic effects. For example, sonnets 1-17 urge the young man to mirror his beauty in the production of a child—or an act of biological mimesis—a possibility that the poet sees threatened by the advance of time. Other examples are found in the discussion of symbolic thought's capacity to represent through imaginative mimesis the image of the desired lover (see Sonnets 44-47). Sonnet 77 typifies the poet's fascination with representation—be it in verse, mirrors, or merely in the poet's mind—as a function of desire, the pains and pleasures of which are ultimately represented as subject to the necessity of death as a result of time's movement. Along with the broader reflections on mimesis, the triangular configuration of desire between the three figures persists into the later sonnets. Take for example the opening conceit of 134:

So, now I have confessed that he is thine,
And I myself am mortgaged to thy will,
Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still: . . .

The poet again admits he will imitate the desire of the dark lady for the young man. Thus, the mimetic logic of the Sonnets recursively asserts itself, as Shakespeare elaborates the intractability of the interindividual relationship that dominates his lyric imagination. In his final two sonnets, he turns to Greek myth and the Ovidian figure of Cupid to situate the mimetic scenario his verses elaborate as a timeless and enduring configuration of desire. In these poems, Cupid's arrow of love, or symbol of desire, is appropriated by a woman who uses it to contaminate a well that might have liberated the speaker from the "disease" of desire; when he immerses himself in the desire-contaminated water, the speaker's amorous feelings are
predictably all the more inflamed.

The sociopsychological insights Shakespeare's sonnets contain are often noted by critics. Wishing to return scholarship of the Sonnets to primarily literary concerns, Helen Vendler's *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1997) criticizes Eve Sedgwick's sociological reading of the poems by denouncing it the result of a widespread, "persistent wish to turn the [sonnet] sequence into a novel (or a drama) [.. which] speaks to the interests of the sociopsychological critic, whose aim is less to inquire into the successful carrying-out of a literary project than to investigate the representation of gender relations" (2). In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Sedgwick examines the triangular configuration of the Sonnets' characters in terms of gender and the asymmetry of power that such relations necessarily involve. Vendler admits that the sonnets lend themselves to such a project, if only because the lyric form allows for virtually any reader to identify with the speaker: "Because lyric is intended to be voiceable by anyone reading it, in its normative form it deliberately strips away most social specification (age, regional location, sex, class, even race)" (2). The power of the Sonnets' lyric form derives from this capacity to allow its reader to inhabit a given narrative position along with all of his or her unique experiences and assumptions, personal elements which complicate the poem's reception and allow the reader to reflect on the point of view the work provides.

In her gendered reading of the Sonnets, Sedgwick takes up Girard's identification of triangular desire in the nineteenth-century novel to demonstrate that he (like other European male voices) assumes that the symmetrical relationships in the poems illustrate gender equality in terms of power distribution within sexual relations between men and women. Sedgwick's aim is to expose the transhistorical affirmation of male privilege accomplished via Girard's and Shakespeare's disregard for the inequality inherent to gendered power relations, which systematically disadvantage women. Sedgwick argues that both Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* and Shakespeare's Sonnets propagate the myth of equality between the sexes by emphasizing the image of the symmetrical balance supposed by the geometric figure of the triangle:

Girard's reading presents itself as one whose symmetry is undisturbed by such differences as gender; although the triangles that most shape his view tend, in the European tradition, to involve bonds of 'rivalry' between males 'over' a woman, in his view any relation of rivalry is structured by the same play of emulation and identification. (*Between Men* 22)

When undertaking a reading of Sonnet 42, which begins her more general engagement with the poems, Sedgwick observes "[t]he Girardian point that the speaker cares as much about the fair youth as about the dark lady," with whom he is a rival, is also "Shakespeare's point, and no critic is likely to be more obsessive about the orderliness of the symmetry than the poet himself" (29). Sedgwick's task is to demonstrate that the bond of rivalry joining the speaker and the dark lady is, in reality, unbalanced by the stronger homosocial bond already existing between the poet and the young man, a bond of male complicity which is always smuggled into relations between the sexes. While she is effective in seeking a more sophisticated rendering of the movements of desire operating in both the triangles of the European novel and those of the Sonnets, Sedgwick's analysis disregards the dynamically imitative nature of the desire that first establishes the triangles. These relations of imitative desire must necessarily shift the configuration's geometric alignments as the dramatic movements of the works unfold.

While differences in the relative social power of the subjects are an important part of understanding the poems, they do not diminish the importance of imitation as an impetus for desire. As they are intimately related, gendered power relations must be considered alongside the mimetic motivations that drive action. Sedgwick does not challenge Girard or Shakespeare's observations regarding the imitative nature of desire in his speaker's choice of objects; indeed, she hardly mentions imitation at all. In *A Theatre of Envy*, which appeared six years after Sedgwick's *Between Men*, Girard would examine the mimetic triangles of Shakespeare's Sonnet 42 and note the intuitive quality of mimetic theory for all readers by observing that "[w]ithout mimetic theory we cannot even summarize this poem competently" (*A Theatre of Envy* 298). In his reading of the poem, Girard's focus is on demonstrating that the Sonnets' characters are always implied to stand in some type of mimetic relation, wherein power shifts as the subjects' desires shift in varying intensity between multiple mediators (300-01).

In making this argument, Girard gestures towards the generic question of how the lyric poem, as a rendering
of an individual perspective, assumes and sets up a wider implied world, which—for the poem to be interesting to the greatest number of readers—must reflect a broad set of social circumstances or experiences. Jealousy is a dominant theme in the Sonnets for this reason, as, in Sonnet 42, the speaker attempts to resign himself to the outcome of his unsuccessful contest with his model; or when (as Girard observes of Sonnet 144) one figure experiences the angst of doubt in his potential exclusion from the relationship he supposes to exist between his "[t]wo loves." The broader social context suggested by this "acute jealousy could be," Girard states, "the intellectual ferment out of which the idea of such [Shakespearean] characters as Phebe, Silvius, Orsino, Pandarus, Claudio, Othello, Leontes, and many others arose" (306). Girard's argument that the lyric form of a given sonnet is a fragment of a larger dramatic narrative, or scene, interior to author and reader gains further credence in light of the material circumstances of the early modern dramatic production that Shakespeare's lyrics and dramas emerge from.

Recent Shakespeare scholarship has taken an interest in the interdividual forces that shaped the dramas of the early modern period, and this interest points again to the mimetic desire represented in Shakespeare's works, which depend on a sharp awareness of how the lyric subjectivity expressed in a particular player's part reflects upon and feeds back into larger intersubjective movements of desire. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern's Shakespeare in Parts (2007) explores the connection of the play's atomized roles to the rest of the drama, its creators, and characters. Their study proceeds by examining how Shakespeare's early modern players' individually transcribed parts—as distinct text detached from the complete draft of the play—"lead to remarkable innovations in creating subjectivity and engineering dramatic affect, producing on-stage drama of unprecedented immediacy" (12). The study concerns itself with the reciprocity between players and playwright by reading its movement in the structure of the players' individual parts. Palfrey and Stern dramatize the collaborative process of playwriting: "Even as [Shakespeare] was meditating upon some brand new work, deep within the fabled smithy of his imagination, part of the metal must have been his mates, their jokes or aura or expectations, the voices from the previous day's playing or the night's carousing" (4). They do this in order to gesture towards a theory of influence, the basis of which is left in vaguely social terms:

What matters are the years and years of experience, of working in each others' pockets, that ensures both repetition and difference; what matters is the individual actor working with the part by himself, picking up everything, identifying with everything, remembering and anticipating everything. (6)

Thus, the individual parts of the actors Shakespeare worked with for so many years become reciprocal—often repetitively imitative or rivalrously different—responses to their collaborator's desires, in which real social relationships are written into the individual parts of the play. Of course, the detailed milieu that forms the backdrop for these part-cum-poems necessarily remains largely irretrievable, as the necessity of the plots and characters of the plays themselves apply formative pressure to the parts' lyrical expressions of subjective desires. Nevertheless, by atomizing the play into a series of discrete parts, Palfrey and Stern open another way to valorize the social import of subjective lyric expression in the Sonnets, which similarly present the reader with a solitary individual's perspective on the larger drama that occasions his verse. "We cannot grasp the part," they write of the plays' fragmented elements, "without first sensing the whole; but equally, we will not know the whole without first rethinking the part" (10). The same could be said of the various imagined narratives uniting the fractured dramatic "parts" known as the Sonnets. In both Shakespeare's Sonnets and plays, a combined multiplicity of subjective voices illustrate the role of imitation in shaping behaviour and plot, and thereby provide a glimpse of the common human experience of desire. Thus from the mimetically impelled wishes of the individual lyrical speakers in Shakespeare's fragmented dramas and poems, multiple histories of desire contribute to a more general theorization of desire's imitative nature.

* * *

In its ventriloquism of the multiplicity of subjectivities animated to ceaseless conflict via the imitative exchanges that constitute history, Byron's lyric poetry represents an experience of desire that mirrors in macrocosmic dimensions the effects of mimetic desire figured by Shakespeare's speaker in the Sonnets. According to Jerome McGann, Byron's lyric voice depicts the determinism that drives the subject ineluctably
into a desolate future, providing a vision which is often troubled by its apprehension of the personal pain wrought by mimetic entanglements. Reflecting on Byron's lyricism—especially as it is exemplified in "The Prophecy of Dante," wherein Byron theatrically adopts the Florentine's persona—McGann states that Byron's version of the "poet literally tells the tale of his own damnation, including the damnation of his poetry," and notes that "[w]hat is worse (from any normative moral and aesthetic point of view), the poet does not ask his readers to transvalue the values by which it will be condemned" since "[a]ll is cursed" (220). McGann's reading aptly characterizes the following lines from the poem, which also betray Byron's awareness of the collective mimetic forces driving his own and Dante's elevation to both ignominious exile and acclaimed positions in cultural history:

"What have I done to thee, my People?" Stern
Are all thy dealings, but in this they pass
The limits of Man's common malice, for
All that a citizen could be I was—
Raised by thy will, all thine in peace or war—
And for this thou hast warred with me.—'Tis done:
I may not overlap the eternal bar
Built up between us, and will die alone,
Beholding with the dark eye of a Seer
The evil days to gifted souls foreshown,
Foretelling them to those who will not hear;
As in the old time, till the hour be come
When Truth shall strike their eyes through many a tear,
And make them own the Prophet in his tomb. (4.141-51)

These lines, which come near the end of the poem, echo in more desolate terms the closing sentiment of Shakespeare's Sonnet 42. Like Shakespeare's speaker, Byron's Dante has endeavoured to give himself wholly to a beloved other: his erstwhile Florentine fellows. As in Sonnet 42, the speaker is not free to pursue autonomously chosen ends, but is "raised by thy will, all thine in peace or war." Though the two poems' speakers are subject to a radically mimetic sympathy, Shakespeare's speaker (at least in Sonnet 42) is able to fashion a more definitive conclusion than is Byron's Dante. Where Shakespeare rhetorically figures the continuity in desire between his lovers and himself as a symbolic consummation, Dante articulates the pain of a separation from the collective, a pain which gestures towards the cold comfort of lyrical representation in imagining "[w]hen Truth shall strike their eyes / ...[a]nd make them own the Prophet in his tomb." The optimism that characterizes Sonnet 42's final couplet ("But here's the joy: my friend and I are one. / Sweet flattery! Then she loves but me alone") contrasts with the resentful despondency of Byron's final conceit. Having been borne aloft by the imitative desire of his countrymen—just as the sonneteer's desire is transmuted and inevitably reciprocated in the mimeticism of the singularity of the three passions—Dante, unlike Shakespeare's speaker, is finally alone and "may not overlap the eternal bar." Byron's lyric confronts in bleak terms the harrowing movement of collective mimetic desire as it impacts the speaker as a historicized memory, while imagining a future where the poet-prophet is symbolically reconciled to his beloved people. Thus, the difference between Byron's lyricism and the lyricism of Shakespeare's Sonnets, as it pertains to mimetic desire, rests primarily in the affective tone accompanying the representation of desire's alternately elevating and alienating effects; where Shakespeare is variously detached and optimistic about the power of his imagination (often self-referentially expressed as the Sonnets themselves) to provide a positive outcome to desire's sometimes painful machinations, Byron, as McGann notes, imagines the poet-subject damned, while his readership benefits from his prophetic perspicacity regarding the nature and import of desire (215).

Both Byron and Shakespeare register that the mimetic flow of affect in personal romantic relationships transmutes itself to the wider field of human history. Before comparing Sonnet 55's subject matter to that of Byron's On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year, G. Wilson Knight notes that Shakespeare's poem transfers the speaker's desire for the young man to the enduring social realm of symbolic representation by consigning it to a finely wrought lyrical form (68-69):

Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time. (Sonnet 55.1-4)

This appeal to history positions the poetic expression of desire as a transhistorical monument open to future readers' subjective inspection and identification: "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme" (13-14). In a way similar to Shakespeare, Byron understands his personal experience of interindividual desire as potentially communicable to multitudes of future politicized readers. In the poem's final lines, Byron charges himself and these future readers to "Seek out ... / A soldier's grave" in pursuit of a worthy political cause (37-38). Registering the intersection of the political and private, Knight's appraisal of On this Day intimates the similarity between the two poets' lyrics when it suggests that Byron "describes a move from personal love to public service, and death" similar to Shakespeare's (69). However, Byron's identification with Shakespeare's lyric voice as an element in a larger drama of mimetic reciprocity is not a "transcendence of personal passion" (71), as Knight suggests; rather, the poem accepts the inextricable, but painful, integration of his individual experience of passion with a larger, collective matrix of desire that endures through history:

'Tis time this heart should be unmov'd,
Since others it hath ceas'd to move:
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of Love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone! (1-8)

While distinctly echoing the sentiments regarding aging time that appear in Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 ("That time of year thou mayst in me behold / When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang" [1-2]), the tragic tone of Byron's lyric on his role in the historical drama of Greek nationalism exceeds in intensity the note of despair in Shakespeare's poem, which ends warmly with the grateful apprehension of his lover's faithfulness: "This [my aging decline] thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong, / To love that well which thou must leave ere long" (13-14). Taking a slightly different course, Byron's On this Day repeats Sonnet 55's monumentalization of individual passion by mediating his desire through the memory of former lovers—who, having reciprocated his desire in the past, are now unmoved by their shared desire—towards a politicized act of love that will expiate his desire's force in a self-sacrificial, martial gesture undertaken in the theatre of Greek history. Unlike the shadowy figures of the Sonnets, the "others" he refers to are easily identified via the explicitly autobiographical nature of his oeuvre. These may be his estranged wife, or even the lost readership of his later career. These relationships are mimetic in nature. Thus, a triangular configuration between Byron, Annabella, and his readership constitutes the dramatic system of mimetic reciprocity which Byron feels desire no longer circulates in. Still charged with the force of desire communicated by these others, Byron lyrically channels his ambition through such remembered mediators into the political theatre of the struggle for Greek independence.

In his lyric echoing of Shakespeare's Sonnets, Byron makes a Shakespearean tragedy of his own life. Characterizing Byron's poetry as forging a link between personal and socio-political history, McGann points to On this Day as exemplary of Byron's style, before asserting:

'The personal is the political.' That widely circulated current idea was never more fully realized than in the case of Byron. . . . Byron's lyrical procedures . . . regularly draw upon a complex set of political, social, and world-historical meditations. Byron identifies himself with whole nations . . . and with their national heroes (political as well as artistic). Those identifications produce in turn a series of further equations between Byron's personal life and the 'lives' of these nations and their leading figures. (211).

Thus, Byron expands upon the Sonnets' association of microcosmic interindividual desires with the general macrocosmic progress of time in monuments and "wasteful war" (55.5) by tracing the continuity of his personal, intersubjective desire to the desires animating a specific political cause. In this expansion, Byron
abandons the reassuring resolutions of Shakespeare's Sonnets for the catharsis of his tragic dramas:

If thou regret'st thy youth, why live?
The land of honourable death
Is here:—up to the field, and give
Away thy breath! (64-68)

The observation and question on aged wisdom's regret recalls the poem's title and opening lines, which make this stanza a candid confession of regret over "The hope, the fear, the jealous care, / The exalted portion of the pain / And power of love," which belong to the past personal relationships he can no longer participate in despite feeling their influence on his desire as a "chain" (13-16). Accordingly, the regretted passions of his youth force him to the tragic question, which is reminiscent of Hamlet's "to be or not to be?": "why live?" In this way, one of Byron's best known and most mature lyric poems echoes Shakespeare's drama in parts—otherwise known as the Sonnets—as they are animated by triangular mimetic rivalry, a rivalry which lurks behind Shakespeare's lyrics and appears fully developed in the plot and characterization of his tragedies.

It is well known that Byron died while engaged in the cause of Greek independence only months after composing On this Day. This poem, among Byron's other lyrics, reflects Shakespeare's dramatization of mimetic desire through the voice of a lone speaker, but—in the emphasis it places on the tragic intensity of his life and correctly forecast death—Byron amplifies the Sonnets' tragic tone. This tone derives primarily from the Sonnets' fascination with the conflicts produced by imitative desire and the passage of time, which causes the Sonnets to resemble parts of a larger drama. For Byron, the larger drama behind his lyrics not only included his personal and literary life, but the course of European history as a whole. Recognizing his experience of desire as continuous with the desires of others, Byron repeats Shakespeare's insight at the end of Sonnet 42, while—in his pained tone—indicating that the continuity of subjectivities created by the recognition of mimetic desire's effects may not always serve as the consolation that Shakespeare's "my friend and I are one" (42.13) would have it to be.

Works Cited


Notes

1. Both Lady Blessington and Thomas Medwin noted Byron's capacious memory of Shakespeare's works and his hostility towards the Bardolatry of his day (Blessington 358-59, Medwin 93-94). (back)
Confronting a Question

Does a theology informed by the thought of René Girard require adherence to a pacifist stance in political ethics? Or does it include an option of adherence to some version of just war theory? Perhaps framing the question in such either-or terms misapprehends the implications of Girard's thought in the first place, and we should let the question go, ensure our seat belts are securely fastened and our tray tables stowed, sit back, relax, and enjoy the flight. Then we might bring up *American Sniper* on the small-screen, a good movie directed by Clint Eastwood, starring Bradley Cooper, based on the memoir of the tragic figure Chris Kyle, who "became the deadliest marksman in U.S. military history, with 255 kills from four tours in the Iraq War" (*American Sniper* in Wikipedia).

Only with difficulty can one begin to answer the question whether "mimetic theory" demands a noncompromising political nonviolence or keeps doors open to some measure of just war thinking. The difficulty derives partly from a conspicuous disproportion in the oeuvre of René Girard. That oeuvre contains many analyses of the structured recuperation of mob violence in archaic sacrifice, interpretations of myths and persecution texts and European novels, and Girard's original and brilliant elucidation of the Biblical revelation of the scapegoat mechanism. But it contains much less in the way of analyses of modern political conflicts, and to my knowledge, no explicit or systematic dialogue with the tradition in Christian ethics of just war thinking. While taking up the question of René Girard's relationship to pacifism and nonviolence as political stances raises some obstacles, mediating negotiations between the politics of René Girard and those of Eric Gans would create many more. In what follows, few direct references to the founding texts of generative anthropology will appear. It is hoped, however, that the reflections will show the influence of what one might call the Jewish political realism of Eric Gans’s thought.

No disrespect to René Girard has been intended in this observation of the disproportion between his openly sweeping, sweepingly open critique of "violence" and what appears to have been his habit of closeting explicit propositions about the ethics of war. Given the purpose of this special issue of *Anthropoetics*, I will pause to declare that I owe the late René Girard an unrepayable personal debt: finding a way back to Christian faith without the guidance given by his work might have been impossible for me. Nevertheless, I find the consequences of the key hypotheses in mimetic theory for the call to pacifism enduringly enigmatic. In a footnote to the chapter "Violence and Reciprocity" in *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, Girard offered this profession: "I should make it clear that I am not an unconditional pacifist, since I do not consider all forms of defense against violence to be illegitimate" (131n13). What the clarification entails, I hesitate to infer. Are the "forms of defense" that Girard considered "not... illegitimate" to be limited only to contexts of interpersonal violence at the level of social groups other than warring peoples or nations—individuals, families, policemen against citizens? Might there operate not-illegitimate "forms of defense" at the level of state-sanctioned military action?

In his authoritative volume *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, in the chapter "Political Implications of the Mimetic Theory," Wolfgang Palaver seems to limit the adjective *political* to the sphere of interpersonal ethics: "Girard's argument that these institutions [xenophobia and warfare] are based in the scapegoat mechanism
shows... that all forms of interpersonal violence and hostility begin in the most elementary human relationships. The way out of violence and enmity must be found on these rudimentary levels" (295). Concluding that warfare begins at the elementary levels of human relatedness, and thus that the "way out" of it will be found on those levels, concludes little. Indeed, political thinkers might murmur that despite the chapter's title, Palaver's remark cannot be assimilated into a discourse that merits the characterization "political." It would be a mistake to charge Palaver with obscurity, wilful or unwitting; on the contrary, he deserves praise for his fidelity to Girard's texts. Girard's avoidance of explicit political position-taking has not gone unremarked.

Consider, for example, the way that in his attempts to apply mimetic theory to international political conflict, Roberto Farneti thinks in a direction similar to that of Palaver. Farneti values the goal of reflective awareness in individuals as the best step toward "conflict resolution": "A Girardian perspective on conflict resolution must therefore concern itself with making the rivals reflectively aware of their mimetic plight" (89); "I believe that reflection, our ability to think 'recursively' about things and about ourselves, and not sacrifice, is the very last protection of which we can avail, after the eventual exhaustion of earlier sacrificial strategies" (137). Witness Giuseppe Fornari's claim: "the question of whether independent political thinking has a rightful place in an age influenced by Christianity... is a question that Girard answers in essentially negative terms" (62). I note Jean-Pierre Dupuy's frustrations with Girard's avoidance of the explicitly political.

Yet politics in its noblest moments is able to resort to fiction or make-believe in order to change the world. It has to be said and repeated that Girard's theory leads inevitably to political relativism and even political nihilism. If only to defend itself against this grave accusation, if my conclusions are correct, we see that it needs to jettison one of its key postulates—namely, the incompatibility between the sacred and self-knowledge. Is the price too high? (Dupuy, "Nuclear" 264)

Elsewhere (in The Mark of the Sacred, a passionate and powerful book), Dupuy describes himself as "intellectually a Christian," a formulation revealing and honorable at once; a formulation that resonates somewhat with Eric Gans's maxim theology is good anthropology, but almost always bad cosmology ("Minimal"). Regardless, the theology of James Alison, one deeply indebted to the inspiration of René Girard, informs the field that this study outlines and colors in. He strives to persuade us of the deathlessness of God and seeks to help us make contact with the One God who has nothing to do with violence (Jesus the Forgiving Victim; Joy of Being Wrong; Raising Abel; On Being Liked). The question for us will be this: what can a God who has nothing to do with violence have to do with any mud-caked, blood-soaked, heavily-armed soldier on the battlefield, a soldier by training prepared to do the enemy combatant unequivocal physical violence, a soldier who might well feel and think himself a Christian? Should that soldier just get himself off the battlefield forthwith, transforming into a conscientious objector? What does mimetic theory have to say, if anything, about the basic and not stupid question, should a Christian go to war? How would mimetic theory answer it? Or would mimetic theory provide only long and winding roads toward an agent-relative morality that will not force the issue, which flexibility might itself count as a performance of intra-ecclesial nonviolence?

To be fair to Girard, it must be said that Achever Clausewitz (2007), in English Battling to the End (2010), confronts the problem of modern warfare head-on. But Girard's formulations in that book do not provide a step-by-step exploration, so that even Stephen Gardner, in one of his two very insightful studies of it, has written this:

The upshot of the modern apocalypse, for Girard, is the "renunciation of violence," the right of retaliation, a power of the "sacred" that previously upheld order. Girard makes it clear, though, that he is not a pacifist. How is it possible to renounce violence without embracing pacifism? This and similar dilemmas will perplex readers of this book. Politics is over, [it] seems to say, but not just yet. War is over, but we may still have to fight them [sic] (though not as promiscuously as "Trotskyite rascals" would have it). Is there any way to square this circle of Girard's thought? ("Deepening" 457)
I include myself among those who feel "perplexed" by the question Gardner poses: "How is it possible to renounce violence without embracing pacifism?"(1)

This study will deploy the analytical tool of the semiotic square,(2) so as to explore descriptions of four figures of victimization-by-war. Its thesis aims less to argue in debate mode "for" or "against" pacifism than to earn dialectically the proffering of this conditional: if just war can be conducted, then it must seek as its goal paradoxically forgiving punishment or punishing forgiveness. The implicit invitation to restlessly rest in and wrestle with pragmatic paradox—forgiving punishment? punishing forgiveness?—conforms to the prioritizing of paradox as originary crisis in generative anthropology. We experience any question of real war as a crisis. As for the deployment of the semiotic square, some colleagues once remarked to me: "Gans is dialectical; Girard is rhetorical." One might present such a four-square "dialectical" testing of descriptive definitions in the spirit of the anthropological austerity of Generative Anthropology, and as a counterweight to the intractably knotted theological route and root of mimetic theory— and in this particular case, the evasion in "mimetic theory" of a terribly difficult question.

The question of the relations between the One God of Jewish and Christian faith and the war-making violence of humankind cannot help but be uneasily asked. I write not as one trained in theology or philosophy or military history but as an amateur long puzzled and provoked by the call of pacifism.(3) My descriptions will cover four different singled-out sacrificial figures: first, the soldier as sacrificial victim bound to the violence of just war; second, the conscientious objector in unjustifiable war as the contrary of the soldier; third, the irrecoverable victim of originary scapegoating, accessible to us only through the intimations of what I will call "exterminating violence," the negation of just war; fourth, the violent Love of God, the paradoxical subcontrary of exterminating violence.

I. "Just War" and the Soldier as Sacrificial Victim

The measured caution one finds in Jean Bethke Elshtain's Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World (2003) and in Nigel Biggar's impressive, indeed stunning, In Defence of War (2013) should give any fair-minded reader pause. Such volumes prove, if nothing else, that drawing upon Judeo-Christian scripture, the works of Augustine and Aquinas, considerations of historical experience and moral intuition, the Christian thinker can give reasons so that certain wars might be considered just. The ethic animating just war thinking foregrounds restrained and reluctant punishment; it foregrounds protection of the innocent against unacceptable injury. Elshtain and Biggar preserve Augustine's concepts of harsh love and kind violence (concepts which may ring oxymoronic in pacifist ears). Biggar by no means exonerates war sweepingly. Biggar firmly owns that "the New Testament does forbid certain kinds of violence" (49). Let us pause over those kinds of violence, to consider just how many conflicts they would exclude.

The New Testament does forbid certain kinds of violence: [1] that which is disproportionate because motivated by contemptuous or hateful or vengeful anger; [2] that which retaliates in response to trivial or tolerable personal injury; [3] that which lacks public authorization; and [4] that which is inspired by religious nationalism. But its prohibition of violence is specific, not absolute. (49) [enumeration added]

Biggar initiates the scriptural basis of his defence by reassessing a certain silence in the relevant New Testament texts regarding soldiers, who seem not to be obliged to abandon their vocation before joining a Christian congregation. (See "The Soldier Narratives: the thin edge of the wedge," 40ff.)

Now mimetic theory, as a critique of the violence that falls short of what a generative anthropologist might call the "gospel utopia," sees in the soldier a sacrificial victim. Girard argued that some primitive warfare seems to have been carried out to supply prisoners taken from the external defeated community to serve as objects of violence in rites internal to the victorious community, performed in due time. Regarding modern warriors slain on the battlefield whose bodies get carried home, just war theory would argue that no shame need attach to the decision to treat them as self-giving sacrificial victims of the people, the nation or the civilization, as they are treated by (for example) the crosses in Flanders Fields.
The ethical energy animating such memorials to soldiers who have died for "good" causes, however, does not guarantee any onto-theological propriety in the cultural sacralisation of the soldier. Relevant to the pointing out of the absence of any such guarantee is the fact that mimetic theory itself certainly had difficulties establishing any model of positive sacrificial self-giving. In fact, the establishment of such a model required nothing less than the interventions of Raymund Schwager. (4) To ask whether the self-sacrifice of a soldier could be considered analogous to, or imitative of, the self-sacrifice of Christ forces a return and retreat to those difficulties. Dying for a cause taken up by a warring party may not be dying for the "cause" of Jesus. If the "cause" of Jesus reduces to a morality of nonviolence (mystical and utopian, or pragmatic and activist)—I do not say it does so reduce, but if it does—and if his sovereignty is not that of a political revolutionary, then no intuitively obvious analogy or sanction connects the sacrificial death of the warrior hired by the nation state or the party in a civil war conflict to the death of Jesus. That Jesus the particular historical individual and his disciples were not military figures does signify. Joshua and Saul and David, by contrast, took up arms as military figures; Mohammed, by contrast, cut an undeniably military figure. Those contrasts may help to account for the fact that certain strains of Christian tradition have developed more explicit and programmatic forms of pacifist or non-violent activism than have the Jewish or Islamic traditions. (5)

Any just war theory will subscribe in some way to the doctrine of the double effect. (6) To summarize complex philosophical problems in one sentence: "the principle of double effect is able to make a crucial moral distinction between the effects of an act that I intend and those that I accept with reluctance" (Biggar 93). The Christian soldier intends to punish wrongdoing and to protect the innocent: the intended effects, he hopes, will be good. The "effects [accepted] with reluctance" will be the injury done and destruction caused in service of the desired good effect. The principle of double effect aims to make it credible that even in the eyes of a nonviolent God the intention of a soldier who would rather not kill but does so reluctantly might be accepted as an intention contributing to the good. It becomes possible, from this point of view, to kill enemies "without malice." Let us attend to Nigel Biggar at length on this point, partly because university intellectuals in the West frequently despise the soldier as an apish armed buffoon of the state and condemn all state violence as inherently immoral.

I can kill you out of contemptuous hatred, intending nothing less that your annihilation, constrained by no necessity, and with no proportionate reason to prefer another's life to yours. Or I can kill you without malice, with respectful and manifest reluctance, necessitated by love for others, and with sufficient reason to prefer their lives to yours. Not all killing is murder. Morally speaking, there are different ways of causing death. Some are culpable, some are innocent, and some (tragically) are commendable. (92)

We will have occasion to consider the notion of killing with a desire for annihilation of the enemy detached from all proportionate reasoning when we consider the imagery of exterminating violence.

Can we say, in the light of Christian revelation as mimetic theory understands it, that Jesus as God justifies killing? It would seem to me that this question must be answered with a quiet but uncompromising no. If we take seriously the idea that Jesus the crucified is God—assuming (with Linda Woodhead among numberless others) that belief in the reality of the man-god Jesus founds the religion of those who have called themselves "Christian" through the centuries down to the present—imagining Divine approval of holy war must entail some squirming oddity. What would it mean for the God who permitted himself to be killed by humans, so as to show humans the folly of their violence, then to enthusiastically approve and endorse killing? Both Nigel Biggar and Jean Bethke Elshtain separate just war from holy war. (7) Jesus will not take sides in human wars just as God makes his sun shine on the just and the unjust alike: when the Christian soldier kills, that soldier should have been ordered to recognize at the same time the divinely-given humanity of his enemy. War is human violence. God is not violent.

However, the historical facts show beyond any shadow of doubt that God permits such killing to the extent that God fails to prevent such killing: from such facts arises the scandal of the seeming historical passivity of the Creator. To the extent that permitting implies "having something to do with it," then some among us might merrily leap to the accusation that not preventing means having something to do with violence. It would be wiser, however, to consider the possibility that a God of Love worthy of the name does not justify the violence inherent in human warfare. In this context, the declaration of Jacques Ellul, at first puzzling,
plumbs depths in proportion as one meditates upon it: "I even say that it is not so much violence itself as justification of violence that is unacceptable to Christian faith" (140). (8)

Whatever we think about war, thinking "God is on our side only" probably is not the way to go to it. If there can be just war, just war cannot be holy war. For a Christian, the war God as Jesus chose to lose on the cross, chose to win by losing, was and will be the only one holy war.

II. Unjustifiable War and the Conscientious Objector

Taking the second step in our semiotic square, we might try out this claim: standing opposite as the strong contrary of the Christian soldier who in good conscience fights as a warrior, the Christian who in good conscience refuses to fight as a warrior stands defiant as an active dissenting protestor or, at the limit, as one imprisoned by the conscripting state and mocked by a war-accepting public. (9) The conscientious objector seems to transform the double-effect reluctance to kill of the just warrior into a single-minded resolve not to kill in the name of the powers. I say seems to transform because such transformations to "nonviolent" action cannot be achieved by simple redirections or cancellations of (all too human) willpower. Consider, for example, John Roedel's description of the struggles in the soul of the nonviolent activist to protect from contamination the intention of love that should animate principled nonviolence. Such intentions easily get lost, according to Roedel, in "tactics" as "means." Strategic nonviolence, when more strategic than nonviolent, risks imitating the violence of its war-accepting rivals. Anyone who understands Girard's elucidation of mimetic rivalry—the way models cannot but help become obstacles, and obstacles become models—will find the susceptibility of the conscientious objector to such unglamorous contaminations wholly unsurprising. (10)

Does God have anything to do with the defiance of the conscientious objector? Surely reconciliation between the spirit of Girard's mimetic theory as a sweeping critique of violence and the politics of active nonviolence comes more easily than reconciliation between it and the politics of just war; the greater easiness itself perhaps connects to the disproportion observed at the outset of this study. I do not think it worth denying that Jesus and his disciples glow with the light of an ascetic gentleness of conduct that would lose its lustre if begrimed by blood from the swords and flags of parties set heavily into an ethic of imperial conquest and limitless consumption.

The easier way of thinking, however, does not always lead to the whole truth. A blanket counsel to perform "renunciation of violence" cannot generate a system of ethical principles. Eric Gans himself has courageously pointed out this fragility in "mimetic theory" more than once. Once again cautioning that I mean no disrespect to René Girard, I feel compelled nonetheless to acknowledge that the works of Walter Wink and Jacques Ellul offer much more help than do the writings of Girard in presenting systematic descriptions of what nonviolent conduct might look like and what disciplinary taxes it might exact from the ordinary person attempting to put "renunciation of violence" into practice. Wink and Ellul concretize "renunciation of violence" in ways Girard does not. Girard did not hesitate to describe himself as primarily "an academic man" and a "researcher," whose interests did not include policy formation or programmes of training. As we have noted, Girard exhibits some disdain for the political and a tendency to locate questions of human conflict at the level of the moral and ethical. War is a political problem; insofar as he avoided the explicitly political, Girard to some extent avoided the problem of war—strange thing for a thinker so preoccupied by collective violence. Few of us personally know somebody who has been the victim of deadly ritual sacrifice or its secular analogues in media scapegoating, but we all know somebody who has been directly harmed by war. The statistical victims of war outnumber those of ritual sacrifice exponentially. A theory of violence that does not explicitly address the theory of war has not been completed.

In any case, and furthermore, because pacifist morality can lead to "violent" verbal condemnation of those who do go to war in good conscience, pacifism will not be free of "violence." The title of John Roedel's study—"Sacrificial and Nonsacrificial Mass Nonviolence"—implies there is mass nonviolence that is sacrificial, thus violent. Nonviolence can be active, aggressive, with programmes designed to shame and weaken the powers that be. Those who have no acquaintance with peace-activist literature might be surprised to learn how frankly workers in nonviolent protest admit the requirement that they pursue psychological harm of their opponents. Take the following passage from Walter Wink, who entered into dialogue with Girard at the
Nor should nonviolence be misconstrued as a way of avoiding conflict. The "peace" that the gospel brings is never the absence of conflict, but an ineffable divine reassurance within the heart of conflict: a peace that surpasses understanding. Christians have all too often called for "nonviolence" when they have really meant tranquility. In fact, nonviolence seeks out conflict, elicits conflict, even initiates conflict, in order to bring it out into the open and lance its poisonous sores. Nonviolence is not idealistic or sentimental about evil; it does not coddle or cajole aggressors but moves against perceived injustice proactively, with the same alacrity as the most hawkish militarist. (Powers That Be 121) [emphasis added]

It seems to me Wink walks a tightrope not unlike that walked by the battlefield Christian soldier when he writes, on the preceding page: "Nor does active nonviolence preclude the use of coercion. But nonviolent coercion is noninjurious; it relies on the force of truth in a universe that bends toward justice" (120). Coercion that does no injury may strike us as ethically counter-intuitive in rather the same way killing without malice seems ethically counter-intuitive. One's confidence in the "noninjurious" quality of the "force" and "coercion" depends entirely on one's confidence in the "truth" that one as a nonviolent activist defends. Such unswerving ascetic conviction resembles the warrior's sweaty adherence to the long-term truth that the good of his injurious violence will outweigh its undesirable effects after all. In both cases a body of thought with its feet firmly planted in convictions of possession of the "truth" performs the juggling of unevenly weighed moral bowling pins. Furthermore, the "double effect" has kicked into operation into both cases. This does not mean that the differences between peaceful protest and taking up arms lack meaning. But the self-righteousness animating the rhetorical violence of the protesting pacifist may be stronger than that animating the physical violence of the marching soldier.

