Sensibility's Double Take: René Girard's "Two Audiences" and Jane Austen's Gospel Hermeneutic

Matthew Taylor

Kinjo Gakuin University
Nagoya, Japan
taylor@kinjo-u.ac.jp

Abstract

Jane Austen offers an outrageous satire of "sensibility" in her teenage burlesque *Love and Freindship*, then a more realistic treatment in *Sense and Sensibility*. Thus, two markedly divergent readings of *Sense and Sensibility* emerge, particularly regarding Marianne Dashwood, a serious one and a satirical one, and they are not easily reconciled.

This "double effect" resonates strongly with René Girard's premise of "two audiences," wherein the literary masters both *reveal* and *obscure* mimetic truth. Yet Girard's "two audiences" premise is hobbled by a certain expository arrogance, which has also been critiqued by Richard van Oort. Austen's double effect in *Sense and Sensibility* might offer a valuable corrective to Girard, while preserving and extending his mimetic insights.

Marianne exemplifies Girard's *mensonge romantique* (romantic lie) and *méconnaissance* (misrecognition), which come to apply to many more characters than Marianne, and ultimately to ourselves as readers. However, contra Girard, this does not mean that there is a "dull" audience that doesn't get Austen and a "clever" one that does. Instead, Austen entangles *all* readers in problematic interpretations, facilitating moral engagement and introspection. Since this is also an effect of the gospel narratives (here I follow the biblical exegesis of Jeremiah Alberg), Austen's double effect operates as a "gospel hermeneutic."

Interestingly, generative anthropology (GA) and mimetic theory create their own "two audiences" effect with *Sense and Sensibility*. GA leans toward the "serious" reading and mimetic theory toward the "satirical." I hope that in exploring Austen's "double effect" I can bring out the best in both perspectives.

Keywords: Jane Austen, René Girard, mimetic theory, generative anthropology, mimesis, *mensonge romantique*, *méconnaissance*

* * *

> "One fatal swoon has cost me my life . . . Beware of swoons dear Laura. . . . A frenzy fit is not one quarter so pernicious; it is an exercise to the body and if not too violent, is I dare say conducive to Health in its consequences—Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint—"
>
> (Sophia in *Love and Freindship*)[1]

Ang Lee's famous and emotional affecting film version of *Sense and Sensibility* is among the most highly regarded of Austen adaptations, yet the Austen scholar Paula Byrne commented that Austen "would be turning in her grave" to see it![2] Byrne's approach to the novel follows Austen's teenage burlesque *Love and Freindship*, an outrageously satirical treatment of "sensibility" exemplified in the opening passage above. For Byrne, *Sense and Sensibility* is clearly a satire—the novel in general and Marianne in particular. Ang Lee's adaptation affronts Byrne because we have lost the caustic and irreverent Austen: "Austen would have been horrified to discover that the film celebrates the very sentiment that she was trying so hard to ironize."[3]

Byrne must be right, but is she *completely* right? A satirical reading of Marianne is indeed very plausible in the first half of SS, but in the second she suffers horribly. According to Byrne's logic, we should find Marianne's sufferings *hilarious*; after all, this is precisely the sort of self-inflicted martyrdom Austen parodies in LF. Yet it is highly unlikely that Byrne would take her satirical reading that far, because we care about Marianne. Thus, in pushing against the sentimental interpretation of SS, what Byrne also does is to bring to light a striking anomaly.

The anomaly is that there are two possible readings of SS, a serious reading and a satirical reading.[4] Either is plausibly supported by the text. Neither can be reconciled with the other. Yet neither can be maintained consistently without being *undermined* by the other. For instance, the satirical reading becomes unstable, in the manner just demonstrated with Marianne's sufferings, but so does a serious reading (as Byrne correctly notes) because we can find virtually any aspect of Marianne, including her suffering, parodied in LF. As I hope will become clear, this destabilizing effect arises elsewhere in the novel, and is (I argue) integral to its interpretive structure.

The "double effect" in SS resonates very strongly with René Girard's premise of "two audiences" for the literary masters.[5] For Girard, the great writers are great specifically because they are "revelatory": they reveal mimetic desire.[6] Discerning audiences understand this (even if, in Girard's case, it may be an audience of one!). Otherwise, the work of the masters is an exercise in dissimulation, satisfying expectations of convention, genre, emotional catharsis, or the like, but the larger audience does not penetrate its real substance. For Girard, there are two audiences, those who comprehend the revelation of

mimetic desire, and those who do not.

To some extent, Girard's "two audiences" premise is unexceptional: literary masters certainly do operate at different levels. However, in other ways the "two audiences" premise leads to unsupportable conclusions, even on Girard's own terms. For Girard, the revelatory literature is about conversion, often in tandem with the descent of the writer into the dark night of mimetic desire.[7] If Girard is right, it is difficult to believe that the revelatory writer is only throwing scraps to the audience, and not morally engaging them as well. Girard, to the extent that he downplays the involvement of the audience, is not only vulnerable to objections that will be outlined in this paper, but is in conflict with the spirit of his own project.

An exploration of Austen might work to correct this. In particular, Austen's "double effect" in SS, which creates tension between a "satirical" and "serious" reading, presents an opportunity to productively engage this interpretive problem with Girard. I hope that by exploring this effect in SS, and by connecting it to what I will call Austen's "Gospel hermeneutic" wherein the purpose of her "double effect" is ultimately moral, I can salvage much or at least some of Girard's "two audiences" premise from its problematic aspects. These have been cogently highlighted by Richard van Oort, whose critique will inform this analysis.[8] Accepting both the validity of van Oort's objections, representing the approach of generative anthropology (GA), and the direction (if not always the exercise!) of Girard's, I hope that the engagement with Austen can bring out the best in both.

In the next section I explore Austen's "two audience" effect in LF and SS, and some of its very disconcerting consequences. In the third section I review Richard van Oort's objections to Girard's "two audiences" and also canvas some of my own. In the fourth section I attempt to integrate the Girardian and GA perspectives by considering the "two audiences" as an operation of Austen's gospel hermeneutic, where Austen's "double effect" creates dissonance with readers in the same manner as the gospel narratives. Austen's purpose is not to show how clever she is, or how dull readers are, but to make interpretation an inescapably moral act that reflects back on itself.

