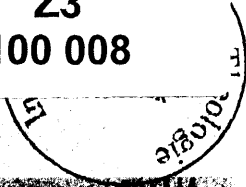


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# CONTAGION



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## Editor's Note

*As has been past practice, the editors of **Contagion** continue to select for referee process papers from the annual meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion. But we also continue to welcome manuscripts from authors in all academic disciplines and fields of professional activity which bear on René Girard's mimetic model of human behavior and cultural organization. Future volumes will also include a section for Notes and Comments, allowing for responses to previous essays and discussion of texts and issues related to interests of the journal.*

*We wish again to express our thanks to Patricia Clemente, Administrative Secretary of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Loyola University Chicago, for her resourceful vigilance in seeing the journal through to its timely production.*



# FROM CAIN AND ABEL TO ESAU AND JACOB

Angel Barahona  
*Universidad Complutense, Madrid*

The theme of twins or of enemy brothers is one which fascinates anthropologists owing to its frequency, the beauty of its mythopoetic settings, and its social significance. The theme always appears in relation to fratricidal violence, and is always linked to myths of foundation or origin. Clyde Kluckhohn in his book about brothers "born in immediate sequence" reminds us that the death of one of them brings with it a momentary peace, the foundation of a new social order. Thus it is not the fact of being twins, or antagonistic brotherhood per se which is the key to the stories, but violence:

Twins are impure in the same way that a warrior steeped in carnage is impure, or an incestuous couple, or a menstruating woman. All forms of violence lead back to violence. We overlook this fact because the primitive concept of a link between the loss of distinctions and violence is strange to us; but we need only consider the calamities primitive people associate with twins to perceive the logic of this concept. Deadly epidemics can result from contact with twins, as can mysterious illnesses that cause sterility in women and animals. Even more significant to us is the role of twins in provoking discord among neighbors, a fatal collapse of ritual, the transgression of interdictions—in short, their part in instigating a sacrificial crisis.... Behind the image of twins lurks the baleful aspect of the sacred, perceived as a disparate but formidable unified force. (Girard 1977, 58)

All the mythological, literary and historical accounts of twins which we have involve bloody conflict: Eteocles and Polyneices, Romulus and Remus, Richard the Lion Heart and John Lackland, and so on. To a

surprising extent even the development of the different stories is similar. When Polynices departs from Thebes leaving his sister there, hoping to reign through her, he takes with him his fraternal conflict as if it were an attribute of his being. Wherever he goes his brother appears to him, and will oppose him to the death. When an oracle announced to Adrastrus that his two daughters would marry, respectively, a lion and a wild boar, animals which are different in their appearance but identical in their violence, it was presaging fraternal conflict.

In Euripides' *The Suppliant Women*, the king tells how he came upon his sons-in-law. At his door, one night, Polynices and Tideus, both reduced to poverty, were quarreling furiously over possession of a camp bed. Their brotherhood by virtue of marriage with two sisters brings them within the fraternal category, like Oedipus and Creon, or Dionysus and Pentheus, rival cousins.

A plot of land or a kingdom, a woman or an object, the status of firstborn or an unjust inheritance, all give pretexts for conflict. We cannot avoid conflict when desires converge on the same object. It is difficult for the brothers to be aware of their symmetry, their reciprocity, the intense violence which is hidden behind their brotherhood,—an awareness which might spare them their confrontations—because they never occupy the same positions at the same time. The reciprocity is real, but it is the sum of non-reciprocal moments. The antagonists occupy the same positions in time, but successively, not simultaneously. The same acts and the same sentiments appear in cyclical alternation, but the brothers cannot directly observe their own reciprocity, and thus their identical nature, because they seem to be differentiated by the role which each one plays.

### **Cain and Abel**

There are many stories of confrontations between brothers in Scripture, including those related to the rights of the first born. From Genesis 4,5 onwards we see how these are an interminable source of conflicts. The first example, Cain and Abel: "And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell" anticipates the themes of the blessing and the looking at the face. And we can observe the games of symmetry with the language: "the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard."

Cain and Abel are presented as an agriculturalist and as a shepherd respectively, two forms of social life. In this quarrel, or symmetric rivalry,

in the maternal womb of the popular Yahwist tradition, the term oblation is used, highlighting its reciprocity even with language, and this is because every human order demands sacrifice. Abel's death begins a new social order: in fact it is said that Cain founds a city in the land of Nod and is the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites. His descendants say of him that he was the founder of urban life: cattle herdsman, musicians, iron workers, prostitutes.

The sedentary life which characterizes Cain's descendants causes material life, vice and distance from God to flourish. To be the founder of a city is not a trivial detail of the story. Just as in all the great foundational myths (Romulus and Remus is the best known, but examples abound), the city appears as the result of a crime between twins, which, in the light of Girardian thought turns out to be what introduces differentiation, and thus an ordered hierarchy which facilitates temporary pacific co-existence, giving rise to commemorative rites and festivals.

Cain will call the city Enoc, as he called his son. In Hebrew this means *dedication*, doubtless so as to relate it to the religious ceremony—a *dedicatory or patronal feast*—which served to found the city. But it is significant that Cain's sentence consists in a life of wandering, fleeing from his *go'el* or blood avenger. The blood of the innocent victim cries out to heaven for vengeance. Thus the victim had to be covered with earth, as if hoping to drown out its mute shout before God who sees everything (Job 16,18; Is 16,21, Ex 24,7-8). The same earth which receives this blood will pursue him and be his curse. The murderer recognizes his guilt: "my guilt is too great for me to bear it" (The TM says "my guilt" (*'awon*) as does the LXX, but the Hebrew word can also have the meaning of "punishment for the fault," which fits better with the terror which he feels.) The punishment is the echo of human reciprocity. We measure God with anthropomorphic criteria, thinking that God's justice consists in taking reprisals, avenging, punishing the guilty, "retaliating."

That is why Cain seeks death and wants to flee to the wilderness, where there is no family protection (because it is the clan's custom to avenge the spilt blood of its victimized members). But God doesn't want violence to be exercised blindly, and so places over Cain the sign (tau-T) which, according to St Jerome, is "the tremor of his body and the agitation of his mind," for what really matters is that God doesn't want vengeance to be unleashed, to grow exponentially, out of control, and cause the human race to disappear.

This interminable chain of crimes which risks being unleashed is announced by the ferocity of Cain's descendent Lamek who threatens to multiply the crimes by seven, the perfect number, that is to say definitively, for a trivial cause. He confesses himself capable of killing a young man for a bruise or a simple scratch. This is the purest paradigm of innocence and mimetism: an evil look, an insult, a gesture insignificant for an outside spectator, perhaps something arbitrary, but, for those who are immersed in mimetic contagion, full of content.

Lamek and his tribe are, besides, held to be the cultivators of industry and of material production: inventors, forgers of iron, creators of instruments of war. Lamek's son Tubal-Cain, and perhaps this is Cain himself, in a sort of anachronism, shows himself to be fierce and pronounces the first song of praise for the sword known in Scripture, remnant of some ritual chant:

I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.  
If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.  
(Gen 4 23b-24)<sup>1</sup>

God will take charge of doing justice. Part of it is that humans cannot just carry on as if nothing had happened after committing a crime. That is why this tale is the backdrop to Jacob's story which announces the need for reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

It should also be pointed out that Abel's substitute is called Seth (from Sath "Yahweh has place, or has set"—even though this is an anachronism, for the sacred name would not be revealed until Sinai), and that from Seth, Enoch is born. Enoch means "the man, the male" (Christ will call himself Son of Man), a name which is linked to the raising of a solemn altar for animal sacrifice (Gn 12,9;13,4;26,25;33,20). A sign that the effect of Abel's death needs to be ritualized by the repetition of a sacrifice so as to obtain the same ends: the founding of the new social order, the city, even though this be in a spurious and ephemeral way.

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<sup>1</sup>This is without doubt a lyric piece, composed following Hebrew metric patterns: a triptych in which the members of each verse are in synonymous parallel. It is an ode to war, to brute force.

<sup>2</sup>Perhaps it is this passage which inspires Jesus to propose a counter mimesis to the one which would set off vengeful violence when it proposes the sevenfold vengeance. Thus the New Testament's insistence on pardoning seventy times seven fold, which is to say, an infinite labor of reconciliation.

The two neolithic orders of food production, the two rival eternal cities, the two twin brothers: these are not simply a literary detail. The Yahwist writer wants to say something by his repeated insistence.<sup>3</sup>

Isaac is also preferred to Ishmael (Gn 21), Rachel to Leah (Gn 29,15-30). Rachel and Leah: the first name means "sheep" who is silent; Leah, the one with weeping eyes, tired, weighed down, sad. Rachel has to "die" ontologically so that her sister can be the first to be married (perhaps because, as the first born of the family of Laban, she should have married Esau. Jacob pays for his sin having to face up to his destiny. Also in the life of the sons of these two, and throughout scripture (1 Sam 16,12; 1 Kings 2,15), the same pattern is at work.

The problem, from Cain onwards, is not so much envy, or the primogeniture itself, nor even lack of reflection. If what God wants is lambs, Cain could have exchanged thousands of lettuces for one lamb, and thus made an acceptable sacrifice. The text encloses a theme rather less simple than a comfortable or mythical mind might see at first. It is anticipating the "meek" sacrifice of Isaac, and all sacrifices and their meaning up until the time when their "méconnaissance"<sup>4</sup> is revealed once and for all time in the one unique meek lamb, the definitive Abel, the exemplary Isaac, the Enoch—the man—in the last sacrifice which could still be governed by that ignorance which was in no way innocent. Cain, like Barrabas, exemplifies love of violence, egoism, self-love, the need to conserve his patrimony won by the hard labor of tilling the soil. He allows himself to be carried away by a mimetic contagion, by the demand of retributive human justice. He has not entered into the dynamic of the free gift. Like Barabbas, he believes in the balancing power of violence.

Jacob disguises himself with a lambskin so as to deceive Isaac and appear as his hirsute brother. But this is not a simply lyrical gesture. Jacob will be that meek lamb when he comes back from Haran and prostrates himself before his brother, the same as his father had experienced in Mount Moriah, with his hands tied—as the targum says—intoning an *Aqedah*, "bind me," which impeded him from resisting the sacrifice.

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<sup>3</sup> In this this type of anthropological exegesis. I am following Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*.

<sup>4</sup> Girard understands by "méconnaissance" that form of human thought which tends to hide from itself what causes it scandal to recognize, namely: the criminal origin of all human culture: *I know, but don't want to understand*.

From the two brothers who try to involve Jesus as judge in a dispute over what their father has left them, or the parable of the prodigal son, passing by the sons (who have all the characteristics of twins, without in fact being twins) of the women who quarrel over the living baby before Solomon,<sup>5</sup> to the rivalry between the other disciples and the sons of Zebedee, we have an idea of how paradigmatic this passage of scripture is meant to be, in which a different end of the story is sought to the one common in mythology. In the face of violent sacrifice, vengeful, vindicating, doing justice as the only way out, there is the meekness of the sacrifice which Isaac inaugurates allegorically as a messianic prefiguration.

### Jacob and Esau

The story of these two brothers seems similar to that of Eteocles and Polynices. However, leaving aside the differentiating nuances within the similarity, the narrative starts to bring out a series of fundamental differences which make of the story something unique in the stories of fraternal relationships.

In Genesis 32,33 we find ourselves with an intriguing, not to say mysterious, text in which a man has a mystical encounter with the absolutely Other. Jacob is the name of the protagonist in the story. The text expresses the importance of this enigmatic personage, son of Isaac and father of Joseph. He is the patriarch from whom Israel will derive its name.

From the first moment the story is centered on the rivalry between the twin brothers. As it is recounted in Genesis 25,19-27, Jacob's life hangs inseparably from that of his brother Esau:

And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is thus, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came forth red, all his body like a hairy

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<sup>5</sup>See Girard, *Things Hidden from the Foundation of the World* (237-245). All the characteristics of similarity and difference are present: symmetry, rivalry between the women, and even the renunciation by one of them of the revindication which could take an innocent to his death, in detriment to her own life. She anticipates the *figura Christi* (Origen, St Jerome).

mantle; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob.

The first detail which springs to mind is that both are the fruit of a sterile womb<sup>6</sup> which experiences a supernatural action. From their time in the womb onwards these twins are locked in conflict. What in principle is presented as a present, a divine gift, where it is emphasized that life is gratuitous and cannot be appropriated by humans, is immediately the source of a mimetic conflict: envy, the search for an appropriated identity which is irreconcilable with the presence of the other.

Mimetic theory reminds us that at the origin of all rivalistic relationships there is a gesture of appropriation which immediately provokes another imitative gesture which generates an antagonistic mimesis. To lose the first place, the primogeniture, or any disputed privilege or significant object, leads to a chain of reciprocal and symmetrical actions which will lock the brothers, or rivals, against each other.

Already in their mother's womb they compete, fight and have discord; their mother, foreseeing that this will be an eternal source of conflictual rivalry, perceives the future as a curse, because of which she confesses that it is not worth living and consults Yahweh. The symmetry is total, with the tiny difference that one of them is the second to be born, is the "brother of the other." Just as when a child is defined by being introduced as the other child's brother, Jacob knows that his identity will forever depend on that of his brother, the first one to see the light of day. That is why even before coming out of the uterus he grabs the first born by the heel and tries to stop him coming out before him. Having the Other as a double of oneself belongs to the very being of the Other.

Even from the first chapter of Genesis Adam and Eve are not really presented as two Adams, or two equal beings: one comes from the other. God creates them one after the other, and creates them face to face, each before the other, each as a reflection of the image of the other; and both are then reflections of the image of the one who created them. Even the

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<sup>6</sup>An element repeated in numerous places in Scripture. from the patriarchal narratives onwards. See Gn 11.30; 17.12-22; 18.11; 29.31-35; Jdg 13.3; I Sam 1.2.5-6 and John the Baptist and Jesus (sterility carried to the extreme by the virginal conception).

Hebrew words joined together form the word Yahweh.<sup>7</sup> In the etymology of the word "Jacob" there is hidden a play of phonemes like "*aquev*" which means heel, and from which the word "*aqav*," to "heel under" or supplant, and "*Ya-aqov*," the supplanter, or one who kicks down, trickster or liar. "Maybe it is because he is called Jacob that he has supplanted me twice?" says Esau in Genesis 27,36. Something which for us may mean nothing, has for a Semite a great deal of importance because a name represents a substance, an essential reality united inextricably to that name, as if to the very nature of the person who bears it. Besides, this qualifier carries on through the prophetic tradition which leads Jeremiah to express the moral corruption of Israel with the expression "*kal-ach.aqov ya.aqov*," which might be translated or paraphrased as "it is essential to the nature of a brother to deceive, to 'jacob.'" This lasts as an image of what is negative in Is 43,27, and as a sign of how important it was for Israel's self-perception, it can be seen in Psalm 41,10 and 49,6 as well as Hosea 12,3-4. In John 1,47 even Jesus has recourse to this meaning when he refers to Nathanael by saying: "Behold a true Israelite, in whom there is no deception"—a phrase in which the word "Israelite" reminds us emphatically of the new name which Jacob will receive after the fight which he sustains with a mysterious being at the ford of Jabbok.

### **Two in one, or the disappearance of mimetic rivalry**

It is the truth of the self's own identity which is questioned in the relationship with a brother. One cannot define oneself except in respect of the other, as in every relationship of twins. The other is so far inside oneself that one cannot live without comparison, without defining one's own steps by calculating the steps of the other. Jacob is warned by his mother that Esau wants to kill him as soon as Isaac has died, such is his thirst for vengeance, fruit of being robbed of his birthright. He does not seem to think of anything other than that thirst in the twenty years which he spends in Haran.

That time is insufficient for Esau's rage to be calmed. It is lodged in his entrails as if since the day of his birth, it is part of him, his symmetry, his

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<sup>7</sup>While he was alone he was called Adam, from the earth ('*adamat*') from which he was taken. But since the help of woman was formed for him he was called male (*y<sup>^</sup>s*) and she female (*^sh*). Since both bear two letters of the divine name (YH) wrapping round their names, they are names which express the strength of God in the couple" (Fernandez)—but also the likeness and the completeness from their inseparability.



antagonist, his rival, his very being. While Jacob is in the house of Laban, Laban will "jacob" him (Gn 29-31), tinkering with the benefits and pact of mutual enrichment he has made with him. But God's promise of a country, Canaan, demands a return journey (Gen 28,3-4). In Genesis 27,41-45 the possibility of a return is recounted, which the midrashic genre will consider to be one of the most profound theological discoveries of Judaism: the *teshuvá*, the capacity for return, for repentance, for being born again, which in Jacob's case passes through reconciliation. During that return journey there are two important moments: the dream of the ladder at Bethel (Gn 28,10-22) and the struggle at the ford of Jabbok (Gn 32,23-33).

Both in his leaving the promised land and in his returning to it, Jacob's life is wrapped around with the mystery of God, and both happenings take place under the auspices of Jacob's conflictive relationship with his brother (Gn 28,17;31,42.53).

And the question which is raised for us is a moral one: Why did Jacob flee from Canaan? Because of the envious, mimetic hatred he had for his brother, or because it is not possible for a man to live in hatred? Why does Jacob make the inverse journey from that other Patriarch of Israel? Abraham had left Ur of Chaldea—in reality, Haran—with the son of his brother, Lot (Gn 12,1-5), and he comes to Canaan, while Jacob, who has to live, like Lot, with his uncle, leaves the land of Canaan to go to Haran, as if he were not suitable to live in that promised land until he has been reconciled to his brother.

So it seems to be, since his brother appears again on the scene as an obligatory stepping stone on the path of the return. Jacob had been obsessed by Esau, unable to let his presence go, whether in dreams, daily life or apparitions, to such an extent that Genesis provides rich details of the symmetry, of the face-to-face in the struggle at the ford of Jabbok.

"Face" is a term which expresses better than any other the reality of a confrontation. For two people to look at each other face to face is almost a provocation at the same time as it is a recognition, a perfect symmetry, reciprocity par excellence, where the other is our mirror, our antagonist, the one who can imitate our gestures while looking us straight in the eye, the one in whose imitative gestures we can recognize ourselves. Indeed, the word "face" (*panim*) appears seven times in the tale: Gn 32,4.17. 18.21 .22. 31; 33,10).

To be able to look on his brother face to face seems to be the only way of reconciliation (Gn 32.21-22), the condition of reaching forgiveness, which passes through The Place *Penuel* (face of God), the name which

Jacob will give to the place where the night-long struggle takes place. Even the geography will have to do with events and will be submitted to them. In the original Hebrew *panim* is repeated, undoubtedly because the sacred writer seeks to give it a profound meaning: "I will placate his *face* with the gift which goes before my *face*, and then I will be able to see his *face*, and perhaps he will give me a good *face*. And so he sent the gift before his *face* while he spent that night in the camp" (Gn 32,21-22).

The symmetrical repetition of the expressions *his face/my face* is pointed out by Girard in successive passages of scripture, as for example *her son/my son* in the passage of Solomon's judgment. The frequency is too notable to be arbitrary. Furthermore it is also present in the tale when reconciliation takes place: "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept the gift from my hand, now that I have seen your *face* as one sees the *face* of God and you have shown me kindness" (Gen 33,10). It is a commonplace of scripture that to see the face of God is synonymous with death. Moses could only see God's nether parts, or a burning bush, and who could stay alive after seeing the radiant face of God? A human cannot bear the resplendent gaze of the face of God without shrivelling up, or being burned, if he were to stay alive: Ex 34,29-35 (See also Ex 3,6; 20,18-21; 33,18-20; Lv 16,2; Nm 4,17-20; Dt 5,23-27; 18,16; Jdg 13,17-23; Ex 3,13; 4,24-36; 33,11.18-23; 34,5-9.29-35; Nm 20,12-13; Dt 1,37; 3,26; 32,50-52; Nm 12,1-10; Dt 34,10; etc).

Jacob contemplates the face of his brother as if it were that of God. The other is God for a human. Thus to cause an offence to any human is like throwing stones at the face of God. If the gaze of the other, his eyes, show me kindness, or fellow feeling, it is also God who is thus looking at me. To "lift up my eyes," to see God in the face of the other is the *sine qua non* of reconciliation. No longer are there two faces but one alone, which reflects the same image, the same identity, God himself.

To see in the other the traces of the face of God is to see oneself, image of the very same God. But before Jacob reaches this point with Esau there will come the central part of this story, the face-to-face struggle with God himself, "*panim. El panim*" (Gn 32,31):

The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as

he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Tell me, I pray, your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his thigh. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh on the sinew of the hip. (Gen 32, 23-33)

The veil in which the text is shrouded continues over the mysterious personage: is it a man or a god, or both at once?<sup>8</sup> Who begins the struggle? Why is it that as it develops no one is really the winner, but at the end it is Jacob who asks to be blessed, as a subject asks? Why is it that the one who had laid hold of his brother's leg so as to trip him up, be a stumbling block, now suffers in his own leg the stigma of limping?

The verb which is used to say that he has remained grasping the leg of the winner (God or human) is "*avaq*"—difficult to translate since it is a *hapax*—but it is assonantal with *Jabboq* and *Ya-aqov*. What is most important is that it allows us to deduce that it is a body-to-body fight, mediated only by pure corporal strength, as can only happen with fetuses constrained within the womb.

The ford respects the near homophony *Jabboq*, as does the gesture of grabbing and not letting go—to love and to hug without loosing in Hebrew: *hb*,/ *.hbq* (Gen 34,12; Hos 3,2; Song 8,7; Prov 4,6-9). Moreover, Jacob comes out of the waters of the ford "baptized" with a compound name which leaves no room for doubt: God is the brother of Ishrael—his rival and his companion.<sup>9</sup>

A difficult, but obligatory, place of passage, the ford serves as a bridge between the brothers, where the Jordan allows a crossing with water up to the waist, but by night the stones cannot be seen which would trip up

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<sup>8</sup> First it is called *ish* (v 25) then *EL*: In v 31 it is not clear whether it is God. and in vv 29-30 both realities are confused.

<sup>9</sup>The translations vary: it could be literally "strong against God," or might be man (*ish*) companion (*ra*) of God (*El-ohim*). Interpretations within the Bible include Hosea 12.5 "God shows himself strong" or also "He has been strong against God."

anyone who tried the crossing, in order to arrive in the land of Canaan. It is a pass which opens into the valley which leads to Sichem. There is the well where Jacob had seen Rachel. Joseph will pass by there looking for his brothers. All in all, it turns out to be a careful route of return, of searching for himself, of reconciliation with himself first, with his brother afterwards, and finally with the mysterious being who chose him from his birth. That is why he asks him what he is called.

To give a name is to become master of the being of the other, to baptize him is to make him be born again, now with no twin, without being two. Doubleness has become unity. No longer will he be called Jacob, the prevaricator, the liar, the trickster, but Israel because "you have been strong against God and against men, and you have vanquished him."

Now there is no doubt that the struggle which every man wages throughout his existence is not against men, nor against himself, but against God. When one finds Him, those subterfuge combats, those representations, dissipate, and it becomes clear that it is with God that every man fights. "He called that place *Penuel*. For, he said, I have seen God face to face and lived."

Jacob becomes the Scriptural paradigm of the human problem. Every person defies his rival, and the only rival worthy of man is God himself. No human is a worthy antagonist.

Even though it doesn't appear explicitly, the force of the biblical Satan which, according to Girard, is shown in a mimetic logical sophism which consists in "making one believe that he doesn't exist," is indeed also present in Esau: "it is better to avenge oneself than to cease to avenge oneself." He cannot forget for so long a period of time his brother's slight, and turns the consummation of his revenge in his life's objective.

The greatness of the Jacob paradigm consists in that he has been tempted to think that he had a right to the primogeniture, but when he saw that that attitude took away his peace, the honey of reconciliation, he stopped and thought, was strong, recognized the superiority of the other, and humbled himself.

That resentment leaves him lame, shows him his weakness, that he is a creature and not the creator. If he had wanted to keep his face before men, not bowing to anybody, there would remain no sign of that titanic struggle, like the tau of Cain—nor a trace of weakness, but the pyrrhic crown of self-divinization, of an always unsatisfied Prometheus fighting gods of flesh and blood, of a tirelessly hardworking Sisyphus kept alive by the senselessness

of wanting to prove to himself that he is alone in the task of climbing hills loaded with reasons for doing what he is doing.

Jacob has conquered himself, rather than that God of the Jabboq, by yielding his pride. Jacob has understood that his aggressor is God, and at the same time the pain of realizing that he is the usurper, the trickster. The confession of a fault always leaves traces, wounds, identifying signs of what happened in that fratricidal struggle: Jacob's femur was dislocated, just as Oedipus limped.

Becoming a new man cost Jacob a limp, but it was worth it: he will be able to look at his brother face to face and bear his gaze, seeing in his face that of God, his own, that of any human.

Since he has been forgiven by God he knows that his brother is right, that he is a thief, and that his brother has the right to demand his humiliation, at the very least. With this attitude he implores his brother's forgiveness: the only guarantee is that he has lost the fear of death which the face of the Other provoked in him, his freedom and his capacity—opened up by Cain—to kill.