Approaching the crucifixion of Jesus as the most significant example of nonviolent action performed in opposition to what Walter Wink names—not entirely appropriately in my opinion, the capital-D, capital-S "Domination System" (Powers 37-62) creates risks not unlike those created for the would-be just warrior: growing into a snakeskin of certainty that one's choices are the only choices the God of Love who has nothing to do with violence has called for. (12) How dare you take up arms? — No, how dare you refuse to take up arms while the innocent are persecuted? I feel obliged to suggest as well that the political stance of what Wink describes and condemns as "the myth of redemptive violence" can be assimilated to the stance of just war theory only at the cost of reducing the latter to a distorted caricature of itself. No doubt the "myth of redemptive violence" promotes immature, vulgar indulgence in nationalist warmongering; it does not resemble the painful, reluctant restraint intrinsic to just war thinking. Recall Nigel Biggar's claim that the New Testament forbids both violence "which is disproportionate because motivated by contemptuous or hateful or vengeful anger" and violence "which is inspired by religious nationalism" (49). Such restrictions go a long way toward disarming many of the engines gunning to take off into the realm where the myth of redemptive violence holds sway.

III. Exterminating Violence and the Non-Accessible Scapegoat

I have attended nine of the twenty-five meetings that The Colloquium on Violence and Religion has held since its inception, as celebrated at the vibrant and stimulating Saint Louis meeting of July 2015. Speaking from the experience of having heard many papers at those meetings, I believe that it cannot be stressed enough, as Girard reminded his interlocutors, that true scapegoating happens as an event necessarily lost to collective memory. Scapegoating proper, unlike sacrifice, is mindless, thoughtless, non-conscious, and inaccessible to the recall and rational assessment of those swept away into its mechanism. (13)

This language [of conscious purpose and deliberate planning] is legitimate, I believe, in the case of ritual sacrifice, but not appropriate in the case of the original scapegoating, which must be completely spontaneous, unplanned, and even unconscious in the sense of the victim being misunderstood for a real culprit, a powerful troublemaker responsible for the ills from which the community suffers. If the victimizers realized that their victims are arbitrary, they would not be unable to transfer their hostilities on them, and peace would not be restored. Effective scapegoating, it is evident, entails unanimous self-deception. ("Violence Renounced" 309)
However flawed and imperfect, Christian just war thinking as the explicit codification of certain violently sacrificial practices does give reasons—it is not "spontaneous, unplanned, and unconscious." Just war theory resists, therefore, the mindlessness of scapegoating. It reasons about human conflict, about the circumstances that make it justifiable to declare war, about the norms of conduct that should govern soldiers' activity during war, about what treaties might create an enduring peace after the battlefields have been cleared of bodies. The contradictory of just war as sacrifice would have to be a form of conflict between human groups resembling originary scapegoating as closely as possible. I will call its visible intimations "exterminating violence." To some extent, exterminating violence does not merit the title war: even the most unjustifiable war displays a rationality that exterminating violence lacks.

In exterminating violence, the all-against-one mob converts itself into the-many-against-the-few or the-armed-majority-against-the-unarmed-minority. Exterminating violence celebrates slaughter and massacre; it feeds upon atrocity; it sanctions genocide; it invites the nuclear-armed nation to bomb the nation with none; the Holocaust displays it. Exterminating violence cannot conceive of punishing an enemy one might respect or love, but throws itself into annihilating enemies that have been hated for so long, the hatred needs no explanation. The Nazi project (now the troublingly under-feared Islamist project) of wiping all Jews from the face of the earth remains the paradigm of exterminating violence. The Nazi death camps were hidden from the front lines, not part of the war effort proper: they were not "sacrificial" practices in the normal sense. Attentiveness to exterminating violence puts a greater strain on theodicy than does attention to justifiable or limited warfare. It stretches to the snapping point any elasticity in our capacity to withhold resentment of the seeming historical passivity of a purportedly benevolent Creator.

For the killer given over to exterminating violence, there can be no double effect, for there will be no reluctance. In contrast to the primitive warfare that supplied archaic communities with prisoners, exterminating violence follows the slogan "take no prisoners." For warriors who try to limit killing, enemy combatants on the defeated side might live to tell tales, which might be tales of having learned from their punishment. The transformations of German and Japanese society after 1945 offer hope that defeated peoples might learn from their defeat. Exterminating violence, however, excludes the very possibility of learning from punishment in that it sees its targets as there simply to be annihilated, neither corrected nor forgiven.

Failures to complete projects of exterminating violence leave behind, as did the killing fields of Cambodia, leave exposed, as if in the bewildering glare of police lights at a bloody night-time crime scene, the sickening worst of the cost of the freedom God has given us to give ourselves over to sinful violence, to limitless self-and-other destruction. Jesus' counsel takes on new meaning when we ponder the horrors of exterminating violence.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 44-45, RSV)

This counsel does not oblige us to disbelieve in the reality of enemies; it does not demand that we be so nice about avoiding trigger warnings as never to call another group of humans "enemies." It presupposes that one might have real enemies, just as evil might be real. It presupposes we can recognize our enemies as such, not having philosophized away their concrete enmity as a delusion we suffer under the effect of mistaken social constructions. Attention to atrocity might nudge us toward feeling that just war theory could regain some breath of whatever credibility it may have lost under blanket judgments that lump all forms of collective violence into one thing to be "renounced." The moral intuitions grounding objections to exterminating violence most certainly do not require Christian revelation. Military actions taken to stop or limit it might seem more than reluctantly justifiable. Going to war to stop exterminating violence against one's neighbours might well seem to be a simple human duty. The replacement of the thick virtues of early Christian just war theory with the thin deliberativeness of liberal human rights theory, a replacement partially responsible for the failures of the "international community" (another oxymoron?) to prevent genocide in (for example) Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia, might well be considered an historical misfortune for the West.

IV. The Violence of God's Love
Exterminating violence, I repeat, offers only intimations of the horror of scapegoating proper; we cannot see originary violence. The contrary of originary scapegoating, I propose, would have to be a form of violence that would rule out any possibility of conflict between human groups; and therefore, it would have to be a form of violence that reconciles humans in one group and as one group. Insofar as Christian teaching invites us to think of the killing of Jesus as the quintessential enactment of humankind's violent unity, the crucifixion stands contrary to all inter-human and intra-human violence.

The anthropological strangeness of the cross radiates partly from its emblematizing our desire to destroy the God of Love in our midst. We prate about loving God. But inside, if we listen, we will hear ourselves resenting and even wishing to kill the central Person. Father Schwager was no fool when he reiterated the phrase the hidden will to kill in his ground-breaking work, Must There Be Scapegoats? (14)

Is not a war of all humankind against one man irrational, the most unfair of fights, the beyond-absurd infliction of violence unthinkably disproportionate? Yes. That disproportion infuses the horror of the cross. By submitting to the most unfair fight in all the history of warfare, Jesus will show the goal of all human warfare. Human warfare tries to expel and to bury the truth that the Creator, despite all appearances, never has wanted humans to have to go to war, never has wished upon humankind any necessity of war. "God has nothing to do with violence" does mean that God would prefer that we the children have nothing to do with violence. To show the Divine distaste for war, God shows humans its ugliness in the most absurd conflict of all: our trying to kill, and our failing to kill, Jesus the One God. In this context, we may find significance in the enigmatic rhetorical question in the gospel of Matthew that Jesus asks the man accompanying him who has just taken out his sword and sliced off the ear of the slave of the high priest. The arresting crowd, armed with clubs-and-swords, would be listening.

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"

(Matt. 26:52-54, RSV)(15)

Mimetic theory would lead us to reject interpretations to the effect that Jesus means, "the angels are standing down now, but no worries, we'll get our revenge later. These Roman bastards and their temple hirelings will get pummelled in due apocalyptic time." A more rewarding interpretation, ventured in the light of Girard's thought, might be something like this: I am guaranteeing that even the legions of angels who could interfere do not, so as to make my aloneness perfectly clear to you: it is as if you, who have come to arrest me, are making the strangest kind of war on me—all of you, against one of me, even though I would do you no harm." The crucifixion stages a cosmic confrontation: humankind must expel God, as those on the originary scene must consume the central food object and come to know their consumption as significant, as violent. (16) But God does not fight back. God has nothing to do with violence.(17)

Another consequence of our insisting on humankind's unity in the killing of Jesus may be the idea that his death was not (is not) that of the originary conscientious objector. Jesus' standing up for certain types of people, his showing the way of active nonviolence as an alternative to the ways of those cruel powers running the "Domination System," his dying for the poor and oppressed or for the most recent jet set of persecuted minorities, may well not be the primary or ultimate meaning of the passion. (18) Contrary to the inclinations of, for example, not only Walter Wink or John Howard Yoder but also the re-Christianized Marxist Terry Eagleton, I hesitate to tint Jesus' self-giving with the stained glass that would make it first a political act. Do we petition the Creator as a politician? Do we demand that God have a politics? Must God be for some, against others? On the cross, may Jesus not present himself only as the chosen One, opposed to the violence of all humankind? Or is the wondering hesitation and hesitating wonder expressed by such questions little more than the betrayal of radical historical concreteness by rootless dialectical abstraction?

For René Girard, all violence was modelled either on the upsetting revelation of Christ—which comes from outside culture—or on the mystifications of historical scapegoats, through which Satan casts out Satan. To continue with our semiotic analysis, let us notice that subcontraries stand related as a pair or propositions that cannot both be false at the same time, although they may be true together. "This violence is modelled on the crucifixion" and "this violence is modelled on exterminating violence" cannot be false together: all violence must be modelled as derivative of either the one or the other. To elaborate on this either/or: if I understand him correctly, Girard has taught us that the contrary of scapegoating is the Christian revelation,
the exposure of scapegoating to the unsettling daylight that clarifies things such that we become free to choose or not a life indebted to the grace of Jesus, the Forgiving Victim (see James Alison's series of lectures). Girard suggests we each must choose: either one remains faithful to the mystification of scapegoats whose victimization has founded the particular cultural configuration on which one now depends, or one tries out faith in the revelation of the violence of God's Love, its violence of demystification.

Subcontraries, although they cannot both be false, may be true together. How could the crucifixion and originary scapegoating be "true" together? They could be so in this sense: the truth of the Crucifixion is the untruth of the scapegoat mechanism revealed. For the scapegoat mechanism to remain unrevealed would entail our continuing to be restricted to the kinds of "gods" who blame us, and ask us to blame them, for violence, in the bountifully available human-deity dialogues characteristic of war-loving mythologies the wide world over. In the conjunction of the Crucifixion's truth as the scapegoat mechanism's lie, however, "irrationality" persists: the idea of a God who forgives us for having crucified him must strike us as wholly unreasonable. Surely, any "supernatural" agent worthy of worship and deity status would take revenge for such an outrage. Surely, such forgiveness must be unreal; there must be a catch; our mortal coil will catch on the barbed-wire fence between us and this "god," we think.

In the resurrection, Jesus as God returns, embodying the healing power of forgiveness. The paradoxical violence of God's Love entails there is no barbed wire, no catch. It may seem strange to speak of this forgiveness as the violence of God's love. But such talk does not reduce to ornamental metaphor. Such forgiveness, if accepted, forces, forces the recognition that every scenic center one has ever held sacred cannot compare to the destabilizing, disorienting strangeness of this new scenic center. The God who refuses to participate in the escalation to extremes appears as the One who tears apart the assumptions and dynamics that found human cultures unchanged by such a revelation. Some remarks of the activist Duncan Morrow, whose on-the-ground work has been informed by the thought of René Girard, resonate well in the context of these contentions.

What is already clear is that Northern Ireland is deeply ambivalent about this experience. Forgiveness and contrition are very painful; and it is my deep experience that all of us fight like tigers to avoid the unveiling of our secrets, and to keep the consequences of the revelation of our complicity with violence as far away as possible. The price of freedom, of knowing that we are all brothers and sisters, and of stopping the game of dividing between the good guys and the bad guys, is paid in profound and disturbing dis-illusion about ourselves. (180)

We experience as terrible (at first) the lesson that one is being loved by the God who forgives our part in the worst warfare, for such charity violates all laws of blame-based thinking. But the Divine Way is to contain human violence, to limit its punishing effects, always to give to defeated enemy and to penitent killer alike a second chance, always to offer hope.

To conclude and to review: limitless exterminating violence reveals the horrifying underside of limited but unjustifiable war; it reveals the chaos into which limited but unjustifiable war threatens to descend. On the other side, the irrational forgiveness of the God who refuses to punish us is the difficult-to-grasp underside of just war, the basis of the hope for the possibility of just war. The scapegoating / violence of God's love opposition suggests one lesson for those who seek to root Christian morality exclusively in non-retaliatory pacifism. To dismiss any possibility of a warrior imitating the perfectly non-punishing self-restraint of God may be too easy in our time, worn down and wearied as we might feel by gruesome records of the horror and frequent futility of war. The other side of the coin, however, shows that we might exercise caution regarding the authenticity of rushing into forgiveness. Human forgiveness detached from punishment risks the failure to demonstrate that wrongdoing was wrong.

Meanwhile, for those who wish to preserve the doctrines of just war theory, another lesson emerges from the scapegoating / violence of God's love opposition. Only insofar as human beings in all their fallen imperfection might imitate the Divine Love that forgives rather than punishes is it possible to believe in the paradoxically forgiving punishment that the idea of just war promises. If we take seriously the idea in mimetic theory that God has nothing to do with violence, then even the most "justified" human war must remain still nothing but a human war with human causes and human reasons; and God's causes and reasons cannot be assimilated to ours. As Jacques Ellul claims, the Christian warrior must throw himself on
the mercy of God when he ventures onto the battlefield. But it seems to me that all of us, warriors or not, throw ourselves on the mercy of God every day.

**Works Cited**


-----. "Nuclear Apocalypse: The Balance of Terror and Girardian 'Misrecognition.'" Antonello and Gifford 253-66.


-----. "Violence Renounced." Swartley 308-320.


Notes

1. More from Gardner on Battling to the End: "A prudent avoidance of unnecessary, unjust, disproportionate, or counterproductive wars is not the same as a pacifist rejection of war itself, in principle. Recognition that wars rarely (almost never) accomplish the aims that motivate them is not pacifism. Girard seems to gesture toward the latter without actually endorsing it, though, leaving readers confused about the precise significance of his two claims or their practical implications" ("René Girard's Apocalyptic Critique" 15). (back)

2. My version of the semiotic square follows partly that of Jameson. (back)

3. Apart from working from the assumption that Girard's sweeping critique of violence at the very least tempts one to pacifist aspirations, I have taken the works of Ellul, Yoder, and Wink as representative of Christian pacifism. I have relied on Gittings for the history of peace movements and nonviolent activism. For the intersections between peace activism and Girardian thought, I recommend the fourteen essays collected in Swartley. I recommend as well the high-quality essays collected in Chase and Jacobs. (back)

4. Bubbio argues that on this score Girard's work might be considered defective: "it is defective in that it does not provide a normative account of sacrifice . . . the absence of a positive and active sacrifice (such as the kenotic sacrifice) makes a hypothetical normativity of sacrifice completely superfluous, and even inconsistent with Girard's premises" (Sacrifice 158). He seems unaware of the revision of mimetic theory through which Girard integrated a concept of Jesus' sacrifice as self-giving. For some of the history of that revisionary moment, see Schwager, "Mimesis and Freedom"; Moosbrugger, "Raymund Schwager's Maieutics." (back)

5. J. Patout Burns, following up on conferences held in St. Louis (1990) and Washington, D.C. (1991), has edited a useful collection titled War and Its Discontents: Pacifism and Quietism in the Abrahamic Traditions (Georgetown University Press, 1993). It contains essays by four Jewish contributors (Michael Brody, Rabbi Everett Gendler, Yehudah Mirsky, Naomi Goodman): five Christian contributors (John Howard Yoder, John P. Langan, S. J., Walter Wink, Edward McGlynn Gaffney Jr., and J. Patout Burns); and two essays on Islam (Adulaziz A. Sachedina, Michael N. Nagler). The volume establishes rather clearly that pacifism and nonviolence fit more easily with the faith's holy texts and therefore arise more easily from Christian tradition than they do in Judaism or Islam. Given the death of Jesus (a victim of violence), the difference perhaps should not surprise anybody. Broyde writes: "Theological pacifism has no place in the Jewish tradition" ("Fighting" 19) [his emphasis]; and he writes: "Jewish law recognized that some wars are completely immoral, that some wars are morally permissible but accompanied by a very limited license to kill, and that some wars are basic battle for good with an enemy that is evil. Each of these situations comes with a different moral responses and a different right to wage war. In sum, it is crucially important to examine the justice of every cause. However, violence in the service of justice is not to be abhorred within the Jewish tradition" ("Fighting" 20-21). For Jewish pacifism, by contrast, consult Goodman. Sachedina writes: "In the final analysis, Islamic revelation by its very emphasis on justice and equity on earth calls upon its followers to evaluate a specific sociopolitical order and preserve it or to overthrow and transform it" (156). Sachedina does not conceal the legitimation of military force in Islam to defend the Islamic social order: "In addition, Islam as a religious ideology is both a critical assessment of human corporate existence and a divine blueprint that awaits implementation to realize God's will on earth to the fullest extent possible and, if necessary, through force" (124); "Moreover, it [unbelief] came to be identified not only as a religious wrong, to be punished in the hereafter, but also as a moral wrong, to be corrected in the here and now—by use of force if necessary" (124). (back)

6. See Biggar, ch. 3, "The Principle of Double Effect: Can It Survive Combat?" (92-110). He writes: "What this analysis reveals is that intention is not just about deliberate choice, but also about desire; not just about willing, but also about wanting. An effect that I intend, therefore, is one that I both choose and want; and an effect that I accept is one that I choose but do not want" (95). (back)

7. "Just wars do stand in danger of becoming holy wars. Nevertheless, just war need not become holy wars where divine sanction bars no holds; and if they remain faithful to the logic of Christian just war thinking, they will not" (Biggar 168; cf. Elshtain 124, 183, 186). (back)
8. I recommend Ellul's work to people working with Girard's ideas. I quote the whole paragraph from which that one sentence comes, so as to clarify that Ellul is much more explicitly and consistently a pacifist than is Girard, while many of his formulations resonate powerfully with those of Girard and synchronize with them: "I have tried to show that, while violence is inevitable and belongs to the order of necessity, this fact does not legitimate it in the sight of God; that indeed violence is contrary to the life in Christ to which we are called. Therefore, as Christians, we must firmly refuse to accept whatever justifications of violence are advanced; and in particular we must reject all attempts to justify violence on Christian grounds. Let me say once more that this applies to the violence of the powerful, of the capitalist, the colonialist, and the state, as well as to the violence of the oppressed. I even say that it is not so much violence as justification of violence that is unacceptable to Christian faith. Violence as such, on the animal level, is the direct expression of our nature as animals; it certainly shows that we live in a state of sin—but that is nothing new. But any attempt to justify violence (by emotional considerations, by a doctrine, a theology, etc.) is a supplementary perversion of fallen nature at the hands of man. Remember Jesus' accusations against the Pharisees. He did not reprove them for doing the works of the law—on the contrary. What he attacked was their belief that their doing these works proved them just; their complacent conviction that their self-justifications were true" (140).

9. Two opposed statements operate as contraries when they cannot be true together, although they may both be false at once. My assumption so far has been that any case of war must be subject to judgment by some form of moral or ethical reasoning as either just or unjustifiable: no act of war may be both just and unjustifiable at once. However, these two characterizations do not exhaust all the descriptions of war, as the later sub-categories of originary scapegoating and the Crucifixion show; in that sense, "this is a just war" and "this is an unjustifiable war" may both be false at once, in that "war" may be conceptualized in the forms of either exterminating violence or the Crucifixion as well. (I think it only fair to concede that some unconditional pacifists—recall our noticing that Girard claimed he was not an unconditional pacifist—would reject outright my "assumption so far" above—war, for them, never being justifiable for any reason.)

10. Roedel: "Beginning with Gandhi, a distinction has often been made between 'strategic' and 'principled' nonviolence. Principled nonviolence is the unconditional embrace of nonviolence, on the basis of a moral or religious commitment. Gandhi spoke of principled nonviolence as a refusal to submit to or inflict violence out of unselfish love for the opponent. He spoke of strategic nonviolence as a means for achieving one's goals; in his opinion, this was not really nonviolence at all, but a simulacrum of it. An individual may even sometimes be unable to distinguish the extent to which his own nonviolence is strategic or principled" (222).

11. My opinion here has been influenced by these remarks by Eric Gans: "No doubt Jesus 'challenged the domination system'—an unfortunate term that washes out all tensions between the Jewish and Roman 'dominators' in a binary opposition between the good oppressed and their evil oppressors. But our own century has surely taught us that political implementations of righteous anger against the social order in the attempt to realize God's kingdom or some secular equivalent on earth are anything but productive of social justice. 'Taking the side of the victim' in the Christian sense is far more than a political act of rebellion against 'the system': it is the concerted and never facile attempt to stand on the side of love against resentment, including the resentment of "the oppressed" that has fueled so many of history's greatest horrors" ("Marcus").

12. Girard: "Myths justify violence against the scapegoat, the community is never guilty. Thebes isn't guilty with respect to Oedipus, Oedipus is guilty with respect to Thebes. But ritual protects communities from the great violence of mimetic disorder thanks to the real and symbolic violence of sacrifice" (When These 33). With the phrase "the great violence of mimetic disorder" Girard refers to originary scapegoating and its total indifferentiation, as opposed to sacrifice.

13. "The violence was not unloaded on him by chance. He provoked it by claims about who he was. The universal conspiracy against the Anointed and Son of God reveals that in its depth the human heart harbors a grudge against God" (Must There Be 196; for the phrase "hidden will to kill," see 183).
15. More context: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?'" The singular to him might seem not to permit us to claim with certainty that those present other than the sword-bearing man who injured the slave heard Jesus' speech; but we read the Scriptures as history, not fiction or myth. Therefore, we presume the witness from whom the account derives overheard the saying; and therefore, we can presume it has been overheard by people other than the man who injured the high priest's slave, people who were listening. (back)

16. For an elaboration of this notion, see my "The Object of Originary Violence." (back)

17. Lest these formulations seem too fancifully abstract, I observe the first sentence in the entry for "War" in a standard reference source: "In the Hebrew Bible war almost always refers to armed struggle between nations; in the New Testament the word more often refers to spiritual or cosmic conflict against evil" (LaSor) [emphasis added]. Returning to the question of whether scripture makes room for just war thinking, notice the opinion expressed by LaSor in his first sentence of the section "In the New Testament": "Contrary to a widely held view, the position of the New Testament is not total pacifism: that was the product of church fathers, principally Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian." LaSor here seems to agree with Biggar. (back)

18. I am agreeing with (among others) Jean-Pierre Dupuy: "To address the question of inequality by constructing a theory that gives the interests of the most disadvantaged a preponderant and unchallengeable weight in deliberations about social justice amounts in turn, then, to proceeding in exactly the opposite direction to the one that needs to be followed, for it serves only to perpetuate the sacralization of the victim. What, then, as a practical matter, can be done?" (Mark of the Sacred 169). Notice that in the context of this argument, the sacralization of Jesus as victim is not a problem; the sacralization of human victims appropriating his suffering to improve the public uses of their self-image is a problem, and a moral problem. It is that perversion of the gospel that Eric Gans, with a more tireless persistence than anybody else, has exposed and critiqued as victimary thinking. Meanwhile, I am aware that later in the same book Dupuy seems to reject without reserve, in far too hasty and apocalyptic a fashion to my mind, anything resembling just war theory: "These principles—meant to convert war into a ritual that is both violent and measured in its effects, a ritual that contains violence by means of violence—died a gruesome death at Hiroshima, and their remains were vaporized in the radioactive blast that then leveled Nagasaki" (178). It is simply not true that those "principles" were "vaporized" by the inaugurating events of the postmodern era. On the contrary, instructors in Western military academics teach those "principles" regularly, as Jean Bethke Elshtain points out. Those at work in the training camps of Islamist suicide bombers do not teach them. That seems to me a factual difference one must take into account. (back)
Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*: Three Approaches

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I. Introduction: A Nameless Genre

Gustave Flaubert’s *La tentation de Saint-Antoine ou la révélation de l’âme* (first version 1848; final version 1874), its *sui generis* character notwithstanding, belongs in a recognizable, yet largely unrecognized, genre of mid- and late-Nineteenth Century literature that includes, among other items, Charles Kingsley’s *Hypatia* (1850), Henrik Ibsen’s *Kejser og Galileer* (1871), Richard Wagner’s incomplete *Jesus von Nazareth* (1849) and his libretto for *Parsifal* (1882), Walter Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), General Lew Wallace’s *Ben Hur* (1880), Anatole France’s *Thaïs* (1890), and Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Quo Vadis* (1895). The genre has no name; it is a hybrid in that it assimilates drama, epic, the novel, the essay, and perhaps even lyric, without distinction and therefore quite promiscuously and un-generically. The nameless, promiscuous, un-generic genre nevertheless succeeds in constituting itself through its specific fascination with the breakdown of Classical Civilization and the growth of the successor-civilization that articulated itself through the codification of Christian orthodoxy and the establishment of a new central institution, the Church, with its precepts and rites. The writers who contribute to this nameless strand of often bizarre literary creativity necessarily also take interest in the relation of the Imperial centuries down through the period of Late Antiquity to modernity, which seems to them likewise imperial, fugacious, and overripe. The literary representation of Christianity’s founding events or of the emergent Christian order’s formative travails thus frequently furnishes the writer with the opportunity to conduct a critique, by indirection, of modernity, a tendency that joins the purely literary endeavor to the speculative endeavor of historio-philosophy. In this way, *La Tentation* or *Kejser og Galileer* or *Marius* communicates with a related, non-fiction genre that takes up the discussion of Christianity either as apologetics or skeptical polemics, as in François-René de Chateaubriand’s *Génie du Christianisme* (1801) and Søren Kierkegaard’s *Practice in Christianity* (1850), on the one hand, or in Ludwig Feuerbach’s *Wesen des Christentums* (1841) and Ernest Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* (1863), on the other. The nameless genre tends to be partial although not uncritical with respect to Christianity while refraining from any blanket rejection of Paganism. Sometimes it seeks a dialectical reconciliation of the two.

This nameless but recognizable, yet largely unrecognized, genre, in which *La Tentation* figures both as typical and outstanding, identifies itself again through its erudition: Flaubert worked on *La Tentation* for more than twenty-five years, during which time he read through a sizeable library of primary and secondary works on Christianity, Philosophical Paganism, and the history of Late Antiquity. It was only by similar arduous preparation that Ibsen fitted himself to write his *Verdens-Historisk Skuespill* (“World-Historic Drama”) about Julian the Apostle and Wagner the libretto for his *Bühnenweihfestspiel* (“Festive Stage-Consecration Play”) about the Sodality of the Holy Grail, to cite but two of the other examples that have already been given. It goes beyond erudition. In *La Tentation* especially, with its form of an immense soliloquy between sunset and sunrise, Flaubert gives the impression of having immersed himself in the antique monastic exercise, the goal of that immersion being nothing less than to relive not only the crucial moment in the saintly life—to re-experience the Temptation—but also to grasp, in a kind of mystic vision, the total historical situation in which that life has its context and from which it takes its meaning. That the vision must be anthropological, a "revelation of the soul," as well as theological nearly goes without saying. That the vision arises in a *milieu* of ideological strife and raw violence also nearly goes without saying, whether one is speaking of the Fourth Century or the Nineteenth Century. In a border-situation of social dissolution, it becomes necessary to recapitulate an inaugural or originary event. Indeed, Flaubert’s
juxtaposition of sectarian warfare with its insistent rhetorical justification, and his intense empathy with the
spiritual fugue that these controversies provoke, lends to *La Tentation* a powerful anticipatory relevance to
the Twentieth Century, whose cohorts have experienced their time as a passage through ideologically driven
catastrophe.

Take, for example, John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* (1921), an autobiographical novelization of the author’s
experience in the First World War in whose pages readers would perhaps little expect to find overt allusions
to Flaubert’s weird text. Even so, such allusions insistently appear. They are even central to the story. Dos
Passos’ protagonist, the cynosure personality among the three titular conscripts, is John Andrews, a young
musician who hopes to become a composer. Andrews harbors the ambition, no less, to set *La Tentation* as
an opera. Wounded by shrapnel while on the march to the front and invalided to a military hospital,
Andrews suffers afflicting dreams while fighting to recover through pain and narcosis. Awakening suddenly
to his first clarity, he thinks to himself, "Funny that the Queen of Sheba had come to his head." (200) The
thought connects itself to a girl standing beneath a tree at a crossroads, one of the last things he
remembers seeing before the shell struck. Andrews repeats to himself, "La reine de Saba, la reine de Saba."
Once more in a fog, he mistakes the night-nurse for his obsession: "The Queen of Sheba carried a parasol
with little vermilion bells all round it that gave out a cool tinkle as she walked towards him. She wore her
hair in a high headdress thickly powdered with blue iris powder, and on her long train, that a monkey held
up at the end, were embroidered in gaudy colors the signs of the zodiac." That is practically a verbatim lift
from *La Tentation*. In M. Walter Dunne’s English of 1904, the line reads: "As she comes forward, she swings
a green parasol with an ivory handle surrounded by vermilion bells; and twelve curly Negro boys carry the
long train of her robe, the end of which is held by an ape, who raises it every now and then." (32)

Other details of *Three Soldiers* also originate in Flaubert. They relate directly to *La Tentation*. Regaining
strength, Andrews requests Applebaum, a visiting fellow soldier, to "buy me a book . . . a special book . . . a
French book." (202) Applebaum’s response when Andrews writes the title on a slip of paper is: "Who’s
Antoine?" He adds quickly, "Gee whiz, I bet that’s hot stuff"; and, "I wish I could read French."

Before being wounded, Andrews, while barracked in a village, becomes acquainted with a girl of easy virtue
by the name of Antoinette, whom the soldier tends, in his fantasies, to identify with the Queen of Sheba.
When Andrews brings his friend Chrisfield to the place of business, a run-down wine shop, Antoinette
appears as "a girl in a faded frock of some purplish material that showed the strong curves of her shoulders
and breasts," who "smiled when she saw the two soldiers, drawing her thin lips away from her ugly yellow
teeth." (140-41) Once more, she "showed her bad teeth in a smile," after which her visage "became
impassive and beautiful again." (142) As one might ask: *Qu’est-ce qu’une tentation?* The image of
Antoinette vacillates between an ideal, which can hardly be anything else than an illusion, and the curious
actuality, which eyes Chrisfield "admiringly," but walks away with another customer whose billfold is
presumably bigger. Andrews tells Chrisfield, "There’s always the Queen of Sheba," making the ideal a
substitute for the reality, a consolation that is lost on Chrisfield. Later, in his hospital bed, Andrews stirs
himself "to think about the music [that] he [had] intended to write about the Queen of Sheba." (204) That
was before his conscription, before the basic training "stripped his life off" and "made a soldier of him." As
the likelihood increases that he will recover fully, but will return to the battlefield, Andrews becomes
increasingly fixated on Flaubert’s text although it remains unclear how fully he has grasped its meaning. He
imagines himself "in the dark desert of despair."

In a long Flaubertian descriptive sequence, Dos Passos gives it to Andrews to imagine the "Sheba" episode of
*La Tentation*, with himself standing in for the saint: "Through the flare of torchlight, the Queen of Sheba
would advance towards him, covered with emeralds and dull-gold ornaments, with a monkey hopping
behind holding up the end of her long train. She would put her hand with its slim fantastic nails on his
shoulder; and, looking into her eyes, he would suddenly feel within reach all the fiery imaginations of his
desire." (204) Andrews reflects in a mood of ennui, "Oh, if only he could be free to work," a sentiment not
foreign to the saint’s monologue in Flaubert’s version of his story. The original Anthony had forsaken home
and family when still young to work on his soul in the solitude of the desert, but to fulfill that work he must
refuse desire, and not facilitate its completion. Sheba’s allure threatens the destruction of Anthony’s opus,
his *Imitatio Christi*. As for Andrews, "After he had eaten, he picked up the *Tentation de Saint Antoine,* that
lay on the cot beside his immovable legs, and buried himself in it, reading the gorgeously modulated
sentences voraciously, as if the book were a drug in which he could drink deep forgetfulness of himself."
In the mood of forgetfulness, Andrews blends a bit with Anthony in that Anthony's radical *askesis* entails systematic suppression of the ego.

Andrews awaits inspiration, which omits to descend: "When he tried to seize hold of his thoughts, to give them definite musical expression in his mind, he found himself suddenly empty, the way a sandy inlet on the beach that has been full of shoals of silver fishes, becomes suddenly empty when a shadow crosses the water, and the man who is watching sees wanly his own reflection instead of the flickering of thousands of tiny silver bodies." (209) Here again Dos Passos is not merely alluding to *La Tentation*; he is imitating Flaubert's style in homage to the master. *La Tentation* is replete with such lapidary constructions; so is *Three Soldiers*.

Andrews resembles Flaubert's Anthony in one way, perhaps, more than another. Famously, in Anthony's *Dark Night of the Soul*, the Devil in his legion assailed the hermit, tempting him to self-betrayal. Athanasius in his *Life of Saint Anthony*, on which Flaubert drew, describes the action vividly, noting that it prolonged itself for twenty years and remarking how the imps and demons physically battered the saint in their attempt to wring from him a denial of his faith. Demonic forces assail Andrews, too, in the form of the omnipresent Military Policemen or M.P.'s. "The M.P.'s sure won't get us tonight," (234) a character named Henslone says, hopefully. When, during an absence-without-leave in Paris, "Two M.P.'s [pass] outside the window," Andrews senses himself to be "joyfully secure from them." (300) Later the paranoid certainty grows on Andrews that "the M.P.'s would get him." (368) The M.P.'s are the agents of the regime that *strips the life* from people; that herds and regiments them, as nations have done since Napoleon. Indeed, the M.P.'s get Andrews, leaving the unfinished sketch of his *Tentation*-opera on a table in a garret to scatter its leaves on the wind. This ignominy only happens, however, after one last arch-foregrounding of Flaubert’s masterpiece. Andrews the deserter has made the acquaintance of Genevieve Rod, whom his friend Aubrey describes as belonging to a family "very advanced," *au courant* that is, and *correct*, holding all the properly vetted opinions. Aubrey tells Andrews that Mademoiselle Rod wishes to learn about American music. Andrews' usual intuition, when Sheba is present, fails; nor does he suspect until it is too late that Genevieve is, in her way, an M.P.

The Rods have invited Andrews to tea. He plays piano while engaging in *causerie* with Genevieve. Dos Passos writes, "As he played without looking at her, he felt that her eyes were fixed on him." (318) Suddenly "her hand touched his shoulder," a gesture that recalls the earlier phantasmagoria of Sheba, in which the fabled queen "would put her hand with its slim fantastic nails on his shoulder." The familiarity arrests his performance. Genevieve apologizes for distracting Andrews and asks what he was playing. He demurs to say but she guesses that he was experimenting with his own composition. What was it, she wants to know? He asks her, "Have you ever read *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*?" She replies, not affirming that she has read it, that, "It's not [Flaubert's] best work" despite being "a very interesting failure though." Andrews, rising, throttling his temper, says, "They seem to teach everybody to say that." After that, although he sticks with Genevieve, Andrews experiences growing alienation that can lead only to a full break. Andrews has made statements to Genevieve, which indicate to her approval, his espousal of socialism. In his last conversation with her, however, he contradicts her assumption. He has had a vision of pervasive evil, of history as an inescapable cycle of suffering and purgation. "It seems to me," he says, "that human society has been always that, and perhaps will be always that: organizations growing and stifling individuals, and individuals revolting hopelessly against them, and at last forming new societies to crush the old societies and becoming slaves again in their turn..." (421) Dos Passos' ellipsis suggests Andrews' conviction of a world without end and without transcendence.