Austen's "Two Audiences" and the Double Reading of Sensibility

Girard's "two audiences" premise is important here for many reasons, but above all because Austen is an extremely mimetic writer. The default to sentimentalism with SS that Paula Byrne astutely critiques is like Girard's *mensonge romantique* ("romantic lie"), and the lack of self-awareness about it is equivalent to Girard's *méconnaissance*, or misrecognition.[9] This is the self-deception inherent in mimetic desire, the insistence that one's desires are original, the refusal to recognize that they are imitative. Marianne most obviously instantiates this with her "sensibility," whose tenets are unbridled passion, uncompromising frankness, and impulsive action. Almost certainly, Girard would have recognized his

mensonge and *méconnaissance* in Marianne, and there is good reason to suppose that he actually did, since Girard read Jane Austen enthusiastically in his later years.[10]

This is not the place for a comprehensive mimetic analysis of *Sense and Sensibility*, which I have attempted elsewhere, but it is important to see how Austen's critique of "sensibility" in *Love and Freindship* is the same as its critique in *Sense and Sensibility*, which is in turn the same as Girard's critique of the *mensonge romantique*.[11] We should be clear about what that critique of "sensibility" is, since this is precisely where interpretations go awry and where Austen's "double effect" comes into play. Like Girard, Austen's core objection to sensibility is not that is it too passionate, too frank, too impetuous, too excessive, or even too self-absorbed. "Sensibility" certainly does manifest these qualities, and they are easy enough to ridicule (or alternately, if one is a romantic, to defend!).

Yet, as per Girard, Austen's real critique is not that sensibility is too independent but that it is not independent at all, that it is inescapably derivative, hyper-alert to others. As usual, Paula Byrne grasps this well:

> Marianne Dashwood's romantic ideas are derived from the books she reads. Austen gains much comic mileage from her heroine's faith in her own originality, although, ironically, her conduct places her as a rather conventional type.[12]

Sensibility purports to be what it is not. Its adherents loudly and haughtily disdain the world even as they put themselves on conspicuous display to it. They are brittle, bristly, perpetually on the attack, perversely self-wounding, yet, for all their brute frankness, utterly unaware of themselves. This is all blatantly obvious in LF and, as Byrne argues, it *should* be obvious in SS as well.

However, the misreadings of SS, orchestrated by Austen herself, center precisely on missing the point of this critique and in so doing falling under it; readers succumb, like Marianne, to the *méconnaissance*. Furthermore, Marianne, the most conspicuously mimetic character, is by no means the only or even the most mimetic. She is a bellwether for mimesis that manifests first in herself, then in other characters, including characters like Edward, a smirking ironist who represents the satirical view yet is just as mimetic in his own way as Marianne. Finally, the mimesis manifests in ourselves, through our inevitable misinterpretations. This is what the "double effect" of the novel is about.

Though van Oort's critique of Girard will be reviewed in the next section, it is useful to introduce Girard's "two audiences" premise about Shakespeare here, since it matches Austen's situation as a writer in a striking and relevant way. Girard speculates that there was an inner circle of friends who were cognizant of Shakespeare's philosophical musings and would have caught the references in the plays. Shakespeare theorized overtly about mimetic desire to his friends, then encoded it covertly in his plays. As Girard puts it,

> During much of his career, he combined two plays in one, deliberately channeling different segments of his audience toward two different interpretations of the same play: a sacrificial explanation for the groundlings, which perpetuates itself in most modern interpretations, and a nonsacrificial, mimetic one for those in the galleries.[13]

In Jane Austen's case there is no need to hypothesize such an inner circle; she literally had two audiences! She initially wrote her first three canonical novels (the first being SS) for her family circle, a sophisticated and discerning group of people. Of course, Austen also wrote the novels (or as the case may be, revised them) for the reading public. Though Austen was published anonymously and could not directly engage either the popular or the literary world as a writer, the appreciative family circle was a critical world unto itself. The biographical accounts indicate that they were an excellent sounding board for Austen, against which to assess critical reactions and test narrative effects.[14] Austen's characteristic meta-awareness as an author—her relaxed consciousness about the reader's presence and the intimacy she establishes—must owe a great deal to that experience.

As they had been following her writing from the beginning, this "inner circle" must also have had a strong awareness of the satire in the novels, in comparison with the public audience; the family had been in on Austen's juvenilia. They appreciated her irony and "got" her references and in-jokes. The direct line from LF to SS would have been obvious to them in the same way it is obvious to Paula Byrne. With that in mind, a parallel examination of both here, of LF (for the home audience) against SS (for both audiences), can suggest what Austen expected of each. I turn then to a review of LF, with particular attention to the elements that are recapitulated in SS.

Austen's discordant effects emerge from the very beginning on the title page of *Love and Freindship*, with its "accidental" misspelling, and an epigraph which immediately contradicts the title: "'Deceived in Freindship and Betrayed in Love.'" Laura, the protagonist in LF, describes herself as follows:

> "A sensibility too tremblingly alive to every affliction of my Freinds, my Acquaintance, and particularly to every affliction of my own, was my only fault, if a fault it could be called."[15]

Laura's chief correspondent in this epistolary narrative is Marianne, the daughter of her intimate friend Isabel. This suggests, rather pointedly, that Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* will be the successor of Laura in LF.

But this is in very bad taste! Marianne, for all her faults, is a beloved and sympathetic character in SS, not a caricature. It is important to emphasize just how *freakish* the existence of *Love and Freindship* is in relation to SS, as if Shakespeare had written *Pyramus and Thisbe* before rather than after *Romeo and Juliet*. Austen satirically deconstructs SS before it is even written. We can indeed sympathize with Paula Byrne and appreciate why

she, with a deep appreciation for Austen's satirical side, is affronted by Ang Lee's tear-jerking screen adaptation.

As we proceed through LF, the resemblances to what will eventually become SS continue to accumulate.[16] The principal male, Edward, makes a sudden, very Willoughby-like appearance. Thus, we preview the infatuation between Willoughby and Marianne that unfolds with suspicious speediness in SS; in LF, Edward and Laura immediately fall in love and are married within minutes.[17] The bulk of LF follows Laura and her cohorts through absurd and catastrophic misadventures. They loudly proclaim their feelings, continually denounce others for not having them, launch themselves into madly impulsive acts at immense injury to themselves and others, and flail around impotently in noisy, pointless self-absorption. Marianne in SS will manifest all of these traits, though of course more realistically.

Like much of the juvenilia, LF is full of absurdly improbable coincidences. In one chapter, an elderly man discovers four random grandchildren within minutes, and wonders if there are more to come: "But tell me (looking he fearfully toward the Door) tell me, have I any other grandchildren in the house."[18] Melodramatic coincidence is also a feature of SS, namely the convergence of plot that connects Colonel Brandon, Willoughby and the young Eliza Williams. Importantly, this is a stumbling block for SS, making it seem the weakest of Austen's canonical novels. The coincidence, though a staple of the sentimental romance Austen constantly parodied in her juvenilia, is usually tolerated in SS as an awkward default to convention. However, in the present context, it prompts a provocative question: did Austen include it as a *joke*?