If he is no longer afraid of God, whose mere face can give death, reconciliation will have to come in looking at the face. If the struggle was like a fetal coupling, the reconciliation will have to respect that symmetry with a reciprocal hug, the fusion of two brothers, as Jacob will do with Esau, as the Father will do in the parable of the prodigal son, going out to meet him, hugging him and lifting him from his prostration, as God did with Jacob: "And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming" (Gn 33:1). "He lifted up his eyes" as a subject has to do to contemplate a superior, and recognize that he is below him. He saw him before him and hurried ahead of the train bearing presents meant to soften the other's heart. Now there are no objects in dispute, now there are no goods nor a heritage as an object of a desire which spills forth in rivalry, in antagonism. Strategies are no longer any use, everything belongs to the Other, now they can look at each other without mediators, directly. The surprise is that the Other smells this attitude, gets ahead of it, dissipates the clouds of panic: "But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (Gen 33,4). Jacob prostrated himself seven times before his brother's feet, as a slave does, or a worshipper who reserves this gesture to be done only before God. The number seven expresses totality for Israel, not his weakness or his strategy. It is even more paradoxical, because this gesture would be unthinkable in a Hebrew. And "seven" refers back to the vengeance of Cain and Lamech.

To prostrate oneself before a human as should only be done before God is a motive for scandal (Dan 3,12-18; 6,11-17—a passage in which to idolatry a man with this sort of gesture is to deny the greatness of God), but that is not Jacob's intention: "If I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favor have you received me" (Gen 33,10).

This biblical text leads us beyond solidarity: the debt which we had contracted with the other has been "paid off" by the Other, and now there are no more commitments, wages to pay back, things unduly appropriated with the concomitant risk of interminable conflict. Jacob doesn't need the gifts which go before him: "But Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself'" (Gen 33,9). No need here for strategies of begging forgiveness:

And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now; and I have oxen, asses, flocks, menservants, and maidservants; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.'" (Gen 32, 3-5)

His brother's forgiveness turns him into his slave, he gives himself totally to him. But here is the paradox: now there is no need for sacrifice. Reconciliation presents no struggle: "So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir" (Gen 33,16)—Se'ar—like unto a coat of skins—on his way to Edom.

According to some exegetes Esau means "made," "perfected," "finished"—which would tie in with "first born," but it is his adjectives which best define him: he was also called "ruddy"—*'admoni*—with all his wives and children, living in peace on the lands bordering those of his brother.

There are no disputes reflected onto objects, nor territories, nor birthrights: the lentils—"Let me eat some of that red pottage, for I am famished!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.)" (Gen 25,30)—which symbolically cost him his birthright are now given back to him in the form of somewhere he can live in peace—the reddish land of

Edom—'*ádom*—ruddy—(also blood, *dam*).<sup>10</sup> These word games for a Semite express essences; names, I repeat, are never gratuitous.

Esau's story, however, remains semi-obscure, and that obscurity gives us an idea of his non-innocence. The art of hunting is, according to Ibn Ezra, that of astuteness and deceit. How can this Rabbi attribute deceitful wiles to Esau? By going to the real basis of the text: "And Isaac loved Esau because he brought him food." But the biblical text says literally: "And Isaac loved Esau because he (had, bore) prey in his mouth." If it were to say "to his mouth." But no, it says *in* his mouth. The grammatical obscurity is apparent: in whose mouth? The logical reply is *in Esau's mouth*. And Isaac loved Esau because there (was) prey (deceit) in his (Esau's) mouth. Isaac's love is no longer a compensatory love—since Rachel loved Jacob, a possible source of non-culpable rivalry, the affective division of the parents—is not a repayment for Esau's good behavior, but it is a love provoked by wiliness and deceit, of the son who showed himself correct and honest before his father, so as to distinguish himself from Jacob the sidewinder. Isaac loved him because he ought to be loved, out of rivalry and the symmetry of parental affection.

However there is more in the story of Esau because the next time he is mentioned, it is emphasized that he has reached the age of forty and taken for wife the daughter of Beerli the Hittite and Bosmat the daughter of Elon the Hittite. The forty years seem to remind us of Isaac who married at the age of forty with Rebecca the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Padan Arath, sister of Laban the Aramean.

Esau marries in emulation, imitating the perfection of his paternal model, but with the difference that he establishes his bonds with the daughters of the Hittites: the same but different. A model but also a rival from whom he must uncouple, and which carries with it a spiritual uncoupling. To marry outside the clan is to worship other idols, to change models. One cannot adore strange gods who take one away from the promise of a Land.

The rivalry is extended starting from this gesture to the two peoples, as had been prophesied in Rebecca's womb. History will avenge Esau's tears shed on losing his birthright, for even though the brothers live in peace after their reconciliation, Mordechai—of Jacob's line—too will have to give

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<sup>10</sup>It is not gratuitous that the association with blood is made, because Esau's determination to spill his brother's blood is firm and explicit. Rebecca says to Jacob: "Esau, your brother, consoles himself with the idea of killing you." Esau revives the spirit of Cain.

"a great and bitter shout" because of Haman, of the line of Esau, who was on the point of exterminating the Jews of Persia, as retold in the book of Esther.

However let us continue with the other line, the one which will come through Jacob. Let us not stop so much with the foundational act of the people—Israel—following the strictest mythological tradition, but with the fact that Jacob doesn't kill in order to found. The victory is not so much against a man, which would be the beginning of an unending vengeance, as against God, who brings the fight to an end, and with it the antagonism, and empowers reconciliation. It is because of this that Jacob will no longer be called Jacob:<sup>11</sup> "Henceforth you will be called not Jacob but *Israel*, because you have been strong against God and against men, and have overcome *him*" (Gen 32,29). And at this point God loses his name, doesn't say it when Jacob asks it of him. It doesn't matter, that piece of iconoclasm has its meaning. God will be in the Place, in the Bethel of *peni'el*—Penuel—the place where God is seen face to face, where not only God but at the same time every "other" is fought against, but only God is overcome, not other men. God is the place, and the place is the visage of each human to whom we must face up: "Jacob asked him: Please tell me your name—Why do you ask my name? And he blessed him there. Jacob called that place Penuel" (Gen 32, 29-30).

### **The originality of the biblical account**

At the beginning we observed an unmistakable case of mimetic rivalry, in which the model, Esau, is threatened by an imitation which takes its desiring subject, Jacob, to the extreme of supplanting him.

The dispute for the object—the birthright—turns them into antagonists. The attempt at supplanting, or "jacobing," is such that Jacob, led on by his mother, disguises himself as Esau in order to fool his father. But over time, and contrary to the outcome expected in the light of other myths and tales of this type and contemporary to it, we don't witness the physical death of the other. Perhaps an ontic death—he was indeed robbed of being, blessing and birthright—but there is a way back here: if reconciliation occurs, the lost terrain can be made up.

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<sup>11</sup>There are other interpretations. See De Vaux, or better still Michaud. It seems to be a question of two different people, Jacob and Israel, who afterwards meld together as if they belong to the same tradition and were in fact the same person, but for our present purpose, of anthro-theological investigation, the effect is the same.



After that combat, in which one of them learnt the utter pointlessness of all rivalry for objects—"The imbecilic genesis of blood-soaked idols"—in which one of them gives up his pretensions for mimetic supplanting, both obtain the reward: blessing as peace, the birthright as land, reconciliation as the first step to peaceful coexistence. The possibility of giving to the other has not brought about the self-destruction of the one giving, but has led to the emergence of both of them, now exempt from rivalry. Brotherhood can be discovered without mimetic reciprocity. This aspect is simply unheard of in the history of mythic thought as also in that of historiographic tales.

This is one of the most important things which makes Old Testament discourse original and genuine in the face of myths and legends contemporary to it. In the face of the sacrificial ending, pregnant with blood, generator of a spurious social order, an ephemeral peace, the biblical account allows reconciliation, liberation from rivalry by the self-giving of one of the participants.

It proposes a solution which goes beyond the innumerable list of "blood-soaked idols," of mythological heroes stoned, sacrificed and then sacralized, which are found in the root of all the myths "of origin," of all religions and of all ethnological legends.

### **The continuation of the story in that of Joseph and his brothers**

Chapter 50 of Genesis recapitulates the whole book. In it we are told that the Canaanites watched on as the Egyptians, including their highest notables, turned out to accompany Joseph to bury Jacob, and they said to themselves: "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians" (Gn 50, 11b). Not so much to emphasize the figure of Joseph as to call attention, by means of a word game, to an important aspect (if we may be allowed the exegetic license), which might escape the less attentive reader. For immediately it is explained that "for this reason that place is called Abel Mitzrayim, which is beyond Jordan." The fact is that mourning ('ebel) and field ('abel) contain an explicit pointer to the reader to notice that the story started by Cain and Abel has found a solution in another "duel" among brothers, in which it has not been necessary for one to die in order for a new social order to come about. Jacob will be the witness, also posthumously, on being buried in a strange land—in a clear reminder of Abel—that there is hope for humanity, that one can stay in "Egypt" with a sense of security, because quarrels among brothers can have a pacific

solution.<sup>12</sup> This passage seems to recapitulate the beginning of human society based on a crime, but with a pointer towards a different solution. Let us follow its development:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil which we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, 'Say to Joseph, Forgive, I pray you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. (Gen 50,15-17)

The brothers undergo the same anguish which they inflicted on Joseph in the well, because there is no sin which remains unpunished. But before *them* a new perspective opens up. The way in which human societies deal with sin is to put it right, they think, by vengeance. The interpretative key, which tells us of the novelty of the Judaeo-Christian in the face of other forms of thought or of religion, resides in the originality of conflict resolution, and which becomes the gateway to an authentic humanism.

So others can cease to be what Sartre called them—hell—if one gives up being the god of others to become instead their brother. Behind the "fraternité" of the enlightenment there is a hidden murder. For that reason Joseph doesn't want to be god for his brothers, with a capacity to take vengeance, to do justice for himself, to judge his brothers who doubtless "worked in ignorance" of the mechanisms which pushed them towards murderous envy: "But Joseph said to them, 'Fear not, for am I in the place of God?'" (Gen 15,19).

The human community, represented by the brothers, perceives that an ideal victim, as Joseph had been, now raised up, after having passed

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<sup>12</sup>When the cortège is about to bury Jacob, Gen 50.8b says "Only their little ones, their flocks and their herds did they leave in the land of Goshen." And at v 21 Joseph repeats emphatically something somewhat similar to what the narrator had said: "So, do not fear. I will provide for you and your little ones." The Jerusalem Bible, in a footnote, recognizes the importance of the apparently insignificant term "little ones" when it points out that "the hebrew term surely has here and at other places a fuller meaning: those who cannot stand up for themselves, children and the elderly." Those who, according to Girard's theory, are universally pointed towards as ideal victims for the expiatory vengeance of human societies because they can't defend themselves. They need a defense lawyer. Joseph appears to be that defense lawyer who anticipates the figures of the Paraclete (defense counsel), and which fulfills what is testified in John 17.11.

through the "sacrifice" of the well, imprisonment, successive stereotypical accusations, holder of a divine power (attested to by his gifts as a diviner), might legitimately exercise vengeance (Rm 12,19; Lev 19,18; Dt 32,35; Prov 25,21-22). But Joseph doesn't allow himself to be divinized, he is only a man, and that power belongs only to God. This situates things in a new perspective, unimaginable for the myths contemporary to it: it rejects the propensity of human communities for making gods of their victims.

For that reason, when the brothers realize that to sustain themselves on the old order, that of reciprocity, of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, is to be exposed to interminable violence, they go and prostrate themselves before Joseph:

His brothers also came and fell down before him, and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he reassured them and comforted them....And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die; but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." (Gen 50, 18-21,24)

Joseph breaks the hermetic circle of human reason (returning evil for evil) by freely offering forgiveness, and, in his death, a new paternity which will watch over the security and continuation of this numerous people. He promises a future in which there will be no place for fear, and he reminds them of the key which is that, in the face of the evil which they can cause each other, there should not be multiplied the pain which comes from the thirst for vengeance: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

For this new social order with which the book of Genesis ends, there is now no need for victims, nor foundational crimes, as the surrounding myths had accustomed us. The story of Joseph demythologizes the founding violence of the precarious order of the cities, because everything which is based on that violence is condemned to repeat the same origin in an interminable form. A new father assumes Jacob's inheritance. Genesis ends with the universal reconciliation of the human family, represented in the family of Jacob, who, besides, is buried in the gentile, Canaanite, field...of Abel.

The book of Genesis ends by making an appeal to universal good sense, to reconciliation, even if it be only unilateral, because it has discovered the false key which sustains the human universe: though they are discovered, murderers are not less convinced that their "sacrifices are worthy" and that their violent solutions to conflicts are the only ones possible for the good of the community. In the end this false key turns out to be true, but ephemeral. Joseph's death, had it been premature, would have truncated the history of Israel. His sacrifice in the well would have aborted a wondrous history of self-giving, of dedication and voluntary self-sacrifice for the good of the other. A path of lanterns lighting up what the Messiah will do in a definitive way.

In Jesus creation and eschatology coincide: his "it is accomplished" (*tetelestai*) gives striking witness to his being conscious of inaugurating a new Shabat, an eternal one, of fulfilling the promises, and of creation being opened up, in a continuous act of giving birth, to the persecuted children of God whom he interprets and consummates in himself.

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## ***THE GREAT GATSBY:* ROMANCE OR HOLOCAUST?**

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In an otherwise appreciative response to *The Great Gatsby*, H. L. Mencken expressed a reservation about the plot of the novel, which he characterized as "no more than a glorified anecdote" (Claridge 156). Writing to Edmund Wilson, Fitzgerald suggested, in turn, that what Mencken did not find in *Gatsby* was "any emotional backbone at the very height of it" (Turnbull 342). Critics of the novel, however, have tended to overlook the self-evident fact that the novel's ostensible emotional center—the reunion between Gatsby and Daisy—does not possess sufficient significance to justify the classic status that has been largely accorded to Fitzgerald's novel. We need only remember Daisy's effusive appreciation of Gatsby's "beautiful shirts," or the even more telling detail that the truly "romantic" moments in Daisy and Gatsby's relationship all occurred several years earlier in Louisville and that the period of the reunion is scarcely mentioned in the novel to convince ourselves that the putative grandeur of Gatsby's dream does not adequately account for the novel's power or its lasting significance.

Reading *Gatsby* as a novel about its hero's dream makes of it, in fact, a precarious literary achievement, one whose numerous absurdities were perceptively delineated by the English novelist L.P. Hartley, who admired Fitzgerald's literary gifts but thought that he had squandered them in *Gatsby*. In a 1926 review of the novel, Hartley offered the following summary of its plot:

An adventurer of shady antecedents builds a palace at a New York seaside resort, entertains on a scale which Lucullus would have marveled at but could not have approved, and spends untold sums of money, all to

catch the eye of his one time sweetheart, who lives on an island opposite, unhappily but very successfully married. At last, after superhuman feats of ostentation and display, the fly walks into the web. A train of disasters follows, comparable in quantity and quality with the scale of the Great Gatsby's prodigies of hospitality. Coincidence leaps to the helm and throws a mistress under a motor-car. The car does not stop, which, all things considered, is the most natural thing that happens in the book. An injured husband finds the Great Gatsby in suicidal mood sitting on a raft in his artificial lake and (apparently) forestalls him; anyhow they are both discovered dead. The elder Gatsby is unearthed and gives a pathetic account of his son's early years. All the characters behave as though they were entitled to grieve over a great sorrow, and the book closes with the airs of tragedy. (Claridge 178)

Minor inaccuracies aside, this must be among the most cogent, disabused responses that the plot of *The Great Gatsby* has ever received. It is such a welcome antidote to the reams of interpretation of the novel produced by critics who, dutifully aping Nick Carraway in this respect, have allowed their conviction as to Gatsby's "greatness" to be matched only by their equally adamant certainty as to the moral tawdriness of Tom and Daisy Buchanan. As Hartley's exasperated summary reminds us, *The Great Gatsby*, read as the account of the eponymous hero's dream, simply cannot support the weight of morally serious interpretation that it would like to invite or that so many of its critics, in their turn, would like to bestow upon it.<sup>1</sup>

Nor do we move any closer to appreciating the greatness of *Gatsby* by shifting our attention to the growth in moral awareness that countless critics have attributed to Nick Carraway, whose self-evaluation as "one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (64) should in itself arouse our suspicions.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, the fruits of Nick's presumed moral education

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<sup>1</sup>The seemingly indestructible resistance to Hartley's lucidity that has been displayed by the great majority of the novel's critics may be observed in the chapter that Jeffrey Hart devotes to *Gatsby* in his recently published *Smiling Through the Cultural Catastrophe*. Arguing that "magical transformation" is the novel's true subject (230), Hart credits Nick with achieving an "epiphany" whereby he recognizes Gatsby's superiority to "the whole damn bunch put together" (238) and concludes that the larger significance of the novel rests with its affirmation that "the transforming imagination is immortal" (239).

<sup>2</sup>The possibility of interpreting Nick's moral vision as the central feature of the novel was recognized from the beginning by Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald's editor, who, in his letter of 20 November 1924, praised the author for choosing a narrator "who is more of a spectator

amount to little more than a self-serving mystification. Likewise, his inchoate effort to express the significance of his story is far less convincing than the truly profound insight into the hollowness of Gatsby's romantic dream that he *inadvertently* gives us when making the passing remark that Gatsby loved Daisy because she was the most desirable prize in the eyes of all the other young men of Louisville. This remark allows us to glimpse a truth that Nick perceives only dimly: Gatsby's desire for Daisy was induced in him by the desires of men, such as Tom Buchanan, whose social status made them the arbiters of desirability. Tom, in other words, is not simply a rival who arrives inconveniently on the scene at some later point to contest a prize that Gatsby had already chosen on his own; he is, rather, the model of a desire that Gatsby has merely borrowed. For this reason, the story of his infatuation with Daisy is as "plagiaristic" as were the revelations of the young men by whom Nick was besieged during his student days.<sup>3</sup>

Nick, however, resists recognizing the borrowed quality of Gatsby's desire, and tries, rather, to locate the "emotional backbone" of his story in Gatsby's so-called "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (6). At the end of his narrative, Nick evokes the image of the Dutch sailors as they arrived in the New World. However, in a move whose strangeness has completely escaped critical attention, he identifies this *group* of sailors with the *solitary figure* of Gatsby at the moment "when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock" (189). However, a more logical, as well as more revealing, association, would have been between the

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than an actor." According to Perkins, "[t]his puts the reader upon a point of observation on a higher level than that on which the characters stand" (Kuehl and Bryer 82). J.S. Westbrook develops this idea by attributing a central structural significance to Nick's point of view in his argument that "[t]o understand the unity of *The Great Gatsby* we must first recognize that its primary subject is the growth of an awareness. The awareness belongs to the narrator, Nick Carraway, who not only enjoys the advantages of distance in time from the events he relates, but even at the scene of their unfolding has been more of a perceiver than a protagonist" (Claridge 265).

<sup>3</sup>My allusion here to the ambiguous role of a character who is, at one and the same time, both an admired model and an invincible rival and the related suggestion that Gatsby's seemingly spontaneous and original desires are, in fact, "plagiaristic," are intended to acknowledge from the outset my indebtedness to René Girard's work as a constant touchstone not only for this essay but also for the study of modernist fiction of which it is a part. Later discussions of the "all against one" motif, of *Gatsby* as the staging of a sacrificial ritual, and of ritual violence as a solution to the problem of male rivalry likewise reflect indispensable reference to mimetic theory.

community of sailors and the "excited young officers from Camp Taylor"(79) who were also pursuing Daisy during that summer in Louisville. Having missed this opportunity to highlight the mimetic implications of the celebrated image with which his narrative concludes, Nick credulously invites his readers to contemplate a pristine, non-rivalistic world in which an unproblematic object "commensurate to the [human] capacity for wonder" (189), such as Gatsby thought that he had found in Daisy, did once exist. He thus fails to point our attention to the inextricable connection between Gatsby's own "capacity for wonder" and the male rivalry that necessarily subtends it.

Recognizing that Gatsby's fate is essentially that of a man whose model, in the form of Tom Buchanan, has also become his rival will lead us to the further discovery of the degree to which Nick Carraway, far from clarifying, has actually obscured the central moral truth of his story. Furthermore, as we shall eventually see, the Nick Carraway whom Fitzgerald shows us at the end of the novel, far from being the reliable observer that he presents himself as being, is as morally obtuse and ethically blameworthy as any of the characters whom he subjects to his self-serving judgments.<sup>4</sup>

The traditional assumption—that the essential significance of *Gatsby* rests either with the magnificence of Gatsby's dream or the lucidity of Nick's understanding that it must be renounced—ignores the fact that both the emotional impact of the novel and its moral complexity arise primarily from the sacrificial ritual that it stages. Gatsby, whom Nick idealizes as a romantic hero, is, more pertinently to the pattern of events in the novel, also a scapegoat figure. Not only does he, in the most obvious, sacrificial way, die in place of Daisy Buchanan. As importantly, he is, throughout the novel, the surrogate through whom Nick will experience romantic

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<sup>4</sup>For an intelligent, although, in my view, not finally persuasive defense of Nick as a reliable narrator whose growth in moral judgement is the novel's true center. see E. Fred Carlisle. "The Triple Vision of Nick Carraway." Adopting a somewhat different line of reasoning, Jeffrey Hart comes to a similarly positive conclusion about Nick's development. For Hart, Nick, who had appeared to be irredeemably "banal" throughout the novel, is "moved to completely unexpected eloquence.... an operatic prose aria" in the novel's concluding paragraphs, an achievement that Hart interprets as proving that "This new and lyrical Nick must have found his voice only through his total experience of Jay Gatsby" (238-239).



adventures vicariously while avoiding their potentially lethal consequences.<sup>5</sup>

Intimations of this pattern may be noted as early as the opening pages of the novel. Nick begins his narrative with several allusions to his own insecurities. His first sentence, for example, refers to his "younger and more vulnerable years." He then alludes to his having been made the "victim of not a few veteran bores" and having been "unjustly accused of being a politician" (5). The role of victim, however, is almost immediately transferred to Gatsby, whom Nick describes on the following page as the target of his own "unaffected scorn" and as "preyed on," and ultimately destroyed, by the "foul dust that floated in the wake of his dreams" (6).

As we shall see, the novel itself actually records the *success* of a dream, which—while glimpsed much less directly than Gatsby's—generates, not only most of Nick Carraway's commentary, but also most of the actual events of the novel. Gatsby's romantic dream, of reliving the past with Daisy, will fail. However, Nick Carraway's dream—of maintaining his position of moral superiority by transferring the responsibility for desires and actions that would compromise the inviolability of his self-image—succeeds thoroughly. In this respect, Nick proves himself to be a worthy descendant of the founder of his family, a great uncle who, as he ingenuously informs us, "sent a substitute to the Civil War" (7).

The novel itself is replete with details that suggest that Nick, far from being the detached moral observer that he would like us to see in him, is as driven (albeit furtively) by his passions as is Gatsby. This is clearly implied by the famous passage where Nick, responding to Gatsby's description of walking with Daisy on a summer's evening in Louisville, finds within himself a mirroring emotion: "Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago" (118).

Nick does not elaborate on this incomplete epiphany because the words that are about to be spoken disappear and "what I had almost remembered

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<sup>5</sup>Frances Kerr offers an intriguing and well-argued analysis of the gender anxiety (in particular, the fear of having his romantic, feminine side exposed) that Nick displaces upon Gatsby. She then pertinently describes the climactic scene in the Plaza Hotel as one in which Gatsby "is publicly feminized by Tom Buchanan" (418), without, however, relating these insights to the underlying scapegoating pattern to which they point.

was uncommunicable forever." He does, however, provide a strikingly revelatory image of himself in a much less noticed passage in the novel that points unmistakably to his desire to conceal illicit passions:

I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and *no one would ever know or disapprove*. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. (61; my emphasis)

This passage—while commented on much less frequently than those that evoke Gatsby's dream or demonstrate Nick's presumed moral awareness—expresses with unmistakable conviction the emotional backbone with which Fitzgerald thought he had failed to provide *Gatsby*. Every important detail of the novel—its principal events as well as Nick's commentary—is constructed upon the remarkably firm foundation that it gives to Fitzgerald's novel. It points to a much profounder achievement than we find when we focus either on Gatsby's romantic quest to "gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (117) as the putative origin of events or on Nick's discovery that the "orgiastic future...year by year recedes before us" (189) as the concluding moral insight to which it leads its readers. With Gatsby as his go-between Nick will indeed enter the life of a "romantic" woman in a way that, while arguably meriting moral censure, will, with few exceptions, incite only respect and admiration on the part of the novel's countless readers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>One of the most impressive exceptions to this rule is Judith Fetterley, who rightly accuses Nick of a tendentious readiness to apply a double standard that consistently works to the disfavor of female characters, turning them effectively into the novel's preferred scapegoats. However, the feminist perspective that permits Fetterley to demystify decades of obtuse commentary on the novel by male critics, limits her criticism of Nick Carraway to his "male chauvinism." The Nick who is willing to make *any* character in the novel a complicitous actor in the plot that he has designed to confirm his moral superiority thus escapes her otherwise penetrating critique. Fetterley's focus on Nick's presumably exclusive choice of female victims of discredited male romantic fantasies leads to her egregious insistence that Gatsby is not treated as a scapegoat in the novel as well as to her largely negative final judgment of *Gatsby* itself, to which she denies its "much touted universality" because this consists finally in its fictional representation of "[T]he structures of the romantic

Towards the end of the novel, not only Gatsby, but also Tom and Daisy, will be enlisted as Nick's surrogates. Thus, Nick will project upon Gatsby, in the moments immediately preceding his death, the ultimate spiritual agony of contemplating the destruction of his romantic dream: "He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass" (169). Gatsby "must" think such thoughts before he dies—even if the rhetorical flourish that conveys them cannot really be attributed to him with any plausibility—because, fundamentally, his role is to take upon himself a shattering experience that would otherwise have been Nick's.