*Three Soldiers*, in absorbing *La Tentation* into itself, situates itself somewhat oddly in the recent evolution, or devolution, of Western consciousness, with its attendant variations, or deformations, of anthropology and esthetics. That Dos Passos saw himself continuing an *esthetic tradition* with a French origin going back to Symbolism is made clear from the insistent self-conscious *stylism*, as it might be called, of his prose. (Just after the war Dos Passos became a student at the Sorbonne.) The passage representing the incident of Andrews' casualty furnishes an example. Andrews has broken from his march to bathe his feet in a pond whose cool green waters a chorus of frogs comically enlivens. "Absently," Dos Passos writes, "as if he had no connection with all that went on about him, he heard the twang of bursting shrapnel down the road." (193) He finds himself "sinking into the puddle" while "a feeling of relief came over him." He half-notices that "the frogs had gone, but from somewhere a little stream of red was creeping out slowly into the putty-
colored water." Reality befalls Andrews "as if he were . . . in a box of a theater watching some dreary monotonous play." (194) Whereas in the usual classification of American writers the academic critics categorize Dos Passos as a high modernist—which, in his full phase he perhaps really is—nevertheless in *Three Soldiers* he works in an earlier ethos that defies the expectation of absolute realism associated with the war-narratives of Henri Barbusse, Rainer Maria Remarque, and Ernest Hemingway. Writing of the realist school in *Originary Thinking* (1993), Eric Gans argues that: "Just as l'art pour l'art is the radical extension of 'right' romanticism after 1848, realism is that of the 'left.' The former attacks bourgeois utility in the name of art; [but] the latter attacks bourgeois complacency in the name of truth." Gans adds that, "Realism insists on representing the ugly sides of life that art has traditionally passed over as un-ideal." Dos Passos spares his readers no ugliness in *Three Soldiers*, but in conflating bourgeois complacency and socialism, as he does, and in attaching his own text to Flaubert's anomalous and reactionary religious extravaganza, he takes a position at right angles to any historical scheme.

If, as Gans plausibly argues, realism should be defined as the literary phase in which "constraints are chosen by the artist and imposed on the audience," and if this imposition indeed prefigured "modern art’s terroristic attitude to its audience," then it would become possible to argue that Dos Passos sees in the anti-transcendent, proto-politically correct esthetic the articulation of a corresponding social prescription or code. It is an M.P.-enforced code and, abrogating freedom, it is dehumanizing. To oppose the code means to defend what it condemns or excludes, including a pre-modern view of the human, mediated by Late Romanticism and Symbolism, in which the word soul still makes sense. When the M.P.’s take Andrews away, finally, they do so in sight of the spires of Notre Dame de Chartres. Dos Passos’ juxtaposition is not accidental.

The name Andrews is itself indicative of Dos Passos’ position: It means "The Son of Man," with a strong Christological implication. *Three Soldiers* is unimaginable without *La Tentation*; and *La Tentation* is the least "realistic" of Flaubert’s major works. In Dos Passos’ story *La Tentation* indeed becomes an object of bourgeois snobbery, in a social context where the bourgeoisie has embraced realism as its settled esthetics, to the point of regarding anything else as hopelessly passé. *Three Soldiers* is a novel of extraordinary paradoxicality, but so is *La Tentation*—supposing that it is a novel, by no means a foregone conclusion. In being *about* Flaubert’s probable masterpiece, *Three Soldiers* adopts the anomalous status of its chosen precursor-text, but the oddity of *La Tentation* far exceeds that of its textual progeny. In *Originary Thinking*, Gans writes that "the modernist solution to the discovery of guilty violence at the origin of culture was to posit the guiltless violence of a pre-cultural, prelinguistic human desire." In case of *Three Soldiers* and even more so in that of *La Tentation*, the pronouncement requires a slight modification: In the nameless genre invoked in the commencement of the present discussion, the writers discover the founding mendacity of the modernist dispensation—which is that its violence is guiltless—that it is not a sacrificial scene founded on the principle of radical exclusion.

It is the purpose of what follows—in three sections and an epilogue—is to revisit *La Tentation* in light, not only of Gans’ Generative Anthropology, another formulation almost entirely anomalous to its time and place, but also of the late René Girard’s Fundamental Anthropology, useful in conjunction with a Gansian exploration of the text because in distinction to Generative Anthropology it operates as a type of apologetics; and finally of Eric Voegelin’s historical phenomenology of the Western Consciousness, his "noetology," as he worked that out in the five volumes of *Order and History* (1956-1985). Girard and Voegelin, like Gans, are anomalous presences on the self-denominating post-modern scene. Girard, like Gans, has written about Flaubert. Voegelin not only wrote about Flaubert, but he often wrote about or took critical inspiration from literature and indeed his readings of the touchstone texts of the Western Continuum in *Order and History* are remarkable instances of literary exegesis. Given Voegelin’s thesis of modernity as a resurgence of Late-Antique heresies, the application of his view to Flaubert’s achievement in *La Tentation* promises rich results. It has long been the opinion of the present writer that Voegelin is closely intellectually affined to Girard and Gans and that the threesome of them potentially completes certain incomplete aspects in the discourse of each. As all three are, moreover, radically eccentric, Flaubert’s radically eccentric *Tentation* is likely to shed light on them, too, and not just vice-versa.

Because *La Tentation* is historically and literarily erudite, and because the events and discourses that inform it belong to the terminal crisis of the great Ecumenic Age, in the dissolute twilight of Antiquity, it would seem most appropriate to begin by undertaking an exploration of Flaubert’s odd book from a Voegelinian
perspective. The argument will be cumulative, of course, carrying over the results of one view into the next.

II. La Tentation from a Voegelinian Perspective

The previous section has gone into detail concerning a book, Dos Passos’ *Three Soldiers*, which declares its genealogical relation to *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, but it has not properly characterized Flaubert’s text except to call attention repeatedly to its oddity and to its relation to other equally odd books for which the contemporary literary seminar has no place. In its final form of 1874, *La Tentation* is a vast oneiric monologue in seven parts given to an historical personage, Saint Anthony of the Desert (251—356 [sic]), the subject of the first Christian Hagiography, *The Life of Saint Anthony* by Athanasius (296—373; also later beatified), who, paradoxically, by fleeing Alexandria to seek absolute solitude in the Egyptian desert, became the founder of the first community of Christian eremites or monks. Anthony famously battled with Satan himself, who strove to draw the holy man away from his faith, so as to prevent him from becoming a model for others. Flaubert’s monologue extrapolates itself in numerous colloquies, inquisitions, operatic choral scenes; imaginary choreographic set-pieces, episodes of gross-out violence and pornography, and "special effects" sequences that anticipate the requirements of cinema. Flaubert’s subtitle, as already mentioned, is *La révélation de l’âme*—”The Revelation of the Soul." But what is it? Is it a play, a kind of Theater of the Mind? Is it a novel, but disguised as a mono-drama? Is it a lyric effusion—a colossal riff on Hamlet’s soliloquy—in prose? Or is it an allegory of Orthodoxy and Heresy? Making the work even more difficult to place generically, the subtitle implies that *La Tentation* belongs to the tradition of Apocalypse.

Dunne’s translation gives helpful section-titles to the seven parts: "A Holy Saint"; "The Temptation of Love and Power"; "The Disciple, Hilarion"; "The Fiery Trial"; "All Gods, All Religions"; "The Mystery of Space"; "The Chimera and the Sphinx." The topical indicators suggest the range of Flaubert’s exploration, beginning with his descent from *his* present to Anthony’s Third and Fourth Centuries, and continuing from there into the remotest archeological strata of religion and religious experience.

Flaubert has composed his text to heighten its scenic character. The action of the seven sections being revelatory, hallucinatory, or in some way psychological, it confines itself, in the presumptive reality of the narrative, to Anthony’s domicile and its immediate environment: "It is in the Thebaïd, on the heights of a mountain, where a platform, shaped like a crescent, is surrounded by huge stones." (1) [*C’est dans le Thébaïde, au haut d’une montagne, sur une plate-forme arrondie en demi-lune, et qu’enferment de grosses pierres.*] The mountainous altitude already boasts mythic and religious connotations; the "huge stones" that surround Anthony’s mud-and-reed cell suggest the prehistoric monuments of the British Isles and France, with their implications of ritual activity, including sacrifice, but also telling of the cosmological orientation of their builder-societies. Anthony has fled to this remote spot, not exactly from some improbable antique modernity, but from its equivalent in the urban contemporaneity of the proto-Byzantine world—the heady ferment, mystical and philosophical, ascetic and orgiastic, of Late Hellenism. As Flaubert’s scene-setting puts it: "Some ten paces or so from the cell a tall cross is planted in the ground; and, at the other end of the platform, a gnarled old palm-tree leans over the abyss, for the side of the mountain is scarped; and at the bottom of the cliff the Nile swells, as it were, into a lake." (1) [*A dix pas de la cabane, il y a une longue croix plantée dans le sol; et, à l’autre bout de la plate-forme, un vieux palmier tordu se penche sur l’abîme, car la montagne est taillée à pic, et le Nil semble faire un lac au bas de la falaise.*]

The Cross stands empty, but the Crucified Christ has displaced himself metaphorically into the twisted palm. Anthony’s work being the *Imitatio Christi*, the tortured character of the palm also stands for the agony in his soul and for the spiritual triumph of the martyrs. Like the palm, Anthony is poised in his itinerary over the abyss. The twistings of the Nile below will eventually transform themselves into the image of a serpent, one of the guises of Satan.

In the distance, importantly as it will prove, "Bushes, the pebbles, the earth, now wear the hard colour of bronze; and through space floats a golden dust so fine that it is scarcely distinguishable from the vibrations of light." (2) [*Les buissons, les cailloux, la terre, tout maintenant paraît dur comme du bronze; et dans l’espace flotte une poudre d’or tellement menue qu’elle se confonde avec la vibration de la lumière.*] Flaubert, the master of symbols, is symbolizing. Readers stand before a moment of radical transformation in consciousness, or what Eric Voegelin liked to call a *leap in being*. Indeed, Voegelin has addressed Flaubert
generally, and even *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, specifically. It is only a mention in passing, but the context is highly suggestive, an essay on Henry James' novelette *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) that began as Voegelin's personal letter to James scholar Robert B. Heilman and later appeared in *The Southern Review* in 1971 with an elaborate afterword. Voegelin interprets *The Turn* as a study in the puritanical deformation of the Platonic-Christian soul, which succumbs to the Gnostic temptation of total Godlike self-sufficiency through the prideful refusal of grace, which is also a refusal of what Voegelin denominates as openness to being or a willingness to cooperate in the process of reality. Concerning *The Turn of the Screw*, in an observation that applies quite relevantly to *La Tentation*, Voegelin writes that James' *Governess* symbolizes "the demonically closed soul... which is possessed by the pride of handling the problem of good and evil by its own means." The "closed soul" aims at "self-mastery and control of spiritual forces." Such a soul runs the risk of becoming "rigid in its blindness to the supernatural." This spiritual deformation, reaching beyond the individual, can afflict a whole society.

In Voegelin's judgment, Western society has, in the modern period, undergone just such "a fateful shift... from existence in openness toward the cosmos to existence in the mode of closure against, and denial of, its reality." In the afterword, Voegelin moderately qualifies his earlier enthusiasm for *The Turn of the Screw* by criticizing James for his deliberate obscuration of his own symbols. "James," he writes, "never used symbols with the intellectual mastery of a Flaubert in his *Tentation de Saint-Antoine.*"

Another of Voegelin's essays from around the same time as the study of James, his "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History" (1970), also speaks relevantly to *La Tentation*. In "Equivalences," Voegelin neatly resumes the analysis of consciousness that he had already elaborated in the first four volumes of *Order and History*. Voegelin insists that consciousness is historically cumulative: "If today a philosopher turns reflectively toward the area of reality called human existence, he does not discover it as a terra incognita, but moves among symbols concerning the truth of existence which represent the experiences of his predecessors." The question whether or not the philosopher will "find his bearings" nevertheless insists on itself. What answer the question produces will depend, Voegelin writes, on "the manner in which [the investigator's] own existence has been formed." Such a formation proceeds in one of two modes, either as "intellectual discipline in openness toward reality" or as "deformed by... uncritical acceptance of beliefs which obscure the reality of immediate experience." A typical deformation denotes the arduously created symbol, which it fails to grasp, to the level of a doctrine, consisting of propositions, which one may learn by rote. Any symbol, like any sacred object, provokes resentment; no one in the audience can claim authorship. Likewise paradox provokes anxiety.

The "fateful shift" at the cusp of modernity that Voegelin invokes in the essay on James undertook resentfully and anxiously the systematic demotion of symbols into doctrines with the result that, beginning in the Nineteenth Century, the West had become a "spectacle of dogmatomachy—with its frustration, anxiety, alienation, ferocious vituperation, and violence."

A milieu of dogmatomachy is exemplarily "closed." But to what is it closed? As Voegelin puts it: "Man participates in the process of reality"; and man remains "conscious... of himself as being part of reality, and of his consciousness as a mode of participation in its reality." Expanding these basic intuitions, Voegelin writes: "Man is able to engender symbols which express his experience of reality"; and, "man knows the symbols... to be part of the reality that they symbolize." Finally, "Reality is not a given that could be observed from a vantage point outside itself but embraces the consciousness in which it becomes luminous." The terms luminous and luminosity stand centrally in Voegelin's discourse. The same terms have an important role in Flaubert's symbolism in *La Tentation*, as in the "golden dust so fine that it is scarcely distinguishable from the vibrations of light" that suffuses the atmosphere just before the saint's epic visionary experience, the projected form of his internally experienced Temptation, commences. In the framework of Voegelin's "noetology," the first major allurement, that of the Queen of Sheba, is not significant. Its appeal is gross; it least challenges the saint's fortitude. With the appearance of Hilarion, Anthony's former disciple, in Section III, however, the fiendish inveiglement acquires a new subtle power. Flaubert has produced in Hilarion the monstrous outgrowth of "the demonically closed soul" whose field of contestation is dogma and whose dogmata are the ethical and intellectual equivalents of idols. This is the soul that attempts to extinguish "the bright morning star" [claire étoile du matin] in favor of nocturnal obscurity on the premise that "the moon affords us sufficient light" (45) [*La lune nous éclaire suffisamment*]. There are other madmen in the cortège of figures in *La Tentation*, not least Valentine and
Apollonius, but Hilarion prefigures them all in his refusal of openness to being.

Hilarion would require that Anthony renounce the Imitatio Christi to declare his total self-sufficiency, but the saint insists stubbornly on his humble status: "Would that I were one of those whose souls are always intrepid and their minds firm—like the great Athanasius." (41) [Que ne suis-je un de ceux dont l’âme est toujours intrépide et l’esprit firme—comme le grand Athanase, par exemple.] Athanasius, who earned the nickname "Pillar of the Church" for his defense of Orthodoxy, would become Anthony’s hagiographer after the holy man’s death at an advanced age. Revealing himself to be the visible form of the satanic principle of slander, Hilarion calumniates Athanasius: "He was unlawfully ordained by seven bishops": he is "haughty, a cruel man, always mixed up in intrigues," who "tried to corrupt Eustatius"; and "he acknowledges that he knows nothing of the Word." (41-42) ["Il a été ordonné illégalement par sept évêques"; "un homme orgueilleux, cruel, toujours dans les intrigues," qui "ait voulu corrompre Eustates"; "il avoue ne rien comprendre à la nature du Verbe."] Refining his doctrinal subtlety, Hilarion reports that, "At the Council of Nicea, he said, speaking of Jesus, ‘The man of the Lord.’" (42) [Au concile de Nicée, il a dit en parlant de Jésus: ‘Homme de Seigneur.’] Hilarion appears in the last-quoted utterance as a veritable military policeman of grammar and diction, prepared on the basis of a single jot to issue an indictment and make an arrest.

Flaubert’s pseudo-Hilarion corresponds to Voegelin’s formulation in the "Experience and Symbolization" essay of “the philosopher who has made deformed existence his own,” whose "existential faith [has] dried up to doctrinal belief," the result being a "scotosis of truth." Flaubert, in this single utterance, anticipates the Twentieth-Century dystopias, not to mention the Twenty-First Century actuality, in which slips of the tongue and false attributions occasion elaborate rituals of denunciation and public chastisement.

When Hilarion fails in his appeal to Anthony to betray his loyalty to Athanasius, he bursts out in a bilious accusation against his interlocutor: Hilarion calls Anthony a hypocrite; he flytes him for fantasizing about whores, feasts, and riches; and he scorns him for lacking in faith and for not possessing truth. Hilarion arrives at the last by a devious pseudo-syllogism: Whereas Anthony is inveterately lugubrious, truth stimulates happiness; therefore Anthony must be in default of truth. Hilarion says: "The possession of the truth gives joy." (42) [La possession de la vérité donne la joie.] Flaubert’s possession is related to Voegelin’s closure. In Voegelin’s reading, Christianity is the most tentative of revelations, even more tentative in its symbolism than Plato’s philosophical vision because the Christian advances the quest for truth to a new level of differentiation. Voegelin’s assertion partakes of a paradox, but not so much as to be irresolvable. The Gospel, according to Voegelin, absorbs the Platonic insight that the luminosity of consciousness illuminates an "in-between" (Plato’s metaxy) where the questing subject invariably finds himself: Between ignorance and knowledge and therefore having to distinguish between truth and falsehood; between birth and death and therefore between mortality and immortality; and above all, always in motion, never coming to a stop. That condition of never coming to a stop, an equivalent of perpetual tentativeness, produces tension in the soul, which some subjects cannot bear. From this resistance arises the demand to bring all processes to a stop.

In the closing-down of experiential movement, the plastic symbols become rigid doctrines which a subject may possess. In The New Science of Politics (1952), Voegelin ascribed the emergence of the Idealist systems to a desperate craving, precisely in a failure of faith, for "massively possessive experience."

Faith, as Flaubert’s Anthony senses, is other than a "massively possessive experience." Flaubert has placed Anthony’s hut between the Cross and the twisted palm hanging over the abyss and has reduced his material possessions to the absolute minimum. In Section I, Anthony complains of his poverty, but he endures it all the same. Hilarion’s new tactic consists in his trying to lure Anthony into accepting the empirically valid as the substitute for faith. Once more, Hilarion’s style is pseudo-syllogistic. In a discussion of the relation of miracle to faith, Hilarion poses, "What, then, is a miracle," to which he gives his own answer: "An occurrence which seems to us outside the limits of Nature." (45) [Qu’est-ce que donc qu’un miracle. . . . [il est] un événement qui nous semble en dehors de la nature.] Hilarion plays verbal tricks. He reduces the cosmos, or reality, to nature; that is, exclusively to the material aspect of the whole. Simultaneously, he sneaks in the false premise that faith requires, and may perfectly satisfy itself with, the equivalent merely of a banal empirical demonstration. Yet that is not all. The real aim shows itself in the follow-up: "But do we know all Nature’s powers? And, from the mere fact that a thing ordinarily does not astonish us, does it follow that we comprehend it?" (45) [Mai connaissions-nous toute sa puissance? Et de ce qu’une chose
ordinairement ne nous étonne pas, s’ensuit-il que nous la comprenions?] Hilarion invokes an anti-principle of epistemological nihilism: The only real knowledge is naturally based and empirically verifiable; but really, we understand almost nothing; therefore in their ignorance people need a doctrine—a thing in whose possession their ceaseless and fruitless inquiries may find rest. It is a version of the Grand-Inquisitor argument.

Voegelin argues in The New Science no less a thesis than that "uncertainty is the very essence of Christianity." The gospel has banished the gods, leaving an unprecedented "de-divinized" world. "The life of the soul in openness toward God, the waiting, the periods of aridity and dullness, guilt and despondency, contrition and repentance, forsakenness and hope against hope the silent stirrings of love and grace, trembling on the verge of a certainty that if gained is lost—the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience." Hilarion’s requirement for demonstrable doctrine suggests that Flaubert had arrived at a similar conclusion already, seventy-five years before Voegelin. For Hilarion (who is, of course, the apparition in Anthony’s dream, not the historical Hilarion), Scripture may be reduced to a textual problem, as though it was the stenographic record of testimony in a legal proceeding: "And yet the Angel of the Annunciation, in Matthew, appears to Joseph, whilst in Luke it is to Mary. The anointing of Jesus by a woman comes to pass, according to the First Gospel, at the beginning of his public life, but according to the three others, a few days before his death." An ellipsis at the end of Hilarion’s four-sentence speech (truncated in the quotation) signifies that, as Flaubert sees it, the catalogue of discrepancies could continue indefinitely—and irrelevantly.

To obsess about factitious details in a revelatory text is to miss the symbolic point entirely. Additionally, no one cares about such discrepancies in the Theogony of Hesiod or the Dionysiaca of Nonnos, but only in the Lives of Christ by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Flaubert finds his personae, ideas, and events in a remote and exotic century, but insofar as La Tentation constitutes a critique, it takes its object in the modern Europe of the author’s day, proudly divesting itself of the superstition of faith. Voegelin’s insight thus bears appositely on La Tentation when, in The New Science, he writes that "the more people are drawn or pressured into the Christian orbit, the greater will be the number among them who do not have the spiritual stamina for the heroic adventure of the soul that is Christianity." Authorization to go pedantically deconstructing among the symbols seems to be what Hilarion means when he tells Anthony that, among the free intellects, "entire liberty of research is permitted us" (47) [toute liberté de recherché nous est permise]. It is a way of pushing back against the articulation of truths in a new leap in being. The project to deconstruct those truths would then be a sign of spiritual anxiety. In place of what the pedants deconstruct, Hilarion’s program for filling the spiritual void offers magical operations. Hilarion questions Anthony, "Do you wish to become acquainted with the hierarchy of Angels, the virtue of Numbers, the explanation of germs and metamorphoses?" (47) [Désires-tu connaître la hiérarchie des Anges, la vertu des Nombres, la raison des germes et des métamorphoses?]

Esoterica such as those correspond to what Voegelin invokes when he writes how "the attempt at immanetizing the meaning of existence is fundamentally an attempt at bringing our knowledge of transcendence into a firmer grip than the cognitio fidei . . . will afford." The esoterica, whose operation Hilarion invites Anthony to learn, constitute the Gnosticism that, in Voegelin’s assessment, has "accompanied Christianity from its very beginnings."

The vulgar interpretation of saintly agony, whether it is Anthony’s or some other holy man’s, is that the subject grapples with an underpowered will to believe. Flaubert offers a different thesis, which Voegelin’s "noetology" greatly clarifies. Whereas Pagan faith was maximal, acquiring by the late Imperial centuries elaborate doctrines and rituals, the new faith is minimal; whereas a Mithraic baptism indeed left its participant in proprietorship of a massively possessive experience, the new faith is, by itself, so tenuous that its espouser, expecting a sensible metamorphosis but registering only the minimum of finding himself in motion in the "in-between," doubts whether he is in possession of anything at all. That doubt is inexorably constitutive of the belief. Now everything that occurs to Anthony in Flaubert’s generically ambiguous text happens to him, of course, in his mind. His struggle, his temptation, unfolds on the internal scene of his symbolic imagination, the interlocutory figures being projections of that imagination. These observations lead to another comment by Voegelin that has relevance in respect of La Tentation. In the essay on James, Voegelin calls attention to the "afflicted . . . public figures" that dominate the contemporary, super-mediated
commons. Not even the truly "critical" man can "escape from the scene that they dominate." Nevertheless, the "critical" man "is not obliged to pretend that disease is health, or that men who suffer in public do not bore him à dormir debout."

Flaubert’s Anthony—reflecting probably the historical Anthony—resolutely refused to suffer in public. He never became a martyr, for example, although his influence on the formation of the emerging Christian society was likely as great as or greater than any martyr’s. On the other hand, in Flaubert’s treatment, Anthony restores the notion of martyrdom to its etymological minimum of witnessing in a cause: "Here, for more than thirty years, have I been constantly groaning in the desert! I have carried on my loins eighty pounds of bronze, like Eusebius; I have exposed my body to the stings of insects, like Macarius; I have remained fifty-three nights without closing an eye, like Pachomius; and those who are decapitated, torn with pincers, or burnt, possess less virtue, inasmuch as my life is a continual martyrdom!" (11)

III. La Tentation from a Girardian perspective

Flaubert in La Tentation has confronted the epoch, summed up in Anthony's spiritual tribulation, in which the archaic sacred, passing through the urbanity of Hellenistic culture and mixing itself with the charisma of the Roman Empire, must acknowledge the new dispensation that accretes around the Passion of Christ and takes the form of a new, non-sacrificial religion, Christianity. Voegelin argues that Imperial "Summodeism" was so similar to Christianity that the distance between them had become minimal; and yet that very brevity appeared, to many, as impassable. Flaubert and Voegelin, brought into juxtaposition, become mutually illuminative.

While it is always très triste to take leave of Voegelin, it is equally always très plaisant to find oneself chez Girard. If only Girard might have slipped himself into Flaubert’s text! Hilarion takes advantage of the saint’s naivety by pesterling him with false syllogisms in a mode of aggressive, nit-picking skepticism. To the barrage of discrepancies that, as Hilarion sees it, qualifies Scripture only as a farrago, Girard might aptly have replied as he does to Michel Treguer, in a similar imbroglio, in When These Things Begin (1996; English version 2014): "I’m not bothered in the least. . . . I define Christianity as the event that wrenched the first Christians away from the power of myth, which is the power of the unanimous mimetic lie." Girard might have pointed out to Anthony’s nightmare-inquisitor, again as he points out to Treguer, that "Christianity is the same drama as the fundamental myths and major foundation stories, and in both cases the result is religion. In the eyes of our ‘wise and learned,’ it has to be a myth." Girard even makes use of the luminosity metaphor common to Flaubert and Voegelin: "Christianity sheds light on mythical religion whereas mythical religion doesn’t shed light on anything at all."

Looking at La Tentation in light of Girard offers the further advantage that Girard’s "Fundamental Anthropology" more or less begins with the discovery, which Girard elaborates in Deceit, Desire & the Novel (1962), that the touchstone realist novels of the second half of the Nineteenth Century invariably put in counterpoint with their meticulous sociological descriptions of middle-class banality an implacable machinery of ritual and theological—that is to say, sacred—metaphors that seems at odds with the pretense of science that ostensibly motivates the authors. Yet in another way, the Girard of Deceit Desire & the Novel offers slightly less overt help in the project of making sense of La Tentation than does Voegelin’s essay on James. Girard surprisingly omits to mention La Tentation in his study of “Self and Other in Literary Structure.” More surprising even than that, the Flaubertian title most closely associated with La Tentation, namely Madame Bovary (1857), receives only four dedicated pages of Girard’s text out of more than three hundred in the English edition. Girard’s theme in Deceit, Desire & the Novel of deviated transcendence nevertheless promises to illuminate La Tentation. Likewise what Girard does say about Madame Bovary, scant though his discussion is, will prove applicable, especially when it is coordinated with Girard’s later work, to La Tentation.

The insight that Madame Bovary indeed tells the same story as La Tentation belongs originally to Charles
Baudelaire, who knew the latter text only from the fragments of Flaubert's 1856 abridged reworking that appeared in L'Artiste in 1856-57. In a review (1857) of Madame Bovary and its attendant scandal, Baudelaire writes (P. E. Charvet's translation) how, had he been able to conduct a systematic comparison of the two works, he "would have found it easy to recognize, under the closely woven texture of Madame Bovary, [Flaubert's] high capacity for irony and lyricism that lights up La Tentation." Extending the parallelism, Baudelaire remarks of La Tentation that: "Here the poet appears without disguise, and his Bovary, tempted by all the devils of illusion, of heresy, by all the lusts of the physical surrounding—in short, his St. Anthony, harassed by all the lunatic urges that get the better of us, would have provided a better apologia than his humble tale of bourgeois life." Baudelaire regards La Tentation as being "more interesting for poets and philosophers" than Madame Bovary. Given the considerable overlap between the concepts of temptation and mediation, it is easy to repair Girard's omission of La Tentation from Deceit, Desire & the Novel.

The chapter in Girard's first book most relevant to La Tentation is the one bearing the title "Men Become Gods in the Eyes of Each Other." Girard writes, "The denial of God does not eliminate transcendency but diverts it from the au-delà to the en-deçà." Every projection of Anthony's internal struggle in La Tentation involves a demonic mediator—a mediator-manipulator—who aims to wrench back Anthony from the wrenching-away from myth, that Christian version of the periagoge, which constitutes the glowing nucleus of his conversion. Thus, quite as Athanasius asserted in his Life of the saint, all tempters of the holy man were metamorphoses of Satan. One simple way of grasping the necessity of eremitic solitude is to see it as the surest way to remove oneself from the constant pressure to fixate on the neighbors and thereby to neutralize the nasty peer-pressure that existing vestigial Christianity rouses itself ritually now and then to denounce. Not only, according to Girard, does denial of God not abolish the vertical or spiritual dimension, but it ensures rather that "the imitation of one's neighbor" should replace "the imitation of Christ."

Flaubert gives to Anthony in Section I of La Tentation to describe the stages of his deliberate self-extraction from society: "When I left home, everyone found fault with me. My mother sank into a dying state; my sister, from a distance, made signs to me to come back; and the other one wept, Ammonaria, that child whom I used to meet every evening, beside the cistern, as she was leading away her cattle." (3) [Tous me blâmaient lorsque j'ai quitté la maison. Ma mère s'affaissa mourante; ma sœur, de loin, me faisait des signes pour revenir; et l'autre pleurait, Ammonaria, cette enfant que je rencontrais chaque soir au bord de la citerne, quand elle amenait ses buffles.]

The departure adds up to the first temptation: Not to wrench oneself away, but to yield to the cozy closure that reveals itself as sacrificial indignation as soon as anyone flouts its solidarity. In Anthony's recollection, Ammonaria tries to follow him, but the camels carry him away too swiftly. She too is detaching herself, but too late. Later, in a dreadful nightmare, Anthony sees Ammonaria being martyred, as her historical type was under the Decian persecution.

Flaubert sees the scene that Anthony physically, but also, and more importantly, spiritually, flees, as a society in a state of demonic crisis—what Girard would call a mimetic crisis. The scene resists flight. Indeed, after initial tribulation in the desert, Anthony finds himself back in Alexandria, where, as Flaubert gives it to his persona to recount, "I became a pupil of the venerable Didymus." (4) [Alors, j'ai voulu m'instruire près du bon vieillard Didyme.] Dunne's English is a bit defective. Flaubert's French emphasizes Anthony's sense of stifling closeness ("près du bon vieillard") in his unwilled homecoming. Whatever and whoever the historical Didymus might have been, even supposing him to have been a moral paragon and an intellectual prodigy, Flaubert will have attended carefully to the etymological basis of his name—from the Greek for twin, with its suggestion of imitative doubling and absolute proximity. Flaubert's Alexandria is the milieu of Voegelin's "dogmatomachy," in an acute historical manifestation. Flaubert anticipates Voegelin in his characterization of ecumenic societies as shattered local societies forced into new and disturbing shapes by imperial conquest. He anticipates Girard in his intuition about the danger in propinquity.

Anthony describes Alexandria as thronged by "men of every nation" ["hommes de toutes les nations"]. He recalls seeing in the Alexandrian commons "Cimmerians, clad in bear-skin, and the Gymnosophists of the Ganges, who smear their bodies with cow-dung" (4) [des Cimmériens, vêtus de peaux d'ours, et des Gymnosophistes du Gange frotté de bouse de vache], images that suggest mythic undifferentiation via a descent into bestiality and in the form of mimetic contagion. "Besides," as Anthony continues, "the city is
filled with heretics, the followers of Manes, of Valentinus, of Basilides, and of Arius, all of them eagerly striving to discuss with you points of doctrine and to convert you to their views." (4) [D'ailleurs la ville est pleine d'hérétiques, des sectateurs de Manès, de Valentin, de Basilide, d'Arius—tous vous accaparent pour discuter et vous convaincre.] The notions of discussion and conviction take from the context an ominous coloration. Discussion becomes inquisition; and the question of conviction becomes the agenda to identify the scapegoats, as demanded by the crisis.

Girard remarks in Deceit, Desire & the Novel that whenever the distance separating the subject and the mediator shrinks so that the mediator becomes the rival, the stature of the mediator seems to the subject to increase. The subject makes of the mediator, now become a model-rival, "a monstrous divinity," as Girard writes. Flaubert undertakes in Anthony's colloquy with Hilarion in Part III of La Tentation that Hilarion should demonstrate this tendency of perceived aggrandizement in nearness. "What an air of authority," says Anthony to Hilarion; "it appears to me that you are growing taller." (44) [Quel air d'autorité! Il me semble que tu grandis.] Flaubert adds in the scenic description that, "In fact, Hilarion's height has progressively increased; and, in order not to see him, Antony closes his eyes." [En effet, la taille d'Hilarion s'est progressivement élevée; et Antoine, pour ne plus le voir, ferme les yeux.] The trouble is that Hilarion goes on talking while Anthony goes on mistaking his aggression and mood-swings as intrepidity. Hilarion has meanwhile changed his tactic: He now ceases speaking for himself and becomes, in Part IV, the master of ceremonies for a review of preachers, ranters, and sectarians.

The review takes place in a vast basilica with numberless galleries, niches, and chapels, through which the saint wanders. The cast of characters consists in a nearly exhaustive round-up of Late-Antique theo-maniacs drawn from every aspect of terminal Paganism and both Orthodox and heretical Christianity. Mani is there; so are Valentinus, Bardesanes, Simon Magus, Origen, Irenaeus, and Basilides. The Elkhaites, Carpocratians, Nicolaitans, Marcionites, Helvidians, and Messalians put in appearances. Every shouting voice propagates a doctrine that purports itself to be truth; a prescriptive ritual regime, usually sadomasochistic in one way or another, accompanies every doctrine. Every third of the way through Section IV, after the appearance of the Cainites, Anthony witnesses a bizarre performance: "The Audians draw arrows against the Devil; the Collyridians fling blue veils to the ceiling; the Ascitians prostrate themselves before a wineskin; the Marcionites baptise a corpse with oil. Close beside Appelles, a woman, the better to explain her idea, shows a round loaf of bread in a bottle; another, surrounded by the Sampsians, distributes like a host the poussière of her sandals." (61) [Les Audiens tirent des flèches contre le Diable; les Collyridiens lancent au plafond des voiles bleus; les Ascites se prosternent devant une outre; et les Marcionites baptisent un mort avec de l'huile. Auprès d'Appelles, une femme, pour expliquer mieux son idée, fait voir un pain rond dans une bouteille; une autre, au milieu des Sampséens, distribue comme une hostie la poussière de ses sandales.]

The performance reaches its climax when "the Circonciliens cut one another's throats; the Velesians make a rattling sound; Bardesanes sings; Carpocras dances; Maximilla and Priscilla utter loud groans; and the false prophetess of Cappadocia, quite naked, resting on a lion and brandishing three torches, yells forth the Terrible Invocation." (61) [Les Circonciliens s'entr'égorgent, les Valésians râlent, Bardesane chante, Carpocras danse, Maximilla et Priscilla poussent des gémissements sonores; et la fausse prophétesse de Cappadoce, toute nue, accoudée sur un lion et secouant trois flambeaux, hurle l'Invocation Terrible.] The exhibition, provoked by the competitive oratory of the doctrines, descends from the level of discourse to the level of ritual action, and finally, through sacrificial suicide, to beastly "groans" and the equally non-verbal "Invocation." Flaubert's chain of events reverses the process of cultural development, as summed up in Girard's brief formula in The One by Whom Scandal Comes (2014): "Historical chronology should begin with the evolution of the human race, accompanied by the rising power of mimetic desire, which gave birth to crises of murderous and destructive violence for human populations." Rituals of sacrifice channel violence until the Passion reveals the underlying scapegoat mechanism. As in Voegelin's reading of history so too, in Girard's, does the appearance of the new dispensation exacerbate the feebleness of the already weakened sacred of the superannuated Greco-Roman world, producing desperate reactions right down to the present day.