This of course would be Byrne's interpretation, but also the kind of audacious proposal Girard might make. He might argue that SS is much too sharp and realistic to have a glaring "flaw" like the narrative melodrama. Girard (insofar as I put words in his mouth) might hypothesize that it is an engineered "shortcoming," like Austen's "accidental" misspelling of *Love and Freindship*, or the "coincidental" naming of the two Mariannes. He might propose that the plot coincidence is Austen's authorial misdirection, and a coded message. The message is that SS and *Love and Freindship* are not far apart; the distinction between the "serious" and "unserious" treatment of sensibility is misleading; the sensibility in the one is the same as the sensibility in the other. Discerning readers (e.g., Paula Byrne) will pick up on this. SS is both Austen's *verité romanesque* ("novelistic truth") and her *mensonge romantique* ("romantic lie"). SS is two novels in one, exactly like Girard's Shakespearean hypothesis.[19]

To buttress this Girard-style conjecture, we can consider Brandon's backstory. It is about parental oppression, sibling rivalry, blackguards, love triangles, and persecuted women (both named Eliza!). Mimesis is not foregrounded in any conspicuous way, but only because the backstory is obscured in historical review, the soft focus of romantic melodrama.

However, when the same elements appear in the real-time narrative—mean parents, disagreeable siblings, and multiple interconnected love triangles—they are supersaturated with mimesis.[20] Thus (through a Girardian lens) the improbable melodrama is mythological, a romantic mirage that evaporates in the harder light of mimetic realism in the real-time narrative.

However, as I advance this Girardian conjecture about Brandon's backstory, there is a problem, also noted above with the suffering of Marianne. It is hard to read the melodramatic coincidence in SS completely *satirically*. It involves wretched stories: the persecution, heartbreak, disgrace, decline and death of the elder Eliza, and the seduction and abandonment of the younger, the more poignant because she is repeating the elder Eliza's tragedy, and despite Brandon's efforts to shelter and protect her, thus failing in his oath to the dying Eliza (senior). Paula Byrne's satirical interpretation of SS seems to wobble here as well, as jarring in its way as the sentimental excess of Ang Lee.

Three irreconcilable possibilities emerge, and it is impossible to commit wholly to any one:

1) *The narrative coincidence in SS is an immature, overly conventional machination of plot*. This is the evidence before us, yet Austen managed such conventions with mocking ease in the juvenilia, hardly a sign of meek deference. This suspiciously glaring "lapse" is not tonally consistent with SS, which is otherwise mature and confident, and sustains its gritty psychosocial realism.

2) *Austen is satirizing the tragic circumstances of the two Elizas*. This implies an irreverence comparable to Oscar Wilde's when he said of Dickens, "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing."[21] While it is true that Austen killed off characters with abandon in her juvenilia, including *Love and Freindship*, the circumstances of the Elizas are genuinely affecting, as is Brandon narrating them. Their plight, even if sentimentalized, seems not to be a laughing matter.

3) *We should be deeply affected by the tragic circumstances of the two Elizas*. There is no avoiding this, yet it is undercut by glaring similarities to *Love and Freindship* that run throughout SS, a haze of suspicion around this clumsy appeal to sentimentality. Moreover, as Brandon recounts his backstory, the affecting circumstances pile up suspiciously, tragedy upon tragedy, an "overkill" also suspiciously reminiscent of the juvenilia.

There is no harmonizing solution to this difficulty, no unifying synthesis, no super-superior point of view that puts a "discerning" reader above the perspective of others. This aspect of SS is like a paradoxical drawing by M.C. Escher, with figures situated right-side up, upside down, and sideways. We can see all of the perspectives clearly enough, but we can never focus on more than one at the same time, and our eyes shift jarringly back and forth. This indeterminable quality narrows but intensifies as we move to Marianne's sufferings, central to the novel's "double effect."

Since Marianne's suffering is rendered realistically, the three undecidable points above collapse to the two canvassed at the beginning: do we take Marianne's sufferings *seriously*, or *satirically*? In the latter case, the parallels with Laura and Sophia's "swoons" and "frenzy fits" are glaring, as are the parallels with Marianne's self-endangering outdoor rambles ("Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint—").[22] This supports a satirical reading of Marianne. In fact, this has been the thrust of Austen's characterization up to the moment Marianne is jilted by Willoughby.

Until then, Marianne's persistent, grating, tone-deaf remonstrations are either laughable or cringe-worthy, as P.J.M. Scott describes well:

> To a large extent she acts out the basic Rousseau-istic premises about the native benevolence of Man and his instinctual wholesomeness as a social being when he is not oppressed by cruel circumstances and his speech and conduct are not perverted into dishonest forms by worldly considerations. This makes her in fact an alarming and mischievous liability. . . . one actually flinches at her participation in any social scene, so likely is she to worsen matters for herself and those associated with her by her free expression of inward feelings.[23]

As with Paula Byrne, Scott's observation is Girardian. What saves Marianne for us is her suffering; she advances from being an annoying caricature to being a sympathetic character. A satirical reading becomes as problematic as snarky chortling at the fate of the two Eizas. We are stuck again with alternating interpretations.

This is not an arcane issue. Recalling Byrne's comments, the "serious" reading of SS resulted in Ang Lee's screen adaptation, which is the sentimental takeaway for millions. Another consequence of "seriousness" is seeing the novel as a "debate" between "sense" and "sensibility." This is surely a gross misinterpretation, yet so common as to be almost canonical. Debates like this do take place *in the novel* (e.g., between Elinor, Marianne, and Edward), but there is no *genuine* debate in the sense of sensibility having pros and cons. That would be like arguing in LF over the relative merits of "swoons" and "frenzy fits." Nevertheless, exactly such thematic summaries of SS appear repeatedly in reading guides and commentaries.[24]

Tony Tanner, who favors a serious reading of Marianne, delves more deeply into the problem, and in a way particularly relevant to Girard and GA. For Tanner, Marianne should be taken seriously, obviously not because her impressions are correct, but because her sufferings are very real. Moreover, following Foucault on "madness," they are symptomatic of socioeconomic conditions that prevailed in England, where such nervous afflictions were particularly strong. England's advanced market society and its competitive pressures create an alienation that manifests in psychosomatic hysteria like Marianne's. Marianne's over-reactions are thus a legitimate protest against the stultifying artificiality of society, and her

sickness is a reaction to it. Marianne is right to seek solace in nature, with its restorative power.[25]

A problem here, which either Paula Byrne or Girard might hasten to point out, is that *Love and Freindship* preempts Tanner's interpretation. If we are talking about restorative effects, Sophia already seems to agree: "Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint—"[26] On socioeconomic status, Edward in *Love and Freindship* also seems to agree, when he denounces his father to perfect strangers as a "a mean and mercenary wretch," "seduced by the false glare of Fortune and the Deluding Pomp of Title."[27] *Love and Freindship* is relentlessly deconstructive of interpretations of SS that might contrast its "serious treatment" of sensibility with the burlesque counterpart. A solution thus might be to take *Love and Freindship* itself more (there is no other word for it) *seriously*.