Similarly, Tom and Daisy will be punished for a tragic outcome that could have been equally blamed on Nick's own behavior. When Tom thought that he was about to lose both Myrtle and Daisy, Nick imagines him to be suffering "the hot whips of panic" (131). After Gatsby's death, he then subjects both Tom and Daisy to a verbal scourging in the presence of his readers: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...." (188). This pillorying of Tom and Daisy (who are not, to be sure, blameless) artfully deflects attention from the contribution that Nick himself may have made to Gatsby's downfall.

Nick's mythologizing explanations aside, Gatsby's dream fails in actual fact because two of its principal figures choose not to play the roles that he has assigned to them: Daisy will not leave her husband for Gatsby nor will Tom passively acquiesce in the plans that Gatsby has made for her. These same characters, however, do play the roles that Nick has chosen for them: Gatsby will act upon the guilty desires that Nick could acknowledge only at the cost of losing his moral advantage; he will then take upon himself the punishment that Nick would have suffered had these desires been discovered; at the time of his death, Tom and Daisy will behave in a sufficiently repellent fashion to sustain the burden of moral guilt that Nick transfers to them. Finally, nearly all of the guests who took advantage of Gatsby's hospitality during the summer betray him by failing to attend his funeral, thus leaving Nick—who confides to us that he "began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against

them all" (173)—with the deeply flattering image of himself as Gatsby's lone faithful standard-bearer.

While bringing Gatsby's dream to a tragic conclusion, Fitzgerald has, in other words, given Nick Carraway precisely the outcome that he himself desired. Of course, since Nick's dream is fulfilled he never has to face the shattering moment of moral insight that he projects upon Gatsby, whereby the latter, just before George Wilson murders him, finally realizes that "he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream" (169). Nick will portentously conclude that his story amounts to a monitory lesson that the "orgiastic future" of wish-fulfillment is irrevocably lost in the past.

However, with an irony that entirely escapes him, it actually proves the contrary: his dream of concealing morally compromising behavior can, indeed, be achieved on condition that other people be made to pay the price. Gatsby, Tom and Daisy must bear the burden of the guilty desires that Nick can only fleetingly acknowledge because they would require a painful reassessment of his moral nature. Thanks to their cooperative behavior, Nick's dream—of confirming through his own example the validity of his father's observation that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth" (6)—remains intact. He subsequently invites readers of his tendentious narrative to contribute to the sustaining of his own self-aggrandizing legend. Thus, the Nick Carraway that we see at the end of the novel is little different from the callow undergraduate who, by his own admission, devoted himself to the writing of "a series of very solemn and obvious editorials for the 'Yale News'" (8).

Generations of readers have almost unanimously ratified the distinction that Nick would like to maintain between such "careless" people as Tom and Daisy and such a fundamentally "honest" person as himself. Nick's actual behavior, however, tends to undermine rather than confirm this distinction. He does, after all, join Daisy and Tom in contributing at the inquest to the cover-up of the real circumstances of Myrtle Wilson's death. He further guarantees that Gatsby's death will indeed bring a return to peacetime "normalcy" by refusing to enlighten Tom Buchanan on this same subject. Likewise his return to the Midwest replicates Tom and Daisy's retreat from a catastrophe for which all three are responsible. Surprisingly, however, neither Nick nor the vast majority of his readers recognize in him the mirror image of the couple upon whom he has chosen to impute the entire guilt.

In his 1989 study of *Gatsby*, Richard Lehan assembled a number of comments by critics that illustrate the virtually unchallenged success that Nick's rhetorical ploy has enjoyed since the novel's publication in 1925. Marius Bewley, for example, denounces Daisy for her "vicious emptiness," Robert Ornstein finds her "criminally amoral" and Alfred Kazin characterizes her as "vulgar and inhuman." Lehan singles out Tom Buchanan as an object of contempt in his denunciation of the sad fact that sacrificial victims must die in order that "the Buchanan way of life can go on." He then extends this condemnation to an entire social class in his affirmation that the rich "are the ultimate source of romantic depletion" (79).

Giles Mitchell expands this list of moral pariahs to include Gatsby himself, in whom he detects the moral failings of a person who suffers from a narcissistic personality, a judgement that leads him to criticize Gatsby for a lack of moral discernment in his desire to marry the already-married Daisy: "There is no evidence in the novel that Gatsby feels any moral conflict about urging Daisy to marry him—to marry into a life supported by criminal activities....It is of crucial importance to note that Gatsby evinces no conscious sense of guilt for deceiving Daisy" (390). While plausible as far as it goes, Mitchell's criticism of Gatsby could, for reasons that we have already discussed, be equally well applied to Nick Carraway, who deceives Daisy into thinking that he has invited her to his house in order to have tea with him and who, rather than evincing any reluctance, aggressively pursues arrangements for the adulterous relationship between Gatsby and Daisy. At no point in his disquisition on Gatsby's "morally devious" behavior, however, does Mitchell consider Nick's resemblance to Gatsby in this respect.

Yet another implicit exoneration of Nick's behavior occurs in Ernest Lockridge's essay "F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Trompe l'Oeil" and *The Great Gatsby's* Buried Plot." Lockridge's basic argument is that Nick "is not to be trusted in his judgments and interpretations" (163). He adduces any number of details from the novel that, in his view, Nick has misunderstood. These range from the relatively uncontroversial, such as the assertion that Nick is often deceived about himself, through the perceptive, such as that Daisy uses Gatsby to incite Tom's jealousy and a renewal of his marital fidelity, to the sensational, such as the assertion that Gatsby was murdered, not by George Wilson, but by order of Meyer Wolfsheim, who has been put "at great risk" by "Gatsby's indiscretion in flagrantly fooling around with another man's wife" (176). At no point in this seemingly exhaustive

analysis of the novel's covert plots, however, does Lockridge subject Nick to anything more than his initial misgivings as to his reliability. The judgments of all these critics tend, rather, to confirm Nick's success in imposing his dream of moral purity on the materials of his story, quite unlike *Gatsby* whose materials—particularly in the form of Tom and Daisy—proved to be ultimately recalcitrant. By directing their own moral condemnation exclusively toward the characters that Nick himself had preceded them in choosing as his scapegoats, they obediently speak the lines that he has given them.

Fitzgerald's rendering of scapegoating in *The Great Gatsby* is not, to be sure, limited to the behavior of his narrator. Rather, he places Nick's characteristic activity of transferring blame to others against the background of a human community that mirrors this procedure. Nick resorts to scapegoating in order to protect the self-esteem that he needs in order to fashion for himself a livable life; the community in which he lives finds in it, despite its moral dubiousness, the socially useful ritual violence through which it protects itself against much more damaging forms of violence. While Nick's efforts to convince us that *Gatsby's* personal attributes justify his calling him "great" are never wholly satisfactory, *Gatsby* does in fact achieve a kind of greatness, albeit unwittingly, through his structural role as the innocent victim who, through his sacrificial death, preserves the stability of his community.

In this respect, we should notice that the creative inspiration that, by his own admission, deserted Fitzgerald when he attempted to render the reunion between *Gatsby* and Daisy emerges with great force when he turns to another scene—involving a community of people and an individual who has become the privileged object of its attention—to which he is much more powerfully committed. Nick alludes to this pattern from the beginning, when he described himself as having been "unjustly accused of being a politician" during his student days and, even more suggestively, as "privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men" (5). The novel concludes, of course, with the famous evocation of the image of the group of Dutch sailors who are united by their contemplation of the "fresh, green breast of the new world" (189).

Throughout his novel, Fitzgerald will intuitively resort to this pattern involving a single individual or object with an anonymous group at precisely those moments that most readers—confirming in this way the powerful emotional appeal of these scenes—will find to be the most memorable. These include *Gatsby* standing alone "regarding the silver

pepper of the stars" as though he were determining "what share was his of our local heavens" (25). A comparable motif occurs in the immediately following description of the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, which gaze upon the "valley of ashes," a place where ashes are described as taking the form "finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (27).

Fitzgerald will, in fact, invoke the image of a single individual surrounded, whether literally or figuratively, by a crowd of observers in his portrayal of each of the novel's main characters, in this way confirming the foundational importance of this pattern for his novel. Thus, Nick grudgingly confers at least former celebrity status on Tom Buchanan, who "had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven" (10). Daisy, in turn, is described as being "by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville" (79). Likewise, Nick will recognize Jordan Baker when meeting her for the first time because her "pleasing contemptuous expression had looked out at me from many rotogravure pictures of the sporting life at Asheville and Hot Springs and Palm Beach" (23). Even Gatsby—whose sights are supposed to be fixed exclusively on Daisy—reveals his own, perhaps even deeper, fascination with celebrity in his claim that, during the war, "I was promoted to be a major and every Allied government gave me a decoratio—even Montenegro, little Montenegro down on the Adriatic Sea" (70). The human longing to enjoy the esteem of a multitudinous group is likewise evinced by Nick Carraway, who had hoped while at Yale to achieve fame as a writer thanks to the "very solemn and obvious editorials" that he wrote for the student newspaper.

This fascination with figures who have attracted public attention takes precedence over the novel's presumed subject of romantic love when Nick describes his ideal woman, who seems, rather oddly, to be drawn from the world of billboard advertising: "Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs..." (85). Nick will allude to the tragic side of this same motif in rendering his final judgement of Gatsby, whom he characterizes as the isolated, innocent victim of a group of adversaries described as the "foul dust [that] floated in the wake of his dreams" (6). Perhaps an additional element is added by the curious detail of Meyer Wolfsheim's cufflinks (77), which, made of human molars, seem intended to evoke a cannibalistic ritual.

So attached is Fitzgerald to this image of an isolated individual, whose elevation in the eyes of the group by no means excludes his becoming the object of its aggression, that he will constantly resort to epithets linking Gatsby—"a son of God...[who] must be about his father's business" (104)—with the figure of Christ, however improbable this association may appear at first glance.<sup>7</sup> As Douglas Taylor has intriguingly suggested, Fitzgerald repeatedly characterizes Gatsby and arranges the episodes leading ultimately to his death in order to imply quite precise parallels with the gospel account of the passion and death of Christ. He further notices that the description of Gatsby's death itself is presented in such a way as to convey unmistakable signs of a sacrificial ritual:

Aside from the literal aspects of Gatsby's preparation for swimming and the manner of his death, the details which invest these final actions have a suggestiveness of tone that accommodates itself tenably to his ritualistic concept of piety and consecration: his bathing trunks, the finality and passivity of his movements, the appropriately autumnal season, his death on water and the slow, symbolic commingling of his blood with the pool's motion to describe within a revolving cluster of dead leaves "a thin red circle" on its surface carry strong overtones of a primitive kind of sacrificial readiness for death which, combined with the immediate factor of natural infertility and decline, echo something of the old animistic response to affliction and unrest, the ceremonious mutilation of life for spiritual salvation and renewal through the reintegrative mystery of death and transfiguration. (Claridge 216)

Arguing that Fitzgerald uses these sacrificial allusions somewhat in the manner of Yeats and Eliot and Joyce "to alchemize the anarchy of modern life into a unity and permanence" (216), Taylor concludes that the effort itself must necessarily fail because modern Americans lack the "moral habits" of their ancestors, which gave to their ancient religious rituals their efficacy. *Gatsby* may, however, be more plausibly interpreted as supporting the contrary conclusion. The Americans of Fitzgerald's novel can be shown, in other words, to be every bit as hypocritical and self-deceived as the ancestors who resorted to the morally dubious practice of scapegoating. Furthermore, Gatsby's death will prove to be every bit as efficacious in

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<sup>7</sup>In "The Mystery of Ungodliness," Bryce Christensen offers a useful analysis of the influence of Fitzgerald's reading of Renan's *Life of Jesus* on this aspect of Gatsby's characterization.



guaranteeing social cohesion as was, for example, the expulsion of Oedipus from Thebes or the persecution of witches in colonial Salem.

Fitzgerald will also allude to this sacrificial pattern even when it doesn't quite correspond to the facts of a given situation. This tendency seems already at work when he blames Gatsby's fall on "the foul dust," which suggests a much larger group of adversaries than could be reasonably accounted for. Even the "whole rotten bunch" may strike some readers as an excessively broad term to apply to the actually quite small number of characters in the novel who have behaved badly toward Gatsby. The most fascinating of these details, however, occurs when Nick Carraway describes Gatsby's murder, which, although it is the work of a single person (George Wilson), he characterizes as a public sacrificial ritual: "It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete" (170).

Most readers would probably grant that Nick's surprising use of the word "holocaust" (which Fitzgerald misspells as "holocaust" in the manuscript) seriously distorts the actual circumstances of Gatsby's murder and Wilson's suicide. The double-death is a purely private affair involving Gatsby and Wilson; it is also presumably an accidental event, which would never have occurred if Wilson had only known the true identity of his wife's murderer. The word "holocaust" has a number of associations that seem entirely inappropriate to the scene that Nick has just observed. A holocaust is, to begin with, a planned, highly organized public event involving the sacrifice of some propitiatory object. As Fitzgerald's misspelling reminds us, holocausts have sacred, religious overtones: an offering is made to a divinity who, it is hoped, will reciprocate with some desirable blessing.

The pattern formed by the human community and its sacrificial victim that is implied by the word "holocaust" appears repeatedly in other places throughout the novel: in Meyer Wolfsheim's cufflinks and in Nick's complaint about his being besieged by "wild, unknown men"—presumably, his casual acquaintances at Yale University, for whom the epithets "wild" and "unknown" may not have been entirely appropriate, except that it does serve Fitzgerald's purpose of evoking a milieu in which "holocausts" may have been a plausible outcome.

Yet another moment where verisimilitude recedes in order to accommodate the novel's underlying pattern occurs when Nick explains the rationale for Gatsby's parties. Fitzgerald creates for the occasion a feeble, personal motivation according to which these lavish affairs are an elaborate

device concocted by Gatsby in the hope that Daisy might one night appear at one of them. Generations of readers have responded to this as a detail that further enhances the aura of *Gatsby's* extravagant romanticism. It may, however, be more legitimately interpreted as showing the intensity of *Fitzgerald's* attachment to the pattern formed by the community and its isolated member. Daisy never does wander into one of Gatsby's parties; hence, the parties themselves never once become the setting for their romantic reunion.

They do, however, become the occasion for one of the most vivid renderings of the "all against one" motif in the novel, which occurs when Nick describes his seeing Gatsby standing in splendid isolation above the group of guests that his invitation has assembled:

The nature of Mr. Tostoff's composition eluded me, because just as it began my eyes fell on Gatsby, standing alone on the marble steps and looking from one group to another with approving eyes. His tanned skin was drawn attractively tight on his face and his short hair looked as though it were trimmed every day. I could see nothing sinister about him. I wondered if the fact that he was not drinking helped to set him off from his guests, for it seemed to me that he grew more correct as the fraternal hilarity increased.(54)

Fitzgerald's intuitive grasp of the unity and coherence with which an isolated individual can invest a human community is further deepened by his characteristic tendency to juxtapose this pattern with one in which this same community is shown as divided into rivalistic factions. The most important rivalry is, to be sure, the one involving Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, who struggle for possession of Daisy. Fitzgerald has, guided by a profound intuition, set the story of their competition against the background of violence between groups, the most important historical example of which is the "Great War," which is associated a number of times with key events in the lives of the main characters. Thus, it provides the occasion that allows such Midwesterners as Nick to escape their provincial origins. It both brings Gatsby within range of Daisy in Louisville and takes him from her when he receives orders sending him to Europe and, eventually, to Oxford. In a deeper way, however, World War I serves to remind the reader that male rivalry does not only lead to struggles for possession of a desirable woman. It can, on the contrary, if not adequately contained by an effective ritual, lead to a worldwide conflagration.

Fitzgerald evokes this possibility by having Nick allude metaphorically to combat between rival armies in the course of describing one of Gatsby's parties. Shortly after the scene in which the party-goers were formed into an organized, harmonious group by his "approving eyes," Gatsby disappears into his mansion. Nick is now the one who observes the guests; what he discovers is that in the absence of Gatsby who has until then been the center of the group's attention (both as their host and as the object of titillating rumors) the party descends into chaos. Fitzgerald appropriately has Nick resort to a military metaphor that reminds us of the recently ended war, which is now being reenacted on a minor scale:

I looked around. Most of the remaining women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands. Even Jordan's party, the quarter from East Egg, were *rent asunder by dissension*. One of the men was talking with curious intensity to a young actress, and his wife after attempting to laugh at the situation in a dignified and indifferent way broke down entirely and resorted to *flank attacks*. (56; my emphasis)

Tom Buchanan's adds a comic dimension to this motif in his concern about the threat posed by "coloured empires." Commenting on the title of the book, *The Rise of the Coloured Empires*, that has provoked this anxiety in Tom, Matthew J. Bruccoli explains, in his notes to the 1995 Scribner's edition of *Gatsby*, that while Fitzgerald's source was Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color*, "it seems clear that Fitzgerald did not want to provide the correct title and author" (208). While informative, this remark does not do entire justice to Fitzgerald's stroke of genius in inventing for Tom's book the eerily oxymoronic phrase "coloured empires." The uncanniness and troubling menace in Tom's eyes of a world that really did have "coloured empires" is a paranoid distortion of a legitimate fear of a world in which equally powerful rival factions competed for the same prize. The destructive violence of such a world is, as allusions to the recently concluded "Great War" remind us, is not merely a paranoid's fantasy or a novelist's invention. While we no doubt find Tom Buchanan's racism repugnant, the verbal hybrid introduced by the title of his favorite book evokes a disquiet that goes much deeper than merely contemptible racial attitudes. It portends a world in which groups that once occupied distinct positions within a stable hierarchy that had kept them from becoming rivals are now involved in the competitive struggle for possession of the same desirable object.

If, as René Girard maintains, the purpose of a ritual involving sacrificial expulsion is to prevent the spread of other, more destructive forms of violence that would threaten the well-being of the community as a whole, then "holocaust" becomes an remarkably precise description—not, surely, of George Wilson's motivations, but of the subliminal communal function served by Gatsby's murder. While the death of Gatsby is, on the level of the novel's surface plot, the result of an unfortunate and contingent mistake, the underlying sacrificial pattern that the plot enacts treats it as a predetermined necessity. Gatsby must be selected as the sacrificial victim because—in spite of his great wealth and mobster connections—he is essentially an outsider, a man from an entirely other world, who lacks the support of associates willing to exact revenge against anyone (Tom Buchanan, for example) who may in any way be held responsible for his death.

Any other scenario that one could imagine following Myrtle's death would have led to a series of acts and counter-acts of violence. Nick's merely apparent malapropism thus points unerringly to the communal significance of Gatsby's death: as a ritual act that restores the peace and well-being of a community that is not overly intent on examining too closely the legitimacy of the act that has brought it such benefits. This "holocaust" will, in turn, transform Gatsby, the "shady adventurer" of L. P. Hartley's dismissive judgement, into the tragic figure upon whose ultimate "greatness" Nick Carraway—rightly, although for a reason he does not understand—insists. As Nick will never recognize, but as the scapegoating pattern of the novel make clear, the sobriquet that he so admiringly bestows on Gatsby is validated, not by the latter's personal attributes, but by the sacrificial role that he has been made to play.

Gatsby's role in unifying the group—in giving shape to a human community that might otherwise descend into potentially boundless rivalistic violence—is confirmed in a curious way by the circumstances of his funeral, which Fitzgerald stages as an event more closely resembling a "holocaust" than did the actual circumstances of his death. For most readers, this is surely one of the most poignant moments in *The Great Gatsby*. The numerous guests who had taken such advantage of his hospitality—making his parties the focal point of their romantic summer—entirely abandon him in the aftermath of his pathetic death.

The poignancy of this painful turn of events should not, however, obscure the continuity that it signifies in terms of Gatsby's role as outsider. Whether Gatsby is embraced by the group or rejected by it is finally a

matter of indifference. Quite apart from his romantic dreams, Gatsby has been chosen to play in the novel that bears his name a preeminently sacrificial role as the figure who will create unanimity among the members of the group that has both elevated and excluded him. For this reason, there is no essential difference between the living Gatsby who stands on the marble steps contemplating his assembled guests and the dead Gatsby from whom they all flee.

Gatsby could not turn the clock back because he invested his imagination in a dream whose success depended on the cooperation of other people: his misjudgment as to their motivations and likely behavior is tragically revealed in the episode at the Plaza Hotel, where both Tom and Daisy refuse to play the roles that he has assigned them. Unlike Gatsby, Nick successfully projected upon the other characters roles that they played to perfection: Gatsby gave him the vicarious satisfaction of possessing Daisy and of almost destroying Tom Buchanan; likewise, Tom and Daisy, while refusing ultimate victory to Gatsby, did offer it to Nick by bearing, in their turn, the burden, not only of their own moral responsibility, but of his as well. Finally, readers of the novel became accomplices to Nick's spurious achievement by admiring the dubious moral insight that he unfailingly attributes to himself. In contrast to this, the genuinely moral dimension of *The Great Gatsby*—and, hence, its enduring greatness and universality—rests with the opportunity that Fitzgerald's masterpiece affords us to experience, yet also to resist, the scapegoating impulses that form—in a way that is, at once, both flagrant and surreptitious—its "emotional backbone."

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# VIOLENCE AS INSTITUTION IN AFRICAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: A CASE STUDY OF RWANDA

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## I. Introduction

Violence is a phenomenon. It is multidimensional and multifarious. It is physical, geographical, spiritual, psychological, sudden or latent. It is metaphysical, because for some religious beliefs, it involves the deed-consequences scheme in terms of rewards and punishments, even beyond this world into the otherworldly life. It is an instrument used in one's own life (suicide), in the simple family, in the small-scale societies, as well as in the multi-ethnic social settings. It can be a national, multinational and universal phenomenon. It presents some contradictions, because, though it is abhorred in general, some individuals or states use it as a means to achieve ultimate good or misuse it for their own selfish interests. It becomes more of a repulsive mystery when it is seen as institutional and integral part of religion which fundamentally should avoid it.

Between April and July 1994, the media of the world brought images of the most violent episode of Rwandan history into the living rooms of this planet's population. The magnitude of the genocide of 1994 was unprecedented in this century. Up to one million of people are estimated to have been killed within only one hundred days. It is difficult to understand the magnitude of this violence. Tribal conflicts in Rwanda, colonial powers, political manipulations and economic problems alone are not enough to explain what has happened. Political analysts, sociologists, anthropologists have tried to understand whether the political instability of the late 80s, the malfunction of political institutions, the October War (1990-94) and the

consequent war atrocities could have necessarily culminated in the genocide the world witnessed. Fundamental questions about the whole philosophy of life and religion in the history of Rwanda and its relationship to violence are to be addressed too, because they touch the inner being of the outward physical person. People have the right to know what has gone wrong all along in all areas of their life. This paper will try to look at religious beliefs and violence as institution in ancient and modern Rwanda in its magico-religious context and its implications in the social structure. As I am only a debutante Girardian, I will discuss only the key terms of his theory—mimesis, desire and scapegoating—as they guide my reflections.

## II. Religious beliefs and violence

Generally, Rwanda is viewed as a monotheistic country. All Rwandan ethnic groups believed in the only one heavenly Superior Being called *Imana*. Though Rwandans recognized *Imana* as the Supreme Being, Creator and Sustainer of all life, they did not have a special service of worship to him at a central place. They thought it was temerity to try and please or influence God because if you try you would not find enough to match his greatness and his merits. A Rwandan saying tells that you cannot handle God because if you try you would pay dearly.<sup>1</sup> *Imana* is the Ancient of days as it is expressed in the name "Habiyakare" (He is before the first dawn). He is all-knowing as in the name "Bizimana" (they [all things] are known by God). He rules over everything as King, Judge and Master as expressed in the name "Hategekimana" (everywhere it is God who rules). Unfortunately Rwandans believed that whatever befell them was pre-ordained by God and most of the time fatalism dominated their lives. They confronted violence or fate with resignation thinking that the origin is in God's will or from angry spirits they did not control.

Rwandans also believe in the existence of a spiritual realm. The spirits of the dead lived further and roamed about. They would come back to trouble their relatives, especially when they felt some duties due to them were neglected. They could even kill through sickness, insanity or provoke infertility. They hold people under the siege of constant mental terror. The spirits most feared were the ones from those who had died in unfortunate

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<sup>1</sup>St Paul expressed the same idea in his discourse at Athens and said: "The god who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by the human hands, as if he need anything..." (Acts 17, 24-25).



conditions without enjoying the blessings one expected in life, which included health, possessions or wealth and having many children (*gusiga imbuto*: to leave the seed behind, especially sons). Therefore the spirits of those who died unhealthy, poor, in exile, during the journey, unmarried or childless, were mostly feared. To determine which spirit was unhappy and had been struck, the family had to consult a divine. Often sacrifices were necessary in addition to rituals of ancestor worship.