In the second half of La Tentation, Part IV, Flaubert brings on stage the embodiment of Late-Antique resistance to the action of the Gospel Logos—none other than the man proposed under the official syncretism of Septimius Severus to fill the requirement for a Pagan Counter-Christ, Apollonius of Tyana (15-100). The writer Philostratus (172-250) composed his Life of Apollonius, Flaubert's source, on a commission
by the emperor's wife, lady Julia, around 220. Flaubert remembers to let the herald of Apollonius, Damis, go before him, announcing the approach of the "Master," who, to Anthony, "has the appearance of a saint" [il a l'air d'un saint]. Apollonius, whom Flaubert portrays as a psychopath, rehearses to Anthony his curriculum vitae. He tells Anthony, "I will first describe to you the long road I travelled to gain doctrine; and, if you find in all my life one bad action, you will stop me—for he must scandalize by his words who has offended by his actions." (86) [Je te raconterai la longue route que j'ai parcourue pour obtenir la doctrine—et si tu trouves dans toute ma vie une action mauvaise, tu m'arrêteras—car celui-là scandalisera par ses paroles qui a méfait par ses œuvres.]

Violence has followed Apollonius along his route. A priest in jealousy slits his own throat; a governor who threatens the mystic with death, dies. Apollonius recalls how "the plague ravaged Ephesus" and "I made them stone an old mendicant," to which Damis adds, "and the plague was gone!" (91) [La peste ravageait Ephèse; j'ai fait lapider un vieux mendiant. . . . Et la peste s'en est allée!]

Whereas Girard never wrote about La Tentation, he did write about Apollonius of Tyana. In particular, in I See Satan Fall like Lightning (2004), he has written about the episode in The Life of the plague at Ephesus and the stoning of the old beggar. Girard reminds his readers concerning Apollonius that "among pagans his miracles were viewed as superior to those of Jesus." The details of Philostratus' account of the episode that pique Girard are the reported persistence of the plague, the fact that Apollonius convenes the Ephesians in the civic amphitheater, the initial reluctance of the Ephesians to heed Apollonius' admonition to stone the beggar, and the transformation of the victim after the stoning, when the bloody corpse is no longer that of a human being but of a large, rabid dog. As Girard writes, "If [Philostratus had been] a Christian, he would have been accused of slandering paganism." For Girard, the epidemic of Philostratus' story functions in the typical mythic way to designate a state of communal or civic crisis, similar to the pestilence that afflicts Thebes in the Oedipus Myth. "The miracle," Girard writes, "consists of triggering a mimetic contagion so powerful that it finally polarizes the entire population of the city against the unfortunate beggar." According to Girard, "Apollonius' miracle embodies the kernel of a teaching rightly termed religious, which would escape us if we took the miracle to be imaginary." By instigating the lapidation in the theater, moreover, Apollonius reinforces the ritualistic character of the purgation—bringing it close to the catharsis that Aristotle attributes to tragic performance.

Flaubert offers Apollonius as a summation of Late Antiquity's religious contentiousness, which frequently led to riots, killings, and massacres. Flaubert disdains to exclude Nicene Christians from being bodied forth along with the Pagans and the heretics in Apollonius. The heresiologist Irenaeus is part of the bellowing crowd of dogma-worshippers, as is the church-historian Eusebius. It seems, given the erudition of La Tentation, that Flaubert's train of thought anticipated Girard's. In I See Satan Fall, Girard remarks that "Eusebius of Caesarea, . . . aware of the harm that The Life of Apollonius did to Christianity . . . set out to show that the miracles of Apollonius are not impressive at all." Yet, Girard continues, Eusebius "never denounces the monstrous stoning," but rather he "reduces the debate, just like the partisans of the guru, to a mimetic rivalry between miracle workers." Girard goes on to compare Apollonius' lapidation of the old beggar to Jesus' refusal to sanction lapidation in the famous episode in the Gospel of John of the woman taken in adultery. "Saving the adulterous woman from being stoned, as Jesus does," Girard writes, "means that he prevents the violent contagion from getting started."

Flaubert's Apollonius sufficiently frightens Anthony that the latter, crying out to God to help him, "flings himself against the Cross" [il se précipite vers la Croix]. Apollonius wants to know of Anthony, "What is your desire?" [Quel est ton désir?] When Anthony prays aloud for Jesus to aid him, Apollonius mistakes the petition as a request to him to "make Jesus appear" (97) [Veux-tu que je fasse apparaître Jésus?]. Apollonius tells Anthony that Jesus shall not only appear, but "He shall cast off His crown, and we shall speak together face to face" [Il fera ta couronne, et nous causerons face à face]. The guru's rhetorical figure, "face to face," communicates with Flaubert's invocations of closeness and thronging elsewhere in La Tentation. The prophesy, which is really a demand in disguise that, coming "face to face" with Apollonius, Jesus shall "cast off His crown," also speaks to the mystic as a personification of rivalry and resentment. Jesus, of course, remains absent. The metaphysical rivalry belongs to Apollonius alone, revealing what Girard, writing of Flaubert in Deceit, Desire & the Novel, calls "the emptiness of oppositions" that stems from "metaphysical desire." Girard indeed credits Flaubert with having invented "the style of false enumerations and false antitheses" that aims at the representation of "double nullity." Every model is his rival and vice versa.
Girard's commentary in *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* concerning Flaubert's last (incomplete) novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (Opus Posthumus 1881) applies equally to *La Tentation*: "In that novel, modern thought loses what dignity and strength remained, with the loss of continuity and stability. . . . Ideas, systems, theories, and principles confront each other in opposed pairs, which are always determined negatively." Rightfully, then, at the very beginning of *La Tentation*, Part V, looking back on the encounter with Apollonius, Flaubert gives these words to Anthony: "That was really hell" (99) [Celui-là vaut tout l'enfer]. Readers must remind themselves, however, of what Dos Passos reminds them in *Three Soldiers*: Whereas Flaubert sets his action in the Fourth Century he uses that action to comment on modernity. The indignity of the dogmatomachy is identical with the indignity of ideological contentions in the Nineteenth or Twentieth or Twenty-First Century. A cross-section of any day in 2016, as reported in the New York *Times* or on the Cable News Network, may serve as a mirror to Anthony's vision in *La Tentation*, Section IV, complete with bloody persecutions, throat-cuttings, and actual stonings-to-death. Demonic heads bark at one another across the ether. In *Evolution and Conversion* (2007), responding to João Cezar de Castro Rocha, Girard opines that "the idea of the end of history as the end of ideologies is simply misleading" because "the ideologies are not violent per se, rather it is man who is violent." Nevertheless, "ideologies provide the grand narrative which covers up our victimary tendency"; ideologies are, "the mythical happy endings to our histories of persecutions."

**IV. *La Tentation* from a Gansian Perspective**

In *La Tentation*, Part I, as night falls and the saint's vision begins to take shape, Flaubert gives an odd detail: "Through the deepening shadows of the night pointed snouts reveal themselves here and there with ears erect and glittering eyes. Anthony advances . . . the animals take flight . . . a troop of jackals." (7) Anthony notices that "one of them remains behind, and, resting on two paws, with his body bent and his head on one side, he places himself in an attitude of defiance." That is Dunne's translation. Kitty Mrosovsky renders the same phrase with a slight but significant difference: "One of them remains, standing on two paws..." ["Un seul est resté, et qui se tient sur deux pattes, le corps en demi-cercle et la tête oblique, dans une pose pleine de défiance."] Anthony remarks out loud that it would mitigate his loneliness were he able to pet the attractive canine, but when he whistles invitingly, the creature runs off "to rejoin his fellows" (8) ["il s'en va rejoindre les autres"]. The little episode, likely to escape the attention of the reader, piquantly insists on a necessarily central theme of *La Tentation*, that namely of the saint's humanity, or rather of his essential nature qua human. Flaubert never editorializes; he never announces his themes, but he works always by the most subtle indirection. Given that bringing his central personality into face-to-face confrontation with numerous contrasting others is a structural device in the narrative, this early instance of the contrasting gesture must be important to what follows. How so?

The jackals first appear in search of prey; Anthony, weak and alone, is potential prey. The pitched ears and bright eyes of the predators indicate, however, noticeable animal intelligence. The pack's cooperation indicates its social character. By separating from the pack and by rising in a quasi-human stance, the alpha jackal resembles something halfway between animal and human rather like the satyrs and werewolves of myth. The semblance proves false; he returns to the pack. The animal-human mixture will recur in Part V of *La Tentation*, where Anthony reviews the totality of known religions from the earliest Mesopotamian cults through to the modern god who calls himself "Science." It will recur one more time in Part VI, where the chief figures are the Sphinx and the Chimera. An animal might rise towards human status; but then so might a human being lapse back into animal status. Flaubert's category of bêtise communicates with such a lapse. Flaubert's idea of consciousness is, moreover, a thoroughly historical idea: For the humble anchorite to represent the struggle of consciousness to ascend to the highest, the visionary or revelatory, niveau, the subject of that consciousness must resume the totality of human experience beginning at the first glimmer of self-awareness.

The episode of the jackal has another meaning: In it Anthony is the tempter rather than the addressee of temptation. The alpha jackal's "defiance" functions as a paradoxical mute model for Anthony moments before the serial temptations of his phantasmagoric experience commence. The alpha jackal has followed his nature and Anthony must now summon the fortitude to defend his ascetic commitments against the seduction of détente at a lower level of consciousness. Anthony feels the tug of self-pity. At that moment: "The two arms of the cross cast a shadow on the sand; Antony, who is weeping, perceives it." (8) ["Les
The way out of the imbroglio is to recognize, as Flaubert has, that resentment is constitutive of consciousness. As Gans reminds his readers in *The End of Culture* (1985), Western consciousness, as represented in the literary continuum, commences with Achilles’ expression of resentment against Agamemnon in Homer’s *Iliad*. Gans writes: "Resentment may be defined as the scandal of the peripheral self at the centrality of the other which transforms the equality of the original scene of representation into an absolute polarity of significance." It is not merely Western consciousness, of course, but consciousness per se that necessarily integrates resentment. For Gans, resentment "differs from mere envy in being directed not at contingent but at communally significant and hence ethically necessary differences." Indeed, Anthony’s mood of resentment prompts a vision in which the saint sees himself *acting out* his resentful impulses in the most extravagant ways. Imagining himself back in Alexandria, Anthony sees "monuments in various styles of architecture . . . an uninterrupted succession of Royal structures . . . [and the] glass, perfume, and paper factories" (22) ["monuments d'architecture différente . . . une suite interrompue de constructions royales . . . [et les] fabriques de verre, de parfums et papyrus"]. He sees, in other words, the signs of the social and cultural establishment from which he originally exiled himself precisely so as to escape the charisma of their attraction. A militant crowd forms and begins to march through the streets. Anthony thinks to himself that these must be the monks of the Thebaïd—his followers—who have mobilized themselves to kill the heretics, the Arians, who dominate the Church in Alexandria.

When the slaughter begins, Anthony joins in. He "meets all his enemies one after another . . . Before killing them, he outrages them . . . rips them open, cuts their throats, knocks them down, drags the old men by their beards, runs over children, and beats those who are wounded." (23) ["Antoine retrouve tous ses ennemis l’un après l’autre . . . avant de les tuer il les outrage . . . il les éventre, égorge, assomme, traîne les vieillards par la barbe, écrase les enfants, frappe les blessés." Later, Anthony is led by the Emperor to witness a humiliation: "Anthony perceives slaves at the end of the stalls," who turn out to be "the fathers of the Council of Nicaea, in rags, abject." (27) ["Antoine remarque des esclaves au fond des loges . . . les pères du Concile de Nicée, en haillons, abjects." ] Anthony has experienced, in the form of a nightmare-hypothesis, what Gans, in *The End of Culture*, describes as the horror that resentment might burst out in practical realization that informs Christian morality. "This is to say," Gans writes, "that the form of sublimation carried out within the Judeo-Christian tradition is ultimately vulnerable to the prior reduction or sublimation of resentment by means *internal* to the operations of the social structure." Resentment is "sublimated" when it is deferred, as Anthony defers it by the practical expedient of absenting himself from the social structure. Since his consciousness necessarily takes the social structure with it, however, Anthony can never eliminate resentment—no more than anyone else.

Anthony suffers the seizure, as it were, of resentment even though he grasps that his ascetic discipline draws nourishment from a leap in consciousness that, in a decisive way, leaves the ethos represented by the hoary monuments of Alexandria far behind. One telling sign of this is that in the panorama of Alexandria with which the dream of slaughter commences Anthony sees among the museums and palaces rows of religious statuary representing Hermes on the one hand and Anubis, on the other, with his dog’s head and long snout. As sophisticated as the Late Hellenistic society is, it has not fully disentrammeled itself from its primitive origins. Here one might also pause to recall Flaubert’s representation of Apollonius of Tyana, who mentions to Anthony his dispelling of the plague in Ephesus through fomenting the lapidation of a beggar. The invocation of Anubis also forcibly recalls the encounter with the jackal, which seems momentarily to yearn towards human status but which retreats into its animality. Religion is, with language, one of the distinguishing marks of the human. Religion articulates itself as revelation. *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* is a revelatory text. In *Science & Faith* (1990), in a discussion of revelation, Gans remarks that "human self-discovery" is *not* "an eventless accumulation of knowledge on the model of the evolution of an academic
discipline." Rather, "Man's ability to extract general laws from a series of empirical observations depends on a language each word of which bears the marks of its origin in a particular event." A new revelation will constitute "the necessary source of a new human order." Flaubert's protagonist participates in the spontaneous formation of such a new order.

In *Science & Faith*, Gans also writes this: "Even in the highest cultural accomplishments of the old hierarchical societies, from the Egyptian 'novels' to the Babylonian epic of creation, we breathe the dead air of *ideology*. The entire cosmos is depicted as having been conceived and created only to lead up to this monarchy and this monarch, whose authority receives from these texts a broader cultural consecration than that which ritual can provide." When Anthony first went into the desert, as Flaubert gives it to him to say: "I selected for my abode the tomb of one of the Pharaohs." He fled when, as he says, "from the depths of the sarcophagi I heard a mournful voice arise, that called me by name—or rather, as it seemed to me, all the fearful pictures on the walls started into hideous life." (3) ["D'abord, j'ai choisi pour demeure le tombeau d'un Pharaon. . . . Du fond des sarcophages j'ai entendu s'élever une voix dolente qui m'appelait; ou bien je voyais vivre, tout à coup, les choses abominables peintes sur les murs."] The tomb and the hieroglyphs that repel Anthony, repel him because they breathe the stale air of an ideology under which a man claims the status of a god, the ultimate blasphemy and yet one that is necessary in the articulation of the human as it is contingent. When, at the conclusion of *La Tentation*, Part V, the final "god" announces itself as "Science," readers may rightfully infer that Flaubert implies a large degree of identity between idolatry on the one hand and ideology on the other.

Hilarion continues his role as master of ceremonies in *La Tentation*, Part V, which Dunne in his translation subtitles, "All Gods, All Religions," but it is the gods who come to the fore. The Anthony of *La Tentation* departs from the Anthony of Athanasius' *Life*, among other ways, by having been something of a lifetime student of comparative religion. The holy man in his monologue at the beginning of Part V tells how, as he says: "I recollect having seen hundreds of [gods] at a time, in the Island of Elephantinum, in the reign of Dioclesian. The Emperor had given up to the nomads a large territory, on condition that they should protect the frontiers; and the treaty was concluded in the name of the invisible Powers." (99) ["Je me rappelle en avoir vu des centaines [de dieux] à la fois, dans l'île d'Eléphantine, du temps du Dioclétien. L'empereur avait cédé aux nomades un grand pays, à la condition qu'ils gardent les frontières; et le traité fut conclu au nom des 'Puissances invisibles.'"] Immediately thereafter in the text, Anthony reports how: "When I dwelt in the Temple of Heliopolis, I used often to contemplate all the objects on the walls: vultures carrying scepters, crocodiles playing on lyres, men's faces joined to serpents' bodies, women with cows' heads prostrated before the ithyphallic deities; and their supernatural forms carried me away into other worlds." (100) ["Quand j'ai habité le temple d'Héliopolis, j'ai souvent considéré tout ce qu'il y a sur les murailes: vautours portant des sceptres, crocodiles pinçant des lyres, figures d'hommes avec des corps de serpent, femmes à tête de vache prosternées devant les dieux ithyphalliques; et leurs formes surnaturelles m'entrainaient vers d'autres mondes."]

Once again the images drag the viewer in the direction, not of openness to the prospect of human being, unfolding in its potentiality, but backwards, into the sacred and totemistic phases of human development. The images are materialistic. Anthony remarks that "in order that matter should have so much power, it should contain spirit" (100) ["pour que de la matière ait tant de pouvoir, il faut qu'elle contienne un esprit"] —words that suggest the absence, not the presence, of that selfsame "spirit." Such idols do in fact constitute the center of a scene that gives rise to representation and the mutual awareness of being suddenly in communion with others, but in a way that has gone flat, so to speak. In the cortege of the gods, all the apparitions partake in the same staledness, fascinating though they are. Buddha appears first, hovering in space, surrounded by a myriad of gods who themselves seem to be his worshippers. Buddha's self-explanation reaches its climax in a kind of Armageddon in which Anthony sees the gods "fall into convulsions and vomit forth their existences" (108) ["tombent dans les convulsions, et vomissent leurs existences"]. The primordial Mesopotamian deity, Oannes, comes next, describing himself as: "The first consciousness of chaos" (109) ["le première conscience de Chaos"]. Oannes has "arisen from the abyss to harden matter, to regulate forms" ["j'ai surgi de l'abîme pour durcir la matière, pour régler les formes"]. Oannes, who has "the head of a man and the body of a fish" ["une tête d'homme sur un corps de poisson,"] also recounts how he taught men how to worship the gods and to fish.

Flaubert extends his catalogue until it constitutes something like an encyclopedia of gods and religions. In
In every case, the divine manifestation entails violence. All of the Olympian gods, for example, commit suicide or sink down into humiliated oblivion. It is a *tour de force* both of erudition and deadly repetition. The voice of Yahweh, when it comes, is an anticlimax, to be followed by the ravings of a capitalized Science, who declares his domain to be "as wide as the universe" (141) ["de la dimension de l'univers"]; and who says of himself that "my desire has no limits" ["mon désir n'a pas de borne"]. Oannes, the most primitive god, claims to incarnate "consciousness," in French conscience; but the name (Science) of the self-proclaiming ultimate god offers up a morphological deficiency with an ontological implication. The initial syllable, signifying communal awareness, has gone missing. Science tells Anthony that, "I am always going about enfranchising the mind" (141) ["je vais toujours affranchissant l'esprit"]. Science describes himself as "without hate, without fear, without pity, without love and without God" ["sans haine, sans peur, sans pitié, sans amour et sans Dieu"]. Flaubert's fearsome irony calls attention to itself: The earliest god, Oannes, surpasses the ultimate god, Science, in human qualities. Having taught men how to fish is an ethical act after all. Science defines himself as an entity possessing unlimited desire, but at the same time he boasts of being unencumbered by capacities that would seem to be inextricably related to desire. One suspects that the phrase "enfranchising minds" means subordinating minds to an imperious, a *closed*, system. In other words, enfranchisement means obliteration—of mind and of any possibility of contingency that might reawaken mind. Anthony, hearing all this, immediately suspects that Science is the Devil in disguise.

In *La Tentation*, Part VI, Science has morphed into the Devil, but the Devil's shadow has been present since the moment in Part I where the shadow of the Cross looks for a passing instant like a pair of demonic horns. Anthony says that the Devil's voice sounds familiar to him: "It appears to him an echo of his thought—a response of his memory" (143) ["elle lui semble un écho de sa pensée—une réponse de sa mémoire"]. Flaubert here alludes by extreme indirection to two Biblical events, the revelation of God to Moses in the form of the burning bush that is not consumed from which issues a bodiless voice, and the revelation of Jesus to Saul, henceforth Paul, on the Road to Damascus in the form of a blinding supernal luminosity and a bodiless voice. Flaubert's Devil does not offer revelation; nor does he articulate any symbol or set of symbols. Rather he systematically abolishes the symbols articulated through previous revelations by declaring in effect that nothing whatever exists save for matter and the void. Readers cannot fail to notice the relish with which the Devil "de-reveals" the layers of mythic and philosophic symbols while he conducts Anthony on a planetarium-style tour of the cosmos. As the earth dwindles beneath him, Anthony strains his ears to detect the Music of the Spheres. The Devil says: "You cannot hear them! No longer will you see the antichthon of Plato, the focus of Philolaüs, the spheres of Aristotle, or the seven heavens of the Jews with the great waters above the vault of crystal!" (144) ["Tu ne les entendras pas! Tu ne verras pas, non plus, l'antichthon de Platon, le foyer de Philolaüs, les sphères d'Aristote, ni les sept cieux des Juifs avec les grandes eaux par-dessus la voûte de cristal!"].

As Gans writes in *Science & Faith*: "The fundamental subject-matter of religious revelation is not the mysteries of nature, with which pre-human being could never have concerned itself, but the mystery of the human community that the scene unites around its center." Likewise, the Satanic falsification of cosmological hypotheses cannot disestablish the anthropological truths of revelation. Thus the Devil's many syllogisms, in resembling Hilarion's syllogisms from *La Tentation*, Part III, mirror their emptiness. They are sophistical in that they aim, not at articulating any truth, but simply in installing the speaker indomitably in the center of the scene. Anthony, whose intellectual resources, as opposed to his basic intuition, are small in comparison with those of the demonic sophist, experiences simultaneously two types of bedazzlement. First, he reacts to the sublimity of what he takes for God's creation, hence as a proof of God; second, he totters on succumbing to the rhetorical devices of the Devil's travelogue. In addition, the things whose supposed non-existence the Devil supposedly demonstrates never had any empirical existence to begin with, and to interpret them that way is to miss their essentially symbolic function in the philosophical systems from which they come. "Resentment," as Gans writes in *Science & Faith*, "is negative revelation." Flaubert's Devil may therefore be "read" as the figure of the resentment generated by the theological minimalism of Christian revelation, represented by Anthony's radically ascetic discipline. To the extent that, "to take a god's place is always a sacrilege; and such a sacrilege can only be authorized by this or another god" (*Science & Faith*), this very event has already occurred. The most the Devil can do is to *shadow* it in the form of an empty imitation.

In *La Tentation*, Part VII, amidst the zoological and teratological phantasmagoria, which include the apparitions of the Sphinx and the Chimera, the most significant manifestation is that of the Cynocephali: "A
forest appears in which huge apes rush along on four paws—they are men with dogs’ heads" (163) ["une forêt paraît, de grands singes y courent à quatre pattes—ce sont des hommes à tête de chien"]. Flaubert has lifted his characterization of the cynocephali from Swift’s Yahoos or their equivalent in French literature. Yet, like everything else in the proliferation of hybrid life-forms, they can speak; they participate in language. They thus reveal themselves as having crossed the threshold from animal to human status. This puts them in contrast to the jackals in La Tentation, Part I. The hybrid forms belong, no doubt, to the totemic figures and sacrificial monstrosities of myths and tribal rituals. Anthony himself has gone far beyond such representations, enabled in his transcendence of them by the refinements of the new faith. In his study of Madame Bovary (1989), writing of the final version of La Tentation, Gans interprets Part V as showing that, "Anthony goes beyond the question of grace or damnation to achieve spiritual peace in a pantheistic union with protoplasmic matter." A close look at the text suggests that Anthony’s achievement might consist in something more specific than that, which nevertheless affirms a Generative Anthropological reading of the text.

The final vision in La Tentation, following the anchorite's prayer-like wish "to become matter" ["être la matière,"] which seems to enfold Anthony as much as he stands apart witnessing it, consists of "the dawn . . . and, like the uplifted curtains of a tabernacle, golden clouds, wreathing themselves into large volutes," in the middle of which "in the disc of the sun itself, shines the face of Jesus Christ" (170) ["le jour . . . et comme les rideaux d’un tabernacle qu’on relève, des nuages d’or en s’enroulant à larges volutes découvrent le ciel . . . et dans le disque même du soleil rayonne la face de Jésus Christ"]. The phenomenon of luminosity is important—for light is equivalent with consciousness. More important, however, is the final line of Flaubert’s text: "Anthony makes the sign of the cross and resumes his prayer" ["Antoine fait le signe de la croix et se remet en prières"]. Thus, what begins in Part I in a scene, ends in Part VII with the production of a sign, which is the minimal expression of a new minimal revelation.

V. Some Further Thoughts about La Tentation

If Three Soldiers by Dos Passos were La Tentation’s progeny then The Life of Saint Anthony by Athanasius would be La Tentation’s progenitor. The Life is itself worthy of consideration. The Life is of interest, for example, for being the first Christian hagiography. Earlier writers had produced hagiographies by other names. The Life of Apollonius of Tyana by Philostratus has already been cited; there is a Life (Middle Second Century) of the philosopher Demonax by his student Lucian of Samosata and there is Prophyry’s Life (Late Third Century) of his teacher Plotinus. Where both Philostratus and Porphyry were Pagan anti-Christians, Lucian seems more neutral in his attitude towards Christianity than Philostratus or Porphyry. Lucian’s subject, Demonax, could quite easily be Christianized with only a few alterations of the text. Athanasius, well educated, was undoubtedly aware of such works, and he had another model in the Acts of the Apostles. In The Life of Apollonius Philostratus created a self-consciously literary work, as did Lucian in writing on Demonax, something which cannot be said of Porphyry on Plotinus. The aim of Athansius in writing The Life of Saint Anthony was not literary refinement but plain documentation of the holy man’s exemplarity, but his text is not lacking in interest.

The relation of La Tentation to The Life is peculiar. The protagonist of the Flaubertian theater-of-the-mind differs from the saint of the Athanasian portrait in any number of ways. For example, Flaubert’s Anthony reads and writes and in the course of the narrative recites passages aloud from his Bible, but according to Athanasius, Anthony "while he was still a boy refused to learn to read and write" (Carolinne White’s translation). On the other hand Flaubert represents Anthony as much less intellectual than does Athanasius. Flaubert’s Anthony listens to long disquisitions but rarely responds at length; he speaks mostly in short speeches that are remarkably un-rhetorical. The Anthony of The Life, although illiterate, is a skilled rhetorician among whose achievements is his facility in dialectic. Three times in The Life Anthony disputes with Pagan theologians. On one occasion, when the Pagans mock Anthony’s illiteracy, he responds with a sophistical construction that might make for a problem in Athansius’ text, as a text. "Answer me," he requests of his disputants: "What comes first, mind or letter? And which is the cause of which?" The disputants can only acquiesce in the thesis that mind is the cause of letters whereupon the saint says: "So if anyone’s mind is sound, he has no need of letters." According to Athanasius, no one was present "who did not exclaim in astonishment," and everyone “marveled at such great sagacity.”
On another occasion, Anthony makes a long speech, rehearsing what astute readers will recognize as a version of Plato's condemnation of the myth-poets in *The Polity*: "Is it not better to endure the cross or a death of this kind inflicted by wicked men than to bewail the unsettled and dubious travels of Isis in search of Osiris? Are you not embarrassed, I ask, by the plots of Typhon, the flight of Saturn and his most cruel devouring of his children?" It goes on with a weight of mythic detail which might be known, on the basis of tradition, by a letterless man, but which gives off an aura of literate and even scholarly knowledge in its precision of detail. Several paragraphs later in the same speech, Anthony critiques what he calls the "distorted logic" of the allegorical interpretations that Alexandrian Late Paganism used to salvage the appearances of myth: "You claim that the obscene and cruel behavior of your gods, their deceptions and their deaths are but myths and so you veil them in allegory. . . . The rape of Libera represents the earth, the half-lame and weak Vulcan represents fire; Juno, the air; Apollo, the sun: Diana, the moon; Neptune, the seas; while Jupiter, the foremost, represents the sky." A bit later, Anthony does say that he invests nothing in dialectics but is only turning the instruments of "secular wisdom" against the secularists; yet that too is sophistical. In *La Tentation*, that is the type of rhetorical subversion given by Flaubert to Pseudo-Hilarion.

In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, in the chapter on "The Horrible Miracle of Apollonius of Tyana," Girard notes that the Church Father Eusebius (260-340), in commenting on the stoning at Ephesus, fails utterly to condemn it. Instead, Girard writes: "Eusebius sets out to show particularly that the miracles of Apollonius are not impressive at all. He never denounces the monstrous stoning . . . he reduces the debate, just like the partisans of the guru, to a mimetic rivalry between miracle workers." What Girard says of Eusebius applies to the portrayal of Anthony in Athanasius' *Life*. Another way in which the prototype of the hagiography differs from the literary adaption of him in *La Tentation* is that the prototype much more prone than the adaptation to entering into rivalry. Consider the episode of the Alexandrian Inquisitor, Balacius, who undertakes to prosecute Anthony for religious subversion. Balacius is an Arian; Anthony is an adherent of the Nicene Creed. According to Athanasius, Balacius "was persecuting the Church of Christ so violently that in his madness he would have virgins and monks stripped and beaten in public." Anthony, hearing of these outrages, sends a letter, presumably dictated, to Balacius in which he warns that, "I see God's anger coming upon you." Athanasius writes: "The accursed man read the letter and laughed; spitting on it he threw it to the ground." Organizing a posse, Balacius heads toward the remote desert to see to Anthony personally, but before he can get to his destination, he is attacked by his lieutenant's horse, which then "ripped his thighs apart and devoured the pieces." Balacius is transported back to Alexandria but dies of his wounds three days later, having lived long enough to feel the full humiliation and pain of his rebuke. "And so," Athanasius writes, "everyone realized that Anthony's threats . . . had swiftly been fulfilled and that the persecutor had come to a fitting end.

Elsewhere, in respect of Anthony's many exorcisms and cures, Athanasius carefully makes the saint the mediator of divine power, not its originator, but those qualifications do not accompany the Balacius episode, whose climax has a sparagmatic quality. Whereas Anthony, assailed by the Devil and his minions on the one hand and the Devil's human allies in the form of the Pagans and heretics on the other, functions as the scapegoat in the hagiography, Balacius functions as the scapegoat of the hagiography. In the Balacius episode, at least, *The Life* is quite as mythic as the myths that Anthony so eloquently denounces. Anthony's hatred of the Arians is likewise un-Christ-like; or at least one must say that Athanasius' narrative is often myth-like in its construction rather than resembling the Gospel: "He loathed the Arians . . . warning everyone not to go near them." Sufficiently aroused, Anthony leaves the Thebaid and goes to Alexandria where he preaches against "the Arians' madness." Flaubert's Anthony sticks to his Nicene faith; he experiences the intoxication of violence representationally, in his vision, not in actuality. As the vision *is* Anthony's temptation, he is obliged in actuality to renounce ire. Flaubert makes Anthony over to be much more *irenic*, a better word than "passive," than does Athanasius. In this sense, *La Tentation* might qualify as more essentially a *Christian* text than its Late-Antique source, whatever was Flaubert's faith or lack thereof.

An impressive figure of Satan as the spirit of resentment appears in *The Life* that undoubtedly exerted suggestive influence on Flaubert. One night Anthony hears a voice telling him to get up and go outside. Athanasius writes: "Raising his eyes to heaven, he saw something tall and terrifying, his head reaching as far as the clouds; he also saw some winged creatures attempting to fly up to heaven, but the tall being stretched out his arms to prevent them getting through." Some aspirants make it past, but others the monstrosity catches and dashes back to the ground. Anthony, interpreting what he sees, thinks to himself.
that, "Those who got the better of [the monster] caused him grief but those who were beaten back gave him the greatest joy." This image reappears in Flaubert's text both as the gigantic Pseudo-Hilarion of Part III and the Devil of Part VI, both of whom relentlessly try to discompose the saint's faith by ferocious dialectical iconoclasm.

The vision of Satan finds its antipode in The Life in an apparition of the Savior. It is early in Anthony's exodus into the desert. The Devil has sent an army of demons to terrorize Anthony. "The face of each bore a savage expression. . . . Anthony, beaten and mauled, experienced . . . atrocious pains in his body but he remained unafraid, his mind alert." Raising his eyes, Anthony sees the roof of the shack where he has taken refuge vanish whereupon "a ray of light poured in on him." Anthony identifies the light with Jesus, but utters what might be taken for a complaint: "Where were you, good Jesus?" The response comes in the form of a bodiless voice: "Anthony, I was here, but I was waiting to watch your struggle." Many years later, drawing on this experience, Anthony preaches a long sermon to the monks of the desert in which he argues that Satan's demons torture the righteous because they—that is, the demons—"are tortured by their envy of us."

Athanasius' hagiography is a peculiar mixture of mythemes and the transcendence of mythemes. Anthony takes preemptive revenge on Balacius around whose gruesome death the early readership of the text would undoubtedly have experienced a sacrificial unanimity at odds with the non-sacrificial epistemology of the Gospels or of Paul's conversion, on which Athanasius draws in the episode just now related. A passage from Girard is relevant to the mélange of insight and crudity in The Life. In I See Satan Fall, in the chapter entitled "The Victory of the Cross," Girard writes: "Before Christ and the Bible the satanic accusation was always victorious by virtue of the violent contagion that imprisoned human beings within systems of myth and ritual. The Crucifixion reduces mythology to powerlessness by exposing violent contagion, which is so effective in myths that it prevents communities from ever finding out the truth, namely the innocence, of their victims." The events of the Passion needed, however, to pass through the visionary experience of Saint Paul before they could become the foundation of Christianity. In A New Way of Thinking (2011), Gans identifies "the key event of Christian revelation" as the moment when, on the famous Road to Damascus, "Jesus appears to Saul as the one he persecutes." Gans argues that, "By accepting to make this one human being responsible . . . for transcendence itself, by accepting the divinity of human firstness, Saul freed himself from the burden of resentment."

As Girard's observation about Eusebius—in a refutation of Apollonius of Tyana, Eusebius has nothing whatever to say about the malicious stoning—suggests, however, the revelation of the scapegoating mechanism although present in the Passion does not immediately communicate itself. The victimary mechanism continues to function, but now does so in an increasingly ineffective way that, itself, constitutes a crisis and requires more victims. Similarly, while Paul was able to overcome resentment and achieve transcendence through his vision of Christ as the one whose divinity is certified by his persecution and murder, and while a small minority was able to share Paul's understanding, most people, the vast majority, did not participate in the theophany. They continued to be confined within the immemorial closed horizon of ritual. The progress of the Christian Logos has been all at once immensely slow and yet immensely destabilizing. Flaubert's insight in La Tentation is that one way in which the progress of the Christian Logos is slowed is by the reduction of symbols to doctrines.

In The Ecumenic Age, in the chapter on "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrection," Voegelin writes how "in the letters of Paul, the central issue is not a doctrine but the assurance of immortalizing transfiguration through the vision of the Resurrected." Voegelin adds that "transfiguration is experienced [by Paul] as an 'historical' event that has begun with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ." Voegelin distrusts the Patristic Christianity that emerges through the Church Councils and prefers—as Flaubert seems to also in La Tentation—the pre-doctrinal Christianity. "Paul . . . moved," as Voegelin writes, "in an open field of theophany." In Voegelin's characterization, Paul's Christ "is presented as a superior divinity in competition with the 'elemental spirits' (stoicheia) of the cosmos." Voegelin finds evidence for his thesis in Paul's Letters to the various congregations in which he rebukes them for "backsiding to the cult of stoicheia." In Voegelin's argument, "the early Patres . . . found one or another subordinationist construction to be the most suitable symbolism for expressing the relation of the Son to the Father-God." For Voegelin "the Athanasian victory" at Nicaea in 325 "put an end to this generous openness." Voegelin indeed finds ditheism preferable to tritheism precisely because in the latter there is a "transition from the open field of theophany
to the realm of dogmatic construction." Voegelin insists that "the ‘Christ’ of Nicaea and Chalcedon is not the reality of theophanic history that confronts us in the Pauline vision of the Resurrected."