This means that similarities between the two are more important than differences, and that the critique of sensibility in LF is continuous with, and consistent with, its critique in SS. This goes back to the point above: Austen's critique of sensibility is the same as Girard's critique of the *mensonge romantique*. Sensibility purports to be exactly what it is not: it is imitative, derivative, manically compulsive, perversely self-wounding, and completely clueless about itself. This is what Austen explores in SS, in a more "serious"—that is, more realistic—way. The difference between SS and LF is one not of kind but of degree. Thus, in many ways, the mimetic approach, considered as a serious moral critique, makes at least some sense of the discordant effects in SS.

Tanner is rightly focused on socioeconomic conditions, but this comes out differently through a mimetic lens. The advance of market forces is not driving madness so much as (in the Girardian view) the madness is driving the market forces; everyone is looking around at their neighbor and making comparisons. In addition, far more things are commodified than Tanner's observations may encompass. Natural landscapes are not reliable as a source of solace, for they too become an embattled arena of one-upmanship—or, in Marianne's case, an opportunity for self-harm. In *Mansfield Park*, landscaping grounds to make them look more "natural" becomes an arena of feverish competition.[28] Even Marianne's illness will become a trendy form of self-expression in Austen's final, unfinished novel *Sanditon*, with its cast of hypochondriacs.[29]

This signals skepticism from Austen not just about the advance of modernity, but also about the romanticism that Tanner finds a healthy, or at least understandable, response to it. In Girard's view this romanticism is itself a symptom, if not at the root of the illness itself. Nevertheless, generative anthropology would make a different evaluation, one closer to Tanner's. Marianne's may or may not be (as per Tanner) a legitimate response to modernity, but for GA it is a *real* one. We have to take Marianne seriously (from the GA perspective) exactly because she is trying to negotiate the self-exacerbating problems of modern resentment. In short, GA would not be so hasty to dismiss Marianne's experience, or the

reader's experience of Marianne. The existence of Austen's youthful satire would not diminish this, in the GA view; Austen would be returning to the problem of sensibility in SS not to simply prolong her satirical treatment but because the burlesque "solution" proved insufficient.

Thus, GA and Girard create their own "two audiences" effect when applied to SS. GA will tend toward the serious reading, and mimetic theory toward the satirical. The GA interpretation leans toward a "sentimental" reading, not because GA gets all emotional about things, but because it appreciates the value of self-expression and the forms that it takes, including its relation to an audience. Girard, by contrast, is concerned with the historical sweep of revelation, where demythologization is key. In that sense, Austen's satirical voice is the natural language of demythologization. To better delineate these differences, we turn to van Oort's critique of Girard's "two audiences" premise.

Girard's "Two Audiences" and Its Difficulties

Girard's "two audiences" thesis is by no means limited to Shakespeare; it applies to most of his intellectual discoveries, whether they be his exegesis of biblical text, his analysis of the modern novel, or his explorations in myth, anthropology, psychology, or human origins.[30] Girard constantly situates himself as the enlightened discoverer against almost everyone else (including scholars in the relevant disciplines) who are among the unenlightened that "don't get it." Before reviewing van Oort's objections, I would like to canvass a few of my own.

My first objection is simply tonal. Girard's stance is presumptuous and off-putting. The "two audiences" premise also smacks of gnostic secret wisdom: "things hidden" from all but the most knowing. More importantly, Girard's "two audiences" imply a contradiction; canonicity should be a puzzle for Girard. His mimetic masters are canonical, and if it is not mere coincidence, the canonicity must be tied to the revelatory quality of their work. Yet this could not be because a tiny number of truly enlightened readers (which before Girard may not even have existed!) served as a selection committee. Surely it is the same unenlightened generations who established the canon. In short, Girard does not give his "uncomprehending" audience enough credit.

It seems much more reasonable (even just from within Girard's system) to conclude that the generations of readers or theatergoers whom Girard thinks don't get it, actually *do* get it, at least on some level. They *are* morally engaged with the problematics of mimesis, or the work would not hold the same fascination for so long. The idea of an unconscious process that canonizes revelatory literature but is somehow unaware of its revelatory quality creates the ambivalence that van Oort will observe below about Girard's "conscious" yet "unconscious" emergence of language and representation.

My final point about Girard's "two audiences"—less an objection than a puzzle—is that the

"two audiences" are actually "many audiences," since everyone's interpretation differs. Girard's "knowing" mimetic interpretation is typically contrasted polemically with a monolithic "standard" interpretation, representing a critical *méconnaissance*. Yet in practice, there is not one audience which is wrong, as against Girard who is right, but indefinitely many audiences (everyone's interpretation being at least slightly different), all presumably wrong. My point here is not to attack Girard but to pose a question about the reality of the multivalent reading experience: is it possible to have many valid interpretations in Girard's system? After all, a text, whether it is Shakespeare, Austen, or the Bible, *can* speak to many people in many different ways, even the same person reading the same text at different times. If Girard effaces this possibility, it seems to deny something about human and literary experience.[31] This is where I hope the engagement with Austen (who took great interest in divergent reader responses) might validate the multivalent experience without compromising the revelation of mimetic desire.[32]

Turning now to van Oort's important critique of Girard, caveats are in order. First, van Oort is openly indebted to Girard, whose insights on Shakespeare he generously engages and often finds "startling and original."[33] The *critique* of Girard, though important, occupies only a portion of van Oort's study. Even Girard's "two audiences" premise van Oort finds unobjectionable in itself:

> 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 want to keep the attention of the more refined, you will have to go beyond mere slapstick and gore.[34]

Nevertheless, van Oort has several objections to the way Girard pursues his literary analysis:

> 1) Girard brushes past Shakespearean critics who make compatible observations.
>
> 2) He insists on the Christian revelation to the exclusion of all else.
>
> 3) He does not take into account different aesthetic periods with their distinct modalities.
>
> 4) He fails to appreciate the self-correcting capabilities of modernity.
>
> 5) He has little regard for the artistic medium (drama).
>
> 6) At a deeper level, Girard's "two audiences" theory betrays (for van Oort) an insecurity about language, or symbolic representation.

In Girard's scenario of human origins, symbolic representation emerges ambivalently as

both conscious and unconscious. For Girard, the “sacred” exists in ritual form, as sacrifice, before a symbolic capacity exists, before any hominids could know what “sacred” is. This is a central objection for GA. Thus, for Girard to set himself up, like Freud, as the arbiter of what is *really* happening with the protohuman unconscious is of a piece with his setting himself up as the “true” interpreter of Shakespeare.[35] It is suspicious because, by definition, no contrary evidence can be considered; such will simply be dismissed as denial: *méconnaissance*, again. Girard is right, because other contenders must always be wrong.