The rites of *guterekera* (i.e., to present a substitution on behalf of the individual concerned) were performed in a shrine built for the spirits. This form of religion was limited to the family. Soothsayers or divines checked the spirit responsible by looking at the intestines of a chicken or a sheep, or using oil or fat, or looking at the position of polished bones from a sacrificed bull which they spread on special curved board, etc. (Bigirumwami 177-217).<sup>2</sup> Errors and bias were not missing and some of these specialists were fake and the results depended on who was seeking and what he could afford to pay. Late Bishop Bigirumwami, one of the leading scholars in the area of traditions, practices and taboos in Rwanda, mentions that the founder of the ritual instituted it to prevent the cycle of revenge which was going to follow the murder of a family member by his relative (*ibid.*218). The *guterekera* could therefore be considered as the original traditional religious experience in Rwanda.

The mysterious cult of Lyangombe known as *kubandwa* was introduced later and came probably from Uganda in the 16th century. Lyangombe, its founder, is a mythical personality who became the ruler of the spiritual world and an intermediary between God, the living and the dead. His life is full of mysteries. Stories about him sound historical but not much is really known about his origin. He was a great hunter. Some stories says that he was challenged with a bet in a typical Rwandan board game (*igisoro*).<sup>3</sup> His challenger was almost winning the game and taking the throne's insignia (emblem) when Lyangombe was helped by his "son" or maybe his follower, Binego and he won the party.<sup>4</sup> The challenger wanted to murder

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<sup>2</sup> Mgr. Aloys Bigirumwami. *Imihango n'Imigenze n'Imiziririzo mu Rwanda*. The title could be translated as "The traditions, Practices, and Taboos in Rwanda). So far this is the most detailed book which exists on this subject by a Rwandese. The late Bigirumwami was respected and encyclopedic.

<sup>3</sup> *Igisoro* is one of the original and popular games in Rwanda. You fill holes in a wooden plate with stones or grains of a certain size and it has rules to follow.

<sup>4</sup> Bigirumwami says the challenger was Mhumutumucunnyi (244), and it is not clear whether he is the same as Ruganzu, one of the earliest kings of Rwanda (1510-1543).

him with his iron club but Binego apparently killed him. Here we have a clear case of the struggle to gain the control over both temporal and spiritual powers. Desire and jealousy played a central part in this. The throne and power over both the land and the spiritual realm were objects of desire. Murder was one other option to eliminate the rival.

One day, Lyangombe went hunting despite the opposition from his mother who feared that something worse could happen to him after she had had mysterious dreams. She even challenged him by spanning the cord she tied her skirt with in the gate.<sup>5</sup> Later he was killed by a buffalo (according to some) or an antelope (according to others), and before he died in the branches of a sacred tree called "*Umurinzi*" (or "*umuko*" in ordinary language),<sup>6</sup> he sent a message to his mother through his servants, saying: "Go and tell my mother that what she said has come true... A child who does not listen to his father and his mother listens to the cricket."<sup>7</sup> He ordered his follower to tell his mother that they will meet at the volcano of Ngendo.<sup>8</sup>

In another version, Lyangombe met with Ruganzu, king of Rwanda who, back from military expeditions, lost the way back home. He promised to show the way to Ruganzu under the condition that from then on the Hutu, the Tutsi and the Twa should be initiated into his cult except the king himself, because no king should worship another king (Mensching 321). In popular beliefs, whoever does not, becomes a deadly enemy and would go to Nyiragongo volcano after his death, whereas the devotee would go to

<sup>5</sup>This is a euphemism to say that defying his mother's order would be as bad as having incest with her. This became proverbial because adults or parents would challenge anyone with: "uzabe unyambuye" (would you dare to undress me) when defying someone's wish.

<sup>6</sup>"*Umurinzi*" means literally "watchman." The tree (in French: erythrine) is so called because it was the only tree which accepted to receive and help Lyangombe when he was falling down, projected by the horn of the buffalo. The Lyangombe cult is celebrated under and around this tree. Perhaps also because of its red flowers which symbolize blood and fire, an interesting idea a propos Jesus and the tree.

<sup>7</sup>Wilhelm Mensching, *Ruanda: Eine Darstellung des Volkes in Alten Überlieferungen* (319). Mensching was one of the first German missionaries in Rwanda before World War I. I was privileged to help in translating the manuscripts he left to his daughter during my studies in Germany (1980-87). He was twice a Nobel Prize nominee for his contribution to peace and friendship between peoples in a world without violence. Last year a street was named after him.

<sup>8</sup> This volcano is not in the popular stories and myths. Perhaps it is the same as the popular volcano Kalisimbi.

Kalisimbi.<sup>9</sup> In the Lyangombe cult participate priests or priestesses who lead the initiation and confirmation special liturgies. They explain the mysteries of Lyangombe to the new candidate or "the possessed," who incarnate Lyangombe or one of his followers. Sacred plants are used, water, milk, beer, blood, kaolin, iron, fire and cloths out of different animal leather (rabbit, leopard, chimpanzee, etc.) as ritual objects. There are two stages of the initiation. First the new member will be "presented" and "witnessed" or "recommended." It is called "*Kwaturwa*" in Kinyarwanda. Then comes the final phase of "returning" (to the throne of Lyangombe) called "*Gusubizwaho*." It is a kind of being confirmed in the cult. After this phase the candidate could perform all duties of a full member, including introducing other candidates into the cult or becoming a "sponsor."

The cult of Lyangombe became a national religion and it was interesting to find that it involved all ethnic groups without segregation. But as far as violence is concerned, an attentive observer is astonished to find that Lyangombe and his original servants or followers called *Imandwa*, who are ten and named, have violent self-eulogizing epics. The candidate who incarnates one of *Imandwa*, would always introduce himself as so and so (naming the *Imandwa*), son of so and so, and then would praise his deeds of bravery. Lyangombe would call himself "*Nkokora itarara inkumi*" (the elbow which does not spend a night without a young girl!), "*Nkota itarara inyama*" (the sword which never spends a night without meat), "*Bikweto bikweteye kunyaga no kuronka*" (huge shoes put on to plunder and to gain, etc.). His follower Binego says: "I am the one who strangles the bulls and the cows die with their heat... I am the butcher son of Mukanya... I killed Mhumutumucunnyi who was almost overthrowing Lyangombe.... I cover the courtyard with blood, [I wash in hot gushing blood], the thunder of Nyirajanja." Another follower, Mugasa says: "In Bugesera, I annihilate; in Burundi, I annihilate; in Gisaka, I annihilate..." Another, named Nyakiriro (i.e. Great fire) says: "I am Nyakiriro son of Gaju, I attacked Rubito, the Munyoro, I plundered him and I devastated him and Lyangombe rewarded me."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Nyiragongo is still an active volcano in the Democratic Republic of Congo, therefore threatening as a condemnation to hell to those who are not consecrated to Lyangombe. Being also in the foreign country meant banishment forever. Kalisimbi on the contrary is an extinct volcano (where pearls are found, as its name indicates), and therefore rich and peaceful. It is a paradisaical place, also the highest in Rwanda.

<sup>10</sup>Bigirumwami (243-45). It is interesting to see how the violent acts (including rape) are praised and the candidate to initiation has to incarnate those spirits and pronounce those

The intensity of violence in this cult is evident. The person initiated has to incarnate one of the *Imandwa*, the model to imitate. Unconsciously the "possessed" damage themselves. But the most damaging effect was psychological because the cult involves an other secret language never heard of in day to day life. It is a vocabulary which includes obscene words and takes the candidate out of the ordinary ethics. The candidate does not dare to divulge the secrets he learns. In order to make sure that it will not be done, the priest brings a round bell with burning coal inside. He places it at an unreachable height and he says to the candidate: "bring down the stars (coal ) you see." The latter tries without success. The priest says: "As you can not do that, in the same way you will not be able to divulge the secrets of *Imandwa*." Then he is given a small upper millstone to crock. As it is hard to crock, so also he will be unable to divulge the secrets of *Imandwa*. Lastly a very bitter beverage is given to him to drink and as he can not swallow it, so he will be unable to divulge the secrets of *Imandwa*. All these words are accompanied by curses. This ordeal haunted the candidates for the rest of their life. It is important to mention that whenever the Rwandans begun to pray to Lyangombe, they said: "God be with you always, Lyangombe." This shows that he was inferior to God and mediator between God and human beings.

Rwandans are generally very syncretistic. Even some Christians still practice these rituals secretly and at the same time go to church regularly. Rumors circulated during the genocide, according to which some killers might have licked or drunk the blood of their victims or even that some might have eaten organs like hearts or livers (something unheard of in Rwanda before!). Maybe some people were under the influence of violent spirits. Maybe they were imitating those who were said to have done the same, supposedly in other countries (like Liberia, Congo or Sierra-Leone). It may also be that by the fear of the spirits of their victims, the killers sought to identify themselves with them to nullify their effect. They would not be haunted by the memories or the spirits of their victims. Here again we have a mixture of political and religious violence.

Another aspect of the traditional religious experience concerns the *Nyabingi* cult which was practiced mainly in the northern territories of Rwanda. According to Bigirumwami, this cult came from Ndorwa during

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words in the first person, realizing the acts in their minds and therefore in danger of carrying them out without questioning. In Rwanda every young person of the age of 14 was supposed to be initiated and confirmed in the cult.

the reign of Rwabugili (1853-1895). They worship *Nyabingi* under the name of *Biheko* (spirit/goddess of fertility?) (Bigirumwami 252-62). Those who are destined to incarnate *Nyabingi* are mainly women. *Nyabingi* was a woman. When she is forgotten she brings misfortune to the families. Her violence is expressed in the way she attacks the living. But there is no expressive way she claims an openly political role. However a parenthesis in Bigirumwami's book indicates that "when they worship her, people say: 'I hate those guys with combs (the Tutsi servants called trustees [who bore a mooned hair style called "*amasunzu*"]), I, myself have come with *Rutamu*<sup>11</sup> whose skin is white (Europeans)" (Bigirumwami 254). The introduction of *Nyabingi* seems to me an attempt to counter the Lyangombe cult and as a response to the domination of some Abatutsi clans and male power which dominated the Rwandan society. It's a form of early religious feminism. The hate issue and the preference of Europeans shows the climate in the country and the hopes the coming of Europeans wakened in the people of the northern region who suffered because of continuous conflicts in ancient Rwanda and women were the most affected like always in times of war. How belief in God and spirits affected the social structure and encouraged violence will be discussed below.

### III. Myths, social structure, and violence

Ancient Rwanda's oral literature has plenty of stories and myths which tell of the mental violence. From the time the Rwandan groups intermingled, the struggle for domination and supremacy started. Probably after the unification of the country under a central government in the 19th century, a psychological conditioning was necessary in order to establish a hierarchical structure among the people who for centuries lived together. With the domination of the clan of *Abanyiginya* by whom the dynastic rule was established and the clan of *Abega* from which kings married and therefore from which the queen-mothers were selected, the specialists of oral literature started creating stories and myths which could provide the justification for putting Rwandan in categories. The stories were collected and they are now in several books written by researchers and missionaries.

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<sup>11</sup>Rutamu is the name of a person or a brown-red bull. "Ru" is a determinative for something big. Here the power of the bull is meant. The brown bull with a whitish color refers to powerful white Europeans. Kagame adds that this corresponds to the arrival of Europeans under the reign of King Rwabugili.

The following three of those myths show how *Imana* (God) and the founder of Rwanda (*Gihanga*) tested the representatives of the three ethnic groups.

The first tells of how God created *Abahutu*, *Abatutsi*, *Abatwa* and a girl. He gave to each one a milk-pot (Mensingh 28-29). He asked them to watch and not to fall asleep until he comes back to see. They waited but after a while they became tired. The lather of the milk of *Umuhutu* (singular of *Abahutu*: the definite article is implied) spilled over the milk-pot's rim and he licked it off. Also the milk of the *Umututsi* partly spilled over. The lather of the girl's milk flowed over her lap. *Umutwa* could not wait any longer and drank out his milk. When God came back and saw what happened, he said to *Umuhutu*: "Listen! In your hands I gave milk. You will cultivate for *Umututsi*, you will make mats and baskets for him!" To the girl God said: "Your milk is in your lap! Let *Umuhutu* marry you and give you milk or let *Umututsi* marry you so that he may give you milk." To *Umututsi* God said: "When you have ten cows, five of them should die..., when you possess twenty cows, ten should die and only ten should remain." To *Umutwa* God said: "Go and become a potter, beg from *Umututsi*, he will give you, beg from the king, he will give you something" (*ibid.* 28-28).

This myth clearly sets out a scenario for rivalry within the Rwandan community. People are classified according to their occupations or specialization. This is a universal reality. Even today in the modern industrial countries one hears of middle class, working class, high class etc.; mimetic desire and scapegoating has created class struggles. This again indicates that those who seek to stress the tribal aspects in poor countries are mistaken.

In Rwanda, the three ethnic groups show more or less their status than racial groups in a scientific sense. The myth claims that God ordained it and therefore it means that it is unchangeable, although it is known that it was possible for anyone to climb up the ladder or to be demoted to the lower category, especially *Abatutsi* when they fell in disgrace or became poor like *Abahutu* and therefore were reduced to doing manual work and forced labor. *Abahutu* could also become *Abatutsi* after a distinguished deed of bravery or having acquired at least five or ten cows. But for our purpose, we can already see that the mimetic theory can be applied to this society and religion comes in because God is involved.

The second story tells of the test that Kazi ka Muntu put to his children.<sup>12</sup> His first son was Gatwa, the second Gahutu and the third Gatutsi (traditions and researchers claimed that they arrived in Rwanda in the same order). They lived together until their father told them: "I will give you an axe. Whoever among you will strike his mother dead will receive a lot of cows from me." Gahutu and Gatutsi could not kill their mother but Gatwa did. Gatwa was disowned and cursed and became a beggar. The story tells also how Gahutu and Gatutsi separated. They wandered through the land and Gahutu ate whatever he could find such as berries, sorrels or potatoes, whether cooked or raw. When he gave some to Gatutsi, he refused to eat, in order not to defile himself. When they reached home, Gatutsi reported what Gahutu did and they were given different food and from that time on they did not share food any more "to this day."

Another version of this story says that it was Gihanga who tested Gahutu, Gatutsi and Gatwa. He asked Gatutsi to take a spear and kill Gahutu but he refused because "he [Gahutu] carries my sleeping mat when it is my turn go to serve at the king's court." On his turn, Gahutu refused to kill Gatutsi because "he will become a vassal of the king, he will be given cows and he will give me one." Gatwa was asked to kill Gahutu and he went off to do it. Gihanga said: "Gatwa is a depraved person" and "should do pottery (dirty work) for others and should beg and they will give him something" (Mensching 30-31).

One more story involves a snake which answered on behalf of *Abahutu*, *Abatutsi* and *Abatwa*, who were put to the test to acquire immortality. But they all slept before God came to give them the secret of immortality. The snake answered when God called and was given the gift of immortality. The snake was used as a caricature for *Abatutsi* who, during the time they suffered violence, especially from 1959, were called *inzoka* (snakes), because they had been described by Europeans as "cunning." But the real reason behind the myth is an attempt to answer the question why people do not slough, as snakes do, to stay young and alive.

All these stories and myths are trying to give an answer to the question of inequality within the Rwandan society. Interestingly, they claim that the three groups are from the same creator and from the same father. That

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<sup>12</sup> Mensching (29-30). Kazi ka Muntu is word play. It means literally "the occupation of the person" and therefore it is a teleological story to show the occupations of every ethnic group. Kazi ka Muntu is said to be the son of Gihange (lit., the founder [of Rwanda]) and shows that there has been some time before the people reached unification.

could be a way of arranging things for the greatest benefit of one group, because the same thing was said about the Europeans later. When the first German Governor in Rwanda, Richard Kandt, reached the king's palace, he was met with some resistance from the reigning king Musinga. Maybe because he had ridiculed *Abahutu* who "let themselves be subjugated by *Abatutsi* whom they surpassed in numbers, and who only could wail and complain like women" (Kandt vol. II, 2). Food supplies were not given to his porters and followers. When rumors went around that *Abatutsi* were "enemies of Europeans," they objected that "they [*Abatutsi*] were rather of the same descent and children of the same father" (*ibid* 18).

To explain and justify why there were differences and inequality within the society, the authority of God and that of the father, to bless or curse, were introduced in the myths and stories to stamp them as unchangeable decrees. It is also interesting to see that all three sons have inclinations to do evil although they have different degrees of resistance. The blessing of *Gatutsi* is not without limitation. The only person free indeed is the girl who can marry in all the groups and who can be cared for by all. Ironically, in all the violent episodes of Rwandan history, women are the ones who mostly suffer violence. The undeniable fact is that at some stage, all Rwandans lived together as people from the same descent or at least they have attempted to harmonize. The systematization of the structure came when the specialization in story-telling and dynastic hegemony had been developed. The myths and stories were composed retrospectively to explain the contemporary situation..

This kind of classification in hierarchical "casts" was later used by researchers to speculate on the origin of the three ethnic groups of Rwandans. Gérard Prunier mentions how Rwandans were later described, without doubt, with the help of the biased oral tradition I mentioned above. He critically observes that *Abatutsi* had been described as having "nothing of the negro apart his color," "usually tall," with "vivacious intelligence," "natural-born leader, capable of extreme self-control and calculated goodwill."<sup>13</sup> Prunier mentions further that "some of the authors become rhapsodic about their 'superior race' linking them with Caucasian and Semitic or Jewish origins" (Prunier 7). The reader can understand how these erroneous theories made *Abatutsi* become like foreigners and colonialists in their own land, as they were considered "whites" in black

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<sup>13</sup> Prunier (6). He is quoting from page 34 of Ministère des colonies, *Rapport sur l'administration belge du Ruanda-Urundi* (1925).



skin. It is, however, true that some *Abatutsi*, especially those in high positions and intellectuals, exploited these views for their own political advantages and developed a superiority complex, modeled on Europeans. *Abahutu*, on the other hand, who had been described as displaying "very typical Bantu features: short, thick-set and big head, wide nose and enormous lips..., extroverts who like to laugh and lead a simple life" (Prunier 6, quoting *Rapport* 34) and consequently born natural servants, developed an inferiority complex. R. Kandt wrote that the "Wahutu, Bantunegroes" were "in slavish dependence" on Watussi, a foreign Semitic or Hamitic noble cast, whose ancestors came from Gallalands, south of Abyssinia (Kandt 1).

As the German Nazi used propaganda and youth movements, so did the extremist parties in Rwanda and the "*Radio Télévision des Mille Collines*" (Radio Television of the Thousand Hills, [a private radio]) to stir up the population against Abatutsi and their real or imagined "collaborators." Youth militia were trained, armed, and used to kill with unimaginable and unspeakable methods which included shooting, burning, raping, macheting and cynically "unearthing the buried bodies to kill them a second time." They told their victims that God had given them up. Surely that was a way of cynically referring to the myths that mentioned that *Abatutsi* had descended from heaven (*Ibimanuka*). They called them names like "snakes," "cockroaches" or "falashas." They accused them of selling their daughters to whites to get support and arms in order to overthrow the *Abahutu* régime and accused them of "incest."<sup>14</sup>

*Abatwa* were described as "small, chunky..., having a monkey-like flat face and a huge nose, being 'similar to the apes..'" (Prunier 6, quoting Rumiya 140). They are also described as specialists of entertainment: they are considered as clowns and unfortunately, following myths and stories, as the only ones who were abused by conditioning and they were permitted to go beyond what conscience dictates and trained to become specialists as executioners at the royal court. This was violence against their humanity and abuse of their weakness as a defenseless minority who constituted only 1% of the Rwandan population. They are today the most neglected group.

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<sup>14</sup>A legend tells the Mututsi, the eponymous ancestor of Abatutsi, married his sister named Myampundi with whom he descended from heaven when God cast them away. It is said that the clan of Banyiginya are free to marry their sisters or have incestuous relationships without considering it a taboo.

Looking at the social organization in ancient Rwanda, the researchers have a general consensus that *Abahutu* small kingdoms which were later conquered by *Abatutsi* had rather a patriarchal system whereby Umuhutu Chief patriarch ruled over people with whom he shared the relationship of consanguinity. As late Bishop Kagame points out, his role was of a magico-religious nature. He inaugurated the sowing season with prescribed rituals, including principally the conjugal act. He was a rainmaker and he was invested with the powers to counter the menacing agents of calamities, like crickets (Kagame 23-24). This system was later changed by the conquest of Abanyiginya clan of *Abatutsi* group who borrowed from *Abahutu* some of the political insignia, methods of governing and economy as well as cultural phenomena, like the language. It was unfortunate that Kagame accepted all the theories of European researchers without challenging them. But one can also understand him because the spirit of the time demanded keeping the status quo.

Future generations will judge intellectuals who tried to manipulate the historical facts to suit one or other of the ruling clans or individuals. The violence we inherited in Rwanda was mostly caused and perpetuated by the fact that intellectuals have never analyzed the situation objectively in order to help the leaders to change their mentalities. All successive régimes had their own invested interests and constitutions were used to promote interests of individuals, not national interest. This is a nation's rape. It is constitutional violence.

The absurdity of the classification of Rwandans into economical categories which were later developed into scientifically arranged, adopted, and accepted ethnic categories was challenged in a myth involving God and a pauper. A certain pauper once wished to meet the unjust God behind all this to ask for an explanation. This pauper thought deeply about his fate, considered his poverty while his brothers were rich and had a lot of cows. He took his axe, his machete and his spear. He said, "If I meet with God, I will kill him. I am only a pauper, I have no bulls and no cows to leave behind." After three days he came to a forest. There *Imana* who had known his intention came and asked him: "Eh! You, man! What are you looking for?" He replied: "I am looking for *Imana*." *Imana* asked: "Why are you looking for *Imana*?" He replied: "I have been born with many brothers in the same house but *Imana* cursed me because I have neither goods nor cows. Now I am wandering to look for *Imana*, so that I can ask him why he punishes me." "When you see him, what will you do to him?" asked *Imana*. "I will kill him." *Imana* said: "Here am I, kill me." He replied: "I do not see

you." Then *Imana* let him see a visible object like a rock. The pauper tried all his weapons, but they were broken into pieces. He tried with his hands. He failed. *Imana* asked him: "Is your rage over?" He replied: "...It is over. I had thought that *Imana* is like other things but he is not, he surpasses all things, he sees us and we do not see him..." At the end *Imana* told him that he will be rich when he comes back from Hades.

The pauper went his way and reached a region where a girl had died following the spell of a sorcerer. The people of that place forced the pauper to be buried with the young girl who was a virgin and therefore whose spirit would be fierce, since she never married. To appease her spirit, a man was to be buried with her. The pauper said: "I cannot fight with you, because I am alone and far from home and my kinsmen cannot come to my rescue. But I beg you, let my sword and my spear be buried with me." They did. The sorcerer came at midnight, took the girl out of the grave. He had a long conversation with her and tried to tempt her. She resisted and proposed to the sorcerer to follow the right procedure to ask her hand from her parents. The pauper slipped out of the grave, seized the sorcerer, bound him with strong strings. The sorcerer offered him five cows in order not to tell the community about the incident. The pauper took the cows to his aunt and left them and the girl there to be cared for. Then he went to the parents and greeted them: "Eh! How are you, house of Nyamuhambababona (of those who bury the living [lit., the seeing])." When they asked who he was, he replied that his name was Ngenzirabona (the wanderer who sees things). He asked the parents to get ready. One day he brought their daughter back, accompanied by his aunt. He asked whether they could recognize her. They did. The kinsmen brought lots of cows which filled a whole valley. Ngenzirabona became very rich. They gave him the daughter and he married her. He became the servant of the king. He remembered the promise of *Imana*, that he would be rich when he came back from the world of the spirits (Johanssen 61-66). From this story we can see that in Rwandan way of thinking, religious, political and social life are not separable. The why of the state of affairs is always a legitimate question and people do not rest until the solution is found. The miserable individual who is forced to become violent even against God, can endanger even more the life of a neighbor, a brother, or any member(s) of the community, or lead a nation to peril because of jealousy towards those who have more or are different. It is also an easy solution to blame God and project the anger against the neighbor who can be scapegoated as responsible for the misery of another.

A. Kagame indicates that the main instrument of the conquest of Rwanda by *Abanyiginya* dynasty was the possession of the cow. The cow was, as in other early civilizations and today, the source and the measure of richness and therefore of social status. The cow under other skies was called *Pecus* and gave the famous word "pecuniary." *Abatutsi* who had more cows were like today's entrepreneurs, investors and employers. Some *Abahutu* had them too. The royal dynasty adopted the title "*Umwami*" (King: the one always and everywhere renown or famous) (Kagame 32-33). All belonged to the king: cows, land and people. He was God's representative. The title itself became object of desire, envied by rivals, whether from the same lineage or from inside or outside political opponents and challengers. The term *Abanyiginya* itself denotes "nobility" and "richness" (*ibid.* 35).

Politically, violence became a means of conquering power when the *Abanyiginya* dynasty progressed in the interior of the country. Already the names of the first monarch who attempted to conquer the whole country inspire awe and violence. He is called Ruganzu (the victorious), Bwimba (the furious), who, according to Kagame reigned between 1312 and 1345 A.D (*ibid.* 57).<sup>15</sup>

#### IV. Abatabzi ("liberators/saviors") and psychological violence

It is under the monarch Ruganzu that the magico-religious phenomenon started having real far-reaching political implications. The king was young and was under the tutorship of his mother Nyiraruganzu I Nyakanga of the clan of *Abasinga* (the victorious). He was faced with powerful kingdoms in the South (Bugesera, under Nsoro I Bihembe) and in the East (Gisaka, under Kimenyi I Musaya, whose intention was to annex the *Abanyiginya* kingdom) (*ibid.* 57-59). To reach his goal, Kimenyi planned to marry the sister of Ruganzu in order to secure a relative who would become heir to the throne and would annex the kingdom of Ruganzu in the future. His soothsayers had their hand in the plan. Ruganzu and the court counsellors were opposed to the plans because the oracles were not favorable. The queen-mother and his favorite Nkurukumbi were favorable to the marriage. Ruganzu, however, agreed with his sister Robwa that she will not give Kimenyi a son. She did not keep her promise. She announced the news of her pregnancy to her brother and faked a suicide.