What Girard refers to as the action of the Logos in the events of the Passion would certainly qualify under Voegelin’s notion of a leap in being through a new differentiation in consciousness. Generative Anthropology too is a theory of consciousness wherein, once consciousness, language, and culture make their appearance on the Originary Scene in the grammatical form of the ostensive, they then develop through the grammatical phases of the imperative and the negated imperative to the stage of mature language: And beyond that, by baroque effusion down through the millennia, into every possible form of ritual and myth and the recovery from myth. All three discourses must grapple with historical forms in and through which consciousness has self-articulated across the ages. While all three discourses trace a path of increasing anthropological self-clarity emerging from signal events, all three also admit the possibility of regression—of a collapse back into less differentiated states. Voegelin and Girard are more wary of Modernity as a likely case of cultural backsliding than is Gans; although latterly, in light of the rise of victimary culture, Gans too has begun to express alarm concerning socio-cultural trends. Whereas Modernity prides itself on its critical stance towards inherited wisdom, Voegelin, Girard, and Gans doubt the veracity of an exclusively modern critique that detaches itself from the cultural continuum while demoting religion, particularly Christianity, to superstition thereby making it disposable. On the contrary, all three are remarkably sensitive to the ethical implications of myth on the one hand and revelation on the other, in which they find echoes of human origin and, in the two testaments, the bases for a non-arbitrary morality that, epochally, refuses to designate victims.

Modernity, experiencing itself as a new apocalypse that abolishes all others, can make neither heads nor tails of La Tentation. Michel Foucault, in his essay (1967) on the topic, simply assumes that Flaubert must have been concerned with everything except a serious study of comparative religion or anthropology. For Foucault La Tentation consists in no more than its own fiendishly elaborate intertextuality; it is a palimpsest of readerly associations summed up in the title of his essay, “Fantasia of the Library.” Thus Flaubert could have been interested in Jacques Matter’s Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence (1828), as Foucault sees it, only as a resource for furnishing his own text with the mass of references required by a project of bibliographical bricolage without a real meaning. Matter’s treatise will, itself, have been for Foucault no more than another text, now having a certain antiquarian interest because of its relation to Flaubert’s weirdly virtuosic bricolage of religious exoticism. Yet Voegelin, writing in Science Politics and Gnosticism (1968) characterizes the Histoire critique as belonging to a body of profound self-knowledge that is now lost—a loss that marks a catastrophic contraction of consciousness currently afflicting the West.

Voegelin admired Flaubert as a master symbolist and singled out La Tentation as a masterful exploration of the symbols by and through which the Western consciousness has articulated itself or by and through "pseudo-philosophical terms" obscured itself. In Dos Passos’ Three Soldiers, John Andrews, whose first name goes back to that of the primordial Mesopotamian god, while recuperating, has been reading La Tentation. He lets the basic spirit of the book penetrate his existence: "His mind was full of intangible floating glow, like the ocean on a warm night, when every wave breaks into pale flame, and mysterious milky lights keep rising to the surface out of the dark waters and gleaming and vanishing. He became absorbed in the strange fluid harmonies that permeated his whole body, as a grey sky at nightfall suddenly becomes filled with endlessly changing patterns of light and color and shadow." (208) A YMCA man, visiting the wounded in hospital, tries to proselytize Andrews, who, however, replies that "I make no pretensions to Christianity." (210) That thought would represent Dos Passos’ understanding of La Tentation, and perhaps also Flaubert’s: The paradox that Christianity must at last make no pretensions to itself.

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Paganism is a worldwide phenomenon, though rarely aware of itself as such. That is, paganism is sometimes self-aware: it sometimes labels itself as paganism. It is also often implicit, however, an organising logic behind an ostensibly diverse series of practices, beliefs, and attitudes. In its most self-conscious, explicit form, contemporary paganism claims firstness for itself—as the Ur-religion, a variety of indigeneity, and therefore, a generative centre of authentic culture and personal experience. Contemporary paganism's PR says that paganism is a manifestation of the sacred in its pristine, prelapsarian state, which is to say, of culture and personhood, before these were sundered from nature. The identity of the supposed sunderers vary: they include: (1) individual thinkers, like Descartes, who becomes the very evil demon he strove to exorcise; (2) vaguely threatening ideologies, such as "the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview" (Capra 73); and (3) quasi-historical periods, like "the Dark Ages," during which humanity buried its best instincts beneath the rubble of already-rotting European superstition and prejudice. Paganists see such influences as degenerative, in that they engender pernicious varieties of dualism, perhaps even dualism itself. In the pagan salvation narrative, paganism is capable of eschewing both kings and (domesticated) horses in order to put Humpty Dumpty (or Gaia) back together again.

In its most unabashed, religious articulation, paganism is organised around an anti- or emphatically non-Christian centre. There is a standard deconstructive move obviously available at this point: our supposed origin, paganism, is subject to a supplementary logic, whereby an ostensibly self-sufficient idea (paganism) is found to rest on what it considers a mere derivation or parasite, Christianity (See Derrida 17-59). Even the name, "paganism," gives us an obvious clue. "Pagan" is a Christian term. The very idea of it requires a refuted Christian centre-point: understanding how this is so, as well as the complex ways in which it disavows its Christocentric nature, is the primary task of this essay. The pagan's acceptance of a Christian self-appellation so that he may reject Christianity threatens him with performative incoherence.(1) Yet there is much for us to explore in the appeal, the structure, and the generative capacity of that incoherence. Paganism is a highly generative cultural field, and there are dangers in simply identifying and dismissing it. Summoning—albeit not citing—Girard, John Milbank has argued that there are reasons for concern with this phenomenon. For him, modern pagan patterns of behaviour have resulted from a reification of primitive ritual in the confused modern culture of the West. For him, these things constitute an ongoing danger:

Ritual violence, sacrificial violence, and violent initiation must already constitute to a degree a realm of theatre, and the continuous re-invocation of primitive ritual by theatrical modernity should therefore cease to surprise us—a modern "society of the spectacle" retreats from the pure liturgy of monotheism to a pagan theatricality. And like paganism, it invests its hopes in a controllable economy of violence where this much and no more blood was once shed to appease
the gods, now this much and no more simulated violence, or rather as much simulated violence
as you like, will appease our "aggressive urges." (Being Reconciled 33)

This is the elusive end-point of an inquiry like ours: Milbank here contends that as modern society shakes off
Christianity, it passes to a state different from, but standing in a new relation to, a new actual paganism.
This new paganism shimmers in a modern city of Babel: peripheral at times, evanescent, occasionally
dangerous. If we do not share Milbank's fears (test cricket well fits his above description, but few have
decried the pagan bloodlust of this sport) we do recognise a need for inquiry, and for interrogation of
supposedly apolitical and harmless practices.

There is a need for a limited cultural empiricism which looks at the claims of paganism. Such an empiricism
would let us frame the flotsam of discarded, fragmentary and borrowed pieces of culture or faith: mystical
miscellany, Shamanism, tantric healing, psychedelic tourism, Hindu face painting, Taoist diets, Indigenous
American drumming, and Egyptian belly-dancing. A vast selection of the rites of man or womanhood all
jostle for position in a welter of intensity, desire, and the frenzy of market exchange. An Australian
Aboriginal friend, drawing attention to this discombobulated syncretism, remarked: "you whitefellas don't
know what the f*** you're doing—but it's pretty funny to watch." In this essay, we seek to make sense of
some of these things and to understand how they function and offer value to some people today.

We situate our inquiry in the context of work by Eric Gans, and in particular his essay on body piercing ("The
Body Sacrificial"). Then we provide a non-encyclopaedic overview of paganism's principal tendencies. We
then address the relationship of paganism to the Judaeo-Christian pattern of autocritique, and propose a
view of paganism as a variety of autocritique and cultural counter-practice. This is best done within the
context of Girard's work on the dismantling of the violent sacred, principally Des choses cachées depuis la
fonction du monde (165-306). This, in turn, leads us to the issue of late twentieth century anthropology
and its own searing self-critique. From here, we develop our major claim that it is less the religious practices
that reveal the nature of paganism than it is the relations posited both to paganism's array of objects, and
to Christianity itself (which make sense of it). To stage this claim, we offer a novel comparative analysis of
participant relations to objects in paganism on the one hand, and in the field of kitsch on the other. By so
doing, we hope to contribute something both to the analysis of late modern culture in general and to the
understanding of the nature of paganism specifically.

Converging Credulities

We know that pagans stake an originary claim. Less well known is the fact that non-pagans are happy to cite
pagans where the latter critique Christianity. On Easter of 2013, the Richard Dawkins "Foundation for
Reason & Science" circulated the following image, which appeared on Facebook pages all over the cyber-
sphere:
There are no overt requirements (such as, say, being a diligent student of comparative religion) to see where this falls apart. What we witness here is less homology than homonymy, though even that is stretched. Unless inebriated, nobody pronounced “Ishtar” as “Easter”—or at least not until this poster was circulated. Even the etymologies diverge at the source: one is Assyrian/Babylonian and the other Anglo-Saxon. Beyond the linguistic and ethnological absurdities, we witness an intended moral lesson. Here the Christian is supposed to be stunned and scandalised by the revelation that the resurrection is somehow unrelated to rabbits (we can imagine forthcoming revelations: perhaps the saviour’s birth is only tangentially related to reindeer). In these and other such earnest atheist evangelist texts, the Vatican is construed as antagonist, as hawker par excellence of religious credulity (among other things). The rhetorical mode of the claim is peculiar, of more interest than the dubious assertion itself. In terms of our inquiry, it is part of what appears to be a sustained attempt to strip away from Christianity any capacity for origination: it is always, in this view, the culturally sickly version of an always prior pagan vim. If we in our turn do treat paganism as a derivative and secondary cultural formation, this is not to deny it the capacity for cultural innovation in its sphere, and perhaps, more widely; it is simply to note that its modern forms, both in name and in nature, occur after—or rather, within—Christian history. (2)

Methods of Cultural Analysis: Piercing and Paganism

In 2000, Gans made use of the then-emergent World Wide Web to explore the issue of piercing. He opened his essay with this comment:

No one who seeks to understand the underlying unity of all human culture can fail to be struck by the revival of primitive sacrificial practices in our own era. Body piercing is perhaps the most striking of these revivals. From its punk beginnings in the 1970s, piercing has become ubiquitous, together with a family of associated practices of "body modification" ranging from tattooing to castration and other "nullifications" carried out deep in the underground of our culture. (159)
To this we would add that a revival does not bring anything like primitive, sacrificial paganism back to life—rather, it is an iteration that creates something new, something decidedly modern, and un-self-aware in its modernity. Paganism is always an alteration/repetition. (If Hegel were present and looked at this phenomenon, he'd likely shout "Aufhebung!"—paganism is both a perpetuation of itself and its own negation.)

Gans’s suggestion that these fields are hidden in the underground of contemporary culture applies only to its lack of self-awareness. To take a metaphors of London’s train system, of underground and overground trains, it might be better to call both piercing and paganism decidedly overground systems: they are in plain view, but little understood; many travel in them, but few know the mechanism.(3)

Gans identifies several features that are relevant also to our own inquiry. To Gans, body modification, 1) is linked to sacrificial rite, 2) negates, 3) revives, and 4) has a dimension which is private. Later, citing Bourdieu and Baudrillard, he adds another characteristic, explaining that behind the pagan impulse is a longing for a society in which production and consumption are reunited (176). Gans structures his inquiry by exploring piercing in terms of its aesthetic aspect, its erotic aspect, and its political aspect.(4) He sees a number of virtues in body piercing and its cultures. He remarks that

"Arts of body modification add real information to the world. These anarchically mimetic activities of self-creation are what make the market system function, not just in the obvious sense, by providing opportunities for purveyors of piercing operations and jewelry, but in the deeper one of enriching the unpredictable dialogue among members of society. (174)"

Like piercing, the practices of paganism offer us real and new anthropologically significant information about "post-Christian" belief systems.

Piercing is often part of the pagan field as well, but paganism raises a variety of issues that go beyond piercing or tattooing. Paganism is replete with half-articulated or at times painfully over-articulated beliefs about the nature of the world, and for this reason, we find a somewhat richer cultural field to analyse. These allow an extension of Gans’s analysis. Like him, we can use the resources of the internet, as well as of international festivals and gatherings. We are certainly not the first to venture an analysis of this field. There is a searching scholarship we will cite when relevant on paganism from a number of cultural critics. Similarly, there is useful commentary on related fields such as New Age and Gothic practices and what might be called, in deference to the Birmingham School of sociology, "everyday medievalism." Unfortunately in the place where the richest source of analysis ought to be—Cultural studies—we find precious little of value. What Cultural studies typically finds in paganism is what it finds everywhere: refutations of Adorno and productive/consumptive "resistance" to hegemonies. In other words, like Narcissus, in the clear waters of paganism, cultural studies sees itself once again.(5)

What is Paganism?

The dictionary tells us paganism is "any of various religions other than Christianity or Judaism or Islamism." This sounds like a negation, and so it is: most of the time, though, the negation is specifically Christian. In its Latin origins, the descriptor "pagan" referred simply to village folk from the country, who practised folk religion "naïvely" in opposition to the new sophistication of Christianity. That would make pagans in our time advocates of bumpkinism, if not bumpkinists themselves. But this usage has, of course, aged: at least since Inherit the Wind (1960 Stanley Kramer film), it is now the Christian who is considered the arch-bumpkin.

In our time, as Paganism.com tells us, paganism includes all sorts of things, and indeed, "No offense intended if we left your particular path out" (Paganism.com). Yet one path is most decidedly out. In his Pensées, Pascal wrote, "Je vois plusieurs religions contraires, et partant toutes fausses, excepté une [I see several contrary religions, and consequently all false, except one]" (202); for pagans, it seems, the opposite injunction holds true: "Having experienced the e pluribus unum of Christianity, I look out to see a wealth of religions and other odds and ends before me, and leave aside therefore the one most proximate to me, and cleave instead to all these others in its place."
Now it is certainly true that many societies called "pagan" in the past have been unaware, or were relatively unaffected, by the appellation. These societies, however, were only pagan in the sense that Christian societies labelled them as such. About them, we have little or nothing to say, because the worlds they construed lie outside the terms of modernity. The pagans we explore are in a defined sense 1) modern, and 2) Christian, and can only be understood once these two characteristics are understood, counter-intuitive as this claim may initially sound. They comprise a heterogeneous series of social groupings which, even from the outset of modernity, have sought various horizonal breaches—of rationality, of capitalism, of hegemonic social order—and have done so in the name of a deliberately non-Christian spirituality.

**Paganism and Romanticism**

There are rich theoretical links between paganism and Romanticism. In the marketplace of pagansisms, there are many to choose from. One listing of pagan festivals declares that it is a site "Only for Pagan festivals! All fields listed here must be Pagan/Wiccan/Asatru in nature; not herbal workshops, not psychic fairs, not Renaissance faires, not pirates fests, not camping parties, etc." (faeriefaith.net). For some the first of May might be known as May Day, but to the pagan community it is Beltane, "The Celtic May Day. It begins at moonrise on May Day Éve" (www.thewhitegoddess.com). While some host it offering music and showers and toilet amenities, others offer a richer menu, including "a traditional Walpurgasnacht [sic], sensual May Games (for couples)" as part of a "fundraiser to protect . . . this sanctuary" (annwfnceremonies.weebly.com).

Around the world, bewildering varieties of summer and winter solstice gatherings take place to connect the human tribe with its genesis. Despite the centrality of this event to many varieties of paganism, we find a grab-bag of practices and promises. The Pagan Spirit Gathering in Earlville Illinois, to take but one instance, has run since 1981, and now hosts Summer solstice rites, a Magical gift circle, a candlelight labyrinth of 1000 candles, Drum circles, Sweatlodge ceremonies, Rites of Passage, plus Women's and Men's rituals. . . . Workshops are given daily on a wide range of Pagan topics. Previous subjects have included Wiccan ways, Goddess spirituality, Celtic Studies, Creative arts, Healing, Shamanism, Chanting, Dancing, Drumming techniques, and various network meetings. (faeriefaith.net).

In their effort to describe what they do, the main site for this event explains that it offers:

- to create community, celebrate summer solstice, and commune with Nature in a sacred environment. Sponsored by Circle Sanctuary, PSG is open to a long-time practitioners as well as newcomers of a wide range of Nature religion traditions, including Wiccan, Contemporary Pagan, Druidic, Heathen, Celtic, Baltic, Greco-Roman, Isian, Shamanic, Hermetic, Animistic, Egyptian, Native American, Afro-Caribbean, Taoist, Pantheistic, Ecofeminist, and Nature mystic.

It is open to almost anyone—anyone, except a Christian believer, or perhaps, an avowed atheist who thrives in the modern world.

Without commenting on the specifics of any of the actual practices or faiths, we can note a straightforwardly structuralist table of binarised traits:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pagan—affirmed negation</th>
<th>Christian—implied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gemeinschaft</td>
<td>Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community music (&quot;Volk&quot;)</td>
<td>Passive observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;ethnic&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;White, unmarked&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Artificial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not all these traits are observable in every variety of paganism. This does not stop it from having cultural force. We have suggested elsewhere that Romanticism is a "field" in that it is something that despite having diffuse causes itself, nevertheless exerts a powerful magnetic force of its own. Paganism is not even as logically ordered in its practices (let alone its "beliefs") but it too exerts a powerful pull of its own.

**The Autocritique**

A group of Westerners, academics perhaps, stands in a circle listening to an indigenous ceremony. They cannot understand the words, and perhaps they do not need to. At the end of it, as they stand in silence, they nod quietly, even reverentially, and then carry on as if nothing happened. This is a quintessentially modern, even postmodern, scene. Yet its self-account is entirely traditional—and its premises are an inherently Romantic, if not always sentimental, rendering of an imaginary past.

As we pointed out in our earlier analysis (Fleming and O'Carroll, "Understanding Anti-Americanism") of the American tendency to self-condemnation, cynical motives ascribed by Western commentators to any and all Western practices did not stop the West from actual oppressive behaviours. In that respect, we might accept a fragment of what Deleuze and Guattari colourfully described as the deliberate chaos of capitalism, such that as they said, "The more it breaks down . . . the better it works" (151)—except it is not deliberate. Paganism appears to be a part of the West that seeks to escape its place in Christendom—but in its negations only reinforces its part in a wider ensemble. Still, paganism is potentially a major form of autocritique—even if it only rarely is able to understand itself as such. It works from within Western longings and Christian frameworks to putatively reject both. In its deepest desires, it is a redemptive, healing impulse, a desire to find footing for artifice, a genuine attempt to substitute a kind of community in place of selfish individualism, and perhaps to atone for damage done in the most Christian and Western way possible.

Now, non-Christian pagans were nothing like any of the things we are seeking to describe. Girard’s work on the processes of mimesis and of primitive sacrifice puts paid to any idea of modern paganism being anything like that which it imagines itself as being (Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 170-181, *Evolution and Conversion*, 234-267, "Generative Scapegoating," 73-148). If these societies worked well, "working" involved stabilisation of conflict through brutal and, to our eye at least, arbitrary murder (including in some societies, of children, such as twins). By modern standards, the process of sacrifice is brutal, unacceptably so. But the Westerners would wish to save this culture from extinction as if it were some species of exotic plant rather than a living and contemporary milieu: to the contrary of its original logic, insisting on certain humane modifications, the sacrifice can go ahead, but loses thereby the significance it originally held. Moreover, by being subjected to Western values, the culture also loses its world-conferring capacity, which is now subordinated to those same Western values. This brings us to the discipline that studies other cultures, the one that has, perhaps more than any other, been racked by self-doubt of a most autocritical variety. Anthropology may have had the capacity to teach these terrible truths had it also had the capacity to sketch historical contexts to its endless fieldwork forays around the world. Instead, though, it has offered a variety of cultural multiplicity that led many to think of Western Christendom as the most deliberately brutal of oppressors. We need to understand anthropology especially when we look in ways *themselves anthropological* at pagan practices, not just to understand the practices, but also, to orient the analysis of participant and observer relations to those practices. For even those who mock them are affected by them.

**Anthropology and White Guilt**
In the last three decades of the twentieth century, the discipline of anthropology was convulsed by a ferocious series of autocritiques. Perhaps the most poignant of these was the critical self-reflection conducted by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his *Tristes tropiques*. Derrida examines Lévi-Strauss’s “writing lesson” in full recognition that Lévi-Strauss is seeking to be self-critical, is seeking to avoid further damage, as he sees it, to the Nambikwara. Commenting on the naivety of Lévi-Strauss’s approach to writing, and to his implicit acceptance of the idea that Western style writing itself is exigeny evil, Derrida remarks scathingly that the Nambikwara “do not make use of what we commonly call writing” (110), even if all of the features that Lévi-Strauss attributes solely to writing were to be found in the tribe’s speech.

In accepting Derrida’s point that a Western writing script was hardly going to do the damage Lévi-Strauss ascribed to it and that the Nambikwara already had “writing” and hierarchies of subordination of their own, it is still the case that anthropologists were the ones whose disciplinary orientation towards a pristine original culture made them most susceptible to a deep version of the autocritique. For anthropology’s task had been to record the ways of other peoples and cultures, often from the point of view of preserving their record, but also, from the point of view of understanding the world of humanity in general.

In the later 1980s, a movement to make anthropology more accountable took an even firmer hold, and a debate broke out between the new reflexive anthropologists and the old school anthropologists like Marshall Sahlins who saw the new upstarts as mere armchair observers with nothing useful to say. Those in the reflexive school took their departure from a beautifully written introduction by James Clifford to the book *Writing Cultures: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. In it, Clifford attacked the impartiality of anthropology by taking on one of its masters, Bronislaw Malinowski, and examining his personal diaries against his scientific anthropology. “Cultures,” Clifford wrote, “are not scientific "objects" . . . [culture] and our view of it are produced historically, and are actively contested” (18). As a result, our truths are always "partial" (as he puts it in his title ["Partial Truths"] with both senses intended).

As accurate as the picture may be, as devastative as the literal deconstruction of the master in his own words may seem, this is but another case of the autocritique at work. Its motivation—to care for others, to be responsible indeed for others—is profoundly well-placed, and is to be commended, as indeed is Lévi-Strauss’s in his own work. Irrespective of the accuracy or otherwise of their scholarship, what gathers all these writings is an autocritical sense of guilt, of a sense of wrongs having been done that need correcting. This, it bears saying, is one of the finest aspects of Western Judaeo-Christian thought, but it also bears saying that there is nothing exceptionally bad about Western behaviours vis-à-vis the conquering behaviours of any other cultures in history. To the contrary, these autocritical impulses are what are remarkable both in their effect, and in their sustained and ongoing nature. Moreover, if we take the Western self-account of its history as an inventory of cultural dead-ends, military brutalities, and political betrayals, we are in danger of recognising the validity of its lists of empirical claims, but missing the epistemological stance that is the condition of possibility for such history to be written.

If anthropology in the traditional sense affords insights into its own practices via its own critically reflexive practitioners on the one hand, as well as into the structure of the time and space terms of the Western point of view, it is only Generative Anthropology that seems to provide the scope for grasping the peculiarity of the Western autocritique itself. This can now be expressed as follows: Paganism provides a profound series of scenes for Generative Anthropology to explore. Paganism makes crucial and contradictory claims about the West, namely 1) the West is utterly exceptional, and 2) it is also utterly derivative. The first aspect concerns the West’s moral culpability and singularity of its bloodlust, corruption, and debasement; the second aspect views its cultural forms (even its science) as inherently parasitic, with even its chief attainments being plagiarised from non-Western sources. This brings us to the view of pagans as both before and beyond the political order.

**The Politics of Paganism**

In taking up the politics of paganism, we encounter complexities. We note that while Gans saw few critical-political issues in the case of piercing, we must here express a rather darker tone. Many before us have looked at the genesis of this thought in extremist politics. The idea that paganism has a politics would seem strange to many of its practitioners who are nowadays, if anything, apolitical—or at least whose politics is so
nominal and utopian it amounts to being apolitical. The paradoxes here are not simply resolved, and perhaps are not resolvable.

Since 1945, many have wondered at how a civilised, Christian society like Germany could perpetrate the horrors of Auschwitz. Many who perpetrated it were indeed practising Christians, acting as Hannah Arendt argued, on orders (and by delegation, giving orders) via a logic of the banality of evil. Yet at the centre of the monstrous enterprise, once we get past the mechanics of war and gas chamber, we find a confused picture that includes alongside orthodox Christianity a strongly thematised paganist anti-Christianity. Much of Hitler’s regime was overtly and deliberately neo-pagan in its orientation—and to that extent it represents to date the only "successful" attempt at putting neo-paganism into practice on a large scale. A Christian negation of Christianity is, to put it mildly, a complex social text—and the work of reading it is hard.

It is easy to obscure this political history in a world of Druidic festivals and Western shamanism. But the words of the following camp song are suggestive of a need to be cautious of the paganist self-account, and indeed of its anti-Christian history:

We are the happy little Hitler Youth;  
We have no need of Christian virtue;  
For Adolf Hitler is our intercessor  
And our redeemer.  
No priest, no evil one  
Can keep us  
From feeling like Hitler’s children.  
Not Christ do we follow, but Horst Wessel!  
Away with incense and holy water pots.  
Singing we follow Hitler’s banners;  
Only then are we worthy of our ancestors.  
I am no Christian and no Catholic.  
Baldur von Schirach, take me along."

Hitler Youth Camp Song (qtd. in Helmreich, p. 267)

The Hitler Youth’s camp song is at once a philosophical cry and a pedagogic song for a renewed golden age of paganism. The man named in the song, Horst Wessel, himself composed the Nazi party anthem. Von Schirach, the composer of this song, was the Reich Youth Leader.

Nineteenth century pagan-politics also touched philosophy. Much work has been done on the political line joining the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (Human All-Too-Human, the first link in a chain of spectacular philosophical works that included the Will to Power edited and shaped politically by his sister, Elizabeth) and Adolf Hitler. It is not the line drawn by pop commentators on philosophers that interests us here. In nearly all respects, the thought, integrity, and dignity of the great nineteenth century philosopher eclipsed those of the resentful, manipulative, shallow, and sentimental dictator as well as many of the more recent commentators on him. But on one point Hitler and Nietzsche were united: both were vehemently and programmatically paganist; their modernism entailed a particular kind of anti-Christianity, and both endorsed a distinctive variety of pagan festivity.

And Hitler established a unique species of political rally and festivity. "Who was greater, Christ or Hitler?" wondered one nameless orator at a Hitler rally. It’s an odd question, given Hitler’s attempt to move beyond the Christian paradigm. But therein lies the point:

Christ had at the time of his death twelve apostles, who, however, did not even remain true to him. Hitler, however, today has a folk of 70 million behind him. We cannot tolerate that another organization is established alongside of us that has a different spirit than ours. We must crush it. National Socialism in all earnestness says: I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . . Then ours is the kingdom and the power; for we have a strong Wehrmacht, and the glory—for we are again a respected nation, and may God will, in eternity. Heil Hitler!"
All this is *not* just a matter of pagan "philosophy," a matter of mere words overlaying some other kinds of practices. The moral compass of modernity has material dimensions, and consequences. The Nazi attempt to return to pre-Judaic religiosity was physically enacted in attempts to revivify the myths and rituals of the Germanic tribes. Göring recognised the ancient sacred sites and actively pushed re-enacting events like the winter solstice. The edition of the German Farmer's Almanac from 1935 (published by the Ministry of Agriculture) replaced Christian holidays with celebration days for Thor and Wotan). These dates and days are themselves practices; but the ideas are too: when a Nazi sympathiser such as Jung suggested that Nazism was the revival of Wotan, we need to examine what this means not just as a textual exercise, but as part of the entire edifice of modernity.

At stake in such texts, we find certain patterns. To start with, there is the now familiar opposition of the pagan and the Christian (as in Nietzsche and Hitler, of course). Judaism and Christianity are viewed by pagans as being "anti-nature" and, as such, as undermining "organic" social order, which is predicated on hierarchy. If pagans today do not all subscribe to such an order, most do not question it. The compatibility of paganism then, and perhaps now, with any political order is an aspect of the field that merits ongoing attention and care. (6)

On Kitsch, Cool, and Indigeneity

We turn now to pagan commodity-relations, and do so via a consideration of their participant-stance. We would like you, even as you read these Western words, to solemnly bear witness to pagan prayer.

I call on you Brighid; in a time of need.
I ask your assistance and blessing for one who is ailing
Someone is ill, and she needs your healing light. (Wigington)

A radical need for healing pervades the pagan (and New Age) industry. The pagan's path is one towards connection, and healing. As one site puts it, "a laugh, a hug, even a pat on the back or soothing tone" can make a difference ("Healing"). In this prayer, Patti Wigington invites the reader to deploy a ritual even with the implied consent of a friend, to "ask the goddess (or god) of your tradition to watch over the ailing individual and assist them with healing" (Wigington). The ritual involves candles being lit, and the prayer being said after focusing on the person in question.

At stake is a scene of sorts, and to evoke it, we take it up in relation to kitsch. When we do so, we notice something remarkable: despite many obvious reasons for attraction, few intellectuals avow such attraction or membership. This is despite the fact it comports surprisingly well with what many intellectuals value. Few, however, apart perhaps from Lyotard in *Just Gaming* (pp. 9-41), claim explicit allegiance to it. We believe the reason for this reticence is more aesthetic than ethical or epistemological: what prevents humanities academics, even Cultural studies academics, from widely publicly avowing their pagan status is that they see it not so much as wrong but as tasteless. A group who would otherwise feel comfortable with the semiotic rehabilitation of indigenous and folk traditions, with attacks on Western decadence, association with the "counter-culture," with a dissociation from Judeo-Christian decay, and so on, cannot become pagans because it is far too kitsch. Paganism would be palatable if it were not so embarrassing.

We can sketch a comparison of the fields of kitsch and of paganism for what each says about the other. Each field requires a distinctive relationship of its participants to its fetish-objects—and how those who partake in it are viewed from outside. We begin with some ideas Gans has proposed on kitsch itself. For Gans, kitsch is less pop culture than middlebrow culture—that is, what we identify as what someone else mistakes for high culture. In our view, the peculiarity of kitsch is not so much its tastelessness—which is far more widespread—but that people, somehow mysteriously, aren't offended by it (Eric Gans, "A Rembrandt in an Elevator" Chronicle XCII). In this purview, kitsch is failed high culture; it signals a certain kind of transcendence, although that signal will end up looking more like a flashing Sacred Heart of Jesus decal than the Sistine Chapel. (7) Kitsch promises the aesthetic distance of high culture and delivers mawkish
sentiment.

For us, however, kitsch is not just a label of aesthetic designation (as the fact that the same aesthetic object can be cool suggests), but rather, it is primarily a designation of spectatorial distance. This is a kind of double scene, for it concerns not only the objects and those who are fixated on them, but also, the scenic quality of kitsch-observation itself. The sophisticate only looks at the object for a moment before then fixing his or her gaze on those embarrassing people who are looking at the object; "kitsch" refers to those who receive pleasure from such aesthetics more than the aesthetics itself. As such, people in the know reject not simply the kitsch object, but laugh or wince at those who get pleasure from it. Kitsch is also that object—after Adorno and Benjamin—that signifies the "cheapness" of the market, the rejection of the auratic and singular qualities of the art object.

Kitsch per se cannot be made cool, and so the modern humanities academic, a sort of Cool Hunter in extremis, cannot be seen with it. S/he will not get into the nightclub if kitsch is there, too. At least, not without spectatorial ironisation; kitsch can be transubstantiated, bread made body, by transforming it into camp: camp is kitsch viewed with inverted commas: the distance that the fan of kitsch-as-kitsch cannot attain. Jeff Koons, that reductio ad absurdum of pop art, has built a career out of making the garish more garish by making it bigger, while making our contemplation of it all the more cool by inserting that distance. Kitsch becomes anti-kitsch through a knowing wink delivered by someone, someone in the know to another in the same scene-observing-scene.

How does paganism relate to this? The difficulty is that paganism is a form of kitsch that cannot be made camp because its sacred objects resist desacralisation. A drag queen can hang a picture of Jesus ironically, but he or she cannot do the same with a dream catcher or an inukshuk. There are many cultural features that determine this asymmetry, but we'll mention only one here, the relation of camp—and paganism—to indigeneity. Modern paganism unfailingly defers to a kind of ethnic firstness, or indigeneity. This gives the pagan consumer two product lines to select from: the first allows for identification with an ethnic other (to play didgeridoo and then go on holiday to pay for sweating), the second allows for identification with a kind of white firstness, so we have contemporary druids, wiccans, Romuva-nians (Lithuania), Asatru-ians (Nordic), and assorted European practitioners of "cunning-craft" (like witchcraft).

What identification with indigeneity (or firstness) entails is a bypassing of the kinds of exemplary violence with which the modern West—and the pre-modern Christian West—is now associated. To be a pagan is to assert "Don't blame me—despite appearances, I’m not really white anyway. Deep down, I’m a rasta—and it's so much me that it forces itself out of my body, popping from the top of my head, in the form of these dreadlocks." Alternatively, it is to assert "Ah yes, I am white—but my cultural allegiances are indigenous, like you; I represent that road not taken, the road of the peaceful druid."

The scenes of popular culture, kitsch, and paganism are thrown into sharp relief by the James Cameron film, Avatar. This film offered an astonishingly detailed and beautiful image of an imaginary off-world pristine indigenous lifeworld—which a brutal West, with its flying metal machines and missiles, then proceeds to destroy. A "good" Westerner fields suspicious natives to help overthrow the re-enacted invaders, and to right and rewrite a colonial history in a fantasy of "good" aliens and evil earthly colonisers. The essential peacefulness of the aliens is depicted in ways that would befit any paganist guilt-vision: the white hero is redeemed by betraying his own invasion force and siding with the victims of exploitation, and those he joins share with him an immanentist-essentialist faith system that allows him to rediscover his own cosmic place in the universe. What makes the scene sickeningly guilt-ridden rather than comically kitsch, however, is the attachment of the narrative to the real stories of colonisation and histories of peoples whose realities are charged with an ethical load that kitsch simply cannot bear—even if the lovely huge-eyed aliens and fairy lights would not be out of place in a plastic dolphin shop. The evocation of such harsh realities of course fails as anything other than under-thought entertainment because unlike Hollywood, intercultural realities are rather more complex than a redemption fantasy of this kind can suggest. (Further, the anti-colonialist impulse behind movies like Avatar is often revealing of an ever deeper kind of colonial impulse, wherein the white hero—who has seen the goodness of indigenous culture and is able to adopt it and internalise it so easily—is the one who ultimately saves that culture from destruction and suddenly assumes the position of leader! The white person, in other words, shows the indigenous person how to be indigenous.)
The Cameron-esque redemptive impulse is deeply problematic, of course. In some of their contortions—looking at the chivalric impulse of the modern intellectual to rescue an other and in so doing rescue him or herself (Fleming and O’Carroll, “Notes on Generative Anthropology”)—the modern intellectual follows the same path as the pagan, although with more cool and far greater obliqueness and prolixity. Indigeneity cannot be made camp because of contemporary interdictions which prevent semiotic recoding; so now paganism is left as intellectually and politically appealing for a wide range of "sophisticated" people, at the same time as it cannot be explicitly endorsed by them because it is so aesthetically naïf.

Coda: Humanism and Plantism

We have offered an interlaced variety of commentary based directly on the work of Eric Gans and René Girard. At the most basic level, without Generative Anthropology, it would not be possible to frame paganism and kitsch scenically—in relation to mimetically conceived cultures of margins and centre; we’d not be able to offer a certain reading of indigeneity in terms of romanticism. Girard’s work, in its analysis of mimesis, was perhaps latently scenic, but Gans brought this element to light in a way that Girard himself never did. More directly, Girard allows us to grasp the logic of the Christianisme déplacé of white, Western "paganism," and the sources of its moral critique. (See Fleming, René Girard, 147-9.) The fact that it is possible to offer a Girardian analysis without repeatedly citing his name, and without a barrage of conceptual neologisms, suggests that this now is a field sufficiently well established such that it no longer needs—in this venue at least—ongoing explication and explanation.