Also incisive are van Oort’s objections concerning Girard’s blithe disregard for relevant scholars and the creative medium (drama).[36] Regarding the former, since Girard often comes in as an outsider, it is somewhat understandable; a professional lifetime is needed to master the secondary literature even for one great figure. There ought to be a place for a thinker like Girard to bring a fresh perspective. Yet, this should have prompted more humility. Since Girard comes in with guns blazing, it is easy for experts to shoot him down, and not even for what he is contradicting, but what he is missing or mischaracterizing.

Probably more problematic (for Girard) is the second objection: Girard’s tendency to treat the artistic medium as mostly irrelevant. Like the shell of a hermit crab, the creative form can be casually cast off once its mimetic content is grasped. Here van Oort showcases a great interpretive advantage for GA, which respects the mode of expression on its own terms; the aesthetic is an adaptation to the problem of resentment, which plays out in terms of a scene of representation, with a center and periphery.

This brings us to van Oort’s other objections which are rather of a piece, regarding aesthetic epochs, modernity, and Christianity.[37] I find that these objections, respectively, start out strong but become somewhat contestable. To be sure, a great strength of GA is its penetrating analysis of aesthetic epochs, like its analysis of aesthetic form. The process of modernity in passing through these epochs is also brilliantly illuminated in GA. However, though van Oort sees an inherent deficit here in mimetic theory, I think such insights are available to—or at least comprehensible from—that perspective, whether or not Girard was negligent.

But how negligent was he, really? The intensifying struggles of mimetic desire through the stages of modernity, and its expression in different aesthetic modes, *is* treated by Girard, in his own way. For instance, mimetic desire for Dante or Cervantes is not the same as it is for Stendhal or Flaubert, and for Stendhal and Flaubert it is not the same as it is for Dostoyevsky or Proust. Broadly speaking, aesthetic expression for Girard follows the evolution of mimetic pathology: model –> obstacle –> rival –> double (alternately, external, internal and double mediation).[38] That Girard doesn’t account for epochs and aesthetics *the way GA does*, is clear enough, but that is not the same as not accounting for them at all.[39] In short, I don’t think van Oort is entirely fair to Girard about modernity.

This extends to Christianity. Girard thinks that modernity is the working out of Christianity, or more accurately, the working out of a crisis introduced by Christianity. van Oort finds this one-dimensional, and no doubt annoying.[40] However, I'm not sure that he gets past this by appealing to GA's more sophisticated distinctions between artistic forms and aesthetic epochs, or by the appeal to modernity's adaptive capability vis-a-vis resentment. Girard would say that these, too, are a working out of a specifically Christian crisis. In fact, I'm not persuaded that GA is not saying the same thing, in so many words.[41] The issue, therefore, is not *that* Girard emphasizes Christianity but *how*.

This is the relation of Christianity to modernity, which goes to the heart of other differences with GA. In GA, resentment can be transmuted and defused. For instance, as van Oort notes—one of his most cogent points—the culminating violence in *Hamlet* for Girard is an "escalation to extremes," even a prophecy of nuclear annihilation![42] But for van Oort, the violence in *Hamlet* is a *representation* which can substitute for violence: resentment finds a creative stand-in, even for Hamlet himself when he orchestrates his play within a play.[43] Here van Oort demonstrates the incisive qualities of GA: its respect for the aesthetic medium and its attention to the processes of modernity vis-a-vis the problem of escalating resentment. GA and mimetic theory may never agree here, because the Christian-infused perspective of mimetic theory will see van Oort's example from *Hamlet* (substituting the bloodletting on stage for bloodletting in real life) as cheap grace, while the more secular spirit of GA will see Girard's reading as nutty fanaticism, like the street corner prophet holding a sign saying "Repent! The end is near!"

This leads back to Jane Austen, who is no fanatic but does believe in repentance. Repentance—whether or not it is Girard's extreme version—should perhaps be taken as seriously as a solution to resentment as the dizzying adaptations of modernity, at least as useful as watching a bloody play, buying a new pair of sneakers, or—as Marianne discovers—expressing oneself through "swoons" and "frenzy fits." I hope to establish in the next section that Austen's "two audiences" facilitates a "Gospel hermeneutic." The problem in the structure of the narrative becomes the reader's own problem of *méconnaissance*, which Austen angles toward moral introspection. Since Austen is deeply mimetic in a way that Girard must certainly have appreciated, I think this aspect of Austen's narrative structure can work to correct some of Girard's missteps, as canvassed above in van Oort's objections as well as my own.

Repentance, Misinterpretation and Austen's Gospel Hermeneutic

To speak of repentance, an obvious point is that Marianne *repents*. She finally comprehends the heroism of her sister Elinor, who endures suffering comparable to her own but with forbearance and self-sacrifice, all the while holding the family together and nursing Marianne through her afflictions. Suitably humbled, Marianne renounces the violent indulgence of emotion that endangered herself and burdened those around her, especially

Elinor. Marianne vows to keep her feelings in check and think about others.[44]

If this tidy moralism were the real takeaway for Marianne, we would have an uplifting but forgettable tale. It conforms to the "serious" reading of SS and the assumption that it constitutes a "debate" about sensibility; Marianne, in this reading, acquires common sense, and Elinor, perhaps, a bit of sensibility. This framing, as noted earlier, is seriously deficient, certainly in Marianne's case, more egregiously in Elinor's. Marianne's "repentance," though commendable, stops short of real self-knowledge. It allows her to preserve her sensibility, her *méconnaissance*, the conviction that her feelings, frankness and impetuosity bubble up from some authentic core within. Marianne's reform only requires that the "selfish" part be reined in, and that she have more consideration for others.

In the Girardian view, this is quite unconvincing. Marianne's sensibility was never about too much independence but the opposite, mimetic agitation. She is not suddenly learning to think about other people; she has been obsessing about them *the whole time*. This is clear from the satirical reading of Marianne, and strongly reinforced by its many correspondences to *Love and Freindship*. If we forgot, it is because our judgment was clouded by Marianne's sufferings. Austen prods us back into the satirical perspective in the end, with Marianne's romantic anti-climax in her marriage to Brandon, "whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married,—and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat!"[45] The arc of Marianne's repentance ends with Brandon's flannel waistcoat.

Everyone can enjoy a chuckle about this, the serious audience and the satirical audience alike. Recalling such incongruities is a classic ironic device for Austen to, especially in her conclusions. However, like other such quips, the joke is on us. What exactly is so funny? For the "serious" audience, to chuckle about Brandon is to tacitly admit something they knew all along: Marianne's sensibility was frivolous, superficial; she bases her ideals on waistcoats. Marianne's amendment is certainly welcome, and nicely ties up the ostensible thematic framing of the novel, but no one takes it too seriously. Marianne lacks moral depth and everyone knows it. The real moral struggle has been Elinor's, not Marianne's; this does not even need to be "debated."