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<sup>15</sup>The Queen-mother carries a name which has a violent connotation because it means "one who hates."

The oracles decided that "a liberator" should be appointed to make the sacrifice of Robwa a hundred fold fruitful. Nkurukumbi was designated to die as a liberator in Gisaka. When he refused, the young king himself was designated by oracles. Before he went he decreed that from *Abasingu* clan should never come a queen-mother again, as punishment for influencing Nkurukumbi to refuse to die as a sacrifice for the throne. The king was then killed by the warriors of Gisaka. When his sister learnt about his death, she threw herself upon the emblem-drum of the Gisaka throne and she died with the child in the womb. Kagame says that the Rwandan tradition considered her as a "liberator" of the kingdom of equal rank as her brother (*ibid.* 57-59).

Kagame explains that the fact that the king himself had to accept to become a sacrificial liberator was due to the magical influence and to the oath he took when he was enthroned, which included the stipulation from the *Abiru*, (the court sages specialists of the esoteric code) which said, "if it is demanded of you, will you give your blood for it [the emblematic drum], will you die for it?" He then answered, "I will give my blood for it, I will die for it" (*ibid.* 60). No one knows when this ideology started but Kagame has recorded one case before this, giving the named Rwambali, who died as an "offensive liberator" under king Nsoro Samukondo (1279-1312) (*ibid.* 53).

Here we have an unprecedented event because a young king and his sister are sacrificed as liberators and this sets forth a succession of voluntary or forced human sacrifices for the sake of conquering or annexing other desired territories. Here violence is singularly glorified and it will have implications in the historical development of Rwanda in modern times. It was decided by the sages of the court that the king would henceforth be substituted by a designated liberator who would be invested with royal dignity, so that his blood shed on the foreign soil could have the awaited, infallible effect (*ibid.* 61).

Kagame mentions the battles between princes who were competing for the throne, especially in case the reigning king died without leaving a clear will. There were also continuing wars between Rwandan kings and the kings of the neighboring territories (Uganda, Burundi, Bunyabungo, in actual DR Congo). The prince Nkoko died voluntarily as a liberator so that his blood could help annex the kingdom of Nduga (*ibid.* 75). There was a mixture of competition, vengeance and intrigues. We have the example of Mibambwe (1411-1444) who had King Mashira of Nduga arrested while he was busy preparing to welcome and host him as his distinguished guest,

but Mibambwe, in hindsight, wanted to conquer Mashira's kingdom (*ibid.* 80).

When somebody was guilty of some sin related to a certain taboo, as the case of a certain Nyabutama, his whole household was exterminated (*ibid.* 80). When there were plans to annex other kingdoms or assimilate other competitive dynasties, sometimes secret marriages were arranged so that a child could be born who would then be designated as a liberator against people of his own blood. This was seen as the sure means for defeating the rivals. This is shown by the example of Yuhi II (1444-1477) who sent his own wife to the court of Samukende, king of Bungwe, and who came back pregnant and the child born was designated as liberator against his real father unknowingly (*ibid.* 85). We can see here the darkest side of a magico-religious enslavement. The real issue behind is desire and jealousy. The human life was nothing compared to the desired object. The human sacrifice was to be found to achieve that end of a selfish monarch. The victims were innocent. This is an abuse of religion, politics and ideology.

There was, in ancient Rwanda, another aspect of violence linked to the magico-religious phenomenon, a psychological one which used the power of the word and imprecations. Besides words accompanying the designation of the liberator, there were also the armies which liberators accompanied. These militia or "armies" were many, whether under the direct king's authority or under rival princes in different provinces of the country. Their names inspired fear and terror in the camps of rivals. There were for example:

*Ibisumizi* (those who catch and fight hand -to-hand),  
*Ingangura-rugo* (assailants of avant-garde),  
*Insambuzi* (destroyers of houses),  
*Abakonja-byuma* (those who twist the iron),  
*Abaganda* (the hammering ones), etc. (*ibid.* 103)<sup>16</sup>

Cases of collective suicide which, sometimes, was rather caused by pride but was also of a psychological nature and unjustifiable, are of historical and social importance. When, for example, a person named

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<sup>16</sup>Well informed readers know the fear and terror inspired in the mind by the name of the militia *Interhamwe* (those who are united for action). When they attacked together, there was no escape.

Rusenge, who was *Umuhutu* and armor-bearer of the king, committed suicide after the king died following the injuries from an enemy's arrow, the army of the king decided to commit a collective suicide in order not to be surpassed in honor by a simple servant (*Umuhutu*) of the court (*ibid.* 107).

Kagame wrote that King Mibambwe Sekarongoro (1609-1642), nicknamed Rugabishabirenge ("the generous" = lit. the great who graciously distributes with his feet"), was the first monarch to oppose torture inflicted on victims out of jealousy. In an incident involving a disgraced person who had to be punished, advice was sought as to what method to use for punishment from the chiefs; two of these suggested that criminals<sup>17</sup> should be bound with strings made with the veins of bulls and put on a hot rock, heated with oil on it! The gracious king was surprised by the suggested method of violence. He waited until the two proponents made mistakes and the punishment they suggested was experimented on one of them (*ibid.* 123). Today the rock on which Kamegeli was burned alive still bears his name and tourists can see it in the center of the country in a place called Ruhango.

Yuhi III Mmazimpaka (1642-1675) had two step-twin brothers (Rubibi and Ruyange) who were by far handsomer than he was, though he, himself, was famous because of his beauty. The queen-mother organized a hunting party during which the twins were killed simply out of jealousy. The king discovered the crime and the instigator, none other than his mother, and he vowed to exterminate her clan. Even when the mother presented a small child, she managed to hide; the king killed the baby with his own sword. The mother could not bear the pain and she committed suicide, plunging a sword into her neck. Again a decree of the king was stipulated that henceforth, if twins were born to a king, they should perish to avoid conflicts (*ibid.* 126).

What happened was linked with the beauty of the monarch. But it is also possible that the priests and magicians saw in this beauty something extraordinary and therefore with which no one else could compete! The mystery of the birth of twins was inexplicable; therefore it could be considered as a danger for ordinary life of which it breaks the laws. This king was also reputed for his ability to compose poems, but equally as the first king to become insane (*ibid.* 129).

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<sup>17</sup>The term "criminal" meant in Kinyarwanda someone who revolts against the authority of the king.

As the ethno-history or rather a clan-history advances, we see the psychological violence develop. The armies were given more and more strongly terrifying names. Especially during the later conquest wars, a motto was formulated by the king Cyilima II Rujugira ( 1675-1708) according to which "Rwanda attacks and is never attacked." Those who chose the names were probably aware of their magical power because they were not given without the blessing of magicians and priests imitating the examples of the followers of Lyangombe as we saw above. Those names included:

*Abalima* (the devastators),  
*Intarindwa* (the irresistables),  
*Abatanguha* (the non-treacherous [who don't desert, the faithful]),  
*Igicikiza* (those who drive enemies back),  
*Imanga* (the precipice),  
*Urwasabahizi* (those who crush the adversaries), etc. (*ibid.* 137-40)

The blood of liberators did not only affect the outcome of the wars but other calamities also, such as the famines and epidemic outbreaks. Kagame tells us that in Burundi a severe famine was attributed to the fact that a Rwandan liberator, Gihana had been killed but the Burundian liberator was not killed in the proper procedure of liberators. He had committed suicide after he killed Gihana. Therefore his blood could not have effect. The council of divines had to mystify the spirit of the prince. They erected a residence for him which they called *Muyange*, as the locality of Gihana was called. They formed an army they called *Abalima*, and a herd of cows called *Nyamumbe* as the prince Gihana had them, in order to neutralize the effect of his blood. This behavior shows how superstition was exercising power over people and each violent act had to be explained, and most of the time it was because of jealousy and mimetic desire seeking to achieve the same goals as the rival or take the desired object from him (land and possessions).

The passing of years and the opening of horizons to the outside world did not change the methods of violence. Instead, competitive specialists invented new ones, even more atrocious than those used before. In the 18th century under Kigeri Ndabarasa, an alliance was sealed with Biyoro King of Mubali, by marrying his daughter to him, but she went as a liberator and she was supposed never to see her father again (*ibid* 155). Sacrificing one's own child in order to keep or gain power or to conquer somebody's territory is unimaginable! But when oracles have decided, there was nothing to do!



In the 19th century nothing changed much in the way violence was conceived. There continued to be struggles, competition, and appropriate violent responses (hand cut, drowning, exiles, etc.). What is even more striking is to read about the purposely spread smallpox through the poisoned cloth, brought as a gift from Bugesera, which contaminated the king and his brothers, following which their mother committed suicide with a poisonous drink (*ibid.* 168-69). When the king died without leaving the known official successor, the aspirant to the throne, Gatarabuhura, was thrown in the Bayanga abyss in Bugesera, after it had been discovered that the king had left a pregnant mistress and she had given birth to a baby boy, who was by tradition the rightful heir. This coincidence was attributed to God's providence and protection (*ibid.* 171-73). Another form of violence linked to the magico-religious tradition was starvation and famines caused by the death of a king. When a king died people were not allowed to cultivate with hoes for four months. They were using blunt wooden instrument called inkonzo instead of the ordinary iron hoes.

In the course of time, more armies were created, including *Abakotanyi* which were an elite army battling with shields and who will in 1990 give the name to the Rwandese Patriotic Front which took power in Rwanda in 1994 after 4 years of war, culminating in the most violent Genocide of this century. Ironically the *Abahutu* Government had adopted another ancient army's name, namely *Inzirabwoba* (i.e., those immune to fear) which also sent irrecoverable young men to death in the name of a modern "goddess" called "sovereignty." Further, the self-proclaimed interim government during the April war and genocide called itself *Leta y'Abatabazi* (the government of "liberators/saviours"). Their aim was to recall the past, to manipulate the minds and revive a false and fatal practice. Ironically, none of the members of this government lost a drop of blood in the original sense of the practice. Only innocent people died, mostly *Abatutsi*, moderate *Abahutu*, and later masses of those they forced to follow them in exile!

To conclude this section, I have to say that it is tempting to read into what was meant to be history, a kind of history of a traditional religion, a religion which contributed to institutionalizing violence. A. Kagame, though a member of the clergy, had looked at it under a historical angle. It is clear that the magico-religion has influenced political decisions, the social structure of the nation, and consequently bears some responsibility for acts of violence it glorified. To the courage of a woman and a man who opposed the practice of sacrificing the so-called "liberators/saviours," we can add the son of Gihana, Kanywabahizi, who refused to become a

liberator like his father and preferred exile in the country in which he was supposed to be sacrificed (*ibid.* 168). Resistance to violence and barbaric ideological political or religious principles is praiseworthy. Future generations will judge their ancestors, looking back to the unnecessary death of "liberators" and young men and woman called heroes, but heroes in graves. There is lack of evidence for people who promoted peace in Rwandan history, without using war machinery. Now we can turn to the role of popular oral literature to see how it was linked to the magico-religious phenomenon of violence.

Father Eugène Hurel was told, and wrote down a story concerning a young man named Shingu-y'intwali who was forced by his uncle to go to war against his will, and alone, while his same aged cousins stayed behind under their father's protection. He asked to be allowed marry first. Then asked for provisions. He left, and later he was killed at the battle field. His young wife who was pregnant gave birth to a son who was named Muhozi (i.e. avenger) (Hurel 97-100). The uncle who desired his children, sacrificed the innocent nephew, but he only delayed the death of those he wanted to keep for himself, because the name of the child left behind by the defunct carries the mission of revenge. Revenge in Rwanda was rather a virtue and a duty to save the honor of the injured family.

The stories told and learnt by heart, orally and transmitted, were full of violent images which anaesthetized minds of some Rwandans who became insensitive to suffering and violence because of the banalization of violence and death. By stories I understand the *Imigani*.<sup>18</sup> Not only violence was expressed in aggressive or defensive wars, but also within families in which preferences, egoistic, absurd favoritism were shown, which had grave consequences. In Rwanda we have plenty of stories involving stepmothers and stepfathers who mishandle their stepchildren and in this way sow the seed of discord and cyclic death and revenge and exclusion and exile. Some characters are represented by dirty and ferocious animals, monsters, giants and ogres. One story I learnt by heart as a child was "Kizimuzimu cya Rwicamakombe."<sup>19</sup> The story tells how Kizimuzimu killed parents, relatives and cattle, but finally the only surviving young man got revenge.

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<sup>18</sup>A term used for proverbs, idioms, stories, myths and parables. The reader or hearer needs to know the context in which *umugani* is applied.

<sup>19</sup>Kizimusimu means literally: the spirit-spirit, the Great Spirit. Cya is a genitive (=of): Rwicamakombe, i.e., the giant killer of mature bulls. The violent connotation is obvious: to kill mature bulls is to stop future generations.

Kizimuzimu told him, "cut my big toe and take away your relatives. Cut my small toe and take away what belongs to your family..." He did it and he killed the giant.<sup>20</sup>

Another story tells of Nyangoma ya Nyabami (one who belongs to the dynasty of kings) and who, through intrigues from the stepmother, was reduced to the rank of a watchman over fields in a foreign land. When nostalgia and oppression from landlords were heavy upon her, she would sing:

My father was Nyangoma ya Nyabami,  
My brother was Biberobyinkindi  
But now I am Murinziwanyoni.<sup>21</sup>

One of the stories my mother used to tell us, which made us sad and cry, was about a young man called Cyubahiro who had just married and was mobilized for the war. Before he went he told his young wife to see him off at least to the living room because that could be the last moment. When they were there he told her, "escort me to the main gate," and from there to the forecourt, and each time he told her "maybe this is the last moment." Later he fell on the battle ground. When his servant came home and announced his death, the mother announced the sad news to her daughter-in-law who became inconsolable. The bereaved mother told her, "have courage, at least you are young and will marry another!," to which the daughter-in-law replied "have courage, you also will bear other sons!" The sadness was unbearable and the young woman took her own life. The mother-in-law took her own life. When Cyubahiro's father came home and saw what happened, he also took his own life. The servants who could not outlive their masters also committed collective suicide. Some of the people of my clan believed that suicide is a virtue and sign of extreme courage. Stories like these have impact on people's minds.

These stories show how violence could destroy families, human life and dignity, reducing people (even girls) to miserable creatures. Elements of mimetic desire are not completely absent. As I indicated above, religion

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<sup>20</sup>The one who carried out revenge was the brother of the last victim. Nyansha (one who found grace).

<sup>21</sup>Myangoma ya Nyabami means one who belongs to the royal dynasties: Biberobyinkindi (contraction of Biber bya indindi) means the lap which deserves royal clothes. Murinziwanyoni is a contraction of Murinzi wa nyoni: watchman of birds, meaning one who chases the birds away.

was an integral part of life. Soothsayers and divines were always involved in every event, whether before, or afterwards. All aspects of life were concerned: marriage, pregnancy, infertility, miscarriage, birth, planting, harvesting, markets, court cases, looking for the job or wars, etc. Priests, divines, witch doctors and sorcerers were consulted.

#### V. Modern Rwanda, colonialism, and violence

Modern Rwanda was marked by the central government which started to take shape under Yuhi IV Gahindiro (1746- 1802). Probably traditional religion and the oral literature linked to it were a central medium of sharpening the psychological conditioning of the people ideologically. Almost all old people I heard when I was a child swore by his name. Most popular stories go as far back as the reign of this monarch. I remember some told by my mother which mention Mutarugera, son of Gahindiro, whose bride was desired by *Abatutsi*, *Abahutu* and *Abatwa*, servants he sent to spy on her, but all introduced themselves as pretenders. Another characteristic story confirming the mimetic theory is the one which tells how a pied crow stole the chicks of a cattle egret though they were friends and lived in the same house. The cattle egret, looking for her chicks, met with shepherds and said: "Eh! You, shepherds! May you graze as long as the blessed rule of Gahindiro! Have you seen the small bird Nyamurokoroko<sup>22</sup> which bears the cloth twice wrapped, which took the chicks of Bununu (i.e. the beautiful one), and left those of Bunuko (i.e., the stinking one)?"<sup>23</sup> The cattle egret met farmers and said to them: "Eh! You, farmers! May you farm as long as the blessed rule of Gahindiro! Have you seen the small bird..." etc. The story ends in successive duels at different agreed places but these were all inconclusive. The king ordered the chicks to be killed. The cattle egret cried a lot and asked the chicks to be rather left with the pied crow. When the king saw her compassion and love, he ordered them to be given to back to the cattle egret, because the pied crow had consented to the king's judgment.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Poetic word play on *ikirokoroko* (si.) or *ibirokoroko* (pl.), meaning the crest under the bill of birds.

<sup>23</sup>This story is in a highly stylized poem in the mother tongue which I am unable to render. Still the story is revealing. The Rwandese society developed in an environment of complexes and rivalry which unfortunately ended in tragic massacres, war atrocities, and genocide and its well known consequences at home and in the region.

<sup>24</sup>Johanssen (39) has another version in which the heron and the raven are "characters" and he interestingly entitles the story "Das Solomonische Urteil," that is, "Solomon's Judgment,"

If I refer to this story while introducing the modern times, I want the reader to understand the political and socio-economic climate forced upon innocent *Abatutsi* and *Abahutu* and the ways used to distinguish and classify them and the kind of rivalry which existed between them. People had no other way of expressing their feelings apart from using fables and animal satires. This "Solomon's judgment" equivalent says much about the Rwandan society.

Modern Rwanda was also marked by the arrival of Europeans. Germans helped to subdue the Northern Region which was still a semi- or wholly independent territory. Their theory of races justified *Abatutsi* supremacy, strengthened the grip to power of one of their clans. Germans accepted the status quo, they helped Musinga, son of Rwabugili, son of Gahindiro who is thought by some as a power usurper. Kabare, his maternal uncle, had killed the rightful heir, Rutarindwa (1895-1896), during the coup d'état of Rucunshu. He, together with the queen, became the most powerful people of the kingdom (Kagame 105-182). Germans not only supported it, they also helped the king to gain overall control on country.

The Belgians who took over from the Germans after World War I deposed king Musinga, who resisted Christianity, and they brought to power his son Rudahigwa, who was favorable to it and who later dedicated Rwanda to Christ the King. There exist numerous books which relate to colonial power and exploitation, but the most remarkable fact is that the Belgians also stressed the supremacy of *Abatutsi* and introduced the so-called "*Ibuku*" (the "book" or identity card, in which the ethnic mention of the bearer was imperatively written). Germans had built schools (*ishuli*, from the German word *Schule*), which were exclusively for *Abatutsi* children in order to train and educate the auxiliaries they needed. Belgians continued the same policy for gaining the favor of the ruling clans in order to have cheap labor from *Abahutu* population. This policy was sometimes initiated, supported or blessed by some powerful members of the Roman Catholic clergy though they could have anticipated its violent consequences. Protestants stood aloof.

As everywhere, the colonial power used harsh and violent methods to subdue and exploit the Rwandan people, whether *Abahutu* or ordinary *Abatutsi*. When the wind of change blew in Africa and there was a general cry for independence in different countries, Belgians and the church changed sides. They supported the demands of *Abahutu* for more rights.

There was a violent revolution in 1959. It has never been studied and analyzed objectively to find those responsible and bring them to justice, whether from *Abatutsi* or *Abahutu* sides. The monarchy was abolished in 1960, *Abahutu* took over for the first time since *Abanyiginya* dynasties took power. The two successive Republics (1960-73, 1973-1994) did not address the pending issues of refugees and their fate in the Diaspora, or the genuine needs of those who remained inside the country, especially the ordinary *Abatutsi*. Every time there was an attempt to recapture power or insurrections in neighboring countries or when the economic situation was in a marasmic state, they became scapegoats and suffered violence of different kinds.

The simple *Abatutsi* were exploited by the ruling clans in ancient times. They were forced to go to some absurd wars and many of them died or went into exile to flee reprisals. Later they became victims of violence because they were collectively associated with the clans of *Abanyiginya* and *Abega*. However everyone knew that not every *Umututsi* had enjoyed the privilege of the ruling clans. *Abahutu*, one the other hand during the two successive Republics did not all become leaders or rich as did some groups and individuals or even those called *Akazu* (the small house or lineage of the powerful family of the wife of the last Rwandan President). A few families and individuals did. *Abahutu* leadership was very divided along regionalist and militaro-politico-economic lines. Many were excluded from the party or simply eliminated. *Abatutsi* were indiscriminately, collectively scapegoated for all ills that befell the country. Some were therefore killed individually, others in massacres, as recently during the 1994 genocide in which military, militia, individuals and mobs were involved. *Abahutu* who were of different political opinion or ideology were also killed or reduced to silence and political inertia during the successive republics and during the genocide. Rivalry between regions became a way of exclusion and clinging to power. The national cake was meant for the lions. Violence through famine, malnutrition, unequal opportunities, intimidation and lack of freedom of expression, could not be greater. It is during this state of affairs that the Rwandese Patriotic Front, made up mainly of *Abatutsi* exiled between 1959 and 1972, took arms in 1990 and started the so-called October War from Uganda that ended in July 1994 with the military victory. A million innocent *Abatutsi* and moderate *Abahutu* had been scapegoated and killed in the most atrocious and vicious way. The object of desire was Rwanda, power, wealth and revenge.

During the time of wars for unification, it was mainly *Abatutsi* powerful warlords whose victims were mainly *Abatutsi* warriors and innocent "liberators." In modern Rwanda, after the centralization of the monarchy and the dynastic consolidation, victims were then mainly the majority of *Abahutu* and ordinary *Abatutsi*. During the colonial time all groups suffered though some less than the others. There was rivalry between the two clans of *Abatutsi*, the colonial masters, and the powerful Roman Catholic Church. We should now turn to the missionary work and the church and see how the rivalry was strengthened and partly set a precedent for what was going to follow in the future.

## **VI. The Christian era**

When the king Musinga received the first Protestant missionaries on the 22nd of July 1907 at his palace in Nyanza, the Catholic missionaries, French White Fathers from the station of Save were also received the same day. The king asked whether, if the Germans were to teach in Rwanda, the French would have to leave the country. They replied that there was enough work for both (Johanssen 34). However, the king took the precaution of sending the Germans to the East of the country in Munyaga (*ibid.* 35). Probably it was because the White Fathers had already founded a mission station in Save, in the South, after the very first one in Zaza (1900) in the East. King Musinga may also have sensed that the activities of Catholics and Protestants could lead to conflicts between them. It was therefore decided to separate the Catholic and Protestant mission stations by a four hours journey distance (*ibid.* 36). It was also a problem for him to see people serving the one and same God who were going to compete for his favor and their influence on him.

The Catholic Church built special schools for *Abatutsi* children in order to gain influence and manpower; by this way they were seeking to convert the ruling class in order to convert the masses through their influence. This created complexes and feelings of discrimination on the part of *Abahutu*. Still there was some resistance to Catholicism or Christianity in general. Protestant missionaries had also failed to gain converts. After World War I, King Musinga who showed resistance to Catholicism and seemed to be sympathetic to Germans was deposed by the Belgians and replaced by his son Rudahigwa. At a later stage, however the Catholic Church changed sides and helped *Abahutu* to enter the seminaries and they later became the spearheading force in the changes that took place during the 1959 revolution against the *Abatutsi* rule and Colonialism. As I said above, this

was the period of the revolution when Abatutsi were collectively demonized, scapegoated and victimized as an ethnic group. Many were killed, others fled in foreign countries. They paid for the political violence inherited from the violent past of a few individuals; under the influence of a magico-religion, priests and divines abused religious and political power.

But the new religion did not change much. Christianity never challenged the violence of the past and instead showed some psychological and religious discrimination and took sides politically instead of protecting the oppressed people, whatever their ethnic or social status. It was even more shocking to see that the Christian Church which preached brotherly love produced some violent leaders it trained in its schools without appealing to their conscience. The Bible was abused. The language of the Bible translated in Kinyarwanda or in hymns used words associated with violence without much reflection on them. For instance, God and Jesus are called "*Umutabazi*" (savior/ liberator) without a footnote showing the nuances. Christ suffered violence but he never inflicted it. He never left Palestine to die in Rome to conquer the land of their oppressors. Sometimes, in their ignorance of the language, missionaries were quick to compare the texts of the Bible and to use the Rwandan stories to prove that these prepared them to receive the Gospel. Some stories of the Bible were used to underline the differences between *Abahutu*, *Abatutsi*, and *Abatwa*. Especially the Book of Genesis was used to prove that *Abatutsi* pastoralists were like Abel, and *Abahutu* like Cain who was agriculturist and who fell in disgrace and therefore was cursed. Myths were used to justify the fate of a group or another with a stamp bearing "predetermined by God." It was even suggested that *Abatutsi* inherited Christianity from Abyssinia and therefore did not need to be evangelized. We should not lose sight of the fact that the Hamite theory propagated by anthropologists and supported or unchallenged by missionaries used the Noah story to claim white supremacy and link *Abatutsi* to their story through Indo-European theory. Therefore the more people were higher in status, the more they displayed God's favor as traditional belief linked God to fate.