Even so, there is value in pointing out that its subtlety can lead people not to see it at work at all. With psychoanalytic theories (for instance, and by contrast), the complexity in analysis invariably comes in the form of comprehending the theories themselves; after attending to Lacan’s theory of the "symbolic" one scarcely has enough energy left to make a cup of tea, let alone analyse social relations. Another tradition, that of anti-psychiatry, as evinced by Félix Guattari, is wonderfully, indeed comically, symptomatic of the labours involved:

“We can clearly see..." Clearly! (And we note here Guattari’s deliciously ironic "dismissal" of "binarism." He is obviously the kind of non-binary thinker who thinks it advisable to opt for non-binarism over binarism. Perhaps all Cretans are binarists.)

With both Girard and Gans, the parsimony of theoretical modelling means that the complexity of analysis must come in through the level of historical and philosophical nuance involved in actually looking at the world. The extraordinary weight and/or baroque beauty of many theoretical models in the humanities means that one can just drop them anywhere and the analysis will be done for you, whether or not it illuminates anything other than the theory itself.

It is regularly lamented that the humanities are in some state of "crisis" and that funding is being pulled away at an alarming rate. But what has been most tragic about this is that the people often calling loudest about this crisis have themselves forged whole careers on undermining the humanities. One of Minnesota University Press’s more recent book series is called "Posthumanities." The Posthumanities is the home of posthumanism. And "posthumanism"—in the words of one of its most well-known exponents—removes "the human and Homo sapiens from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition" (Wolfe, What is Posthumanism? xii). What a removal—not only the human, but Homo Sapiens too! The word "privileged" here is signal, in the sense that it captures both an epistemological and an ethical position—the posthumanist is not just keen to see differently, but—like a good parent—wants to revoke certain "privileges." Shorn of its ethical pose, posthumanism is in many ways still the playing out of one of the main currents of radical structuralism, perhaps best sampled in the high
drama denouement of Michel Foucault’s *Les Mots et les choses*:

L’homme est une invention dont l’archéologie de notre pensée montre aisément la date récente. Et peut-être la fin prochaine. Si ces dispositions venaient à disparaître comme elles sont apparues . . . alors on peut bien parier que l’homme s’effacerait, comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable. [That man is an invention of recent date is something that the archaelogy of our thought easily shows. And it may be nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared . . . then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn on the sand at the edge of the sea’] 398.

But where shall we stop? No sooner had the most recent spate of posthumanist thought emerged that it appeared that *this* face, too—and perhaps now faces-in-general—may also become a victim of tides. The newest form of posthumanism might be called postposthumanism. It *might*—but it’s not; it’s usually called "Plant Studies." Titles in the Minnesota UP series mentioned above include: *Plants Have So Much to Teach Us, All We Have to do is Ask; Inanimation: Theories of Inorganic Life;* and *Insect Media.* Where once talk of "posthumanism" implied addressing non-human animal life, posthumanism itself has been criticised for privileging animal life over vegetation. It is not a one-off: Brill’s series "Critical Plant Studies" hopes to fill a perceived gap in philosophy. *(9)* It was inaugurated by Michael Marder’s *Plant Life,* which explored "the potential of vegetation to resist the logic of totalization and to exceed the narrow confines of instrumentality" (surprise, surprise!). As with such revolutionary work, the indications so far are that horticulturalists, botanists and hobby-gardeners don’t care even slightly. Not that this stops the enthusiasts. Witness the program for a session at a recent conference:
Vegetal Ecocriticism: The Question of “The Plant”
KANSAS ROOM, KANSAS MEMORIAL UNION
Leaders: Joni Adamson, Arizona State University, and Cate Sandilands, York University
♦ Elizabeth Callaway, UC Santa Barbara, Towards an Aesthetics of Difference: Eduardo Kac's Edunia and the Overemphasis on Similarity
♦ Hannes De Vriese, Université de Toulouse II-Le Miraill (France) / Universiteit Gent (Belgium), Dormancy: Learning the Patience of Plants with Jean-Loup Trassard
♦ Erin Despard, Concordia University, On Garden Writing and the Socialization of the Vegetal
♦ Micha Gerrit Philipp Edlich, Johannes Gutenberg University, "My intelligence is a web": "Plant-Thinking" and Plant Rights in Alan Moore's Swamp Thing
♦ Hsinya Huang, National Sun Yat-sen University, Orality, Textuality and Memory: The Power of the Plant in Pacific Islands Writing
♦ Wang Huang, The Ohio State University, The Touch of An Other: Flower-Spirits, Body, and Place in Liaozhai zhiyi
♦ Annie Merrill Ingram, Davidson College, Sentience and Personification
♦ Julie Joosten, Experience Elsewhere: Light and the Matter of the Plant
♦ Yeonhaun Kang, University of Florida, Journey into Vegetal Aesthetics: Food, Gardening, and Transpacific Environmental Studies
♦ Maya L. Kapoor, University of Arizona, The Social Life of Plants
♦ Margaret Konkol, Georgia Institute of Technology, The Civic Life of Trees
♦ Anthony Lioi, The Juilliard School, There's Nothing Wrong with Men That Plants Can't Fix: Phytomorphic Genderfuck in Contemporary Science Fiction
♦ Gillian Osborne, University of California Berkeley, Representative Men, Vegetative Men: Emersonian Composition
♦ Darren Patrick, York University, Grounding the Ghetto Palm: Toward a Vegetal Ethics and Politics of Queer Urban Ecologies
♦ Elana Santana, York University, Old Growth Feminism: Arboreal Agencies on Lesbian Land
♦ Aubrey Streit Krug, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Producing Plant Bodies on the Great Plains
♦ Sarah Weiger, University of Portland, "It bloomed and dropt": Phenology in Dickinson and Thoreau

Workshop:
Still, what is good about Plant Studies and Thing Studies (when Thing Studies eventually becomes a thing in itself) is that they actually foreground a kind of anthropology, indeed one which they themselves are forced to thematise. And where the ostensible focus of Plant Studies is ontological, its real impetus is ethical (which is also true of GA). In this universe, animals and plants are to be welcomed back, as if reality were some grand cosmic party to which some guests (plants and animals) were not invited and that we should invite them forthwith. But although anthropological and ethical themes are foregrounded in these kinds of work, their bases are rarely justified. It is assumed that welcoming animals back into the fold will ensure that they get a better go of things. But there’s no such guarantee. The Australian-South African writer, J. M. Coetzee, wrote in The Sydney Morning Herald that:

> The campaign of human beings for animal rights is curious in one respect: the creatures on whose behalf human beings are acting are unaware of what their benefactors are up to and, if they succeed, are unlikely to thank them. There is even a sense in which animals do not know what is wrong—they do certainly not know what is wrong in the same way that humans do. Thus, however close the well-meaning benefactor may feel to animals, the animal rights campaign remains a human project from beginning to end. (“Exposing the Beast”)

Coetzee’s point is as obvious as it is rarely stated. He points to a cultural pattern, a social pattern, and of course, an anthropology which deserves explication. With the work of Girard and Gans, we could hardly be in better hands.

**References**


1. Just as those who invoke "secularism" to vanquish Christian thought don't realise that they are smuggling in theology, paganism packs its very own Trojan Horse. (back)

2. Yet, to concede something to the implicit historiography of paganism—as well as to thinkers such as Michel Serres—truly originary moments of human culture are few. The scene of human cultural genesis concerns the movement from animal to human, something that occurred once, or perhaps many times, when a group of proto-humans were gathered around an appetitively attractive object with no one of the member of the group able to assert immediate dominance. As all hands reached out, a common moment of realisation occurred when by grunt or sign, the attempt to seize it was replaced by a deferral of violence, an aborted gesture of appropriation which is coeval with and equivalent to the first sign. (back)

3. To be sure, piercings are often partially concealed, as in the tongue which can be kept behind the doors
of the mouth, or the navel, or the genitals or other parts of the body which are hidden behind clothes. (back)

4. These are useful headings, though the erotic aspect in our view is better understood in terms of corporeality, especially Romantic desires for bodily agonistics and physical experience ranging from breathing techniques to physical rituals. (back)

5. One example here is Sabina Magliocco’s Witching Culture: Folklore and Neopaganism in America, a study of Wiccan and pagan communities in the US, in which she sees—all too predictably —"resistance culture" that engages in "textual poaching" (Magliocco 23-56). All acts of this culture she sees are, almost by definition, stupefyingly fantastic (n.b., Magliocco herself is a pagan). (back)

6. At its most grim it could be contended that paganism takes its deepest sense from the attempt to move beyond Christianity. In this regard, the task becomes simply a matter of overcoming oneself by exterminating others. As Steiner puts it, "By killing the Jews, Western culture would eradicate those who had "invented" God. . . . The holocaust is a reflex, the more complete for being long-inhibited, of natural sensory consciousness, of instinctual polytheistic and animist needs. (back)

7. Indeed the aesthetic impoverishment of religion is a topic we can’t consider, but we need at some point to think how we went from Dante and Bach to stickers that say "Honk if you love Jesus!" and bad music on acoustic guitars. (back)

8. "The scenic" is implicit in Gans’s work from The Origin of Language on, but what this approach amounts to—especially in the context of contemporary philosophy—is taken up in The Scenic Imagination. (back)

9. Of course, on the horizon now are those for whom a focus on biotic life is itself missing the point, and we should instead be doing "alien phenomenology", to explore "what it’s like to be a thing." (Here we’d want to point out that the objectification of aliens is something we find ethically distasteful, even if they themselves engage in cruel probing practices.) Ian Bogost, who is both a professor of literature, media and communication and the programmer of hit games such as "Fatworld" and "Cruel 2 B Kind," wants us to consider how things like chilies and cotton (his examples) "interact with, perceive, and experience one another." We await the emergence of funding for something called Thing Studies. (back)
The novel is the quintessential modern literary genre, and its emergence in the seventeenth century is a classic problem of literary history. The novel's appearance is connected to the emergence of Modernity, so a theory of the novel is also more or less a theory of Modernity. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist, the novel is distinguished by polyphony: the author orchestrates distinct voices in ways not found in monologic genres like epic. In this perspective, Dostoevsky is the paradigmatic novelist, the most successful at bringing singular perspectives into productive dialogue. The novel's form, for Bakhtin, is symptomatic of larger social changes in Modernity: as medieval hierarchy breaks down, class and geographic mobility increases, and formerly isolated groups are brought into creative contact with each other.

René Girard, in contrast, does not share Bakhtin's overriding concern with form. Girard's interest lies squarely with content. For Girard, the realist novel demystifies romance and the illusions of desire. Girard derives his theory of mimetic or mediated desire from his reading of leading novelists such as Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoevsky. For both Bakhtin and Girard, the novel genre serves as primary evidence for an ambitious theory about the meaning of Modernity and, for Bakhtin, language itself. Working with the same genre, however, they come to widely divergent conclusions. My goal in this essay is to bring their theories into dialogue, bridge the gap between them, and show how their theories complement each other in fruitful ways. I'll begin by reviewing and evaluating Girard's theory.

Girard published Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque in 1961, and the English translation followed a few years later. The title can be translated literally as romantic lie and novelistic truth. (The word play on romantique and romanesque does not translate into English, unfortunately, and the English translator, Yvonne Freccero, apparently settled for an alliteration: Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure, published in 1965.) The realist novel is often defined by its contrast with romance, but Girard articulates this opposition in a new way. The "lie" of romance is that one's desire for the beloved is singular and spontaneous, that the beloved is unique and perfect, and that union with the beloved will bring complete happiness. The romantic believes, "no one loves ______ like I do." The "lie" applies not only to romantic desires but human desire in general: for example, modern consumer society, in which people define themselves by, and take great pride in, their taste in music, food, clothing, and other goods.

The realist novel, according to Girard, reveals the truth of desire, that desire is mediated by an other or others. Desire is not original and spontaneous, but rather an imitation of another's desire. Desire is social, not individual. Girard distinguishes simple appetite, which we share with animals, from desire (DDN 3). Babies are born with an appetite for food, but they are not born wanting brand-name consumer products; such desires must be learned, and they are learned by imitation. Girard notes, "the most skillful advertising does not try to convince that a product is superior but that it is desired by Others" (DDN 104). The human condition is desire, insofar as we are social animals. Desire is based on something more fundamental: imitation, which is quasi-instinctual—a powerful learning method, but also an expression of competition. When two people desire the same object, they compete for its possession, resulting often in conflict. While desire can be mediated by literary representations, as with Don Quixote and Emma Bovary, often there is a specific human model. Because the desires of the individual and the model converge on the same object (or
Miguel Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* is often considered the first novel, and it illustrates Girard's theory perfectly. Don Quixote has given up his life to the imitation of the "most perfect" knight, Amadis of Gaul, on whom his desires for adventure and romance are modeled. Girard's genius was to take this obvious point and from it create a theory of the human with far-reaching implications. Madame Bovary, from Gustave Flaubert's novel, is a modern day Don Quixote who is likewise inspired by her reading of romance. Flaubert's demystification is more cruel than Cervantes' in that her adulterous affairs are desperately sordid, and they end in suicide, madness, and the poorhouse, for her orphaned daughter.

Girard notes that the mediator of desire can be "external" or "internal" to the social world of the desiring individual. When I imitate the desire of someone I know, this can lead to rivalry for the same object of desire, as in the classic love triangle; such is internal mediation. In contrast, Don Quixote's mediator is external. Since he doesn't have any contact with Amadis of Gaul, there is no possibility of entering into conflict with him. External mediators are preferable to internal mediators for this reason, and they can serve as positive role models. Many critics, of course, see Don Quixote's illusions as ennobling. But the fact remains that he has enslaved himself to a false ideal. Girard is aware that Don Quixote is a comic figure, and that his novel is not just a simple morality tale warning us against reading too literally. Nevertheless, Don Quixote is deluded, and from a religious perspective his life is wasted. Girard disagrees with the Romantic and modern critics who take Don Quixote as heroic in his illusions. Girard points out the essential vanity in Don Quixote's attempts to "rescue" the helpless: "The victim to be rescued is never more than a pretext for asserting oneself gloriously against the whole universe" (*DDN* 144). Accordingly, Girard places great weight on Don Quixote's final deathbed return to sanity when he repudiates his chivalric illusions.

Girard finds a historical development in the novel genre from depictions of external mediation in early novels such as *Don Quixote*, to the representation of internal mediation, which is more messy and complicated. Dostoevsky's mature novels exemplify the latter. In his novels, we find individuals who are obsessed with their mediators in perverse ways, such as the husband, Trusotsky, of *The Eternal Husband*. One of the peculiarities of mimetic desire is that the beloved is not considered worthy of romantic love unless a mediator confirms the desire. So Trusotsky introduces his fiancée to his rival, creating a love triangle which frustrates the achievement of his desire. With internal mediation, the subject and model become mediators for each other, leading to an escalation of rivalry and conflict, often resulting in the anarchic situations not unusual in Dostoevsky's novels. In the novelistic representation of internal mediation, individuals often take actions which frustrate the achievement of their desires. Any object of desire that can be actually attained becomes ipso facto worthless. The true object of the desire is the "being" of the rival, but because this goal is inherently unattainable, individuals seek for ever more inaccessible objects. While Don Quixote, at least, achieves a semblance of transcendence in his quests (with his local fame), the modern protagonist is condemned to the endless pursuit of frustrated transcendence. The only true transcendence, for Girard, is to be found in Christianity, through the renunciation of mimetic rivalry and the embrace of Christian love. God is the only valid mediator for desire.

What makes the novelistic revelation of mimetic desire so revolutionary is that its operation is essentially unconscious. The individual remains convinced that his desire is spontaneous and original, and that only the evil obstacles to his desire prevent him from achieving the utopia of fulfilled desire. The individual is oblivious to the fact that he often goes out of his way to create impediments. One might object that Don Quixote is aware that his desire is modeled on Amadis of Gaul, but he remains unaware that the world of romance is entirely fictional, and so he remains essentially deluded. He is convinced that only the evil "enchancers" who constantly deceive him prevent the full achievement of his dreams.

The most important context for the great novels, for Girard, is the life of the novelist. The novelist is a former romantic who has suffered acutely from the illusions of desire. Since romantic desires are so blinding, he must undergo a quasi-religious conversion that illuminates his darkness. The novelist is one who has experienced the delusions, the degradations, the disappointments of mimetic desire most acutely in his own life. Only one who drinks this wine to its last bitter dregs can finally see through to its ultimate emptiness and vanity. In this way, the novelist is able to decisively renounce his previous life and find...
reconciliation with himself and others—an experience which constitutes the raw material for his novels. The great novels lead the reader through this experience, plunging us into the world of romantic betrayals, struggles, and chaos. At the end of such novels, the protagonist finally renounces his former life and achieves peace. Raskolnikov's redemption at the end of Crime and Punishment through the ministrations of the Christ-like Sonia is exemplary in this regard. Romantic lies are so overwhelming that only such a radical conversion is able to overcome them. So while the truth of desire can be expressed in rational propositions, only by a terrifying journey through fiery "hell" can individuals finally arrive at the base of Purgatory hill and begin the labor of repentance. The Künstlerroman conforms to this pattern, telling how the artist became the person capable of writing the novel we are reading.

A theory of genre must not only distinguish the genre from other genres but also explain the genre's emergence. For Girard, the novel is rooted in the ground prepared by the Christian revelation, and explaining his take on Christianity requires a brief excursion into his anthropology of sacrifice and human origins, which he developed from his theory of mimetic desire. First of all, Girard makes a sharp distinction between myth and the Bible. Myths generally represent in disguised form an originary human murder or scapegoating, which Girard argues founds and structures the pre-historic human community as a sacrificial order. The Bible, in contrast, reveals the truth of the founding murder, especially the New Testament Passion of Christ, which presents Jesus as an innocent scapegoat. The violence of his death is human not divine. The opposition of Bible and myth is analogous at a broader level to the opposition of novel to romance. Girard argues that mimetic desire leads to scapegoating: when several people compete for the same object, a mimetic crisis ensues which endangers the existence of the group. The crisis is resolved, according to Girard, when the group finds a scapegoat who is held responsible. The scapegoat is demonized and then killed, channeling and purging the violence of the crisis. But afterwards, the scapegoat is associated with the peace which results from his death, and then divinized, becoming a sacrificial deity who requires periodic, symbolic repetitions of the founding murder. The story of Christ's Passion demystifies this basic human pattern, revealing the innocence of the victim.

How does Christianity prepare the ground for the novel? The influence of Christianity can be discerned at two levels, the larger social-political evolution of the West, and in the conversion of individuals. Girard's emphasis on conversion in his theory derives from New Testament Christianity, which calls for repentance and faith resulting in a new identity, e.g., from Saul to Paul. Girard maintains that Christian conversion is not comparable to or derived from any of the numerous pagan cults or philosophies in the ancient world (MT 265-8). As we have seen, the denouement of the great novels often represents the conversion of the protagonist, and the insights of the novel result from the conversion experience of the novelist. Such a conversion is not always overtly Christian, but it does involve an insight into the vanity of romantic illusions and the mimetic nature of desire. But how does the Passion story relate to mimetic desire? We can observe mimetic behavior in the events surrounding Christ's Passion, for example, the crowd's demand for the release of Barabbas and the death of Jesus; and Peter's repudiation of Jesus after his death when he is surrounded by hostile non-believers. Girard interprets Christ's command to "turn the other cheek" as a refusal of mimetic conflict.

In terms of the social-political evolution of the West, the New Testament demystifies the sacrificial nature of traditional hierarchies, creating a skepticism about the divine nature of political authority with far-reaching consequences. Christianity frees individuals from the illusion that "sacred" violence is necessary, leaving them with the stark choice between God or Satan. Girard interprets Satan as the biblical metaphor for mimetic influence leading to violence. The Christian revelation is so radical, according to Girard, that it took many centuries for humans to fully understand and put into practice its revelations.(1) Theologians commonly misunderstood Christ's death on the cross as a sacrifice analogous to pagan sacrifice.

Cesáreo Bandera has examined Medieval and Early Modern literature in terms of the Girardian theory of the Christian revelation. For Bandera, the key issue is the representation of heroes who serve as models of identity. The epic hero, who triumphs by military might, is essentially anti-Christian according to Bandera. Medieval artists sometimes tried to assimilate Christ to pagan concepts of a hero, picturing him as the Pantocrator, Ruler of the cosmos. The task for writers, which took many centuries, was to go beyond the epic concept of heroic identity (based on sacrificial violence) and find new models. Cervantes' Don Quixote was a crucial step in the demystification of heroic models. Don Quixote transcends the binarism of the sacred because he is neither idealized nor demonized (cf. Thersites in Homer's The Iliad).(2)
In religion, the later medieval focus on the sufferings of Christ was decisive in ushering in a new model of identity, one which recognized the sinful, fallen nature of the self. Other significant developments include the Devotio Moderna movement, the Imitatio Christi, Christian mysticism, and Jesuit spiritual exercises; all of which paved the way for Erasmus and the Reformation. As Catholics, however, both Girard and Bandera have a largely negative view of the Protestant Reformation. Bandera sees Protestant iconoclasm as regressive form of sacrifice, what Girard calls "Satan driving out Satan" (Bandera, TSG 236fn). In Girard's interpretation of this New Testament episode, Satan is essentially the action of driving out, of sacrificial expulsion; so that "Satan driving out Satan" is a false reformation that merely reproduces the logic of sacrifice. (3) Girard sees Protestantism as symptomatic of the Early Modern dissolution of sacrificial order, and the inability of existing traditions to find any workable replacements:

Today, almost a thousand years later [after the schism between Eastern and Western Christendom in 1054], we are witnessing the breakdown of the Reformation. There are now thousands of Protestant churches. Protestantism is coming apart at the seams, crumbling really. Yet some of the new churches display more spiritual fervor than the old ones. (TOWSC 77)

The breakdown of the sacrificial order in the Early Modern period has ambivalent consequences in Girard's reading. On the one hand, humans are (at least partially) freed from the lies that justify killing the innocent. We no longer countenance the execution of accused witches, for example. The destruction of such idolatrous illusions allows for the development of modern science and medicine. But on the other hand, we lose the traditional protection (i.e., scapegoating) against mimetic violence. Secularization means that "men become gods for each other." The novel takes as its subject matter this new world of internal mediation, which escalates as we become more secular. Modernity allows for the insights of the great novelists into the hell of internal mediation. The stories and novels of Franz Kafka exemplify the nightmarish world of internal mediation and frustrated transcendence which typifies Modernity at its worst. (4) Despite the dangers created by demystifying sacrificial illusions, their destruction is still necessary for the possible turn to non-sacrificial truth and peace.

Girard's basic insight—that the novel explores the workings of desire in the modern world, revealing its mediated nature—is solid, well-supported, and, indeed, revolutionary—because of its profound anthropological implications. Nevertheless, we need to consider its limitations. The most obvious objection to Girard's theory is that it is too narrow to encompass such a diverse genre as the novel. Girard speaks mainly about what he calls the "great novels" of his chosen major novelists. So to that degree, he himself limits the scope of his theory. At the same time, however, he often makes generalizations about "the world of the novel," and the clear implication is that his theory accounts for the main raison d'être of the genre, even if some novels fit better than others. Moreover, the opposition of mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque implies a way to classify novels according to their perspective on desire—a classification which corresponds broadly to a distinction between popular (i.e., romantic) and more serious novels. In this way his theory can be (and has been) expanded to account for more that just his chosen great novels.

Furthermore, insofar as desire is fundamental to what it means to be human, all realist novels afford a perspective on the workings of desire in the modern world.

The main limitation of Girard's theory, in my view, is the binary nature of his distinction between the sacrificial and the non-sacrificial, an opposition he insists is not dialectical; he argues they are true contraries which cannot be synthesized. But in this way he creates a Manichean world-view that ironically reproduces the very binarism of the sacred that he, better than anyone, has demystified. For example, Girard consistently denounces Romantic individualism as a form of the mensonge romantique, the illusion that one is special and unique. To some extent Girard has a valid point; if one's identity is defined by one's desires, and desire is mediated, then the self is by definition social and mediated, not autonomous. Girard opposes this false individualism to the true individualism offered by Christianity: "passion" as opposed to "desire" (RFU 43). (5) But individuals, in novels as in life, do not fit into such black and white categories. Girard imposes a theological framework which is foreign to the representation of life in novels, even his chosen novels.

Girard insists that there is no alternative to mensonge romantique besides the Christian refusal of violence and mimetic slavery. I agree this is a valid distinction—a true opposition—but a false dichotomy. Girard ignores how practical belief in individualism actually functions in Modernity. What actually distinguishes one
person from another? We should remember that difference is ultimately a question of perception and belief. There are real differences in values, abilities, and achievements, of course; but what matters for social order is the perception of difference; because it is perception/belief that governs behavior. A superiority which must be constantly proved, for example, does not function effectively: a man who always needs to draw his gun to prove his authority is less effective that one whose authority is respected by the community.

We know from Girard that the basic enemy of social order is the sameness that results from imitation, because it stimulates rivalry and conflict. It follows that difference is what enables social order and peace. The most obvious and important form of difference, historically, is the division of individuals into different groups; for example, rulers, priests, and workers. The worker is inhibited from imitating the ruler or priest, competing and thus conflicting with them. The different classes of society are not equal but rather arranged into a hierarchy. Girard's work on scapegoating suggests that hierarchy can be seen as an institutional form of sacrifice: the interests of the lower classes are sacrificed to the interests of the ruling classes. Insofar as class divisions are arbitrary and unmotivated, this is true. But this ignores the fact that everyone benefits from social order, as Hobbes pointed out in his social contract theory. Furthermore, class divisions are not completely arbitrary; aristocrats were originally warriors distinguished by their skill in battle. When class status is hereditary, of course, then its original justification is weakened over time. Kings and aristocrats have always appealed to the sacred to justify their position. Girard argues that the sacred is really a disguised form of sacrificial violence. Christianity, in contrast, asserts the equality of souls before God. Christianity's historical appeal was due, in part, to the weakness of traditional justifications of class status.

In the Renaissance, traditional hierarchy was undergoing a process of disintegration, a process which results in Modernity. This is the essential context for the emergence of the novel. What is at stake in larger terms is not the false alternatives of Christianity or apocalypse, but simply different means to social order.

As Girard points out correctly, the disintegration of cosmic hierarchy poses problems for social order; problems which the novel takes for its subject matter, usually at the local rather than national level. What Girard didn't recognize, or at least didn't fully appreciate, is that individual difference can also serve to preserve order. If I believe that I am special and unique, then I am relieved of the burden of trying to compete with others. In a similar fashion, if I have an external mediator, a personal hero who far exceeds me and everyone in my social group, then I needn't feel resentment when someone in my group receives recognition that I feel is excessive, since my hero far exceeds both of us in both achievement and recognition. What each person needs is a scene on which they can successfully compete and earn recognition. The West offers many such avenues, the Internet being an obvious example. If I'm perceived as different, then I don't need to be the best. I'm the best at being me. This is the ideology of individualism, derived largely from Protestantism, and it allows for the continued existence of the modern world, indeed, drives it. Individualism is not a panacea, of course, and there is plenty of free-floating resentment resulting in occasional outbreaks of violence. The crux is that recognition or centrality has to circulate in Modernity. Everyone needs to feel they have a voice. Someone who monopolizes the limelight arouses our resentment (although they may also fulfill our fantasy of centrality). Marxists see the ideology of individualism as a conspiracy to mystify the "truth" of class society. Yet everything is relative. Compared to the Medieval and Renaissance periods, our society really does offer widespread opportunities to talent and discipline irrespective of class status, race, or gender. And there is really a substantial fluidity of class status (or more accurately, simply wealth) in the modern world. The myth of Marxism is that utopia is possible, a myth hundreds of times more destructive than the petty but constructive illusions of individualism. It's true of course that individualism tends to undermine many of the traditional bases of community. But community can be oppressive just as often as nourishing. Our highest value is ultimately freedom, and we retain the freedom to form (or leave) a great variety of associations at our choice.

The "divine" hierarchy that structured ancient and medieval societies worked by repressing mimetic desire through taboos and prohibitions. This structure worked for most of human history, enabling the species to continue. The modern world, in contrast, allows for the liberation of desire, with laws mainly directed to the protection of rights and enforcement of contracts. Each of us can aspire to the stars, and we are encouraged to do so. At the very least, each of us can work for and create a better life for ourselves. Whereas unrestrained mimetic desire was a destructive force in the ancient world, the modern world harnesses desire and the resulting competition as positive forces for progress. In economic terms, if the free market runs on desire, then it becomes necessary to understand desire, not just its destructive illusions, but also its potential for enriching our lives. The novel explores the complex (and often counterintuitive) ways
that desire works in the modern world: essential information for thriving or simply surviving. The "marriage market" in Jane Austen's novels and others is one example. The "marriage plot" of so many Victorian novels teaches young men and women to restrain their immediate desires in order to achieve their enduring desires. Girard's view of desire in binary terms is ultimately too narrow. He has acknowledged that desire can be good, but his theory still depends on a sharp distinction between sacrificial and non-sacrificial. He hypothesizes that culture originates in the violent scapegoating of a human individual. This originary legacy creates a Manichean and even conspiratorial world view in Girard's theory. But Eric Gans, with his Originary Hypothesis, has demonstrated convincingly that culture can be explained more economically as the deferral of violence.(7)

Culture is built on the mutual exchange of sacrifice, at all levels. Exchange, and the deferral of desire, are the originary and still essential operations of culture. The maturity of the individual, in or out of the novel, involves the recognition that not all sacrifices are reciprocated, and they don't need to be. In Christian terms, it is enough that God recognizes my sacrifice.

One area of agreement between Girard and Bakhtin is an understanding of human culture as fundamentally social. Girard makes this point within the context of psychology, however, while Bakhtin focuses on language. The insight that language is social is the foundation for Bakhtin's linguistic and literary theories. He begins his seminal essay "Discourse in the Novel" by observing:

verbal discourse is a social phenomenon—social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning. It is this idea that has motivated our emphasis on "the stylistics of genre." (259)

Bakhtin has a strong sense of language as structure, a recognition of what's called "the content of form." By his definition, language has a certain autonomy or agency, resulting from its social nature:

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intention; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. ("Discourse" 294)

Unlike pure structuralism, Bakhtin clearly allows for individual agency. What is most original about his quasi-structural approach is his emphasis on the plasticity and diversity of discourses and how they interact. Bakhtin allows more room for creativity and freedom in the structuralist "prison-house of language" than most neo-Marxists.

The best way to introduce Bakhtin's theory of the novel is by reviewing his understanding of language. His key linguistic concept is heteroglossia, a term that requires some unpacking. We know that any group of people, to the degree of its isolation from others, will develop its own way of speaking—a distinctive vocabulary, jargon, characteristic speech and writing patterns— professions, for example, locales, hobbyists, enthusiasts of all kinds, economic classes, time periods, even families. In communication theory, such groups are called discourse communities, and individuals belong to a variety of such communities and speak in a variety of ways, according to which group they are addressing. Even "an illiterate peasant," Bakhtin writes,

miles away from any urban center, naively immersed in an unmoving and for him unshakable everyday world, nevertheless lived in several language systems: he prayed to God in one language (Church Slavonic), sang songs in another, spoke to his family in a third, and when he began to dictate petitions to the local authorities through a scribe, he tried speaking yet a fourth language. ("Discourse" 295-6)

The language of a particular discourse embodies a distinct set of values, a way of viewing the world. Language is not, then, a transparent representation of the world, nor is it a straightforward expression of an individual's intentions; different forms of language express different ideological perspectives on the world ("Discourse" 271). Insisting on the diversity of discourses within any language, Bakhtin opposes any linguistic approach which views a language as a monolithic whole ("Discourse" 265, 270, 288). Heteroglossia refers first of all to the stratification of language into discourses, so that no utterance is neutral and transparent ("Discourse" 272). Furthermore, different discourses are constantly interacting with
each other, spreading their influence, so that any particular utterance may exhibit a dialogue between discourses. Such interactions typically involve some struggle, to the extent that the values of each discourse conflict with each other.

The individual's relationship to the various discourses of his environment is fraught with struggle. Authoritative discourses—religious, political, moral—come to us as an alien force, full of the intentions and accents of others:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. ("Discourse" 293)

In fact, the individual is defined by just this process of appropriation and adaptation: "The ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" ("Discourse" 341). Individuals must exercise agency in their relationship with the language of those in authority. Such authoritative discourses are not without value; they may embody necessary norms of behavior. But the word of authority, initially, comes from outside, from the past, from tradition, demanding our acknowledgement and limiting our freedom. The individual must struggle with such voices, discarding some and acknowledging others, so that they become "internally-persuasive" discourse, an element of identity and a means of agency. Novels sometimes portray this struggle: for example, Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, in which Huck feels torn between the authoritative discourse on slavery and his own human feelings for the escaped slave Jim.

For Bakhtin, language is "always-already" dialogic, always orientated to a potential audience, always responsive (whether in sympathy or hostility) to the concerns of others, even in our most private thoughts. The stratification of discourses, and their constant interaction with each other at every level, including any particular utterance, constitutes what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia, which he considers the defining nature of language.

An utterance can take different postures towards its own heteroglossia, seeking to exclude or embrace it. Some literary genres such as epic seek to create a monologic, unified perspective that embodies the traditions of a culture. The novel, on the other hand, embraces heteroglossia, providing a variety of different ideological perspectives on the world. In the novel, any particular discourse is relativized, revealed as limited, as existing only in dialogic relationship with other discourses and perspectives. Some of the dialogic styles of the novel are specifically literary in form, such as skaz, when the narrator mimics the oral speech patterns of one of the characters. But the particular virtue of the novel is that the genre draws on virtually all of the available written and oral discourses of a language, with or without quotation marks.

For Bakhtin, the novel's embodiment of a great variety of discourses, and its particular attitude towards different discourses, are what define the genre. Such a stylistic definition is rather unusual; the novel is usually defined by its content and only secondarily by its style, because the basic form is narrative, which the novel shares with romance and epic. In an important sense, for Bakhtin, the novel is "about" language, specifically heteroglossia. He connects the emergence of the novel to the "epistemological turn" in philosophy with Descartes, and the novel is likewise fundamentally epistemological in its orientation ("Epic" 15). The novel's great discovery is that every discourse is a form of knowledge, and that an utterance is meaningful only in the context of discourse. According to Bakhtin, the novel, ideally, does not employ any master discourse or narrative voice which governs and judges the other discourses from a superior perspective. Indeed, the best novels question the legitimacy of any such master discourse. The novel is self-aware and self-critical in a way foreign to other genres ("Epic" 6). Bakhtin acknowledges, however, that some novels exemplify his theory better than others. He even characterizes some novels as "monologic" in comparison to other more "dialogic" examples. But such novels are monologic only as compared to other novels, and the genre as whole is still distinguished from other genres by its dialogic nature. Bakhtin classifies novels according to the degree which they reveal heteroglossia. He doesn't explicitly rate novels in this way, but his favorites are clearly the more heteroglossic.
The novel and its revelation of heteroglossia have clear socio-political implications. The novel is a subversive genre in Bakhtin's reading because it relativizes and questions all forms of authoritative discourse, creating a carnivalesque context where traditional power relations are upended. Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is Bakhtin's great exemplar of literary carnival, but he also finds carnivalesque elements in Dostoevsky and others. In general, Bakhtin loved comic literature—Rabelais, Charles Dickens, and Lawrence Sterne, for example—and his theory of the novel works particularly well with comic novels, which often parody the voices of authority ("Epic" 21-28). Parody, of course, is a great example of dialogic discourse. The value of the novel is tied up with its subversive tendencies. (We should note that although he typically framed his discussion of subversion in Marxist terms, the political authorities in Stalinist Russia found his work threatening, and his books were suppressed until relatively recently.)