But if there is no comparison, what *about* that "debate" between sense and sensibility? How can the serious reader believe in that debate, yet not really believe in it? How can Marianne's problem be that she just *feels too much* (as per the sensibility debate) *and* that her feelings are superficial? The wry chuckle about Brandon's waistcoat reveals that there is something discordant in the reader's interpretation.

Satirically minded readers do not escape this quandary, though it assumes a different form. Brandon's waistcoat is funny because it is unsexy, falling comically short of Marianne's romantic expectations and making a particularly glaring contrast with Willoughby. This sort

of critical reaction has even become a trope, as when Billy Crystal's character in *When Harry Met Sally* cynically deconstructs the ending of *Casablanca*: it is tragic because Ingrid Bergman chooses altruism over Humphrey Bogart and must remain sexually unfulfilled. In fact, the conclusion of SS disappoints many readers exactly for its romantic blandness, not only with Brandon but also Edward, who is underwhelming as Elinor's ardent lover.[46] With Marianne and Willoughby, Austen sets the bar exceedingly high for "hot" romance, then turns around and frustrates expectations—an exercise she repeats and amplifies in *Mansfield Park*.[47]

Since Austen is quite capable of satisfying romantic resolutions (e.g., Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*) the romantic blandness concluding SS is not an artistic lapse but something deliberate: Austen is provoking an adverse reaction. When we chuckle at Brandon's flannel waistcoat, we confirm this. Marianne "settled," stooped laughably far from her romantic ideal. The reaction signifies that we resent the resolution with Brandon, and pine for Willoughby! Yet, as an opportunistic con man who unscrupulously plays to Marianne's romantic sensibilities but makes life choices strictly according to calculated self-interest, Willoughby is literally the "romantic lie." In addition, their exhibitionist romance in the early stages of their attraction represented both peak sensibility for Marianne, and peak satire for Austen.

If we chuckle satirically about Brandon's waistcoat because it is unsexy, we are undercut by the larger satire about sensibility. We are ensnared by our response. To disdain Brandon is to still want Willoughby, but to still want Willoughby is to demonstrate our susceptibility to the "romantic lie." If we presume to be on the inside with Austen, or even against Austen (e.g., dissatisfied with the romantic resolution) we will find ourselves on the outside, the *object* of satire. Readers' misinterpretations thus become intrinsic to the story.

Lest this extrapolation from Brandon's waistcoat seem unconvincing, there is an earlier example, where the same process is unmistakable. Edward adopts a satirical stance regarding Marianne's appreciation of picturesque beauty, a hallmark of sensibility. Edward mockingly presents several picturesque clichés, to rile Marianne. Elinor then intervenes with an incisive comment:

> "I suspect," said Elinor, "that to avoid one kind of affectation, Edward here falls into another. Because he believes many people pretend to more admiration of the beauties of nature than they really feel, and is disgusted with such pretensions, he affects greater indifference and less discrimination in viewing them himself than he possesses. He is fastidious and will have an affectation of his own."[48]

If Marianne's admiration of picturesque beauty is the "cool" thing, Edward is "cooler" by being conspicuously uncool, uber cool. But, as Elinor points out, such a perspective, that of the smirking satirist, is itself vulnerable to satire.

If we think we are one step ahead of Edward, adopting Elinor's stance, are we vulnerable to satire as well? Are we also striking an affectation? Ironic knowingness with Austen always risks such self-incrimination. This is the game—a rather devious cat and mouse game—that Austen plays with her "clever" readers, while her "naïve" readers will branch off toward a different sort of misinterpretation. That is, readers may be like Edmund, or they may be like Marianne. (This, of course, is just another way of characterizing the "double effect.")

My contention is that the participation of the reader in this process is part of Austen's point about sensibility, about the *méconnaissance*. Just as the misrecognition inherent in "sensibility" will come to apply to many more characters than just Marianne, both in SS and in the masterpieces to follow, this *méconnaissance* also applies to us as readers. There are interpretive traps that, when we fall into them, betray us as having the same mimetic symptoms as the characters. Yet, when we *do* fall into them—here I deviate from Girard's approach—it is not that we belong to a "dull" Austen audience that doesn't get her, as opposed to the "clever" one that does.

What is happening instead is that we are "falling into" the novel, becoming part of Austen's story, and most importantly, removing the moral distance between ourselves and the characters. Austen is facilitating moral engagement by entangling us in the narrative, making us trip over our contradictory perspectives. Again, this pervades Austen's writing and is particularly hard to escape in the later novels, yet it is already strongly present in SS.[49] There is a crucial sense in which the novels are interpreting us, rather than us interpreting the novels. This is what I characterize as Austen's "gospel hermeneutic" (discussed below). Austen's goal is to foster introspection.

A solution is emerging, then, to Girard's "two audiences" problem, something that works like subliminal awareness or peripheral vision. The "two audiences" can exist in one person, in the conflicted consciousness of the reader. This is like Girard's "conscious unconscious," which troubled van Oort (in the previous section) because it allowed Girard to put forward unfalsifiable assertions. Here, however, I can make a limited case for it, because the *méconnaissance* has demonstrable effects in Austen's writing. For instance, a reader can chortle about Brandon's flannel waistcoat, which essentially deconstructs Marianne's "sensibility," yet *still* believe somehow that the novel encompasses a serious debate about sensibility. The contradictions inherent in the "double reading" (and no reader escapes them), even if not grasped explicitly, create this subliminal dissonance.

This also addresses the problem of canonicity, raised earlier: how can Girard's revelatory works become canonical if the generations that establish their canonicity are blind to that very revelatory quality? It is because they are *not* blind to it, after all; the revelatory elements come in under the radar. The mimesis is hidden in plain sight. Its subtle but insistent presence destabilizes the reading experience, yet that destabilization is one of the things that animates the narrative and makes it inexhaustible—in other words, canonical.

This is one reason Austen lovers can go back to her novels again and again and make new discoveries, since its revelations flit in and out of awareness, constantly revealing different sides of the same thing.

Thus, this also addresses the issue of the multivalent reading experience, where Girard (as noted earlier) would seem to insist on a single, correct interpretation of a great literary work, the mimetic one. In fact, there is not going to be a single mimetic interpretation because every reader will be bringing in different mimetic baggage. A reader could be a Marianne, or the reader could be an ironic hipster like Edward. In *Mansfield Park* this effect is even stronger because readers reproduce the foibles of a far greater menagerie of characters.[50] Austen perfects this art of bringing readers under judgment by their inadvertent identification with conspicuously flawed characters. And again, in the reader's act of interpreting the novel, *it is actually the novel that is interpreting the reader*. This is in fact quite an important element in Girard's literary interpretation, or at least, it is consistent with the direction of it.[51]

In Girard's story of stories, the gospel narrative, this effect is constant. Jeremiah Alberg has provided a particularly lucid exposition of this process, exemplified in Jesus' scandalous explanation of his own parables: "That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them."[52] Jesus tells the disciples that they get it, but that he is speaking in parables to the crowd exactly so that they *won't* get it—a shockingly outrageous and insensitive statement and one that, as Alberg notes, has indeed been a stumbling block to biblical commentators.