When missionaries introduced Christianity, they preached obedience to God and authorities. The authorities created rules according to their own interests. When people challenged it, they were told not to bother about these earthly things. One of the consequences of the first and the second World Wars was eschatological teaching. Christians should look more to rewards and riches in heaven and should not care about what is going on earth. Jesus was coming back soon! The wars were there to prove it. People



were in the last days! So, in Africa mostly, people did not learn to tackle problems of injustice, violence and exploitation. To be a politician, or a businessman, was to be directly a candidate for hell! Money had not the same value in Europe and in Africa, as if human needs were different. I know of a learned missionary with an MA degree who fought hard not to give diplomas to students he trained for four years in a theological school to become pastors! Some of those are scholars today. This is not a lesser violence. He wanted to secure his place and his future by keeping Rwandans at a lower level of achievement.

The colonial power was helped by the established churches of different denominations who helped to tamp down the challenging new converts. The supremacy of colonial power, their way of life and especially the power of the written word, became instruments of domination and not always of positive transformation. The theories of races written down after the arrival of Europeans in Rwanda added another weight to the burden people had. The country was still struggling to gain a political direction and philosophy. Already after the arrival of Germans, the theory of the supremacy of *Abatutsi* was more stressed than before. What had been the struggle between some rival *Abatutsi* clans ceased because the Germans helped in the final breaking of strongholds which resisted *Abanyiginya* and *Abega* powerful clans. With the power of the gun they strengthened the rule of the Rwandan "Kaiser." When they found a reigning king over a well structure society, they could not believe their eyes. They had never seen an African country which was lead in a European style. With their interest in mind, they strengthened their indirect rule. They also introduced the Hamitic theory to justify their supremacy and to twist the minds of *Abatutsi* by seeking their origin in Asia, thus making them foreign to their own country and putting them on the equal level as colonialists. When the extremists were calling for the extermination of *Abatutsi* in 1994, they were saying that they are sending them back to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). For them to kill Umututsi was like getting rid of a colonialist, a white in black skin.

Why the churches did not challenge this ideology and the injustice and violence which accompanied it from the beginning of the mission work in Rwanda in 1900 (Catholics) and 1907 (Protestants) remains a mystery. Why did the churches not speak out for the innocent refugees who were in camps and in misery in neighboring countries? Why did they show such weakness in assessing the seriousness of violence? Why were they compromising? Why did they not introduce in school systems the courses related to politics and why did they not use their influence to teach positive

pragmatism and tolerance? These are questions which will have to be answered in the effort to do our autopsy of the dead Rwandans at least for some generations.

Some missionaries who had failed from the beginning to show unity and were rather in an atmosphere of rivalry, and later took sides when Europeans were fighting during World Wars I and II, could not solve the Rwandan problems. The so-called Christian countries never showed the real difference. It took little time to draw colonies in their rivalry and many Rwandans died fighting for Germans (1914-16) and contributing to war efforts behind the Belgians (1939-45). So even the Christian Church failed. People have always asked the question, "How could the violence of that magnitude happen in a Christian country like Rwanda?" No one has a satisfactory answer. This paper is an attempt to look for possible causes and surely religions have responsibility in what happened.

## VII. Conclusion

Religious beliefs and practices have influenced the way Rwandans understand and deal with violence whether consciously or unconsciously. The introduction of Lyangombe and Nyabingi cults created a religious that resulted in rivalry between the priests and between the two great spirits (Lyangombe and Nyabingi) and their followers. Daily life was influenced by religion whether socially, culturally or politically. The problem became more serious during the struggles for the unification of the country by different successive kings. The fate of some people was decided according to omens and oracles which only priests, divines and sorcerers could interpret or control. The king himself was exempted from being initiated into Lyangombe cult because Lyangombe was considered the king of *Imandwa* and the spiritual realm, and therefore equal to the king of the land. There is rivalry between the temporal and the spiritual. Whenever there were important decisions to make, especially in the succession struggles or in war planning for conquering and annexing foreign countries, religion and office holders played a big role. The sending of willing or picked Abatabazi ("liberators/saviours") who were designed to go and let their blood be shed in a foreign country before it was attacked and conquered by Rwandan kings and their armies was the utmost abject form of twisting other people's minds, especially urging young warriors to sacrifice themselves sometimes for wrong motives. The appropriation of the ideology by the so-called interim government is a perverted side of it.

Some people tried to resist it unsuccessfully and their families were exterminated. Manipulation and family interests were involved because the rewards and honors were given to the families of *Abatabazi*. However, sometimes a rival was designated as a way of getting rid of him. In that way it was "sanctified" violence out of jealousy; scapegoating for the elimination of the rival. If I dwelt on ancient Rwanda it is because it was fundamental to understand how the mentalities were developed.

Because religious beliefs were not separated from other aspects of ordinary life, since there has been no clear break from violence at the beginning of Christianizing of the country, there is a need to rethink all the stages of our history of religion and see how it has contributed to violence through its abuse by ruling groups, whether of ancient or modern Rwanda. Rwandans have to deal with these issues as they deal with other aspects and causes, if they want to be comprehensive in looking for possible solutions to the problem of violence. It will be necessary to go back to the ancient history of Rwanda and see how violence was considered and how it was anchored in the mentality of people. The ancient and modern Rwandan political structures have supported violence and sometimes have glorified it in terms of sacrifice and heroism, guided by mimetic desire. The colonial power used violence to achieve their goals of dominating and exploiting the populations under their rule, out of rivalry between the nations they represented, although they were first of all members of the body of Christ whose sacrificial death was to make obsolete rivalry, sacrifices and scapegoating. Christian nations should play a more positive role in efforts of reconciliation of Rwandan people by recognizing their own responsibility. Early missionaries were influenced by the spirit of rivalry because of their religious and national background. The object of desire being Rwanda and its people, it was tempting for them to fight for favor and influence. Because they also wanted protection, manpower and a share in authority, they could not speak against current injustices. Sometimes there was a confusion of roles. I heard that a missionary in the Protestant Western Rwanda became once a governor *ad interim* during the time of colonial rule. In modern Rwanda, an archbishop became a member of the Central Committee of the ruling party (MRND, 1975-94) until he was forced out by papal pressure. I believe that as long as this issue of the legacy of violence anchored in religious experience is not addressed churches will be unable to help break the chain of violence. Rwanda needs a public day of repentance if it is to overcome its past full of violence. The genocide of 1994 was not haphazard. It has been bred by Rwanda's culture

of violence, by collective responsibility and a tribal globalization approach in the style of "it is not you it is your brother" in La Fontaine's fable "The Wolf and the Lamb." It was hatched by modern sophisticated politics and manipulated by politicians, intellectuals, international commercial greed in arms dealing as well as by demons of revenge and the lack of the church's prophetic stand. Churches should define a theology which challenges "acquisitive rivalry."

However, Rwandans are the first responsible for their situation. They should face it and try to break the chains of violence. They should understand that the rulers and intellectuals are most responsible because they created the atmosphere and culture of violence for their own interests at the expense of innocents citizens who want to live together in peace and harmony. I have tried to show that part of responsibility of the colonial powers, of some missionaries and some Rwandan clergy who justified and supported divisions rooted in mimetic desire and scapegoating among people.

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# MIMETIC SADISM IN THE FICTION OF YUKIO MISHIMA

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Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) was one of the most enigmatic authors of the 20th century. Novelist, playwright, actor, exhibitionist—his novels are rife with homoerotic and violent imagery, while his fanatical and nihilistic philosophy calls for a return to a Samurai ethos. Mishima thus attained infamy in Japan and in the West, as his shocking novels inspired hordes of young Japanese into a cult of Mishima worship, while critics who acknowledge his genius are still nervous about his sadistic homosexuality and his suicide. Mishima's works are suffused with erotic bloodshed and misogyny, and Mishima finally ended his life by ritually disemboweling himself. I will make the case that Mishima was incessantly plagued by torturous mimetic frustrations, and that his final act of spilling his blood and intestines can be interpreted as the result of mimetic hatred against his rivals. I also argue that Mishima was fundamentally schizoid; in Girardian terms, a man whose hypocrisy for the sake of desire rendered him an exhibitionistic mask disguising mimetic rage and fear. Having previously written about Mishima from a psychoanalytic perspective, I believe that a Girardian approach would often yield drastically different interpretations of identical biographical and literary materials.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I initially wrote on Mishima for several diagnostic assignments at my psychoanalytic institute, the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP). After considering the psychoanalytic and Girardian approaches, I expanded these original essays using *identical* material to determine whether the interpretations or conclusions would differ; I was struck by the way the same details could provide both remarkable congruences and vast divergences of perspective. Read side by side, one can find compatible conclusions, but one also finds perceptions of the same details that would be difficult to conceive or articulate

### Mimesis, misogyny, and maculacy

Kimitake Hiraoka was a frail, sickly child before he became the muscular and exhibitionistic novelist Yukio Mishima. His brutal and helpless childhood inaugurated his mimetic complexes: his need to escape the suffocating and diseased environment of his grandmother, his rivalry with her, and his mimetic ideal of beauty and muscular invulnerability.

Mishima was an unhealthy youth, taken from the arms of his mother before he was two months old, and confined to the sickroom of his grandmother for the first twelve years of his life. Under the auspices of his tyrannical and ostensibly psychotic grandmother, Mishima lived in the dark, could play only female friends (because they were deemed harmless), and could eat only gentle foods. He thus lived an imprisoned life away from his parents, amid the excrescences of his sick and hysterical grandmother until adolescence, when his father "reclaimed him." Mishima later rebelled against this sickly nature, sculpting himself into a statuesque ideal of masculine beauty. He became obsessed with martial arts and the eroticism of his own engraved body. His fiction and philosophy were permeated by misogyny, glorification of Grecian male sexuality and aesthetics, and the repudiation of anything weak or feminine. He finally killed himself before age could wither his masculine beauty.

Mishima's fiction prominently features protagonists who mirror his sickly youth. The autobiographical *Confessions of a Mask* (*Kamen no Kokuhaku*) describes the homoerotic development of this frail child. Such frail characters in Mishima's fiction are always drawn erotically to beautiful males as both mimetic rivals and models. The narrator of *Confessions* describes his sexual attraction to a sewage collector, a "ladler of excrement" (8). The handsome man with "ruddy cheeks" and "shining eyes" fascinates the narrator, and he is filled with desire looking at his tight jeans.

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using psychoanalytic perspectives and jargon. Two of the original essays will be published in the *Psychoanalytic Review* in coming months: "Phallic Narcissism, Anal Sadism, and Oral Discord: The Case of Yukio Mishima (part I)," and "Narcissistic Revenge and Suicide: The Case of Yukio Mishima (part II)." I am currently translating these articles for publication in Japan. I included a brief discussion of Mishima in the introduction to *Psychological Undercurrents of History* (Piven and Lawton, eds.), to explore the complex methodological and psychological dynamics of the field of psychohistory. A commentary on Mishima's traumatic childhood entitled "The Pathology of Genius," will appear in a forthcoming edition of *Tapestry: The Journal of Historical Motivations and the Social Fabric*, and a final article, "Voyeurism and Rage in *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*," will appear in *Psychological Undercurrents of History, Volume II* (2002).

The narrator thus emerges into a burgeoning homosexuality, but he also fantasizes about dying dramatically. His sexual fantasies revolve around excrement and being killed, while he simultaneously feels disgust for the fetid environment of his sick grandmother.

These are distinct erotic currents which are manifested in Mishima's real sexual life and his fantasies: he aspires to a purified, invulnerable self which abjures dirt, weakness, and femininity, while nevertheless experiencing sexual arousal in the presence of excrement and squalor. The persona obsessed with escaping impurity and weakness can be seen in Mishima's striving to attain a samurai aesthetic. Here the sickness and stultification of childhood are combated with the enforcement of masculine behavior and the rejection of anything dirty, sickly, or vulnerable.<sup>2</sup> The most shocking vignette in Mishima's fiction is in *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*, where the young antagonist throws a cat against a log, dissects, and uncoils its intestines. The messy, disgusting, and weak innards are destroyed in this fantasy, while Mishima himself pursued his fantasy of cleanliness and invulnerability.<sup>3</sup>

The fantasies all contain mimetic impulses. Mishima wishes to escape the nauseating sickness of his grandmother and therefore finds a mimetic model who enables him to escape such disgust. Masculine and invulnerable males provide a template for male identity, a conduit for his escape from the suffocating and diseased environment of his childhood as well as his own frailty. However, Mishima's grandmother was also a model. Her authoritarian personality provided a standard of strength and invulnerability, a model he could imitate to escape weakness while inflicting his hostility on others. She also barred access to Mishima's mother and became a mimetic rival he wished to defeat. Tyrannical femininity was an

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<sup>2</sup>Lifton believes that Mishima became numbed to feelings of weakness, death, and disintegration as means of dissociating his anxiety. His "mask" was a means of withdrawing from the excrement, disease, and impingements of his childhood, of deadening himself to ward off the threat of actual or psychic death. At the same time, these experiences immersed him in death-related imagery which would pervade his psyche for life (264-5).

<sup>3</sup>As Annie Reich writes, "the need for narcissistic inflation arises from a striving to overcome threats to one's bodily intactness" (294). Mishima's sadism is an attempt to overcome the fear of "catastrophic annihilation" (p. 301), of "disintegration" (Kohut 1977, 1979), of what Ogden (1989) calls the "autistic-contiguous dread" of collapse, fragmentation, and dissolution into urine and feces. The severe narcissist fears "falling apart at the seams," or feels like "a bagful of excrement" (Reich 301).

obstacle to his drives for masculine identity, and throughout his fiction manipulative women interfere with his pursuits and deflate his maleness.

Even beautiful women without insidious qualities become ghosts of his grandmother, as some evil quality eventually suffuses their being. They are not always actually evil, it is a matter of perception and projection. Mishima invariably imagines a cold, infantilizing, castrating quality in them which inhibits intimacy and arouses a revengeful destructiveness. In *Confessions of a Mask*, the narrator sees a beautiful woman on a bus, and is entranced by how cold and unloving she appears. In *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, the young Buddhist acolyte Mizoguchi is haunted by the beautiful Uiko, who laughs at him and knocks him into the dirt when he tries to confront her.<sup>4</sup> Later Mizoguchi is forced to step on a prostitute's belly by an American soldier. But he begins to enjoy violating her and trampling the site of her most vulnerable and feminine essence, her womb. Mimetic rivalry thus consists in the attempt to both escape and defeat the effeminacy of his own body as well as the femininity of tyrannical women around him.

If Mishima was drawn to the irresistible authority of his grandmother, he needed male models to escape her sickness and femininity. Mishima experienced women as polluted and castrating. The young protagonist of *Confessions of a Mask* loves heroes but feels repugnance learning that Joan of Arc is female (*Confessions* 12). His grandmother was the prototype of hostile and disgusting women who dominated and feminized men.<sup>5</sup> Mishima's father submitted meekly to the grandmother, and Mishima both despised his father's impotence and his grandmother's coerciveness.<sup>6</sup> Women are scheming, vain, and immensely jealous in Mishima's novels. Mishima expressly speaks of women as treacherous, that mothers manipulate their children against their fathers, that they enjoy making men suffer. In *Forbidden Colors* the misogynistic protagonists collude in an endless series of humiliating reprisals against disloyal and insidious

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<sup>4</sup>This is reminiscent of the scene in Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground*, where the protagonist tries to gain recognition from a soldier who wounded his pride by bumping into him, only to fall humiliatingly at the soldier's feet. See Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* for elaboration on this theme.

<sup>5</sup>The grandmother showed contempt for both Mishima's father and grandfather (*Confessions* 5).

<sup>6</sup>Wilhelm Reich (152-53, 203) states that phallic narcissism results from serious disappointments in the object of the other sex, while the father is weak or insignificant.



women.<sup>7</sup> Women are equated with everything weak and diseased. The protagonist of *Confessions of a Mask* is anemic, and the doctor mentions that he might have chlorosis, "a woman's disease."<sup>8</sup> Mishima's homosexuality seems to be an escape from anything sick, feminine, or dirty, and his sexual proclivities impelled him to seduce and become masculine, clean, and powerful men.<sup>9</sup>

Mishima was in fact married, and not all women portrayed in his work are representations of evil manipulators. Mishima also envisioned pure virgins and aesthetically perfect women. But even beautiful, chaste women are implicated by Mishima's mimetic rivalry. Mishima both desires the love and innocence of a benign mother denied him in competition with his possessive grandmother, and also revenge against women who obstruct his desire for masculinity, autonomy, and power. In *Spring Snow* (*Haru No Yuki*), the authoritarian abbess (identical to the grandmother) bars Kiyooki entry to the chambers of his lover even as he is dying.<sup>10</sup> In *Confessions*, a grandmother stands in the doorway as sentry between the narrator and the lovely Sonoko.<sup>11</sup> Women need not actually be insidious, but Mishima

<sup>7</sup> The term "forbidden colors" (*kinjiki*) is a classical literary term which refers to homosexuality.

<sup>8</sup> *Confessions* (92). It should also be noted that the doctor believes that anemia might be caused by masturbation, and the ensuing shame from this mumbled diagnosis immediately leads to fantasies of bloodshed and sadistic homosexuality. Mishima's sexuality and object choice can thus be related to entrenched feelings of shame.

<sup>9</sup> The idea that homosexuality relates to emotional problems is not particularly accepted in contemporary psychology, largely because of the stigma of describing homosexuality as a disease or perversion. However, in the case of Mishima, homosexuality does seem to be related to his traumatic relations with women, as evidenced by both his biography and his own confessions. Girard writes that homosexuality is sometimes "the total subordination of the sexual appetite to the effects of a mimetic game that concentrates all the subject's powers of attention or absorption upon the individual who is responsible for the double bind—the model as rival, the rival as model." (Girard 1987, 335). In Mishima's case the mimetic model was the grandmother, and hence he experienced arousal in excrement. However, because grandmother was so terrifying and abusive, Mishima found a model in a sewage collector who could galvanize his excremental sexuality while allowing him to escape the grandmother who made him feel sick and weak.

<sup>10</sup> Kiyooki's lover ultimately becomes the next abbess, thus symbolically becoming the inaccessible and unloving condensation of the mother and grandmother.

<sup>11</sup> *Confessions* (168-9). The narrator of *Confessions* expresses almost entirely homoerotic impulses, but Sonoko is the split off idealized aspect of the feminine that Mishima never attained when separated from his mother, and hence he feels a sense of bliss in her pure and naïve beauty. Sonoko represents other things as well, such as proof that the narrator is not a weak and castrated male who cannot seduce women, and a naïve girl he can injure in

protagonists will see them as rivals, foils against his masculine invincibility, and even competitors in his acquisitive pursuit of male lovers. Mimetic rivalry means attaining what they have that he does not, which means power, autonomy, the ability to control and manipulate others, their cold and unloving nature which forces others to love them ardently and helplessly. For Mishima, attaining and defeating women means the ability to make others helpless, to make them as castrated, vulnerable, and desperate for love as he was, to acquire invincible power over others.

### **Mimetic sadomasochism**

However, Mishima's mimetic desires for beautiful males also take on self-punitive and revengeful qualities. Mishima is sexually attracted to the men who enable him to escape his excremental and diseased youth, but he wishes to murder them as well. They become model/obstacles. However, these murderous impulses are not only the result of competition and rivalry with such males. Mishima wants to replace them, but he also feels sexually rejected by them. In the awareness that he is not the masculine beauty he desires, Mishima wishes to both attain that beauty and destroy his own ugliness. He therefore fantasizes about killing beautiful males and himself as well, alternating between the roles of masturbating voyeur and slain victim, who is the object of erotic fantasy as well as self-hatred.

In *Confessions*, Mishima is sexually aroused by the sewage collector, and fantasizes the tragic life of the hero hauling excrement. Since he identifies himself with disease and excrement, he envisions a hero whose tragic fate is to carry excrement nobly. And yet, since young Mishima's tragic heroes are also invariably murdered in his fantasies, he seeks to punish that self which he equates with excrement. He also wishes to kill off his helpless and needy self, abhorring the hungry vulnerability of selfish infants he equates with murderous parasites. This further indicates a mimetic rivalry toward anyone who needs love and wishes to survive, as though they were competitors for limited supplies of nurturance and nourishment.<sup>12</sup> Succumbing to the authority of his grandmother, Mishima

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revenge against women (his grandmother and mother). That the grandmother who bars entry to Sonoko recapitulates his own grandmother barring entry to mother is supported by his equation of Sonoko's grandmother with "some sort of inorganic matter," that is, not a living thing, and his feeling that "everything had suddenly become motionless" after he is denied entry. He experiences a regressive sense of infantile imprisonment, immobility, numbing, and death.

<sup>12</sup>In *Confessions*, the narrator says that the baby murders his mother when she dies trying to

aligns himself with her malice, and imagines destroying the weak and shameful creature she has envisioned and forced upon his self-image. Mishima therefore becomes powerful and authoritarian, derogating weakness and impurity, and counteracting his own weakness through aggressive behavior and mimetic rivalry with grandmother.

Mishima's mimesis also involves a further relationship with the feminine. He developed an early inclination to transvestitism in identification with egocentric women. He identified with the narcissistic exhibitionism of his grandmother, with the performer Tenkatsu, and with Cleopatra. This is an erotic fascination with their erotic conceit, as these women command sensual attention, exhibit their sexuality for all to desire, and remain in control as they seduce their audiences. It is a wish to be loved passively, be the object of love and lust, rather than having to actively pursue the unrequited love of abandoning objects.

It is also simultaneously an identification with the grandmother, and the wish to be father's love object, loved by father as though Mishima were a woman. One might even suggest that he was in mimetic rivalry for the phallus of his grandmother. For him, his grandmother was masculine and castrated men, inculcating what the psychoanalysts call the fantasy of the "phallic mother." The phallus becomes a signifier of power, penetration, and the ability to invade and dismember others. Transvestitism is simultaneously imitation of the feminine, the retention of one's gender, and the mimetic fantasy of attaining the feminine phallicity of the grandmother.<sup>13</sup> In equating himself with weakness and femininity, Mishima feels

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save it (161). His rage and shame over both his vulnerability and neediness are manifest in his blaming the helpless infant for crying out in hunger. This is undoubtedly commingled with an identification with the grandmother who abused him, thus enabling him to escape neediness through her strength while preserving her as a love object. He subsequently revels in the torture of others.

<sup>13</sup>*Confessions* (16-20). See Socarides (363), who claims that transvestitism "reassures against and lessens castration fears, and keeps in repression deeper anxieties of merging and fusion with the mother and fears of engulfment by her." It maintains the relationship with mother but keeps her at a distance, while retaining the penis. Transvestitism further idealizes the feminine psychic attitude, maintains the belief in the phallic women, and enacts the "object-erotic (fetishistic)" substitution of the mother by her clothes, and a "narcissistic (homosexual)" substitution of her clothes for her penis (366-7). Transvestitism reveals the inability of the child to identify with father or disidentify with mother (369), and abates fears of fragmentation, through identification with her (377-81). Socarides claims that homosexual transvestites dress as women to be loved by men, and that penetration by a male reinforces masculine identity through incorporating the partner's maleness and penis, while simultaneously preserving the tie with the mother (382).

castrated and dresses like a girl, but at the same time he seeks to become that which possesses phallic invasiveness. It is perhaps a supreme irony of his fiction that he must imitate a woman to become a man.

However, Mishima experienced alienation when his adolescent transvestitism was discovered. It was seen as shameful by his family, and together with his disgust for the feminine, began to conceive of masculine puissance as a less degrading means of escaping weakness. Remember, the feminine is identified with disease, but his grandmother is invasive, which is why transvestitism is mimetically phallic for Mishima. He needed a mimetic model which could incorporate his the sexuality of Cleopatra but escape the equation of femininity with weakness and castration.

Mishima therefore experiences the fantasy of killing his weak self in mimetic identification with the cruelty of his grandmother, and in the pursuit of attaining masculine invulnerability. He feels sexually aroused by the act of killing such weak alter egos in a kind of mimetic transcendence—in surmounting himself he identifies with the fantasy of powerful masculinity and leaves his weak self in the grave. Thus the young protagonist of *Confessions of a Mask* is "completely in love with any youth who was killed" (*Confessions* 20), and feels cheated when a prince eaten by a dragon springs back to life (*ibid.* 22). From among Andersen's fairy tales, only the "Rose-Elf" throws "deep shadows" over his heart, as the beautiful youth is stabbed to death and decapitated just as he is kissing the rose his love gave him (*ibid.* 21).

This image of beauty murdered amidst vulnerability is eroticized, and becomes the obsession of the narrator's masturbation fantasies. He is aroused by the naked bodies of young men at the seashore, and he becomes erect imagining death, pools of blood, and muscular flesh, scenes of samurai cutting open their bellies and soldiers struck by bullets.<sup>14</sup> When the narrator reaches adolescence, he is captivated and sexually aroused by Guido Reni's painting of Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows and bleeding. He thus experiences his first ejaculation in mimetic self-murder and self-transcendence (*Confessions* 38-41). Mishima becomes masochistic in mimetic identification with the weak self he needs to punish and murder,

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<sup>14</sup>*Confessions* (35). Mishima also expresses sexual arousal in cutting open the bellies of his victims to prolong their pain (93), and concludes the novel with fantasies of cutting the belly of a man who arouses him (p. 253). If Mishima was aroused sexually by seppuku, it is likely that his own ritual suicide was a sexual fulfillment in which he played the victim and the voyeur.

while becoming sadistic to that self in that same desire to murder and transcend himself.