To a large extent, Bakhtin sees the novel as a relatively independent literary development; he doesn't adhere to any crude Marxist "reflection theory," whereby literature is a passive reflection of economic developments. Nevertheless, he does recognize that the novel is a child of the modern world, expressing some of its unique advances. Certain developments in Early Modern Europe parallel the dynamic structure of the novel. Bakhtin writes,

> Polyglossia had always existed (it is more ancient than pure, canonic monoglossia), but it had not been a factor in literary creation; an artistically conscious choice between languages did not serve as the creative center of the literary and language process. . . . The new cultural and creative consciousness [of the novel] lives in an actively polyglot world [i.e., Modernity]. The world becomes polyglot, once and for all and irreversibly. ("Epic" 12)

The progress from a feudal economy to capitalism is crucial, of course; the increase of trade brings about enormous changes, bringing formerly isolated areas into contact with a wider world; and trade also brings about new possibilities of social mobility. In a very literal sense, different languages and discourses are brought into dialogue with each other, such that history parallels novelistic structure. As Bakhtin observes, the particular form of the novel is

> powerfully affected by a very specific rupture in the history of European civilization: its emergence from a socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society, and its entrance into international and interlingual contacts and relationships. A multitude of different languages, cultures and times become available to Europe, and this became a decisive factor in its life and thought. ("Epic" 11)

Bakhtin has enjoyed phenomenal influence in the wake of post-structuralism, especially by neo-Marxist critics interested in forms of subversion. His work on language and his various neologisms have become essential features of the current theoretical landscape, and for good reasons. But we need to dig deeper into his key concept of heteroglossia in order to understand what is really at stake in the relationship of different discourses. It's been observed that Bakhtin's theory is utopian, but what exactly is missing? He maintains that real contradictions drive the process of dialogism and that such dialogue is open-ended and unfinalizable: he resists the move to any easy synthesis. But the possibility of real conflict is missing; instead we find only a vaguely-motivated dialogue. The basic problem with Bakhtin is that he lacks any real sense of the anthropological function of language in deferring violence. As we'll see in our discussion of Dostoevsky, what brings discourses and voices into dialogue is mimesis, the same force that creates their contradictions, which are not merely logical, but real conflicts of interest. The deficits in Bakhtin's theory must be remedied by Girard's theory of mimetic desire, or else we are left with a romantic aestheticizing of language and literature.

By the same token, we can also see that Girard lacks any theory of language, so his theory of the novel would benefit from Bakhtin's sensitivity to different discourses. Yet Girard does not take kindly to any variety of structuralism. He writes,

> In Bakhtin the notion of the carnivalesque designates the form of what no longer has form and thereby remains the prisoner of formalism, like rites themselves. The notion of the dialogic inflicts all sorts of miseries on the linguistic structures, strives radically to weaken them, multiplies their substitutions and oscillations, but nonetheless in the final analysis
remains the prisoner of linguistic structuralism. To escape the latter, it would be necessary to understand that the total of this operation always equals zero. This would instantly free us from all methodological préciosité and grant us access at last to the doubles [created by mimetic desire], that is, the essential. (TDBB 46)

Girard assimilates linguistic form to sacrificial "rites," and he reads Bakhtin's notion of the "carnivalesque" as simply a lack of form resulting from the weakening of sacrificial order in the Renaissance. Structural analyses, Girard suggests, are ultimately tautological and even nihilistic: "the total of this operation always equals zero." We would be better off, Girard claims, to forego structuralism altogether and focus instead on the psychology of mimetic desire. But the forms of discourse cannot so simply be assimilated to sacrificial "rites"; they are actually a necessary feature of language and linguistic analysis. The claim that any particular form is sacrificial, valorizing certain terms and denigrating their opposites, is central to Deconstruction. And Bakhtin's carnivalesque, far from being "the form of what no longer has form," actually serves to counter the sacrificial in discourse, hence its popularity among poststructuralists.

We can further our dialogue here by considering Fyodor Dostoevsky, who constitutes a prime theoretical exemplar for Girard and Bakhtin, both of whom have a book devoted to him. For Girard, Dostoevsky provides acute insights into post-Christian Modernity and internal mediation. Bakhtin, on the other hand, finds a radically new form of the novel with Dostoevsky that he characterizes as "polyphonic." Rather surprisingly, Bakhtin seems to define polyphony as a technique in characterization rather than style or discourse (more on this below). In a polyphonic novel, the characters assume a certain independence such that they are not controlled by or subsumed under the author's perspective, as in previous novels; as a result, we respond "as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual words" (Bakhtin, PDP 5). Bakhtin writes,

> A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse. In no way, then, can a character's discourse be exhausted by the usual functions of characterization and plot development, nor does it serve as a vehicle for the author's own ideological position (as with Byron, for instance). The consciousness of a character is given as someone else's consciousness, another consciousness, yet at the same time it is not turned into an object, is not closed, does not become a simple object of the author's consciousness. (PDP 6-7)

What is the relationship of heteroglossia and polyphony? Bakhtin emphasizes the novelty of polyphony, calling it "a completely new type of artistic thinking," "a fundamentally new novelistic genre" (PDP 3, 7). At the same time, however, he acknowledges that polyphony is dialogic to an extreme degree:

> In Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel we are dealing not with ordinary dialogic form, that is, with an unfolding of material within the framework of its own monologic understanding and against the firm background of a unified world of objects. No, here we are dealing with an ultimate dialogicality, that is, a dialogicality of the ultimate whole. (PDP 18)

So there is a dialogic dimension to polyphony, although it is an extreme form, "an ultimate dialogicality," which leads one to suspect that polyphony is related more closely to heteroglossia than his insistence on polyphony's novelty might otherwise lead us to conclude. When tracing out the literary roots of the novel, he finds that dialogic artistic prose "leads to Dostoevsky" (PDP 109). Perhaps surprisingly, however, he admits that Dostoevsky's novels are not actually stylistically diverse in the ordinary sense; nevertheless, he maintains they include "dialogic relationships" which are "metalinguistic" (PDP 181). He explains,

> Dostoevsky's works astound us first of all by their extraordinary diversity of types and varieties of discourse, types and varieties, moreover, that are present in their most extreme expression. Clearly predominant is vari-directional double-voiced discourse, in particular internally dialogized
discourse and the reflected discourse of an other: hidden polemic, polemically colored confession, hidden dialogue. In Dostoevsky almost no word is without its intense sideward glance at someone else's word. At the same time there are almost no objectified words in Dostoevsky, since the speech of his characters is constructed in a way that deprives it of all objectification. What also astounds us is the continual and abrupt alternation of the most varied types of discourse. Sharp and unexpected transitions from parody to internal polemic, from polemic to hidden dialogue, from hidden dialogue to stylization in serene hagiographic tones, then back again to parodistic narration and finally to an extremely intense open dialogue—such is the agitated verbal surface of his works. (PDP 203)

What Bakhtin describes here is discursive, but polyphony finds expression in the words of the characters and their dynamic and unexpected interactions, leading him to describe polyphony in terms of character. Paradoxically, what makes the characters seem so independent (of authorial control) is their deeply dialogical (or mimetic, in Girardian terms) relationship to others.

Polyphony and heteroglossia share some structural features. Just as discourses have their own life independent of the author in heteroglossia, so the characters in polyphony have their own life independent of the author; and there is no master discourse or perspective which governs the various discourses and characters—leading to the "unfinalizability" (PDP 252) which some critics have identified as the heart of Bakhtin's theoretical project. Of course, in a novel, even character is ultimately discursive; so we are justified, I believe, in viewing polyphony as another, more intense, variety of heteroglossia. If so, then Bakhtin's theory of the novel remains centered on heteroglossia. If heteroglossia is defined by heterogeneity, we shouldn't be surprised that there is more than one type of heteroglossia.

We need to go further into what Bakhtin means by the "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" in polyphony. In practical terms, I would submit, this means that characters act and speak in unpredictable ways, and as a result are hard to classify as unambiguously good or evil. Furthermore, major characters often have distinct, more or less developed ideological and sometimes philosophical perspectives. Wayne Booth sees polyphony as an issue of realism or objectivity (xx). In other words, people really are independent and unpredictable, and Dostoevsky is faithful to this basic human reality. Polyphony is "realistic" in the sense that it is rooted in an important anthropological insight, but ultimately polyphony is an aesthetic effect, similar to what Freud calls the uncanny. Simply put, Dostoevsky's characters have an uncanny liveliness to them. In Freud's famous essay on the uncanny, he mentions the theory of Ernst Jentsch, who traces the uncanny experience to an unresolvable "uncertainty . . . [about] whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton" (Freud 227). Freud comments that Jentsch's theory is accurate as far as it goes but is more descriptive than analytical. What is needed, however, is not Freud's Oedipus theory but rather Girard's anthropology of desire. As per Jentsch, the uncanny involves the ambiguous animation of something non-living, often a doll or a dead person. What "animates" things or people, making them uncanny, is desire. In Eric Gans's Originary Hypothesis, on the originary scene, the mimetic desires of the humans are projected onto the central object, a dead animal which becomes, for the group, ambiguously animate. Desire is precisely the uncanny in Girard's theory, the most familiar but also the most "other" or threatening (Cf. Freud's analysis of the German word Unheimlich). Desire is "animated" because mimesis seems to operate by itself, without conscious intention, and thus erupts in strange and unexpected ways. The uncanny is typically found in surreal literature but can be produced by certain realist works also. As a literary effect in Dostoevsky's novels, a character becomes uncanny when we thought we had them identified as a type (the "automaton" in Jentsch's definition), but they act in an unexpected way, asserting the centrality of their own uncanny desire, which is modeled on our own (or the protagonist's, with whom we identify), yet uncanny because threatening. Only Girard's theory gives a convincing explanation of how alterity can be based on sameness: "The more desire aspires to difference, the more it generates identity" (TDBB 96). The mimetic desire of the other is modeled on our own, but that very sameness produces the threat of conflict and violence, the perception of alterity. The destabilizing oscillation of attraction and repulsion is essentially mimetic. Again we see that Girard supplies what is missing with Bakhtin. Girard's thesis that Dostoevsky is the premier psychologist of mimetic desire in Modernity is entirely convincing. Polyphony ultimately concerns Dostoevsky's novel representation of a world decentered by desire; traditionally a fictional cosmos is structured around the desire of the protagonist, to which everything else is subordinated, either in opposition or support. The real world is not like this, of course, which is one reason why we have different expectations for life and fiction. But what makes
Dostoevsky's polyphony so compelling is not its realism (fidelity to experience), but its disruption of our narrative expectations through a hypermimeticism among the characters. Polyphony includes the desire of the reader in its dialogical transmutations (more on this below). As Bakhtin notes, Dostoevsky's characters often seem to know what the other is thinking, even when they can't admit to themselves that such is their thought. For example, when Alyosha, in *The Brother's Karamazov*, tells Ivan that Ivan is not guilty for their father's death (Bakhtin, *PDP* 255). Another uncanny mimetic effect is the paranoia rampant in Dostoevsky's works, e.g. *The Eternal Husband* and *The Double*. Dostoevsky's characters are continually haunted by the voice of the other. Bakhtin comments on the underground man (from *Notes from the Underground*): "In everything he senses above all someone else's will predetermining him" (*PDP* 236). Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky requires Girard's mimetic theory to support it.

Girard observes that Dostoevsky's mature novels take place in a contemporary world in which "men become gods for each other." In other words, men have generally abandoned God and religion, and with those, the possibility of transcendence. The Christian revelation has the ironic effect of ushering in secular Modernity by dissolving the old sacrificial order. Without God as an external mediator, humans take each other for mediators, creating the rampant rivalry found in Dostoevsky's works. Girard pays close attention to Dostoevsky's personal history, and he views *Notes from the Underground* as Dostoevsky's first mature work, demonstrating that he had overcome his youthful romanticism. The narrator of *Notes from the Underground* is so mimetic that he views virtually everyone as a rival and obstacle; he sees their indifference as a personal insult, a challenge. Anyone who views him with sympathy, like the prostitute Liza, becomes for that reason worthless in his eyes. The underground man suffers simultaneously from excessive vanity, delusions of grandeur, and the most abject inferiority complex. He demonstrates with great clarity the slavery involved in mimeticism. Girard argues cogently that the value placed on freedom by the underground man (and taken up by existentialists), his refutation of rationalism, is a red herring. The underground man is not free at all; even though he acts contrary to his rational self-interest, everything he does is intended to impress the "other" in one way or another; he is enslaved to what he imagines that others think about him.

Bakhtin's interpretation of *Notes from the Underground* is in some ways quite similar: "The Underground Man remains in his inescapable opposition to the 'other person'" (*PDP* 254). Everything he says and does constantly anticipates, and resists, what others might say and think about him:

> What he fears most of all is that people might think he is repenting before someone, that he is asking someone's forgiveness, that he is reconciling himself to someone else's judgment or evaluation, that his self-affirmation is somehow in need of affirmation and recognition by another. . . . But precisely in this act of anticipating the other's response and in responding to it he again demonstrates to the other (and to himself) his own dependence on this other. He fears that the other might think he fears that other's opinion. But through this fear he immediately demonstrates his own dependence on the other's consciousness, his own inability to be at peace with his own definition of self. With his refutation, he confirms precisely what he wishes to refute, and he knows it. (*PDP* 227)

Bakhtin's analysis here advances Girard's interpretation, although without the central mechanism of mimetic desire. But Bakhtin also adds important insight not found in Girard. In the underground man's confession, Bakhtin identifies a peculiar rhetorical feature he calls the "loophole" (*PDP* 233):

> A loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words. If a word retains such a loophole this must inevitably be reflected in its structure. This potential other meaning, that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and does present itself as such, but in fact it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final, period. (*PDP* 233)

The underground man is constantly anticipating every possible reaction, objection, or other possible interpretation to what he says, and includes them all in his discourse. The result is that everything he says becomes conditional. He is impossible to pin down to any position. And this "unfinalizability" is finally the underground man's most important characteristic. He resists every possible definition of himself, so that he can't be identified even as a character in a novel. The underground man consciously resists the reader's
desire for closure or even understanding. For Bakhtin, there is an implicit self-referential dimension to the underground man (and all Dostoevsky's heroes):

The Underground Man not only dissolves in himself all possible fixed features of his person, making them all the object of his own introspection, but in fact he no longer has any such traits at all, no fixed definitions, there is nothing to say about him, he figures not as a person taken from life but rather as the subject of consciousness and dream. And for the author as well he is not a carrier of traits and qualities that could have been neutral toward his self-consciousness and could have finalized him; no, what the author visualizes is precisely the hero's self-consciousness and the inescapable open-endedness, the vicious circle of that self-consciousness. (PDP 51)

In the above passage, Dostoevsky elaborates on what he means by polyphony, and what I call the uncanny dimension of his characters, which is properly meta-fictional. The underground man is continually surprising everyone, including himself and his author; at the same time he is utterly predictable in his obsessions. He is a fictional character, who by definition is fixed by the words of the author. In that sense, he is a doll, an inanimate body, a puppet. But he continually exceeds the boundaries of the fiction, taking on uncanny life. He is surrounded by doubles, of course, everyone whom he takes for rivals; but he is also his own double; his character includes the other within himself, leading to what Bakhtin notes as the "inescapable perpetuum mobile of the dialogized self-consciousness" (PDP 230).

Mikhail Bakhtin and René Girard have produced two highly original theories of the novel genre, along with brilliant analyses of particular novels. They both take Dostoevsky as a primary example for their theories, and as we saw, their readings of his novels bear significant similarities. We may wonder if Christianity is a common thread connecting these three authors. Bakhtin was accused by the Soviet authorities of participation in a prohibited Russian Orthodox group, but there is no certain evidence one way or another, and his religious convictions remain an open question. His sympathy for the profoundly Christian writer Dostoevsky, however, is probably not coincidental in this regard. The Christian anthropology of fallen humankind, subject to rivalry and conflict, may be a decisive factor for both Bakhtin's and Girard's theories. Bakhtin and Dostoevsky were also influenced by Christian utopianism, but we have seen that mimetic rivalry is the anthropological subtext of Heteroglossia and Polyphony. Bakhtin's theory of language and the novel requires to be supplemented with Girard's theory of desire. And both Girard and Bakhtin suffer from the lack of any rigorous understanding of language, its ethical function in deferring violence and the scenic nature of representation. Their work, however, remains irreplaceable for scholars of the novel and Modernity.

Works Cited


The Comedy of Desire: Four Variations and a Coda in Homage to René Girard

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1. The Unenviable Position

"The triangle of desire," writes Girard in Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque, "scarcely interests anyone but vaudevillians and novelists of genius," (MRVR, p. 115). With this thought in mind, I would like to examine what initially struck me as an enigmatic passage in Les Origines de la culture, the French translation of the book-length interview with Girard conducted by Pierpao lo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha. Girard is making his patented comparison between Proust’s Jean Santeuil and La Recherche, and in attempting to define the difference between the two works, the first of which is an unfinished youthful novel, while the second is of course the masterpiece, he says the following: "comme un bon comédien, l’écrivain sait qu’il ne peut écrire de la bonne littérature qu’à ses dépens, en mettant en avant son propre désir mimétique" (230). Translation: "like a good actor, the writer knows that he can only write good literature at his own expense, by putting his own mimetic desire ‘out there’.

For some time I was puzzled by this reference to an actor. There were ways to account for it, given that Proust devoted some memorable pages to the genius of the stage actress La Berma, but the sentence still seemed obscure. Then I read Evolution and Conversion, the original English edition. There I found the following: "like a good comedian, the Proust of La Recherche knows that he can write good literature only at his own expense, at the expense of his own mimetic desire" (176). The discrepancy between original and translation at the end of the sentence can be explained by the French reluctance to repeat words—no doubt "at his own expense" followed by "at the expense of" raised a red flag. The translation of comedian by comédien, instead of as "comique" or "humoriste" (stand-up comedian), is also easily explained by the false cognate. There's another possible explanation, however: the comparison of Proust to a stand-up comedian is startling because stand-up comedy and the exquisite novelistic art of the great French author seem to operate on such different cultural planes. It's as if the translator were unwilling to believe that Girard could be referring in the same breath to an icon of world literature and a vulgar form of popular entertainment.

Whatever the reason for the mistranslation, the reference to stand-up comedy made the sentence seem a bit clearer. But it was only when I stumbled upon a passage in Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde that everything was finally illuminated.

The passage comes toward the end of Des choses cachées, in the context of a discussion of Proust, Freud, and narcissism. For Girard, Freud's theory of narcissism ascribes too much reality to the phenomenon, which in Proust's great novel is revealed as a mask donned for the purposes of amorous or social strategizing, or as an illusion projected onto the apparent indifference of a group of girls or socialites. In the earlier Jean Santeuil, however, the narcissistic position was given more consistency. The main character was shown hobnobbing with aristocrats beneath the envious gaze of his snobbish enemies, "living the dream"—a dream in which Proust, by the time he wrote La Recherche, had ceased to believe.

Girard analyzes the well-known passage in the second volume of La Recherche in which Marcel first encounters "the little band" of girls, among whom, although he does not yet know her, is his future mistress Albertine. Intimidated and fascinated by the athletic bodies strolling nonchalantly together down the beach, the rather sickly and over-intellectual Marcel sees in them the embodiment of self-contentment, and longs to join this enchanted circle of scornful and immodest teenagers. It is at this point that Girard makes some
Freud ascribes a formidable narcissism to the comedian. Freud conceives professional humor as mockery at the audience's expense, as an expulsion of the audience. In reality, the opposite is true: if the stand-up comic behaved like the little band, he wouldn't make the audience laugh. There is nothing laughable about the little band for the narrator; it's fascinating, terrifying, but certainly not laughable. To make the audience laugh, you have to make them laugh at your own expense, and it is Proust, of course, who is right. . . . To make others laugh, one must find oneself, or place oneself deliberately, in the position of the victim . . .

When Girard says "victim" here, I don't think he means the consenting victim, the Lamb of God, who is expelled because he refuses violence. Rather he means the victim of mimetic desire. The latter repeatedly finds himself excluded from a group not because the group is particularly bent on excluding him, but because his desire transfigures precisely the most unwelcoming groups and individuals. So Girard means that instead of occupying the unassailable "narcissistic" position, instead of trying to fascinate the audience, the successful comedian has to place himself in the position of the one who desires—and believes in—the ineffable bliss of being welcomed into the closed narcissistic circle: "la petite bande" of insolent girls on the beach in Balbec or the carriage in which Odette disappears with Forcheville and the Verdurins to the horror of Charles Swann in *Swann in Love*.

The simple sentence from *Evolution and Conversion* compresses a wealth of insight into just a few words. Girard paints a picture of the author as someone who uses his own mimetic desire as material for a comic performance. But is the comparison accurate? Is Girard right about professional comedians?

I know of one stand-up comedian who deliberately places himself "in the position of the victim," with exactly the results Girard predicts: the French-speaking comic Gad Elmaleh. Known to American audiences for a small role in Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, Elmaleh has enjoyed success on stage with "The Blond," a stand-up routine about envy. Being "blond," according to Elmaleh, is not primarily about the color of one’s hair; it’s something more essential, a state of mind, even a "concept." The Blond is the successful other guy whose achievements and aplomb put each of us to shame. Muscular, successful, and chic, the Blond never makes a mess when he eats a sandwich. He isn’t afraid of flying. His kids are perfectly obedient. At the ski resort, the Blond flies down the most difficult slopes, eliciting cries of admiration from one and all (and especially from the comedian’s own girlfriend). Meanwhile, Elmaleh himself struggles to get off the chair lift without falling down.

If Elmaleh speaks of the blond as a "concept," this is because in reality the Blond does not exist as such. His apparent perfection is a figment of the comedian’s desire, a chimera that exists only when viewed from the outside, from the envious perspective, much like the little group’s apparently narcissistic outward closure in Proust’s novel. The Blond himself, if one were to question him, might boast of his achievements and let us believe in his perfect mastery. Deep down, however, he no doubt also has his Blond—a perpetually victorious rival whom he is unable to surpass.

The success of Elmaleh’s material depends on the nonexistence of the Blond as a concrete individual and his universal existence as an archetype of frustrating otherness. "Blondness" is everywhere and nowhere, a mirage of desire. Today’s social media are a good example. Studies have shown that spending extended periods on Facebook breeds unhappiness: we know that our own lives bear only a passing resemblance to the selectively edited versions of them that we present to the world, but we cannot shake the suspicion that everyone else’s flattering photos reflect an objectively blissful existence we will never attain. To avoid looking like the hapless exception to the rule, we post photos of ourselves in only the most desirable situations ("Look at me in these awesome seats at the concert!"). We strive to be "blond" in order not to be excluded from the happy circle of "blondness."

The key to the comedian’s routine is the way the characters are positioned with respect to each other: as Elmaleh recounts his humiliating encounters with his unflappable, multi-talented nemesis, we experience everything from the normal guy’s insecure vantage point, while the Blond remains a cipher, his gaze masked by reflecting ski sunglasses, his demeanor cool and self-composed.
If Elmaleh were to rewrite his material from the Blond’s perspective, his routine would fall flat. Tranquil and content, the object of admiring glances on the slopes as he soared gracefully off a ski jump, the Blond would once again bask in the flattering attention of beautiful women and wealthy jet-setters, while the average Joes (and their girlfriends) contemplated him with envy in their hearts. But this time the comedian would take on the Blond’s role. He would make fun of the losers who fear flying or can’t perform a schussboom without ending up in a snowdrift. He would relate his languorous fireside conversation in the ski lodge with a famous actress who gave him her room number. Mere boasting, however, likely wouldn’t make anyone laugh.

“One day,” Gad Elmaleh solemnly vows at the end of his stand-up routine, “one day, ladies and gentlemen—I will be the Blond.” The vow hovers between naïveté and self-mockery. The comedian plainly understands that the Blond is nothing more than a figment of a perpetual longing for mastery—blondness is forever unattainable. But the final pirouette would not be so funny if the vow were not also deeply sincere. The comedian serves himself and his desire up as sacrificial offerings for the audience’s enjoyment. And if Girard likens Proust to a stand-up comedian, perhaps Elmaleh is in turn more Proustian than one might suspect. His current girlfriend, after all, is Charlotte Casiraghi, eighth in line to the throne of Monaco...

2. The Dialectic of Vanity

With NBC’s Cruel Intentions revival in the works, the world of French libertines is poised to make a comeback on the American cultural scene. Meanwhile, overseas, Christopher Hampton’s Dangerous Liaisons, a theatrical adaptation of Laclos’ novel, is enjoying a successful run at the National Theatre in London. These productions fit neatly into our cultural moment of dating apps and sexual assault, tapping into our aspirations to sexual fulfillment and our fears of coercion and excess. They also testify to our ongoing fascination with the character of the seducer, coolly exerting a magnetic charm over his numerous conquests, who in virtue of their multiplicity necessarily mean less to him than he does to each of them. At Yale University’s annual “Sex Week” in 2008, writes Helen Andrews in First Things, one of the featured speakers was a professional pick-up artist named Matador "hawking his ‘Mystery Method’ for seducing women." The lecture was apparently well attended, suggesting that our contemporary obsession with sex is only partly about sex. Still deeper needs are at stake, beginning with the need to feel desired and desirable in a world of uneasy relations between the sexes. Becoming a "player" offers a solution to the problem of the modern male ego lost in the vast crowd of modern male egos. Sex is a side benefit, perhaps, but it may not always be the primary goal.

As René Girard taught us long ago, however, using love as a tool for self-aggrandizement comes with its own set of risks. "Modern vanity," he writes in a 1959 article that, incredibly, has scarcely aged—a testament to Girard’s insights, but also to a general socio-cultural stagnation—"dreads nothing more than sheer indifference." Becoming and staying divinely invulnerable is hard work. The slightest misstep could lead to rejection, which in a world of limitless freedom is impossible not to take personally. In the zero-sum game of seduction, each partner strives to impress his or her disdain upon the other, who is simultaneously doing the same back. The first to flinch is consumed by what Girard describes as "a weird fascination," which may result—for example—in an ill-advised volley of text messages or an overly effusive email. The other’s feigned indifference, offered credible support by this show of interest, may then cease to be merely an act. "Since the two partners are haunted by the same mirage of divine autonomy, the first who reveals his desire will never be desired, and he will see his dependence turn into utter enslavement" (36-37). Little wonder that so many adolescents today take prescription medications for anxiety. The more one seeks to imitate the chilly mastery of the Vicomte de Valmont and his modern epigones, the more one is exposed to the danger of an inopportune and humiliating obsession.

In a popular song entitled "Vade Retro Telephone," the French singer-songwriter Bénabar offers a candid look at the tribulations of modern love. A young man has just left a young woman’s apartment after having spent a first night with her. He wants some confirmation that she is as interested as he is (that they have just slept together is no guarantee). He longs to call her but fears coming off as clingy, so vows to wait at least three days before giving in to his desire:

Le combiné dans les mains j’hésite et je raccroche
Pas pressé d’ passer pour celui qui s’accroche
Fébrile et collant ça donne pas vraiment envie
Loin d'être et distrait, j'sais pas pourquoi mais c'est sexy
Même si je ne pense qu'à elle, si je rêve de la revoir
Vade retro téléphone, elle ne doit pas le savoir
Nos meilleurs techniciens se sont penchés sur la formule
C'est trois jours au moins le résultat de leurs calculs

The receiver in my hands, I hesitate and hang up
In no hurry to come off as the one who’s been hooked
Feverish and clingy isn’t exactly a turn-on
Far away and distant—I don’t know why, but it’s sexy
Even if all I can think about is her, and seeing her again
Vade retro telephone, I can’t let her know this
Our best technicians have looked into the formula
Three days at least is the result of their calculations

The song’s title, which refers back in a secular mode to the medieval formula for exorcism (and possibly also to Mark 8:33—“Get behind me, Satan!”), suggests that the temptation to call is a grave one, with high stakes. Should the young man succumb, he will compromise not only the woman’s perception of him as a paragon of virile self-sufficiency, but also his own peace of mind. The agony of self-denial is preferable to the still more acute suffering of knowing that one has lost the upper hand through a shameful lack of will-power.

The Bénabar song humorously addresses the predicament faced by young people navigating love relationships in a world where the old rules no longer apply. When divorced from yesterday’s courtship rituals and the moral constraints that accompanied them, lovers can no longer pattern their behavior on a set of scripted moves. More than ever, they find themselves forced into taking their cues entirely from each other, which greatly increases the chances of miscommunication. One imagines, for example, that while the young man may think of her as serenely unruffled, the young woman in the song may be waiting for him to call as anxiously as he is contemplating the possible negative repercussions of doing so. The very delay by which he hopes to ward off her disdain could easily have the unintended consequence of convincing her that he is no longer interested. By the time he finally does get in touch, she may have decided to console herself with someone else.

In his introduction to a recent edition of Paul Tillich’s The Courage to Be, Harvey Cox affirms that Tillich’s phenomenology of anxiety still applies in the twenty-first century. "Researchers who observe how young people rely on their iPads, Facebook pages, and cell phones have noticed a certain jittery anxiety in their behavior," he notes (xvii). "Videos of such young people indicate that they grow tense and fidgety if they have to stop using their devices even for a short time. Have they missed a call or message? Should they send a text, however trivial, to someone, anyone?"

Cox sees their absorption in these exchanges as an attempt to avoid "facing the precariousness of their own being." In other words, as a mask for a deeper existential anguish. Bénabar’s song points to a more concrete sort of anxiety, generated less by uncertainty about the meaning of everything than by doubts about one’s own worth as reflected in others’ opinions and perceptions. The screens of our devices are mirrors in which we contemplate a self-image perpetually subject to judgments over which we can exert at best only partial control. In the domain of love, where personal investments are strongest, the resultant anguish has the potential to become extraordinarily intense.

The problem posed by the dialectic of vanity and the non-reciprocity of desire is almost entirely missing from current discussions of sexual libertarianism. This is all the more surprising in light of the prevalence of the latter topic. From Tom Wolfe’s 2004 I Am Charlotte Simmons, a neo-naturalist satire of contemporary campus life, to articles on sexual assault and the campus hookup culture in newspapers, magazines, and online media outlets, sex—and especially sex on campus—has occupied a privileged place in our national consciousness over the last decade or so. Some of these stories suggest an epidemic of casual sexual encounters at the expense of long-term, committed coupling. Others downplay the phenomenon, which seems to involve only a minority, or even spring to the defense of casual sex. Newspaper headlines blame
Though there is no consensus on the meaning and value of the hookup culture, the academic literature, as surveyed in one article in the Review of General Psychology, points to “the entanglement of more intimate and emotional aspects with sex” and “competing interests at multiple levels” that “result in young adults having to negotiate multiple desires, and multiple social pressures” (161–176).

Might the Girardian dilemma of the seducer have some part in all this? Could the anguish of rejection and the fraught quest for invulnerability be lurking somewhere behind the various "competing interests" and "multiple desires"? The scholarly literature offers only vague answers. The studies reveal contradictory motives for and attitudes toward no-strings-attached sex. The very men who deliberately pursue such encounters confess to harboring deeply ambivalent feelings about them. Women frequently initiate hookups yet often regret having done so. A brief tour of the literature leaves one with the suspicion that the hookup culture, far from simplifying the pursuit of sexual pleasure, has brought a host of unintended complications in its wake.

3. How (Not) to Write a Girardian Novel

The day after René Girard’s death in November 2015, novelist Mathias Enard was interviewed on French radio. He had just been awarded the Prix Goncourt for his novel Boussole, and he must have been in a generous frame of mind. Even so, his words in praise of Girard were effusive: “I am very touched by this death,” he said. “I discovered his thought rather late. . . . It was a revelation for me. More than a revelation, René Girard was a long infusion. . . . He offers keys to reading, doors to understanding, whether in books or in the world on a daily basis.” There followed a humorous admission: upon first encountering Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, Enard thought he had found a secret recipe for producing great literature: “When one is a novelist,” he said, “necessarily [Girard’s book] almost takes on the appearance of a creative writing manual, in the sense that one says, ‘Oh, maybe if I take this in reverse I too could write like Proust or Dostoevsky by starting from this core insight about triangular desire.’ That’s the first reaction.”

Could a writer use Girard’s book to reverse-engineer a masterpiece? Let’s imagine an aspiring novelist at work in his seventh-floor walk-up in the fifth arrondissement of Paris. He’s a young American studying abroad, and he recently managed to get his hands on a copy of Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque (in the original French, of course), which he read in only two days, neglecting to eat and bathe during that time. The book’s thesis about triangular desire is now burned into his brain’s neural networks. No longer does he want to be just any old novelist—he wants to be the sort of novelist that Girard would have written about, a novelist of genius. With great excitement, he sits down at his desk to write a “triangular” novel, impatient to join the ranks of the literary giants—Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Stendhal...

When he thinks about it (his computer is still booting up), our aspiring writer is amazed not to have noticed triangular desire before having read Girard. It’s really so obvious, after all. To live in the bustling world he glimpses from the windows of his minuscule chambre de bonne—a world of celebrity spokespeople, extravagantly expensive contemporary art, and stock market bubbles—is to be exposed on a daily basis to Girard’s ideas writ large. Just watching people go by on the sidewalk is a lesson in the mimetic power of fashion...

But enough idle musing—the screen glows in front of him, and it’s time to get down to work. He types a few words and deletes them, wondering whether his novel should be about someone buying items they don’t need because of TV ads, or about a collector bidding millions on an abstract canvas to outdo a rival, or perhaps about an amateur investor who falls for the hype surrounding a stock just before the market crashes. Or maybe he should write about his friend Ludovic, who suffers from pathological jealousy?

He outlines a few ideas, but they feel remote from his own experience, and therefore arbitrary. So, without quite realizing he is doing so, he turns to his own life. And his memory comes up with... nothing, or at least nothing that could be characterized as triangular desire. Sure, he wanted more than anything in the world to get into Harvard when he was in high school, but that had nothing to do with prestige—Harvard was just a great place, with a gorgeous campus and exactly the right sort of classes and programs. As for aspiring to
become a writer, that's a dream he's always cherished, probably from the womb. The writer's life, all cafés and book signings, would, he believes, suit him perfectly. In the arena of love, he flatters himself that (unlike Ludovic) he's something of a player, with a growing number of conquests to his credit. Deep down, it's true, he pines after the girl he has come to think of as the One, who broke up with him three years back. Though she is now married and working for an NGO in South Africa, he still secretly hopes they will end up together.

But none of this has anything to do with mimetic desire. With a frown, he scratches his head. What to do? His eyes fall on his copy of Mensonge romantique, open on the desk beside his laptop to a chapter entitled "Technical Problems in Cervantes, Stendhal, and Flaubert." Only a few minutes ago it all seemed so easy. The masterpiece was going to write itself. Now he's stuck. He sighs, drums his fingers on the desk.

Then, in a flash, it occurs to him: why not write a novel about a young author who, in a world dominated by memes, trends, and hype, is immune to mimetic desire? Invulnerable to the ploys of advertising, indifferent to the shifting currents of fashion, his main character would be an original outlier in a world of sameness. Armed with René Girard's theories, he would embark on a campaign to enlighten others about their enslavement to imitation. And in due course he would fall victim to the crowd's rage, and end up a martyr to the very mimetic passions he tried but tragically failed to cure. This idea strikes him as promising. Inspired, enthusiastic once more, he bends over the keyboard and begins to type…

Here we have a dualist narrative system, admittedly presented in a rather cartoonish way. Our Girardian novelist views the concept of mimetic desire as "a mere social satire," a tendency Girard noted in Anorexia and Mimetic Desire (63). It is to him at once the most obvious thing in the world (the only reason Ludovic wants us to go to that nightclub is that it's hard to get in!), and the most improbable (but my dream of getting into Harvard had nothing to do with selectivity or prestige); a bland truism (Ludovic always wants what he can't have!), and a fantastical myth (when I want something that I can't have, it's not because I can't have it—it's because that thing is truly worth wanting). It depends on whether he's looking around at others, or engaging in an inventory of his own desires.

We all tend to apply this sort of double standard. When scrutinizing our friends' motives, we readily spot traces of mimeticism ("He's only dating her because she comes from such a prominent family"; "He doesn't actually like that painting, he just wants to see himself as an art connoisseur"). But when we contemplate our own behavior, we mistake the effects of mimetic desire for objective givens of the world around us: the obnoxious, self-involved heiress becomes our most compatible dream partner, and the abstract canvas an inexhaustible source of aesthetic bliss.

Of course, it's entirely possible that the second cousin once removed of an impoverished branch of the Kennedy family tree is the One, and that the 12' x 12' black monochrome is worth every penny of the $150,000 we spent on it. Who can say? What's suspicious is not the idea that an object could possess unique and valuable qualities, but the systematic habit of ascribing others' desires to triangular snobbery while professing the incorruptible authenticity of our own motives. The truth has trouble reaching us, as if the self were surrounded by an invisible force field. Little matter, then, that we have read Girard and know all about triangular desire. Like our expat novelist in his dismal garret, we reroute whatever knowledge we might acquire from Deceit, Desire, and the Novel away from ourselves and toward others.