For present purposes, we can note that the gospel verse is a "two audiences" formulation. It is useful here to highlight the parallels with earlier pairings:

- Jesus' disciples get the parables, but the crowd doesn't.
- Girard and a select inner circle in the gallery get Shakespeare, but the "groundlings" don't.
- Paula Byrne gets Austen, but Ang Lee doesn't.

A moment's reflection on the foibles of Jesus' disciples is enough to make the first contrast questionable, and that should be enough to problematize the other two.

In fact, as Alberg shows in the analysis of the surrounding text in Mark, including the parable of the Good Samaritan, such a formulation is not the real thrust of the gospel verse. Instead, the context of the gospel narrative concerns insiders and outsiders. The moment one thinks one is on the inside (for instance, as a presumptuous disciple), one finds oneself on the outside, because one has stood in judgment. This interpretation does not "resolve" itself. Or rather, to the extent that it *does* resolve itself, it indicates a problem, a deficiency. There is no stable or comfortable place to stand in the gospel narrative except, *maybe*, at

the edge of introspection and moral engagement, that is, repentance.

Austen appropriates this effect of the gospel narratives; we make judgments about characters which, if we followed through with them, would reveal either a self-contradiction, or an unflattering similarity with a flawed character that is actually *in* the narrative. To bring this back to Girard, Austen's "double effect" shows how Girard's "unconscious," operating alertly but half-aware, can accommodate an audience that can "get it" even when it "doesn't get it." As in the gospel narrative, that means everyone.

This could have been emphasized more by Girard, since it accords well with his "interdividual" psychology, where no-one escapes the gravity well of mimetic desire.[53] It is unfortunate that Girard's "expository arrogance" handicaps this presentation. Too eager, no doubt, to emphasize the proprietary "firstness" of his intellectual discoveries, Girard emphasizes the *méconnaissance* of everyone else. Yet in setting this tone, he is hobbling one of the strengths of the mimetic interpretation, which is that it is obvious, that it is hovering just beyond the focus of attention, for all to see, if they would but look. Girard himself often effectively elucidates this barely-under-the-surface aspect of mimesis.[54] The "expository arrogance" distracts us from the moral implications of Girard's discovery: the act of interpretation becomes a moral act, and there is a sense in which no reader escapes it.

There is an aspect of this "spirituality"—if we deign to call it that—that is transferable to the categories of GA. Though GA tends to be allergic to Girard's Christianity, the disagreeable aspects of Girard with his "two audiences" comes, as just argued, not from his Christianity but from his *failure to follow through* with his Christianity, owing perhaps to intellectual pride. However, if we look past that, at mimetic desire as a problem of resentment and at representation as an ongoing remedy to it, we can see how Austen's "introspection" creates an "inner scene" of representation.[55] As with Alberg's mimetic exegesis of the gospels, one can fancy oneself at the center of this scene of representation in SS, e.g., in sympathy to Marianne, or standing next to Austen in confederacy, as a smirking satirist. Yet any such interpretation, if interrogated, can be destabilized, and one will suddenly be on the periphery. This alternation of narrative presumption and narrative culpability is an alternation of center and periphery. It is an ongoing dynamic of introspection and repentance, not necessarily complete, as in Marianne's case, but never without value.

Bibliography

Alberg, Jeremiah. *Beneath the Veil of the Strange Verses: Reading Scandalous Texts*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013.

Austen, Jane. *Love and Freindship*. In *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen: Juvenilia*, 101-141. Edited by Peter Sabor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

—. “Opinions of *Mansfield Park* (1814, 1815).” In *Mansfield Park*, Norton Critical Edition, 375-378. Edited by Claudia L. Johnson. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.

—. *Sanditon*. In *Oxford World Classics: Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon,* 293-346. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

—. *Sense and Sensibility*. Norton Critical Edition. Edited by Claudia L. Johnson. New York: Norton, 2002.

Byrne, Paula. “Jane Austen and Satire.” *The Oxonian Review* 24, no. 6 (March 31, 2014). http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/jane-austen-and-satire/

Casablanca, featuring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Warner Brothers, 1942.

Duckworth, Alistair M. *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.

Gans, Eric. *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

—. “The Scenic Imagination I—Before and after Christianity,” *Chronicles of Love and Resentment*, no. 252 (December 1, 2001). http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw252/

—. *Science and Faith: The Anthropology of Revelation*, 2nd ed. Aurora, Colorado: Noesis Press, 2015.

Girard, René. *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* [*Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*]. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

—. *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*. Edited and translated by James G. Williams. New York: Crossroad, 1997.

—. *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare*. Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2000.

—. “Theory and Its Terrors.” In *Mimesis and Theory*. Edited by Robert Doran. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

—. *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Goldman, Peter. “A New Way of Interpreting Literature, Shakespeare and Milton,“ *Anthropoetics* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2021). http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1601/index.htm

Hollingsworth, Paula. *The Spirituality of Jane Austen*. Oxford: Lion, 2017.

Lauber, John. *Jane Austen*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.

Le Faye, Dierdre. *Jane Austen: A Family Record*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [1989].

Lee, Ang, director. *Sense and Sensibility*. Columbia Pictures, 1995.

McMaster, Juliet. "Teaching 'Love and Freindship.'" In *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, 135-151. Edited by J. David Grey. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989.

Pemberly.com. Introductory note for Jane Austen's *Love and Freindship*. https://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/lovfrend.html

Scott, P. J. M. *Jane Austen: A Reassessment*. London: Vision Press, 1982.

Tanner, Tony. *Jane Austen*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Taylor, Matthew. "*Mansfield Park* and Scandal," *Anthropoetics* 16, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2010). http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1601/index.htm

—. "*Mensonge Mélodramatique*: Triangular Desire in *Sense and Sensibility*," *Contagion* 29 (Spring 2022) (forthcoming).

—. "Traipsing into the Forest: Landscapes and Rivalry in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*," *Anthropoetics* 14, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009). http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1402/index.htm

—. "What Persuasion Really Means in *Persuasion*: A Mimetic Reading of Jane Austen," *Contagion* 11 (Spring 2004): 105-123.

Thompson, James. *Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988.

Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life*. New York: Knopf, 1998.

van Oort, Richard. "René Girard's Shakespeare," *Anthropoetics* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2016). http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap2102/2102vanOort/

—. *Shakespeare's Big Men: Tragedy and the Problem of Resentment*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016.

When Harry Met Sally, directed by Rob Reiner, written by Nora Ephron, featuring Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan. Columbia Pictures, 1989.