### Mimetic revenge

Vengeance on beautiful objects is yet another aspect of Mishima's mimetic sadism. Mishima has fantasies of killing his decrepit self, of attaining masculine beauty, and of merging with (and therefore becoming) beautiful male sex partners. However, he repeatedly fantasizes about destroying beauty which eludes and mocks him.<sup>15</sup> Rage erupts when attempted merger with the mimetic object fails, refilling Mishima with excruciating feelings of shame and rejection. Destruction or murder of the idealized and now despised object is the result. Mishima's own tragic suicide becomes the sadistic murder of the alienating and abandoning mimetic object.<sup>16</sup>

The narrator of *Confessions* becomes infatuated by the mature, masculine sexuality of a youth named Omi at his school. He realizes it is a desire of the flesh and waits for summer to see Omi's naked body and his huge penis (*Confessions* 61). He says, "...what I did derive from him was a precise definition of the perfection of life and manhood" (*ibid.* 64). The narrator idealizes his love and fashions "a perfect, flawless image" of Omi (*ibid.* 63). He notes how much Omi has affected his life: "because of him I cannot love an intellectual person....I began to love strength, an impression of overflowing blood, ignorance, rough gestures, careless speech, and the savage melancholy inherent in flesh not tainted in any way with intellect..." (*ibid.* 64).

Mishima conceives the unintellectual relationship as pure, devoid of artifice, and unsusceptible to the disappointment inevitably resulting from knowing his lover. Vulnerability and merger have been traumatic and excruciating, while intimacy leads to destructive rivalry. Only a mimetic object removed from the possibility of rivalry can retain its grace, and thus Mishima sequesters himself from sexuality and relationships. Mishima thus engages in askesis, denying his own desires to avoid both his own

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<sup>15</sup>See Melanie Klein's perspective in "Envy and Gratitude" (216) that severe narcissists despise the objects they envy and love. They idealize the envied object to diminish envy, splitting the good from the bad object to merge with the exalted love object, but often come to turn their rage upon those they envy.

<sup>16</sup>As Kernberg says, the object is "at bottom both needed and desired, and its destruction is equally needed and desired" (23). Kernberg continues by noting that "self-mutilation typically reflects unconscious identification with the object" (26).

vulnerability and defeat, and the destruction and failure of the mimetic model he admires (see *Things Hidden* 328). Mimetic rivalry would contain the possibility of annihilating the model he loves and imitates, thus even demolishing his own possibility of transcending his weak self since his model and source of strength has been defeated.<sup>17</sup>

The narrator notes: "The discovery of even the slightest intellectualism in a companion would force me to a rational judgment of values" (*Confessions* 64). Contact with the object of his desire could lead not only to destructive rivalry, but finally to rejection as well. He thus endeavors to remain at a distance, and fancies the ideal relationship unattainable.<sup>18</sup> He therefore becomes a voyeur "forever watching" toughs, sailors, soldiers, and fishermen from afar, pretending not to be aroused (*Confessions* 65). He watches Omi with a "primeval glance," cannot take his eyes off Omi's profile, and continues to have a fierce desire to see Omi's naked body.<sup>19</sup> He becomes aroused watching Omi's wooly armpits (*Confessions* 78-79, 82-83). Unfortunately even askesis and isolation cannot eliminate his mimetic rivalry and rage, as his sexual attraction to Omi seduces him into fantasies of merger and awareness of his inferiority and rejection.

Mishima was conscious that his own physical weakness created the obsession for an "Omi" image, and that his own fear impelled him to create a replica of an "Omi" out of himself. The narrator of *Confessions* identifies with Omi and wishes to be like him. He experiences immense loneliness and searches for some element of similarity between himself and his love object, thus becoming "a stand-in for Omi" and feeling the same emotions.

<sup>17</sup> As Girard (1987) says, "the only type of model that can still generate excitement is the one who cannot be defeated, the one who will always defeat his disciple" (332; see also 361).

<sup>18</sup> As Kernberg writes, "hatred and the inability to tolerate communication with the object may protect the patient from what might otherwise emerge as a combination of cruel attacks on the object, paranoid fears of that object, and self-directed aggression in identification with the object" (26). Thus for Mishima, an erotic relationship could only be achieved when communication was inhibited, else he would despise and fear the object, and sink into self-punitive hostility through recreating the merger relationship of his infancy where his love objects abandoned and derogated him. Communication would be an impinging and engulfing transference re-enactment of childhood excruciation. Silence allows the projective identification to operate effectively, as idealizing transferences protect the erotic illusion from molestation by actual interaction with the object.

<sup>19</sup> *Confessions* (73). When Omi makes contact and is friendly, the narrator feels disappointed because this "hurt the image" he had been constructing of Omi (60). In other words, Omi must be vulnerable and defective if he can be friendly with such an inferior and unlikable person as the narrator. Despite these disappointments, however, the narrator soon falls in love with Omi.

Finally the narrator falls into the pose of Saint Sebastian, espies his own armpits, becomes aroused, and masturbates to himself as fetish and sexual object.<sup>20</sup>

And yet those delusional fantasies of merger are punctuated by the reality of his separation and alienation from Omi, as he looks at his reflection and thinks, "never in this world can you resemble Omi."<sup>21</sup> The realization that he bears no resemblance to Omi arouses in the narrator of *Confessions* a destructive envy, and agitates his hostile and reactive narcissism by the understanding that he was devoid of beauty and therefore different. He sees the abundant growth of hair in Omi's armpits and notices his bulging muscles, and suddenly becomes aroused with violent fantasies of Omi as "an insane human-sacrifice." The narrator has an erection, is filled with jealousy, and forswears his love for Omi (*Confessions* 78-79). His life becomes the pursuit of the "Omi" image, whether in the simple case of the narrator being attracted only to unintellectual sailors and soldiers, or in reality where Mishima eventually became that masculine image.<sup>22</sup> Omi not only becomes the object of his fantasies, but beautiful male images also become the victims of a recurring tragic death fantasy where they are slaughtered by the protagonist and kissed while still quivering.

The weapon of my imagination slaughtered many a Grecian soldier, many white slaves of Arabia, princes of savage tribes, hotel elevator-boys, waiters, young toughs, army officers, circus roustabouts....I was one of those savage marauders who, not knowing how to express their love, mistakenly kill the person they love. I would kiss the lips of those who had fallen on the ground and were still moving spasmodically. (*Confessions* 93)

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<sup>20</sup> *Confessions* (88-9). Mishima thus enacts a narcissistic sexual fantasy becoming aroused while looking at himself, as his armpits become the fetish which arouses him. The armpits are displacements of both the bodily organ and the love object which originally excited him. Since the narrator of *Confessions* is aroused by the pose of Saint Sebastian and the armpits of Omi, the arousal is in attaining a masculinity he utterly lacks.

<sup>21</sup> *Confessions* (83). Consider also the narrator's realization (120) that he could not be like Omi makes him believe he could not attract women. The implication is that he wants to be like Omi so that he can seduce women, but one can also argue that he tries to desire women to be like Omi, which accords with his fantasies of becoming Omi to escape his weakness.

<sup>22</sup> The narrator of *Confessions* becomes obsessed with a single motto: "Be Strong!" (80). He realizes that he is still infatuated with Omi, and falls in love with the hair under his arms which makes him resemble Omi. Once again, this repeats his fantasies of merger which dissolves differences of identity between lover and love object.

The narrator of *Confessions* calls this his "murder theater," and he has innumerable sexual fantasies revolving around bloodshed and orgasm. He envisions killing one of his classmates through strangulation from the rear, after which the unconscious boy is stripped naked and given a "lingering kiss" on his "slightly parted lips."<sup>23</sup> The narrator subsequently serves the boy on a platter and thrusts his fork into the boy's heart, a "fountain of blood" striking the narrator in the face.

Desiring that which he is exempt from leads the protagonist to despair involvement, and forebodes tragedy and destruction when that ideal cannot be realized. The character will become all the more aware of his ugliness in the face of beauty:

The pain proclaimed: You're not human. You're a being who is incapable of social intercourse. You're nothing but a creature, non-human and somehow strangely pathetic.....The need to prove to myself that I had some sort of potency seemed to become more urgent everyday.  
(*Confessions* 230)

This encapsulates Mishima's essential shame, his inflation into a grandiose and invulnerable masculine image devoid of weakness.<sup>24</sup> However, the critical agency which conceives his self-representation as inferior, weak, and castrated is now projected upon external objects (some of them inanimate). Despite Mishima's attempts to murder his shameful self-representation of weakness, he nevertheless retains a trenchant sense of inferiority and the need for punishment. After the narrator of *Confessions* flees a vain attempt at a heterosexual relationship, he feels years later as though he should be insulted by her once more to assuage his guilt.<sup>25</sup>

The need to exact revenge, feel pain once again and control the situation figures prominently in *Thirst for Love (Ai No Kawaki)*, where Etsuko is a bitter woman resenting even the laughter of children (8). In the home of her father-in-law, Etsuko falls for the farm boy, Saburo. Yet Etsuko feels betrayed because of Saburo's affair with the maid, Miyo, forcing her to relive the disappointment of love. Etsuko then endeavors to

<sup>23</sup> Note the image of anal domination envisioned in this fantasy.

<sup>24</sup>As A. Reich says, the "bottomless need for grandiosity is clearly a compensatory striving....Compensatory narcissistic self-inflation is among the most conspicuous forms of self-esteem regulation" (293).

<sup>25</sup>*Confessions* (235). The narrator is more strongly attracted to a tattooed tough at a café than to Sonoko.



make Miyo suffer, lose hope and collapse (141). Dispensing with the lover of the masculine "Omi" figure enacts the mimetic fantasy of destroying the rival. However, the apathy of Saburo (the male love object) is so enraging that Etsuko murders him with a scythe. In this case the murderous merger and revenge are situated within a dramatic gender reversal. Mishima identifies with the feminine, as he wishes to be loved by a masculine figure.<sup>26</sup> His homosexuality involves being loved by a man as though he were a woman.

It should also be understood that Etsuko's sexual interest is catalyzed by the fact that the provincial farmer is the object of another's affection. Saburo now becomes the sexual signifier whose possession augments the status of the woman chosen by him, while diminishing the woman defeated in mimetic rivalry. This is not a story of broken hearts, but of competition for a signifier whose possession eradicates Etsuko's former identity as one sexually and emotionally injured by others. Etsuko's revenge against him is based not in unrequited love—love is not an issue where the person desired is ideal precisely because he or she is too dull-witted to understand or appreciate you—but in rejection of her desire and the emotional significance of attaining the object of rivalrous competition. Saburo's dullness renders him an erotic piece of meat, and the women fight over an object not a human being. Rejection by a cretin is the ultimate reinforcement of narcissistic injury—one desires a man too witless to reject a woman his superior, and thus rejection by him is the ultimate debasement and induces homicidal rage.

Mimetic rivalry and revenge are the locus of *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*, where an adolescent boy becomes intensely jealous of his mother's new lover. Critics have described this theme as an Oedipal conflict, relying on a Freudian interpretation of the family romance. However, a Girardian interpretation explains why the adolescent is more interested in the lover than his mother. The novel opens with the young son watching his mother masturbate through a peephole. When she becomes sexually involved with a sailor, the boy seems sexually aroused by the man's erection. The adolescent feels not jealousy toward the sailor, but passion and admiration, as the sailor becomes his mimetic model of masculine heroism and tragedy. His rage is turned against the sailor only

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<sup>26</sup>The narrator of *Confessions* devotes all of his "elegant dreams to thoughts of love between man and maid, and to marriage, exactly as though (he) were the young girl who knew nothing of the world" (81).

when he falls from grace with his tragic heroism by being domesticated by the mother. The adolescent becomes hostile when the sailor behaves foolishly, and can no longer sustain the boy's need for a powerful model. The boy therefore poisons the sailor, and the novel concludes with his companions strapping on rubber gloves to dissect the corpse.

*Forbidden Colors* further corroborates the mimetic interpretation of desire and revenge, against the notion of Oedipal rivalry. Destruction results not from innate desire, but from rivalry and humiliation. Here a decrepit old writer experiences immense misogyny toward women, derived from his own ugliness and resentment. He enlists an extraordinarily beautiful youth to wreak havoc on the emotions of women. The beautiful Yuichi's personality is entirely malleable and is manipulated into Shunsuke's misogynistic machinations. Yuichi becomes what others wish, and is the epitome of the Girardian interdividual formed on the basis of transitory mimetic models. Yuichi can refuse no one, being the locus of their own mimetic strivings. Innumerable women and homosexual men desire Yuichi, and he conforms to their sexual fantasies unable to resist (physically). Mimetic desire propels them into frenzies of desire and competition, while he remains an elusive non-entity who wonders where his real self is, whether it exists or not.

Yuichi is reminiscent of Stavrogin of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* in that mimetic desire converges on him, and Yuichi does not reciprocate their desires even when he allows them access to his body. His apathy leaves them humiliated and desperate for his love. All eyes alight on Yuichi and follow him through the streets. Hordes of homosexual men vie for him and pursue him hungrily. Count Kaburagi rolls on the floor weeping and crying Yuichi's name. Women learn to despise one another in rivalry for his affections. He is still the pawn of the decrepit Shunsuke, and only through identification with the innumerable corrupt people who desire Yuichi, can he eventually become as bad and malicious as they. Yuichi's gratification emerges in power over the desires of others. Their mimetic desire orchestrates the mimetic rivalry and destruction, and even the decrepit Shunuke who schemed such humiliations eventually gets sucked into the mimetic desire and competition for Yuichi.

Unlike Stavrogin, however, Yuichi is explicitly described as a Narcissus enjoying his own reflection and deriving gratification from the pleading sexual supplications of others. He enjoys their excruciatingly unfulfilled desires, enjoys making them beg in agony, delights in their humiliation. When Yuichi finally does allow Kaburagi access to his body,

he leaves the door unlocked so that (it can be no accident) the man's wife, who also desires Yuichi, will be humiliated and rejected. He orchestrates and enjoys betrayal and disloyalty, rivalries which leave the losers defeated and vengeful, the victors even more desperately aroused. He absorbs the desiring glances of others, of old rapacious gays and lonely women. He receives their gifts, their money, and their bodies, experiencing sangfroid in the shame and rejection erupting from hostile mimetic competition. The novel is thus four hundred pages of mimetic desire, rivalry, and suffering, as all compete for the love of a youth whose actual feelings are never of interest to any of the parasites who attempt to consume and exploit him, but become consumed by their own excruciating desires.

The vengeful maneuver, which ultimately defeats and debases one's enemies, is to get them to reveal their own desires when one's own are disguised. Aplomb in the face of rivalry and jealousy is the victorious mask, while the person whose vulnerability, failure, desire, and sexual rejection are humiliating diminutions of their worth as human beings. To be desirous and rejected is the worst annihilation of a person's value and reputation. Thus askesis is the discipline and the weapon, while exposing the desires of others is the most vicious murder. Like General Ivolgin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, who is mortified when his pretenses of poise and heroism are discovered to be plagiarized, humiliation and deepest shame emerge when people reveal their needs and postures. One would rather let riches burn than reveal one's ignoble avarice, or suffer incredible loneliness than admit one's need for love. In *Forbidden Colors*, the stratagem defeating others is the orchestration of mimetic desire and humiliation, while concealing one's own.

Mimetic revenge against beauty, alienation, and abandonment can be seen most prominently in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, in which the alienated protagonist desecrates a glittering Buddhist temple covered in gold leaf by incinerating it. Mizoguchi is frail and weak like Mishima as a youth, the narrator of *Confessions*, and Etsuko from *Thirst*. He is further alienated from conformity by a stutter, perhaps caused by seeing his mother have sexual intercourse with his uncle while in the same bed as he and his father, who was too emotionally weak to interrupt their fornication. Mizoguchi's ugliness and stuttering parallel the alienation other Mishima's protagonists feel toward the outer world.

Mizoguchi finds a mimetic rival and model in the club-footed Kashiwagi, who perpetually manipulates others in vicious sangfroidal schemes. Kashiwagi's supreme pleasure is transforming the pity of others

into love and degradation. He comforts an old widow in mourning, and then penetrates her sexually. He absorbs and seduces women into pitying and caring for him, kissing his deformed feet in self-debasement, as they exult in their own narcissistic compassion for a cripple. Kashiwagi pretends to fall from a wall, moans in agony, and entices a beautiful, gentle woman to care for him. He supplicates her to teach him flower arranging and be his lover. Then after eliciting her pity and love, Kashiwagi dismisses her insultingly. This is his sexual *modus operandi*, by which he transforms his own disability into sexual violation and debasement of women. At the height of their pride and devotion, Kashiwagi spurns their affections. Now they are not only heartbroken, but also humiliated by being rejected by a cripple. They loved him only to enhance their own pride with the fantasy of bestowing compassionate grace upon a disgusting and deformed animal, and now they are in sheer disbelief that he would reject them.

Kashiwagi is Mizoguchi's (the protagonist's) double, someone as ugly and deformed as he, who provides a template for the committing of evil acts. While Mizoguchi may experience some relief that there is someone as crippled as himself, or even more deformed, he also feels mimetic rivalry toward his double. Mizoguchi feels diminished by his double's lack of shame and his disposition to evil. Mizoguchi feels repugnance for his double's malicious acts, but feels jealous as well, since he is an object of ridicule and is utterly unable to defeat others. And unlike his double, who violates and debases women, Mizoguchi is sexually impotent. Mizoguchi's envy and need to distinguish his own capacity for evil accrues toward the impulse to enact a monumental destruction and defacement of beauty.

Repeating the fantasy of the masculine ideal and model depicted in *Confessions*, a handsome naval engineer visits Mizoguchi's school. The youth's beauty and stature cause such jealousy in Mizoguchi that he defaces the scabbard of the engineer's sword. This is an act of phallic and cultural debasement. Mizoguchi destroys an object of beauty symbolic of homosexual desire, sexual potency, cultural nobility, from all of which he is alienated. He castrates his homosexual fantasy, his model, his rival, and the sexual-cultural potency and beauty which belittle him. This mimetic revenge foreshadows a far more intense holocaust.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> While this act seems symbolic of destroying the phallus, it is also a particular form of anal besmirching. To deface an object of beauty can often be seen as a means of sullyng it as a repetition of infantile rage. The personality who besmirches enjoys the act of dirtyng and debasing and uses this as his weapon, a fantasy found frequently in Mishima. I refer the

When Mizoguchi was a child, his father introduced him to the Golden Temple, extolling its unrivalled beauty ceaselessly. When Mizoguchi becomes an acolyte at the Temple, it becomes an idol for him, as he believes it has opened up to him the world of beauty. But the Temple becomes a mimetic symbol which must be destroyed.<sup>28</sup> It primarily represents his father, his values, edicts, and authority. Mizoguchi resents such tyrannical authority which has decided his life as a priest. He also despises his father for having witnessed his mother's infidelity without acting upon it. He loathes his father for his weakness. Mizoguchi also identifies the Temple with his mother, since she betrayed her husband and son in illicit sexuality. He further derogates the Temple because his abhorred mother continually invests all her hopes in her son's achieving the priesthood at the Temple. Thus far, the Temple is despised because it represents paternal authority, weakness, betrayal, and insidious sexuality. However, the Temple also represents the fundamental mimetic rage of envy and exemption from beauty.

As Mizoguchi becomes aware of the difference between himself and the Temple, he becomes estranged from it. The Temple stood there amid the corpses and wartime destruction around it, and seemed to look down on him for its audacious capacity to survive the ugliness of the decimated landscape. As he comes to believe that the Temple will be destroyed in air raids, he once again falls in love with it. If the Temple were destroyed, then beauty would be fused with ugliness, he would not be alienated from the world around him and life would hold validity for him: "...the Golden Temple was sure to turn into ashes. Since this idea took root within me, the Golden Temple once again increased in tragic beauty" (*The Temple* 42).

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reader to Stanley Rosenman's fascinating article "Begriming the Unsullied: A Theme Driving Historical Action" as an explication of how the Nazis took great joy in sullyng the Jews. The article will appear in a forthcoming anthology entitled *Psychological Undercurrents of History*.

<sup>28</sup> I describe the Temple as a mimetic *symbol* because it is inanimate, and further because it is representative of so many mimetic conflicts displaced from other rivals. Girard suggests that some models are beyond mimetic rivalry (such as Jesus), but I would contend that their transcendence can be even more oppressive, as they have the potential for belittling and humiliating the envious subject proportionally. Even Jesus can become such a mimetic rival or obstacle who arouses rage. Hence Kirilov's hatred of God in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, and Hyppolyte's disgust with fate in *The Idiot*. Transcendence can mock existence itself. In *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, Mizoguchi sees the permanence of the Temple compared to his own evanescence and feels nausea, depression, and rage.

Finally, Mizoguchi burns the Temple to the ground in an act of malignant and joyful revenge.

In this novel beauty itself is a rival which annihilates him and forever thrusts upon him awareness of his ugliness in relation to others. Just as pain proclaims the narrator's impotence in *Confessions of a Mask*, the Temple tells Mizoguchi that he is nothing but a pathetic creature. As Girard notes, "Desire will increasingly interpret the humiliation that it is made to suffer and the disdain that it is made to undergo in terms of the absolute superiority of the model" (*Things Hidden* 327). Thus beauty has so shamed him that he must obliterate its existence. However, as Girard elsewhere states, each time one feels like a god he will suffer severe consequences.<sup>29</sup> The antagonist of *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* feels ecstatic, but Mishima's own fantasies led him to a state of imminent decrepitude that was insurmountable. The postscript of all of Mishima's novels is that mimetic fantasies are ultimately futile. Mishima cannot defeat his mimetic rivals, cannot destroy his grandmother or her influence, cannot escape his experience of being ugly. No fantasy of destruction will stop his body from senescing or evanescing into death and decay. Mishima's final novel depicts an aged paltry man, a voyeur looking out at the garden expanse of a Buddhist monastery, wondering whether the people of his life ever existed.

### **Mimetic narcissism**

In 1970, at the age of forty-five, Mishima wrote the final words of his tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility*, and prepared for death. With his following of trained soldiers, he seized an army defense force base and held the senior officer hostage in a command tower while he reviled the troops for having lost their indigenous Japanese samurai values. He finally withdrew from the balcony of the tower and committed seppuku, disemboweling himself with a Japanese sword.

The mimetic significance of this act is complex. Mishima was simultaneously making a political statement and murdering the object of his lifelong hatred: himself. He enacted the murder so frequently depicted in his literary murders of youths, eradicating the weakened self once and for all. He was killing femininity, weakness, decay, and death by putting a blade through them. In this sense he is simultaneously killing his decrepit self and the unconscious presence of those he identified with, who made

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<sup>29</sup> Girard (1978, 82) says this of Nietzsche, whose proclamations of God's death and the will to power nevertheless trapped him in the manic-depressive cycle of self-defeat.

him feel sick and vulnerable. In mimetic identification with his grandmother, he internalized her voice and critical judgment, which he was now murdering by killing that self. He was utilizing her aggression against himself, but destroying her judgment, her controlling insidious persona as well. Mishima said repeatedly that he would rather die than be effeminate, and that the most disgusting and ignoble fate would be to live into agedness and decay. He destroyed his weak and disgusting self before it could emerge once again through senescence.

But he was simultaneously murdering the masculine athlete he had forged of himself. Ironically, mimetic rivalry had engendered such murderous fantasies toward the objects of his desire and aspiration that he felt hostility toward the aesthetic image he had become. Paradoxically, this contained the fantasy of retaining the invulnerable and beautiful self. In suicide "the revengeful destruction of this bad object is intended to magically restore the good one...." (Kernberg 27). Amidst immense hostility toward his inner decay and a malignant need to destroy himself and the internalized presences of those who abandoned and victimized him, Mishima's suicide was also a fantasy of both the rejuvenation of his ideal self and a resurrection of his love objects. Like the transmigration of souls in his fiction, suicide in reality enacted the fantasy that Mishima and his objects would be reborn as they were idealized, split from their decrepitude, shorn and devoid of shameful malignance.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, in suicide Mishima was enacting his erotic fantasies of killing the helpless and vulnerable self at the moment of orgasm. Recall his recurring fantasies of murdering ejaculating lovers, masturbating while viewing images of wounded victims, and became erect when imagining samurai cutting their bellies open. In cutting his own abdomen, Mishima's seppuku was an erotic act which repeated his sexual arousal toward the murdered beautiful victim and his voyeuristic arousal in imagining the murder.<sup>31</sup> Would that he had a model who could have extricated him from

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<sup>30</sup> My colleague Judd Grill describes Mishima's suicide as his own "caesarian section" where he enacts the fantasy of giving birth to his purified self and expelling his toxic innards.

<sup>31</sup> This also implies that the subsequent decapitation was an act of castrating the erect phallus. While this may or may not reflect on the eroticism of Japanese imagery concerning death and suicide, in Mishima's case sexual arousal follows violent fantasy, and castration fantasies and anxieties follow sexual arousal. Once again this is joy in murdering death, in being murdered, and punishing the sexually aroused penis and self. Punishing sexual arousal is a repetition and identification with punitive action toward the infantile self which needed love and attempted loving contact. It is a repetition of the anguish experienced during moments

his own sense of ugliness rather than coercing that shame and disgust. He might not have needed the sadism of others to feel erotic pleasure.