Mathias Enard eventually abandoned the idea that Deceit, Desire, and the Novel could offer an alchemical formula for literary creation: "One realizes obviously that not only does [Girard's book] go way beyond that," he said, "but also my novelistic practice cannot be subordinated to a model, my novelistic practice… will resist my own attempt to theorize it." He must have come to sense that the problem of creative writing goes deeper than a mere theoretical understanding of triangular desire. Learning to spot the effects of mediation around us is easy, especially in today's world, where free-floating desires encounter a never-ending succession of models on the screens through which we filter our lives. The more challenging obstacle to producing good literature (or, for that matter, good literary criticism) is dualism, and, fundamentally, pride. The stories that pride whispers to us are the very ones that found their way into our Girardian novelist's first literary effort. So long as he continues to believe in these specious alibis, he'll see himself as a shining exception to the otherwise implacable rule of desire.
4. The Process of Transfiguration

To my knowledge, the late historian Tony Judt wrote only once about René Girard, and then merely to mention him in passing at the beginning of an essay about trains published in *The New York Review of Books* in 2010:

According to literary theorist René Girard, we come to yearn for and eventually love those who are loved by others. I cannot confirm this from personal experience—I have a history of frustrated longings for objects and women who were palpably unavailable to me but of no particular interest to anyone else.

This short passage gives a serviceable definition of mimetic desire: we take cues from someone else about who to love, and the result is the well-known Girardian triangle composed of the desiring subject, the model of desire, and the object on which the desires of both converge. But does the triangular pattern hold true for everyone and every desire? Could there be other ways of desiring, which have nothing triangular about them? After all, if we are to believe Judt, he himself flouts the Girardian rule. His desire travels straight from subject to object; he is a Quixote without an Amadis, a Jules sans Jim. The theoretician of triangular desire is puzzled. According to everything he knows and believes, desire is unfailingly mimetic. To deny this is to fall prey to one of those self-serving myths of autonomy that Girard places under the heading of the *romantic lie*.

Why, then, does the self-deprecating portrait Judt sketches ring so true? His frustration is already funny; that he should be rejected by women nobody else wants is doubly so. By comparison, the idea of systematically falling for people others love sounds like the typical stuff of academic theory, or the implausible plot of some network sitcom. In two sentences, Judt manages to cast doubt on the applicability of triangular desire to his own love life. He plainly isn’t trying to make himself look good—the account he gives of his "frustrated longings" places him in a less enviable position than would the relatively decorous "yearning" of the first sentence.

The mimetic triangle, however, has a way of rising from the ashes just when we thought it dead and buried. Take those "frustrated longings" for "palpably unavailable" women. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard examines this very pattern—a man gripped by fierce desire for a woman who, deploying the strategies of coquetry, withholds her affections from him. There is no rival, and apparently no triangle; the woman's indifference fuels the man's frustration. Without a third party to serve as "mediator," how can Girard claim that this scenario meets the conditions for triangular desire? The author is prepared for this objection: "...the presence of a rival," he writes in *Mensonge romantique*, "is not necessary, in sexual desire, for this desire to be qualified as triangular." We can conceive of a

triangle whose three vertices are occupied by the lover, the beloved, and the body of the beloved. Sexual desire, like all triangular desires, is always contagious. To speak of contagion is necessarily to speak of a second desire bearing on the same object as the original desire. To imitate the desire of one's lover is to desire oneself thanks to that lover's desire (110).

This idea can be turned around: to imitate the desire of one's mistress is to desire her thanks to her self-desire. Her unruffled glances and laconic text messages indicate cool self-possession. We gravitate to those who appear to love themselves; no third party is needed to complete the triangle formed of the frustrated intellectual repeatedly checking his cell phone, the objectively undesirable woman ("of no particular interest to anyone else"), and that same woman in her bewitching, maddening role as model of desire.

Put the two scenarios together—a woman who desires herself via the affirmation provided by her lover; and a lover who pines after his mistress thanks to her alluring self-desire—and a circular process of feedback reinforcement is set in motion. The man's desire bolsters the woman's; hers feeds into his. The more she pulls away, the more eagerly he pursues her. His phone calls come in bunches; his text messages multiply. Soon she is positively repelled. Her unavailability solidifies, becomes, to use Judt's word, "palpable." From the subject's perspective, she appears to withdraw into a world sealed off to him, whose hermetic outward closure is asserted all the more implacably the more he seeks to penetrate it. And so the scenario that seemed at first to have nothing to do with triangular desire can be accounted for in a plausible way with
that very theory.

This is possible because triangular desire is a metaphor, not a physical configuration. The metaphor captures the workings of an intersubjective structure, and this structure explains how an objectively undesirable object could be perceived as intensely desirable. The novelists Girard analyzed in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* were "interested neither in the insignificant reality of the object nor even in the transfigured object," he wrote, "but in the process of transfiguration. The great novelist has always been that way. Cervantes is interested neither in the barber's basin nor in Mambrino's helmet. What he finds fascinating is that Don Quixote should confuse a mere barber's basin with Mambrino's helmet..." (221-222). The Girardian critic is fascinated neither by the woman of "no particular interest to anyone else" nor even by the woman for whom Tony Judt feels a "frustrated longing." He is interested in the process by which the first becomes the second (or by which the second reverts to the first).

Sufficient first-hand experience with this process can make the subject turn away from "easy" mediators and gravitate toward those—like the statue in *Don Giovanni*, as Jean-Pierre Dupuy points out in a recent essay—who are hard and unforgiving. Thus do the most blasé and seemingly autonomous among us have a tendency to suffer the cruel torments of silence and disdain.

A case in point: Witold Gombrowicz's early short story, "Lawyer Kraykowski's Dancer," which tells of a young writer's encounter at the theater with a polished, well-dressed gentleman—Lawyer Kraykowski—who unceremoniously drags him to the back of the ticket line he has tried to cut, and coolly ignores him. By the next day the young man, who is also the story's narrator, has transformed the ferocious rival into an adored model: "Ah, ah—he was walking along and whistling and occasionally waving his cane, waving his cane... I immediately paid the check and followed him—and, admiring the slightly sinuous motion of his back, I reveled in the fact that he knew nothing of it, that this was my own, inside [...] Oh, I could have stared for hours at the place where his hair ended in an even line and his pale neck began" (6). With his back turned, Lawyer Kraykowski is in a little Olympian world all his own; the young writer is excluded from the circle, wallowing in his own interiority ("this was my own, inside"). But the narrator stands beyond his former self. He has enough sense of humor to admit that what was inside was not, in fact, his own. To convey this he describes a restaurant scene:

> [Lawyer Kraykowski] didn't pay me the slightest attention; he devoted himself to the ladies, leaning toward them, then looked about, scrutinizing the other women there. He spoke slowly, with relish, looking through the menu:

> "Hors d'oeuvre, caviar... mayonnaise... poularde... pineapple for dessert—black coffee, Pommard, Chablis, brandy and liqueurs."

I ordered:

> "Caviar—mayonnaise—poularde—pineapple for dessert—black coffee, Pommard, Chablis, brandy and liqueurs" (7).

Gombrowicz's punctuation is as eloquent as are the duplicate orders: the ellipses in Lawyer Kraykowski's speech indicate pauses, reflection; the dashes in the protagonist’s indicate the mechanical repetition of what came before, the absence of thought—pure imitation. The story goes on to narrate a bizarre episode of self-defeating sexual generosity. In a striking illustration of triangular ambivalence, the narrator does everything in his power to further Lawyer Kraykowski's affair with a doctor's wife—but once he discovers them embracing on a park bench he shouts the secret of their adultery to the world, forcing them apart. The story concludes with the narrator, now hospitalized due to his exertions, vowing: "I'll follow him! Yes, I'll follow him! Everywhere I shall follow that guiding star of mine! But it's unclear whether I'll return alive from the journey; these emotions are too strong. I may die suddenly on the street, by the fence, and in such a case—a card must be written—they should send my body to Lawyer Kraykowski" (16). The story turns out to be a last will and testament in which the subject "leaves himself," as it were, to the mediator!

Lawyer Kraykowski is an ordinary Polish gentleman; it is the protagonist of Gombrowicz's story who mistakes him for a living deity. Although it is grafted onto the geographical Faubourg Saint-Germain,
you and I can walk today in the eastern part of the 7th arrondissement of Paris, the magical "Faubourg Saint-Germain" exists purely in the mind of the Proustian snob. What fascinated Gombrowicz, what fascinated Proust, is that a mere lawyer could be perceived as a terrible god, or that for a time, long after the French nobility had lost its political power, le Faubourg could have shimmered in the eyes of a young aesthete gazing at the hôtels particuliers on the Rue de Varenne.


Stendhal, Girard observes in Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, tried to write comedies like his literary hero Molière. He failed, but those years of effort "transformed his soul." He eventually renounced his dream of becoming a playwright, but not his goal of becoming a great comic author. "All novelistic works tend toward laughter," writes Girard, praising the satirical humor of Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground, the comic genius of Bouvard et Pécuchet. Proust's crowning achievement, he says, is his most bitterly funny character, the proto-Dostoevskian Baron de Charlus.

Girard's own criticism is notable not only for the elegance of its prose and the beauty of its images (who can forget the fable of the man who, unwilling to believe the treasure he is seeking is nowhere to be found, looks for it under a boulder too heavy to lift?), but also for its sense of humor. This is not a matter of "laugh lines" or any of the usual effets de manche of comic writing. It's a sort of glow that lights up every corner of the essayistic space. It intensifies here or there, perhaps, as in the analysis of the bidding war between de Rênal and Valenod in The Red and the Black or in the comparison between the underground man’s look-at-me-not-paying-attention-to-you histrionics and the clench-jawed anti-rhetoric of l’écriture blanche. In the main, however, the comic quality of Girard's essay is thoroughgoing, an unbroken texture.

This ability to transform mimetic desire into literary-critical comedy is, I believe, the single most important source of the magic in Deceit, Desire, and the Novel. It is connected to the exceptional rigor with which Girard depicts the laws of mimetic desire. "There are in Balzac many intuitions parallel to those of the novelists studied in this book," Girard writes. "But the web in which the desiring subject is trapped is full of rents through which often enough the author himself or his personal representatives slip. In the novelists we have chosen to study the cloth is so closely woven, the thread so strong that it is impossible for anyone to escape the unyielding laws of desire without escaping the desire itself." (168). The same can be said of Deceit, Desire, and the Novel. Patterns take precedence over anomalies, sameness over difference. Impersonal forces trump the self-determination of the individual will. The daisy chain of unrequited desire in Racine's Andromache is emphasized at the expense of the precious singularity of each isolated love story; the drawing rooms of Proust become a series of worlds orbiting around one another like the gears in a machine of snobbery. Childish imitation, sexual sadomasochism, political partisanship, economic activity, advertising, and coquetry are all explained by means of the same simple principle of human relations. The arabesques of desire, like the topiary hedges in a parterre garden, are perfectly symmetrical. There is no flaw in the chain-mail, no breach through which a spontaneous desire might be allowed to wriggle free.

But this rigor comes at a price. "The observer," Girard writes, "does not want to descend, in the truth of desire, all the way to the point where this truth would concern himself just as much as the subject of his observations" (187). If Girard had not himself faced the resistance he describes, he would not have been able to testify so convincingly to its strength. If he had not also eventually overcome it, he would not have been able to write Deceit, Desire, and the Novel.

In a radio interview with Robert Harrison, Girard explained how his own early amorous relationships helped him to write his first book. After he turned down a girlfriend who wanted marriage, she got over him, at which point he found himself drawn to her once more. When she wanted commitment, her desire fueled his narcissism, making him wary of giving in; but when she denied herself to him, his self-love collapsed. The current of desire switched direction and began to flow away from him and back toward her. It was then that he realized she was his model of desire.

Girard's remarks suggest something both obvious and difficult to grasp, namely that the literary comedy that is Deceit, Desire, and the Novel would have been impossible had Girard held himself aloof from the laws of desire. The magic of his work is inseparable from his willingness to sacrifice his vanity for the sake of truthfully representing those laws.
Bibliography


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In what sense was Shakespeare an anthropologist? Harold Bloom credits Shakespeare with having "invented" the human. This may be an overstatement. Anthropologists are supposed to study humans, not invent them. Of course, when Bloom says such things he is being deliberately belligerent. He presents himself as the last romantic, the last believer in the transcendence of art. As far as Bloom is concerned, Shakespeare provided us not merely with entertainment but also with ethical models for how to live the good life—good life here meaning above all an aesthetic life. "Shakespeare," Bloom writes, "teaches us how and what to perceive, and he also instructs us how and what to sense and then to experience as sensation." Shakespeare teaches you how to see the world aesthetically.

The flip side to Bloom's unabashed romantic aestheticism is what Bloom calls "French Shakespeare," or the Shakespeare of the "school of resentment." French Shakespeare is really a corollary of the romantic Shakespeare in which Bloom so fervently believes. For if Shakespeare did indeed invent the human, as Bloom claims, then presumably we can un-invent or deconstruct this invention by showing the ideological assumptions behind the idea of Shakespeare himself. This "hermeneutic of suspicion" has been the dominant mode of criticism for almost half a century. Michel Foucault argued in his 1966 *Les mots et les choses* that "man" is an invention of nineteenth-century anthropology. The sooner we realize this, the better. It's not clear to me exactly what we are supposed to do after we have established the fact that man is a recent invention. Bloom clearly is happy with the idea. He just disagrees about who should be credited with the invention. It is not nineteenth-century anthropology that invented man but Shakespeare. Moreover, Bloom believes that since Shakespeare's intelligence vastly outmatches ours, we are better off accepting his version of humanity, at least for the time being. For all Bloom's romantic bombast, there is a certain humility in his belief that Shakespeare is the definitive anthropologist. But this humility before the aesthetic master (Shakespeare) is won at the cost of anthropology itself. Bloom's anthropological universe is a purely aesthetic one. You pay homage to the bard in the hope that some of his genius will rub off on you.

Like Bloom, René Girard believes in Shakespeare's transcendent status among literary authors. But unlike Bloom, Girard interprets Shakespeare's greatness in explicitly anthropological rather than purely aesthetic terms. Shakespeare is great not because he taught us how to perceive the world aesthetically, but because he discovered an otherwise nonobvious anthropological or sociological truth. If the social order is to survive, it needs to constrain the contagion of mimetic desire. So for Girard, Shakespeare is quite literally an anthropologist or sociologist. Presumably the only reason he didn't get his PhD in anthropology or some other related theoretical discipline, such as sociology, philosophy, or critical theory, was that these fields of study didn't exist in his day. Instead he was forced to make do with the medium he knew and loved best, which was the theatre.

The idea that Shakespeare was a keen student of human behaviour, a philosopher or anthropologist of sorts, is not new. But the more one emphasizes the idea that Shakespeare was a social theorist, the more tricky it becomes to explain the fact that he was also, quite obviously, a dramatist, an entertainer of the people. Bloom gets around this problem by making the strong romantic claim that human beings are fundamentally aesthetic creatures. Shakespeare teaches us how to perceive and feel. Hence for Bloom there is no
contradiction between the two conceptions of Shakespeare. Dramatist and anthropologist are one. The two are the same because poetry defines—indeed creates—humanity. We are *homo aestheticus*, not *homo politicus*. As Bloom well knows, this stance puts him at odds with his anti-romantic contemporaries, which is precisely why Bloom's heroes don't go beyond the mid-twentieth-century Shakespeare critic Harold Goddard. Believers in *homo aestheticus* are a dying breed in the universities.

Still, at least Bloom has a tradition he can refer to, even if he is perceived as quaint and outmoded by the more advanced—postmodern—members of this tradition. In contrast, when Girard writes on Shakespeare, he appears to be writing in a vacuum. Let me quote from the introduction of his major work on Shakespeare, *A Theater of Envy*:

> My goal in this study is to show that the more quintessentially "mimetic" a critic becomes, the more faithful to Shakespeare he remains. To most people, no doubt, this reconciliation of practical and theoretical criticism seems impossible. This book is intended to demonstrate that they are wrong. All theories are not equal in regard to Shakespeare: his creation obeys the same mimetic principles I bring to bear upon his work, and it obeys them explicitly . . . The mimetic approach solves the "problems" of many a so-called problem play. It generates new interpretations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado about Nothing, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, Twelfth Night, Troilus and Cressida, Hamlet, King Lear, The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. It reveals the dramatic unity of Shakespeare's theater and its thematic continuity. It discloses great variations in his personal perspective, a history of his oeuvre that points to his own personal history. Above all, the mimetic approach reveals an original thinker centuries ahead of his time, more modern than any of our so-called master thinkers.(5)

To the question, "Why do we need another book on Shakespeare?" Girard has a bulletproof reply: Because you've never seen a Shakespeare like this before.

But the persuasiveness of the reply really depends upon whether you accept the premise. Is Girard as original as he claims to be? What is to distinguish Girard's reading of Shakespeare from, for example, Francis Fergusson's reading of the ritual origins of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, or John Holloway's remarks on the sacrificial origins of Shakespearean tragedy?(6) More generally, can't we see a connection between Girard's ideas about sacrifice and the work of James George Frazer or Émile Durkheim in the early twentieth century, both of whom were highly influential among critics of the early and mid-twentieth century? What about the ironic, late-romantic readings of Shakespeare by Wilson Knight or Harold Goddard? Finally, don't Girard's ideas about tragedy sound very similar to Kenneth Burke's?

But Girard's *Theater of Envy* is almost totally devoid of references to previous scholarship, and this has understandably upset Shakespeare specialists. Girard explicitly rejects the idea that he is just another "Shakespearean" humbly providing another interpretation to the ever-growing mountain of Shakespeare scholarship. "Interpretation," Girard writes, "is not the appropriate word for what I am doing. My task is more elementary. I am reading for the first time the letter of the text that has never been read on many subjects essential to dramatic literature: desire, conflict, violence, sacrifice."(7) Interpretation is an inadequate word for Girard because interpretation is what everybody else is doing. His task is, as he says, "more elementary."

When Girard says his task is more elementary, one is reminded of Durkheim's use of the word in the title of his magnum opus, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Girard's other key phrase, "for the first time," is also noteworthy. Girard is saying he is the *first* interpreter of Shakespeare to read him in this *elementary* fashion. Where others have merely interpreted Shakespeare in terms of the content of his works, Girard proposes to go beyond this content to explore the elementary anthropological conditions of the theatre itself. Girard proposes to trace literary content back to its elementary form in ritual sacrifice.

Let me briefly rehearse Girard's argument about the elementary structure of sacrifice. Sacrifice is necessary because desire is contagious. Desire, because it is always imitated from others, tends to get out of hand. If we all imitate each other, sooner or later a crisis of "undifferentiation" occurs, when all hands reach for the same object. To constrain the contagiousness of mimetic desire, it is necessary every now and again to punish those who seem to be responsible for it. It is not necessary that these victims really are the cause of
the disorder. What is absolutely necessary, however, is that they are believed to be the cause. This "mimetic" account of desire leads Girard to his famous scapegoat hypothesis of culture outlined in his 1972 book, *La violence et le sacré.*

With this simple theory Girard explains numerous puzzling facts in Shakespeare’s plays. Consider, for example, his discussion of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona.* Proteus and Valentine are best friends. Proteus is in love with Julia, but he is torn between staying in Verona with Julia and following his best friend to Milan. Valentine goes to Milan and falls in love with Silvia. When Proteus decides to follow him there, he also falls in love with Silvia. Girard points out that Proteus, the more mimetic of the two friends, doesn’t really have a choice. Valentine so praises Silvia that Proteus imitates his friend’s desire and falls in love with the same woman. At the end Proteus tries to rape Silvia. She is saved only by the sudden appearance of Valentine, whose main concern seems to be that he has been betrayed by his best friend: "Oh, time most accurst, / 'Mongst all foes that a friend should be the worst!" (5.4.71–2). Proteus, embarrassed by his poor behaviour, begs forgiveness of his friend: "My shame and guilt confounds me. / Forgive me Valentine" (5.4.73–4).

In a gesture that upsets audiences and critics alike, Valentine responds by offering Proteus the woman he (Proteus) has just attempted to rape: "And, that my love may appear plain and free, / All that was mine in Silvia I give thee" (5.4.82–3). Girard explains this apparently despicable action as a logical consequence of mimetic desire. Valentine feels guilty for having encouraged Proteus to desire Silvia in the first place. He realizes that he is partly responsible for what his friend has done. "The only peaceful solution," Girard says, "is to let the rival have the disputed object."

Girard reads this moment as a classic mimetic double bind. To remain friends, Proteus and Valentine must give up their rivalry for the same object. Valentine learns this more quickly than Proteus, which is why he is the first to give up Silvia. The important point, Girard says, is not that Valentine abandons Silvia to a would-be rapist, but that he abandons the rivalry of mimetic desire. By giving up the object, he gives up the rivalry. Luckily this spirit of renunciation is catching. Proteus refuses to accept Silvia. Instead he returns to the girl he originally loved, Julia. The play ends happily with Valentine marrying Silvia, and Proteus marrying Julia.

Girard’s book is full of examples like this. Often the readings are quite brilliant. Highlights for me include his reading of *The Winter’s Tale,* especially the final act in which Girard describes Leontes as a man tempted by the sight of Florizel and Perdita holding hands just as Polixenes and Hermione had sixteen years earlier. Will Leontes be able to withstand this second test of mimetic desire? Happily, sixteen years of repentance allow him to triumph over the temptation. He agrees to be a friend to Florizel without also falling in love with Florizel’s fiancée, the beautiful Perdita, who is the mirror image of her mother, Hermione, the woman whom Leontes believes he has killed in a fit of jealous rage. As Girard says, "The entire past seems resurrected."

But this time there is a difference. Leontes does not make the same mistake the second time. Instead of treating Florizel as a rival, he treats him as a friend. The key lines for Girard occur when Leontes says to Florizel, "Your honor not o’erthrown by your desires, / I am friend to them and you" (5.1.230–1). Leontes has mastered his desire, and this is why he can be a friend to Florizel. Unlike his earlier self, or the Proteus of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* Leontes has renounced the object of mimetic desire.

I could easily cite more examples of Girard’s reading of Shakespeare. But rather than simply repeat what Girard has said, I want to return to the question I began with. How does Girard justify his "mimetic" approach to Shakespeare? We have already seen that Girard claims that he is not simply offering another interpretation of Shakespeare. But if that is the case, then he can’t justify himself by citing the self-evident plausibility of his reading of Shakespeare, because that would be to concede precisely what he finds objectionable: that is, the assumption that there is no way to go beyond the aesthetic.

For many critics, of course, criticism is criticism of aesthetic texts, and that’s the end of the matter. Critics differ on how much latitude they’re willing to give to this idea of textuality. Bloom is a traditionalist because he restricts the text to Shakespeare, but many critics are willing to spread the wealth around a bit more. For this reason, I think it is wrong to read the new historicism as antithetical to aesthetic formalism. On the contrary, the new historicism is an attempt to expand the categories of aesthetic criticism beyond the canonical work to the surrounding cultural context. I think this is quite obvious, for instance, in the case of Stephen Greenblatt.

Like the new historicists, Girard also claims that he is new. Implicit in this claim of newness is the sense that
the aesthetic tradition has worn itself out and therefore needs renewing. Bloom's representation of contemporary cultural criticism as an exercise in resentment may be a caricature, but it has the virtue of identifying our general disenchantment with the aesthetic. Bloom compensates for this disenchantment by raising his voice and plugging his ears. He imagines himself transcending his contemporaries to take his rightful place in a tradition of criticism that stretches from Johnson and Hazlitt to Bradley, Wilson Knight, and Harold Goddard. Girard's claim to newness, however, is to present himself neither as the last romantic nor as a certified member of the disenchanted postmodern vanguard. Rather, his claim is that he is transcending the aesthetic tradition altogether. Shakespeare is great because he sees exactly what Girard sees: the futility of using art to conquer mimetic desire.

This conception of the aesthetic leads to a curious paradox. On the one hand, Shakespeare is a great dramatist who uncovers the mimetic structure of desire. On the other, he is a poor theorist because as a dramatist he is not at liberty to explain his theory in the straightforward logical fashion of a philosopher or anthropologist. Philosophers are not known for their capacity to earn a living by their writing alone. People are understandably unwilling to part with their hard-earned cash just to hear a philosopher lecture about the truth of his theory. Shakespeare's solution to this dilemma, Girard says, was to be fiendishly clever. Knowing that merely stating the principles of mimetic desire in sober, logical fashion is unlikely to satisfy the crowds, who are expecting something with a bit more gore, sensation, and slapstick, Shakespeare disguised the theory by cloaking it in good old-fashioned tragedy and comedy. In other words, he wrote two plays in one. The first version of the play was for the regular audience, who were looking for pure entertainment. The second, ironic version was for the philosophers, hoping for something more profound.

In principle there is nothing wrong with this "two-audience" theory to describe Shakespeare's method. You can strive to entertain everyone all the time, but if you wish to keep the attention of the more refined you will have to go beyond mere slapstick and gore. What is problematic in Girard's use of the two-audience theory, however, is his apocalyptic application of it to modernity. Consider, for example, this remark from his discussion of Hamlet. After commenting that Hamlet is caught in the double bind between revenge and no revenge, Girard goes on to generalize Hamlet's condition to all modernity:

In Hamlet, the very absence of a case against revenge becomes a powerful intimation of what the modern world is really about. Even at those later stages in our culture when physical revenge and blood feuds completely disappeared or were limited to such marginal milieux as the underworld, it would seem that no revenge play, not even a play of reluctant revenge, could strike a really deep chord in the modern psyche. In reality the question is never entirely settled and the strange void at the center of Hamlet becomes a symbolic expression of the Western and modern malaise, no less powerful than the most brilliant attempts to define the problem, such as Dostoyevsky's underground revenge. Our "symptoms" always resemble that unnameable paralysis of will, that ineffable corruption of the spirit that affect[s] not only Hamlet, but the other characters as well. The devious ways of these characters, the bizarre plots they hatch, their passion for watching without being watched, their propensity to voyeurism and spying, the general disease of human relations make a good deal of sense as a description of an undifferentiated no man's land between revenge and no revenge in which we are still living. (13)

In his reading of Shakespeare, Girard remains blind to a key aspect of modernity: the capacity of its secular institutions to absorb resentment more effectively than its ritual precursors, including its precursors in Christian ritual. Girard tends to read modernity in a rather bleak either-or fashion. Either we must absorb the Christian lesson of forgiveness, or we must perish in a malaise of bad faith as we become increasingly disenchanted with the sacrificial institutions we no longer believe in but continue to use. The upshot is that the specifically aesthetic incarnations of modernity, in their various neoclassical, romantic, modernist, and postmodern guises, all get collapsed into one narrative of Christian demythologization.

Another way of putting this is to say that Girard subordinates his reading of literature to his reading of religion; in particular, to his reading of Christianity. The reason he can ignore the difference between classical, neoclassical, romantic, modernist, and postmodernist aesthetics is that next to Christianity, the difference between these aesthetic periods appears negligible. For Girard, the really significant difference, the one that trumps all others, is the difference between primitive religion and Judeo-Christianity. The role of literature in understanding this fundamental difference is at best ambivalent. Consider Girard's
explanation of Shakespeare's turn to romance towards the end of the playwright's career. These last plays, especially *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, are (Girard says) resolutely self-undermining. *The Tempest* is an allegory of Shakespeare's career, beginning with Caliban who represents the monstrosity of mimetic desire, which Shakespeare had exploited to satisfy the audience's relentless appetite for mimetic violence. When Prospero breaks his staff and promises to leave off magic for good, this is Shakespeare's way of saying, "Enough already!" Tired of the mimetic games of the dramatist, Shakespeare announces his retirement. Presumably Shakespeare had learned his lesson; in particular, the lesson of the Gospels, in which forgiveness and love triumph over the violence and rivalry of mimetic desire. For Shakespeare, to continue to write drama would be merely bad faith.

I said just now that Girard doesn't really care about the difference between the various periods of literature because these seem insignificant when compared to the more fundamental anthropological problem of the origin of literature in sacrificial ritual. I think that the two-audience theory can help us unpack this problem. The theatre affords excellent opportunities for words to be supported by their actual flesh-and-blood contexts. This fact should not be underestimated. Despite what many philosophers believe, or used to believe, language is not primarily a means for communicating facts about the world. It is above all a means for producing what psychologists call "joint attention." (14) The most elementary form of language, the ostensive, is a pointing gesture. But what is worth pointing at? Girard believes it is the scapegoat, the first cultural and historical object of joint attention. But paradoxically he also insists that this form of attention is nonsymbolic. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Girard writes, "I think that even the most elementary form of the victimage mechanism, prior to the emergence of the sign, should be seen as an exceptionally powerful means of creating a new degree of attention, the first non-instinctual attention." (15)

Here are the essential ingredients of sacrifice, all packed into a single primal scene. Again Girard stresses that he is looking at the most "elementary form" of culture, the very first moment of "non-instinctual attention." But there is a problem. The scapegoaters are both conscious and unconscious of what they are doing. They are conscious in the sense that this is a new moment of attention in which instinct has been superseded by something else, by a new type of attention that is therefore by definition the very first of its kind, unique in all human history. But they are also unconscious in the sense that this new type of attention is only a very minimal form of awareness. Girard really wants to say that they are in a state of semi-consciousness, a sort of liminal state between waking and sleeping where one is not really sure what one is doing. Perhaps noticing this ambivalence, Girard's interlocutor, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, asks a very good question: "Would this already be a sacred victim?" Girard responds:

To the extent that the new type of attention is awakened, the victim will be imbued with the emotions provoked by the crisis and its resolution. The powerful experience crystallizes around the victim. As weak as it might be, the "consciousness" the participants have of the victim is linked structurally to the prodigious effects produced by its passage from life to death, by the spectacular and liberating reversal that has occurred at that instant. The double transference will determine the only possible meaning to take shape under the circumstances, and this will constitute the sacred and confer total responsibility for the event on the victim. It is necessary to conceive of stages, however, which were perhaps the longest in all human history, in which the signifying effects have still not truly taken shape. One would have to answer your question by saying that once the victim has appeared, however dimly, the process leading toward the sacred has begun, although concepts and representations are not yet part of it.

There is no need to assume that the mechanism of awakening attention works right away; one can imagine that for a considerable period it produced nothing at all, or *next to nothing*. Nonetheless, even the most rudimentary signifying effects result from the necessity of controlling excessive mimesis; as soon as we grant that these effects can be in the slightest degree cumulative, we will have recognized them as forerunners of human culture. (16)

I don't think Girard has adequately answered Oughourlian's question. The key point is not the amount of violence in the scene, nor the tremendous contrast between violence and peace that Girard says the scene produces. Girard assumes that the sheer violence of the mimetic crisis is sufficient to generate an experience of the sacred. By bombarding your perceptual field with enough violence, you will eventually be compelled to see the sacred. But violence in itself is nothing new. On the contrary, nature is full of it. What
is key is rather the representation of the violence and, more precisely, the collective form of attention that Girard says the violence leads to. For if the victim truly is to be represented as sacred, then this is already to say that the victim is an object of a collective attention, which is irreducible to the kind of indexical associations of purely individual perceptual experience. Collective attention—symbolic representation—cannot originate unconsciously. On the contrary, the function it performs is by definition a conscious one—that is, to order and constrain the chaotic and largely unconscious associations of individual sensory experience. The joint scene of attention requires the individual not merely to attend to the object qua individual, but to attend to it as part of an intersubjective, collectively shared experience. In the scene of joint attention I attend to your attention to the object. And this relationship is reciprocal. Just as I attend to your attention to the object, so you attend to my attention to the object. Our relationship to the object is an instance of shared, collective attention, and this—the origin of joint attention—is indeed quite revolutionary in the history of hominid evolution. In the oscillation between other-model and central-object the word is born. This intersubjective oscillation is also what distinguishes the act of pointing from the indexical signals of animal communication. Animal signals remain unmediated by the intersubjective, joint attentional scene.

Girard's ambivalence towards the uniqueness of this originary event is reproduced in his ambivalence towards modernity and Shakespeare's place in it. Girard's paradoxical claim that the originary scene is both conscious and unconscious, both a unique event in human history and an intermediate stage in a series of endless intermediate stages, applies equally to his understanding of Shakespeare. On the one hand, Shakespeare is a vast intelligence who exposes ruthlessly and definitively the myth of romantic desire. On the other, Shakespeare is a dramatist who must hide this mimetic awareness behind the mythologizing narratives of tragic and comic form. Shakespeare has the potential to be a unique event in human history, but unfortunately the medium he selected for sharing his discovery of mimetic desire inevitably meant that his anthropological insights would be buried behind a wall of conventional theatrical pieties. If we read for the theatrical pieties, we will miss forever the mimetic intelligence. This is the fate of all Shakespeare narratives of tragic and comic form. Shakespeare has the potential to be a unique event in human history, but unfortunately the medium he selected for sharing his discovery of mimetic desire inevitably meant that his anthropological insights would be buried behind a wall of conventional theatrical pieties. If we read for the theatrical pieties, we will miss forever the mimetic intelligence. This is the fate of all Shakespeare criticism before Girard. If we read for the mimetic intelligence, we are forced to dispense with the theatre altogether, which is why Girard argues that Shakespeare's farewell to the stage in The Tempest is so critically self-referential. It is a deconstruction of the aesthetic myth of Shakespeare by Shakespeare himself.

So what can we learn from Girard's reading of Shakespeare? I think we can learn a great deal from Girard, but I have to add a significant caveat. Girard's ambivalence towards Shakespeare is a direct consequence of his ambivalence towards language. This is most clear in his hypothesis of the origin of sacrifice, which he sees as the fundamental cultural institution pre-existing even language itself. By claiming that the first act of scapegoating was unconscious and unrepresentable, Girard can say that all subsequent historical evidence that seems to contradict his hypothesis is merely a misrepresentation, a ruse distracting us from the reality of scapegoating. The technique of using the unconscious as a clever ruse has been made familiar to us by Freud. Because the unconscious is by definition elusive, it is always up to the one who is uniquely qualified in sniffing it out to let you know whether or not you have correctly identified the problem. The same rule applies to Girard's theory of the scapegoat. If you don't see how Shakespeare's plays demonstrate the scapegoating hypothesis, then you just have to look harder. And you do that by training yourself in the technique of Girard's peculiar brand of mimetic anthropology.

In the end, all claims to originality are by definition problematic. If you are the first to see things this way, then by definition nobody else does. But Girard's claim goes one step further. Not only is he the first, he is also the last. By making scapegoating unconscious, he absolves himself of the inconvenience of ever being refuted. For how can you refute something of which you are unconscious? Any refutation can be immediately dismissed as yet another confirmation of the unconscious at work. One has been hoodwinked yet again by the ruse of scapegoating.

What is the solution to this conundrum? The solution is to admit that scapegoating depends upon representation, and that representation itself cannot originate unconsciously. Once we have conceded this, it remains up to the individual investigator to decide what to include in an anthropological hypothesis of origin. The real point of formulating such a hypothesis is not to be the first or the last, the most original or the most definitive. It is to provide a minimal starting point for dialogue on our fundamental humanity. That is the simplest way to define an anthropology. I hope that Girard's work on Shakespeare will be read in this sense: that is, as an attempt to initiate a dialogue concerning Shakespeare's contribution to human self-understanding—in other words, as a step towards a Shakespearean anthropology.
Notes


2. Ibid., 8. (back)

3. Ibid., 9. (back)


8. *La violence et le sacré* was preceded by Girard’s 1961 study of the novel, *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque*, in which Girard first proposed his theory of mimetic desire. In *La violence et le sacré* Girard applied the "mimetic" model of desire he discovered in the novels of Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, and Proust to the general anthropological problem of human origin, proposing a global theory of human society. *Mensonge* was translated into English in 1965 as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. *La violence* was translated into English in 1977 as *Violence and the Sacred*. (back)


11. Ibid., 328. (back)


16. Ibid., 100. (back)


18. This essay is an excerpt from *Shakespeare’s Big Men: Tragedy and the Problem of Resentment*, forthcoming from the University of Toronto Press, June 2016. (back)
As our readers are aware, René Girard passed away last November shortly before his 92nd birthday. The present issue was conceived as a modest memorial to him. All the articles in this issue pay tribute in one way or another to René Girard, who was my teacher and whom I consider the honorary founder of Generative Anthropology.

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