Wilde, Oscar. “One must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing.” *Quote Investigator* (February 21, 2021). https://quoteinvestigator.com/2021/02/21/heart-stone/

Notes

[1] Jane Austen, *Love and Freindship*, 132-133. The misspelling in the title is conventionally retained. All references are to this edition, henceforth usually LF.

[2] Paula Byrne, “Jane Austen and Satire,” par. 1; Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*. All references are to this edition, henceforth usually SS.

[3] Byrne, par. 1

[4] The “serious” reading of SS seems by far the most common, even in explicit comparison to LF. See for instance the introductory note to the online text at *Pemberly.com*: “*Love and Freindship* . . . is an exuberant parody of the cult of sensibility, which [Austen] later criticized in a more serious way in her novel *Sense and Sensibility*”, par. 1. See also Tony Tanner, who finds Marianne’s suffering is “something much more serious than the amazing burlesque of excessive sensibility to be found in such pieces as *Love and Freindship*.” 82.

[5] The term “two audiences” is from Richard van Oort, whose critique of Girard will be considered at length. See the final chapter of his *Shakespeare’s Big Men*, 188-199, also available online as an essay in *Anthropoetics*, “René Girard’s Shakespeare.”

[6] Developed in all of Girard’s literary criticism, most famously in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. See also *A Theater of Envy*.

[7] See again *Deceit*, and also Girard’s *Resurrection from the Underground*.

[8] See Note 5.

[9] This is well explained by Girard in *Deceit*, 1-18.

[10] Jeremiah Alberg (personal communication). Alberg and Girard were close and in regular phone contact.

[11] My comprehensive mimetic analysis of SS is “*Mensonge Mélodramatique*,” forthcoming in *Contagion*.

[12] Byrne, par. 13.

[13] *A Theater of Envy*, 6.

[14] Well chronicled in Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* and Dierdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*.

[15] LF, 104.

[16] Juliet McMaster's commentary on LF is invaluable in connection to SS as well as the other novels.

[17] LF., 109

[18] LF., 121.

[19] See above and note 13.

[20] I refer again to my mimetic analysis off SS, "*Mensonge Mélodramatique*."

[21] A conversational quip by Wilde, possibly apocryphal.

[22] Early in the novel Marianne gets caught heedlessly in a rainstorm, then dashes down a hill, stumbles, and falls, spraining her ankle. SS, 32-33. "Swoons" and "frenzy fits," insensitively but not inaccurately describe Marianne's trauma after being jilted by Willoughby. Later, Marianne deliberately exposes herself to the damp and nearly dies.

[23] Scott, 90.

[24] See for instance Tomalin, 155; Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, 103-109; Paula Hollingsworth, *The Spirituality of Jane Austen*, 60-62.

[25] Tanner, 81-83.

[26] LF, 133.

[27] LF, 108.

[28] See my analyses of landscaping in *Mansfield Park*: "Traipsing into the Forest" and "*Mansfield Park* and Scandal.".

[29] This forms part of my analysis of Marianne in "*Mensonge Mélodramatique*."

[30] For literature this runs through *Deceit* and *A Theater of Envy*. For anthropology,

mythology, biblical interpretation and psychology it is well-represented in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*.

[31] This is too large a subject to be done justice here, moreover, it is hard to find statements in which Girard addresses this point explicitly. Indirectly, Girard broaches the subject in *Deceit*, 3. In "Theory and Its Terrors," Girard lambasts the conceit that "interpretation is infinite" (p. 203-204). However, there Girard critiques deconstructionist precociousness, not the ordinary reading experience. Implicitly, we can assume Girard rejects the idea of each person's interpretation *being valid because it is unique*, which is a sort of *mensonge*. My argument (I think in harmony with Austen) is instead that each person's *mimetic experience* is unique, and they bring *that* to the interpretation. This is developed a little further below.

[32] For instance, Austen collected and recorded reactions to *Mansfield Park*. See her "Opinions of *Mansfield Park* (1814, 1815)."

[33] E.g., van Oort, *Shakespeare's Big Men*, 9. van Oort's commentary is primarily on *A Theater of Envy*, Girard's great Shakespearean study.

[34] Ibid., 194.

[35] Ibid., 195-199. van Oort is referencing Girard's account of hominization in *Things Hidden*, particularly 99-100.

[36] van Oort, *Shakespeare's Big Men*, 190-191, 193-194.

[37] Ibid., 194-195.

[38] This is, broadly, the progression of literary development laid out in *Deceit*, and Girard seems fairly consistent about it throughout his literary criticism.

[39] As van Oort put it to me (personal communication), "Girard doesn't have a theory of the aesthetic." I would venture that Girard has at least nascent one. Its intertwined threads are 1) the historical evolution of mimetic desire, 2) the literary "revelation" of mimetic desire, and 3) artistic "conversion" from mimetic desire. However, it is true that Girard never develops this into a full-blown aesthetic.

[40] *Shakespeare's Big Men*, 194-195.

[41] See for instance Eric Gans' *Science and Faith,* or his treatment of the neoclassical aesthetic in *Originary Thinking*, 150-163. For me, this seems a constant subtext in Gans' Chronicles; for just a single example see "The Scenic Imagination I — Before and after Christianity."

[42] Girard, *A Theater of Envy*, 286-289.

[43] van Oort, Shakespeare's Big Men, 66-67, 194-195.

[44] SS, 244-246.

[45] SS, 268.

[46] See for instance James Thompson: "it is common to find muted expressions of disappointment at what happens to Marianne, disappointment that she has to be penalized with Colonel Brandon, chastised under a policy of reduced expectations." 150. John Lauber also articulates this disappointment pointedly, both about Brandon and about Edward, 36-37.

[47] See my analysis in "*Mansfield Park* and Scandal."

[48] SS, 71.

[49] See my analyses in "*Mansfield Park* and Scandal" and "What Persuasion Really Means in *Persuasion*," 108-109.

[50] Again, a central point of my analysis in "*Mansfield Park* and Scandal."

[51] For Girard this is almost a trope. A representative example was quoted above (note 13): Shakespeare has "a sacrificial explanation for the groundlings, *which perpetuates itself in most modern interpretations*, and a nonsacrificial, mimetic one for those in the galleries." (Emphasis mine.) Another example is the chapter "Mimesis and Sexuality" in *Things Hidden*, in which Dostoyevsky and Proust continually preempt Freudian interpretations.

[52] Mark 4:12 (King James Version); Alberg, Chapter 5, "The Lesson of the Gospels," 71-97.

[53] This is laid out well in the final section of *Things Hidden*, "Interdividual Psychology," 281-431.

[54] Girard does this very persuasively in the first chapter of *Deceit*, "Triangular Desire," 1-52.

[55] GA's extrapolation of the "private scene" with respect to literature is finely articulated by Peter Goldman in "A New Way of Interpreting Literature, Shakespeare and Milton."