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of vulnerability and neediness. It is also a punishment of individual will and desire, which are forbidden forms of selfishness and arousal to those who need to stifle those feelings. Eroticizing such pain and rage are also ways of transforming anguish into pleasure both masochistically, as self-purification and absolution, and defensively, as a reaction to pain and anxiety.



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# MIMETIC THEORY AND THE PROGRAM OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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No prophet can claim to bring a final message unless he says things that will have a sound of reality in the ears of victims....  
(William James, *The Variety of Religious Experience*)

## **Is it possible to live nonviolently?**

The works of René Girard involve us in understanding of the Gospel's revelation of the mechanisms of violence and non-violence, but how is one to begin applying the Gospel to end violence? If Girard shows us that violence is the basis of all culture and religion, where does one find a new model today? If the shift from human to transcendent mediation results only in personal destruction, then why bother? If Girard is correct, and the power of the nonviolent Gospel is moving like a vapor through the world, where are the people who are living non-violently? Is there corroboration for Girard's statement, "A new kind of humanity is in the process of gestation; it will be both very similar to and very different from the one featured in the dreams of our Utopian thinkers" (*Things Hidden* 445)?

If it were possible to show that someone, somewhere were able to live in community without the protection of scapegoating, following their lead might save us from the spirals of violence we are creating. If one could find a design or an application of Girard's theories, with confirmation that the result is peace, would people be willing to consider giving up the protection of violence? Some demonstration that Girard's understanding of Gospel

non-violence is practical and possible seems necessary in order to hasten a non-violent cure for our violent world.

Perhaps we must accept on faith that it is possible to live non-violently. If it were not, then why would the Gospels have ever been written and why have they persisted? In my examination of historical applications of non-violence, it seemed that whenever non-violence was implemented, the results were remarkable. Of course, we think of Jesus, Paul, Francis, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King...but they are all dead and most of them were murdered. Yet there is a modern community where Girard's theories of non-violence through the relinquishment of human mediation is being lived out daily. And, thankfully, it is a flourishing community that experiences healing and renewal through the practice of what René Girard terms "the abandonment of mimetic desire" (*Things Hidden* 430).

The world is witnessing the healing power of non-violence without knowing that Gospel non-violence is involved. Millions of men and women are attempting to live non-violently in the "Utopian" community of Girard and the Gospels without having read Girard and without the need to believe in the truth of the Gospels. It seems to me that the twentieth century has seen the establishment of a community not based upon scapegoating but, rather, upon having been scapegoated. It is a fellowship of the Spirit that distinguishes itself by being a fellowship of believers without "religious" scapegoating. It resembles first century Christianity and is experiencing the same explosive growth. This phenomenon is what I call the non-violent "religion" of Alcoholics Anonymous. In this Fellowship of A. A. we can see what might be called, in Girardian terms, a community of scapegoats.

Since 1935 there has been a laboratory wherein the theories of René Girard are being applied. Bill Wilson, another visionary, intuited the underlying mimetic principles which Girard shows us, and implemented his understandings in order to escape the violence<sup>1</sup> of his addiction to alcohol. Though he did not articulate what he discovered in the way that René Girard has, Wilson found a way to break free of mimetic desire. He knew that to continue to drink would result in his death (*AA* 13). Though he did not speak of his dilemma in terms of mimetic crisis, he found a way out of alcoholism by exchanging the mediator of his desires. What Girard discovered and now describes is demonstrated by the practical applications

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<sup>1</sup>In the words of Jack Alexander. "There is a close resemblance between the criminal psychopath and the alcoholic mind. Both are grandiose, resentful, defiant, and hating of authority; both unconsciously destroy themselves trying to destroy others" (*Pass it on* 364).

contained in the writings of Wilson, in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, with its Twelve Steps, and the Twelve Traditions. The Steps contain an outline for personal conversion from human to divine mediation. The Twelve Traditions detail the blueprint for a community without rivalry or scapegoating. The principles of Gospel non-violence are being applied daily in the Fellowship of A.A.

Girard, Wilson and the Jesus of the Gospels communicate the same understanding of real peace—in contradistinction from an order brought about by scapegoating mechanisms. In order that we may have peace, René Girard explains that "what must be given up is the right to reprisals and even the right to what passes, in a number of cases, for legitimate defense" (*Things Hidden* 198). Wilson expressed it in his own way: "we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol" (*A.A.* 84). The Gospel's prescription for peace is: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you..." (Lk 6, 27-28). The Gospels contain a prescription; Girard gives us theories; Wilson had a plan.

### **Gospel non-violent religion**

The Gospel texts postulate the beginning of some sort of communal unity for those who would follow Christ. The word "church" is used in modern translation, but according to Girard, what Jesus did not establish in his "church" was another violent religion. Girard shows us that religion as we have experienced it exists only where there are scapegoats. The Gospels proclaim that the scapegoat mechanism will no longer be the foundation of the unity of the community that follows Christ. The new communal unity will be the unity of all against no one. In this new unity of community, the "church" will be that fellowship which is inclusive, non-acquisitive, non-hierarchical, non-dominative, non-legalistic, non-rivalrous and, therefore, non-violent. If religion is the only word we have for any community of believers, then it is certainly a non-violent religion that is described.

Furthermore, in this new community there will be no need for proscriptions since there will be no acquisitive, rivalrous behavior. Law has as its sole purpose the prevention of rivalry. The Gospel Jesus is not rivalrous. His followers, imitating him, will not be rivalrous either and therefore will not be under the law. They will remain in him by seeking only to do the will of the Father, desiring only what God desires. By

imitating Jesus, his followers will give up mimetic rivalry. In Girard's words:

[Jesus] offers not the slightest hold to any form of rivalry or mimetic interference. There is no acquisitive desire in him. As a consequence, any will that is really turned toward Jesus will not meet with the slightest of obstacles.... Following Christ means giving up mimetic desire. (*Things Hidden* 430, 431)

The question remains, how does one give up mimetic desire? The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are a blueprint answer to an individual's question, "How will I do this?", while the Twelve Traditions contain an answer to the question, "How will *we* do this together without scapegoats?" In sum, the template for a new beginning, a model for individual and communal non-violence, is contained in the literature and the practices of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Traditions provide a structure of community that should have been the hallmark of Christianity. The Steps illustrate a means to the abandonment of mimetic rivalry. The Steps and The Twelve Traditions furnish Gospel non-violence the practical means of implementation and A.A. provides confirmation that a community of all against none will work.

### **A community founded on being cast out**

Alcoholics Anonymous, as a fellowship, began on June 10, 1935. There were two members: Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith ( *A.A. Comes of Age* vii). Both were diagnosed as hopeless alcoholics. Neither had money. Smith's medical practice was in ruins and Wilson had no job. At one time both had some degree of power, prestige and property but lost everything esteemed by culture due to drinking. Their alcoholism had left them nothing worthy of the admiration that each hungered for. They were, in Girard's terms, scapegoats. Each had been cast out by society and sentenced to death due to alcoholism. In 1935 there were two hopeless drunks who met to help each another. Today, there are more than 2 million sober drunks in 99,000 groups in 150 countries who identify themselves as members of Alcoholics Anonymous.<sup>2</sup>

We know, having read Girard, that the marginalized, those outside the societal norms, are our scapegoats. The mentally ill, the criminals, and the

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<sup>2</sup>General Services Office records New York. New York.

alcoholic who fits both categories, become the outcast "other" who is the cause of all our problems. They are, for the most part, locked away or left to wander the streets no less rejected and no less useful than the demonic of the Gadarenes (Mt 8, 28-34). Wilson had begun a worldwide "community of scapegoats" at a kitchen table in Akron, Ohio. He sensed his own communality of exclusion with society's outcasts, and understood that alcoholism had something to do with scapegoating. In a letter to the convicted murderer Carl Chessman, Bill wrote:

I think that society is only beginning to catch on to the fact that its own neurosis is tearing it apart. It still looks on people like you and me as dangerous or wicked freaks who ought to be punished or maybe killed off. This natural approach, it is thought, will make the world a safer place for the respectable and the sane.

Therefore, alcoholics, criminals, and the like, whose symptoms are violent and menacing, are apt to be set off as a class apart. Society can't yet identify itself with us at all.

Being better behaved, on the surface at least, society does not take in the fact that it has become just about as sick as we are. It can't think of itself as destructively neurotic, nor can it see us as merely the grotesque and dangerous end products of its own defects. (*Pass it on* 365)

Beginning in 1935, two anonymous drunks labored over "The Good Book" to find a way to pass their remarkable healing on to other suffering scapegoats. By November of 1937 there were forty people who were sober through the work of these two men. The growing numbers of hopeless alcoholics formed a core group that participated in the compilation of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Affectionately known as the "Big Book" by the membership, *Alcoholics Anonymous* would be their instrument for reaching other hopeless drunks. Containing information on alcoholism and instructions for how to achieve sobriety, the book represents a compilation of their collective experiences and has become the "bible" of their association. By December of 1938 Bill Wilson had written the Twelve Steps of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, a systematic methodology for replicating his own miraculous healing. Membership in 1939 had reached 100 sober alcoholics. On borrowed money, this small community published the "Big Book" of *Alcoholics Anonymous* in April of 1939 (*A.A.* vii-viii). Later, as groups of

recovering alcoholics met together, Wilson compiled the Twelve Traditions of A.A., a road map for a non-violent community.<sup>3</sup>

Within sixteen years of the first printing of the Big Book there were 6,000 groups with a membership in excess of 150,000 people. Groups of recovering alcoholics existed in every state in the United States and in 50 foreign countries (*A.A.* xv). The growth continued in an organization with no hierarchy, no laws, and no exclusionary mechanism. The "fellowship" was self-supporting, non-acquisitive and anonymous; humility and service were its foundational principles.

By the publication of the Second Edition of the book in 1955, what was termed a "wholesale miracle" (*A.A.* xv) had occurred. By 1983 Alcoholics Anonymous numbered 50,000 groups with activity in 110 countries (*A.A.* xii). Still today there is no group ownership of property and members need not use their last names. There are no leaders, no centralized authority apart from God as the members understand God, no dogma, no theology, no requirements for membership.<sup>4</sup> The "Big Book" has been translated into 40 languages, in addition to American Sign Language and Braille. The latest translation is in Punjabi. By the end of May 2000, there will be 20,000,000 copies of the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous in print in English alone. As of January 2000, there were 1,995,804 members of A.A. in 150 countries. A. A. World Services always adds that this number is probably only fractional since there is no duty to report membership in an anonymous organization. Today there are 99,020 groups who are listed

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<sup>2</sup>"As we discovered the principles by which the individual could live, so we had to evolve principles by which the A.A. groups and A.A. as a whole could survive and function effectively. It was thought that no alcoholic man or woman could be excluded from our Society; that our leaders might serve but never govern; that each group was to be autonomous and there was to be no professional class of therapy. There would be no fees or dues; our expenses were to be met by our own voluntary contributions. There was to be the least possible organization, even in our service centers. Our public relations were to be based upon attraction rather than promotion. It was decided that all members ought to be anonymous at the level of press, radio, TV and films. And in no circumstances should we give endorsements, make alliances, or enter public controversies.... None of these principles had the force of rules of law" (*A.A.* xix).

<sup>4</sup><[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org)>. Financial Policy, April, 19, 2000. "Over the years, Alcoholics Anonymous has affirmed and strengthened a tradition of being fully self-supporting and of not seeking, or accepting, contributions from non-members. When outside contributions are received at the General Service Office, they are returned with a note explaining AA's position on the question of self-support. Within the Fellowship, the amount that may be contributed to the support of movement-wide services by any individual member is \$2,000 a year.

with World Services, the national service center in New York. Each group continues to use the Twelve Traditions in order to maintain unity without the need of sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

### **Dependence upon human models as the basis of violence**

René Girard and those following his thinking have unveiled a societal mechanism that explains the problem of violence in our time and in all times. Violence emanates from our admiration of one another and proceeds to imitation of each other's desires. Our dependence upon human mediation results in acquisitive rivalry. Our only remedy, until the Gospel's revelation of the scapegoating mechanism, was to blame another for the violence that was ours. Admiration and imitation of one another's desires results in death for someone somewhere along the line; it is either a physical death or a death of the spirit. Wilson didn't say it that way, but he understood that acquisitive mimesis was part of the problem of his own disease of alcoholism.

Every time a person imposes his instincts upon others, unhappiness follows. If the pursuit of wealth tramples upon people who happen to be in the way, then anger, jealousy, and revenge are likely to be aroused. If sex runs riot, there is a similar uproar. Demands made upon other people for too much attention, protection, and love can only invite domination or revulsion in the protectors themselves—two emotions quite as unhealthy as the demands which evoked them. When an individual's desire for prestige becomes uncontrollable, whether in the sewing circle or at the international conference table, other people suffer and often revolt. This collision of instincts can produce anything from a cold snub to a blazing revolution. (*The Twelve Steps and The Twelve Traditions* 44)

### **The desire to be a model**

Girard has shown us that our becoming models to others and making others our model results in a triangulation of human desire that will end, soon or late, in violence. Wilson saw that this triangulation of human mediation was linked to the disease of alcoholism. We can see in his description of himself Girard's "model" par excellence:

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<sup>5</sup>World Services statistics as of April 19, 2000. All figures for groups and membership are conservative since registration with World Services is voluntary in an anonymous organization.



I fancied myself a leader, for had not the men of my battery given me a special token of appreciation? My talent for leadership, I imagined, would place me at the head of vast enterprises which I would manage with the utmost assurance. I took a night law course, and obtained employment as investigator for a surety company. The drive for success was on. I'd prove to the world I was important. My work took me about Wall Street and little by little I became interested in the market....I studied economics and business as well as law.... Business and financial leaders were my heroes. Out of this alloy of drink and speculation, I commenced to forge the weapon that one day would turn in its flight like a boomerang and cut me to ribbons. (A.A. 2)

With the loss of culturally defined "success" (money, prestige and power), Wilson moved further into his reliance upon alcohol to give him the artificial affirmation, which a "subject" provides in the Girardian triangulation of Model/Subject mimetics. As "success" eluded him, he was no longer "admirable" and only alcohol gave him the internal surety that an admiring "subject" might have afforded temporarily. Ultimately, Wilson was confined in a state mental institution and diagnosed an incurable "drunk." The doctor informed him that, in all probability, he would die of his alcoholism; his case was hopeless.

A former drinking buddy who had been similarly diagnosed by Carl Jung visited Wilson. Ebby was sober and "changed" through an application of what Jung had described as a "spiritual experience." He told Wilson of his own experience of healing and suggested that only this change of mind could save one from death by alcohol. This drunk-to-drunk sharing became the hallmark of the fellowship and was incorporated in the twelfth step of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This process of carrying the message of recovery is "good mimesis" in practical terms. Robert Hamerton-Kelly in his book, *Sacred Violence*, explicates this mechanism of "good mimesis" as follows: "Compassion for the suffering 'other' replaces rivalry. God rather than 'I' becomes the apex of the triangle of desire. Acceptance of the 'marked other' supplants expelling. Self-sacrifice for the sake of the other replaces the sacrificing of 'other' as scapegoat" (177; see also 174-82).

### **God, as we understood God**

When Wilson's friend suggested the need for "surrender to God" (transcendent mediation, in Girard's terms), Wilson experienced despair. He had no idea of God apart from the sacrificial god of sacrificial religion.

Wilson distrusted religion for reasons Girard would later explain. As Wilson wrote:

With ministers, and the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a God personal to me, superhuman strength and direction, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such a theory.

To Christ I conceded the certainty of a great man, not too closely followed by those who claimed Him. His moral teaching—most excellent. For myself, I had adopted those parts which seemed convenient and not too difficult; the rest I disregarded.

The wars which had been fought, the burnings and chicanery that religious dispute had facilitated, made me sick. I honestly doubted whether, on balance, the religions of mankind had done any good. Judging from what I had seen in Europe (World War One) and since, the power of God in human affairs was negligible, the Brotherhood of Man a grim jest. If there was a Devil, he seemed the Boss Universal, and he certainly had me. (*A.A.* 10-11)

The fear of God and hopelessness that Bill experienced when he contemplated surrender to the god of "religion," was fear of the god of scapegoaters, and not the God of scapegoats. In light of mimetic theory, Wilson's fear is understandable. In the words of Roel Kaptein:

The sacred is violence. The gods of religion are the gods of the scapegoaters. They are the gods of all the "good" people. They are our gods. They have all the same possibilities as us. They can be both nice and dreadful. They have our violent side—the side which we don't really want to know about. (*On the Way of Freedom* 88).

### **The scapegoat hits "bottom"**

Hospitalized, financially ruined, jobless and friendless except for his wife Lois,<sup>6</sup> Wilson reached "bottom." From the depths of his despair he cried out: "I'll do anything, anything at all!" Having no faith or hope, he cried, "If there be a God, let Him show Himself" (*Pass it on* 120). "Bottom," as Wilson experienced it, occurs when one has become a scapegoat, scapegoated by the community at large, the person him/herself, or both.

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<sup>6</sup>Lois Wilson would go on to begin the program of Al-anon, an exact replica of Alcoholics Anonymous but addressing the spiritual illness of the friends and family of alcoholics, those who had been in mimetic rivalry with the alcoholic.

In that moment of life-giving despair, Wilson switched both his model and the mediator of his desires. The results were immediate and permanent.

There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since. (*A.A.* 13)

At that moment, Bill encountered God who stands always with the scapegoats, *Abba*, the non-violent God of the Gospels who wants mercy and not sacrifice, the non-mythical God of Girard's reading of Scripture, as described by Kaptein:.

The God of the scapegoats has the "face of the victims"....He is not demanding, ferocious or subject to whim, neither is he a do-gooder. He is not like the gods of the scapegoaters. He only asks us to give ourselves to him and to experience, like the scapegoated, that we are living in abundance and freedom, in a land of milk and honey. In that land we are living outside desire. (88)

Later, Wilson believed that unless one hits bottom, there is little possibility that the Steps can produce their intended transformation. Bottom was the place where one became willing to change:

Why all this insistence that every A.A. must hit bottom first? The answer is that few people will sincerely try to practice the A.A. program unless they have hit bottom. For practicing A.A.'s remaining eleven Steps means the adoption of attitudes that almost no alcoholic who is still drinking can dream of taking. Who wishes to be rigorously honest and tolerant? Who wants to confess his faults to another and make restitution for harm done? Who cares anything about a Higher Power, let alone meditation and prayer? Who wants to sacrifice time and energy in trying to carry A.A.'s message to the next sufferer? No, the average alcoholic, self-centered in the extreme, doesn't care for this prospect—unless he has to do these things in order to stay alive himself. (*Twelve Steps* 24)

"Hitting bottom" is tantamount to a Girardian description of the experience of moving away from the crowd. The experience of moving outside the

supposed safety of the cultural structures, including the structures of thought, is a sort of death.<sup>7</sup>

### **"These are the steps we took"**

The Twelve Steps suggest a progression of actions that, if taken, begin detachment from human mediation and its resultant conflict. Applying Girardian thought, Steps One might read as follows: I admit that my life is unmanageable, and I am powerless to correct the conflict that I have with people, places and things. These conflicts have resulted in my dependence upon alcohol to provide my internal security (Step One). In Wilson's words:

The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony? First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. (A.A. 62-63)

Though Step One refers to powerlessness over alcohol, the same step is used by derivative Twelve Step Groups whose members admit powerlessness regarding food, gambling, drugs, smoking, shopping, sexual dependency, and "co-dependency."<sup>8</sup> Each of these conditions reflect mimetic dependency and have been identified by these groups as the "problem" which is causing the inextricable circumstances which have brought the member to what Bill termed "bottom."

### **Movement toward transcendent mediation**

The Second Step is the movement toward transcendent mediation. "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." The admission of insanity (in Program parlance, "doing the same

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<sup>7</sup>See especially Gill Bailie's "The Vine and Branches Discourse: The Gospel's Psychological Apocalypse.

<sup>8</sup>See Girard. "Eating Disorders," and *Things Hidden* (327) on mimesis and sexuality. The term 'co-dependency' simply defines the addiction to another human being, which is the subject of Girard's mimetic theory.

thing over and over again and expecting a different result") continues the progressive movement away from other-determination and toward the transcendent mediation of a Power which is greater than the power of human mediation and ultimately beneficial. It is in Step Two that one approaches the *God of one's own understanding*, perhaps for the first time. In this Step a Power that is trustworthy replaces the sacrificial gods of violent "religion."

Next, we decide that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. (*A.A.* 62-63)

The progression of the steps tracks a movement from thought to action. Step One is the admission of powerlessness to change our minds and our actions; Step Two entails humble recognition of the insanity of our continued dependency upon mechanisms that promised joy but resulted in being cast out. It is also the Step where a "power greater than I am" is envisioned and approached. Step Three is the surrender of thought and action to that Power:

God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage to self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always. (*A.A.* 63)

The first three Steps are verbal agreements to the principle of transcendent mediation. The Fourth Step presents what we might call a "stumbling block" to the achievement of that new mediation. Fear is the real obstacle to non-violence and to our movement into transcendent mediation. We may desire a new desire, but we dread what will become of our comfortable lives if we move outside the cultural circle, the ring around the bright fire that so attracted Peter when he denied Jesus in the Gospel accounts.

**Fear of desiring only what God desires**

Wilson experienced the fear that turning his life and his will over to the care of God would result in his annihilation. The thought of surrender, even to a God of our own understanding, remains a frightful prospect. Bill was able to describe the fear as follows:

Nothing is going to turn me into a nonentity. If I keep turning my life and my will (*all desire*) over to the care of Something or Somebody else, what will become of *me*? I'll look like the hole in the doughnut. This, of course, is the process by which instinct and logic always seek to bolster egotism, and so frustrate spiritual development. The trouble is that this kind of thinking takes no real account of the facts. And the facts seem to be these: The more we become willing to depend upon a Higher Power, the more independent we actually are. Therefore dependence, as A.A. practices it, is really a means of gaining true independence of the spirit. (*Twelve Steps* 36)

Girard tells us that there is cause for fear when one gives up the "safety" of mimetic desire based on human mediation. The only reason to give up such "safety" is the fear of even greater harm as a result of continuing along the cultural path of scapegoating. In one of Girard's more prophetic passages he tells us:

To leave the community of sacred violence is to refuse the unanimity of conflictual mimesis. As soon as one dissents, one becomes a victim oneself. Such dissent is tantamount to identifying with the victim, because the group of conflictual mimesis needs unanimity to function and can treat dissenters only as victims.

For Wilson the choice was to surrender to transcendent mediation or die. The Gospel texts speak in terms of life and death and Girard clearly articulates our choices in terms of sacralized violence.

Humans have always found peace in the shadow of their idols—that is to say, of human violence in a sacralized form. This is still true, as humanity looks for peace under the shelter of the ultimate violence. In a world that is continually losing its sacred character, only the permanent threat of immediate and total destruction can prevent men from destroying one another. Once again, violence prevents violence from breaking out. To take their word for it—which we are unable to question—nuclear armaments alone maintain world peace. The specialists tell us without a

blink that this violence alone can *protect* us. Either we are moving ineluctably toward nonviolence, or we are about to disappear completely. (*Things Hidden* 255, 258)

Perhaps only the fear of death prompts one to move from the cultural norm of horizontal mimetic desire and the violence which it spawns toward transcendent mediation. We may be as addicted to violence as Wilson was to alcohol. But the "bottom" of violence seems more collectively lethal if that is what must be reached before we become willing to change our mediation.

### **Inventory of mimetics**

In order to begin Step Four, the fear of change must have been overcome. No one sits down to write a searching and fearless self-appraisal without having moved past the fear that accompanies this endeavor. Taking Step Four is the proof that Step Three has been successfully taken; I am now about to begin doing, not my own will, but something which is against my will: naked self-examination. Step Four requires implementation of new behaviors including humility, honesty, willingness and openness. A change of mediation begins before the person taking the Step realizes it. Step Four remains the most daunting step of individual recovery in the program of A.A. As Wilson described it,

Step Four is our vigorous and painstaking effort to discover what these liabilities in each of us have been, and are. We want to find exactly how, when, and where our natural desires have warped us. We wish to look squarely at the unhappiness this has caused others and ourselves. By discovering what our emotional deformities are, we can move toward their correction. Without a willing and persistent effort to do this, there can be little sobriety or contentment for us. Without a searching and fearless moral inventory, most of us have found that the faith which really works in daily living is still out of reach. (*Twelve Steps* 42)

Step Four is a personal cataloguing of mimetic conflicts. Excuses abound as to why violence is justified. Scapegoating is the immediate response to the suggestion of the inventory.

We also clutch at another wonderful excuse for avoiding an inventory. Our present anxieties and troubles, we cry, are caused by the behavior of other people—people who *really* need a moral inventory. We

firmly believe that if only they'd treat us better, we'd be all right. Therefore we think our indignation is justified and reasonable—that our resentments are the "right kind." We aren't the guilty ones. They are! (*ibid.* 45, 46)

Seeing the other person's wrongs as larger than our own is part of scapegoating. We focus on the injury that has been done to us while excusing the violence we visit on others. This re-focusing of our attention is one of the points of resistance in working this step. The moral inventory begins the process of a true conversion to the mediation of a transcendent model. The working of this Step requires the abandonment of scapegoating as it manifests itself in the form of resentment toward others.

Resentment is the number one offender; from it stem all forms of spiritual disease. We listed people, institutions, or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships (including sex) were hurt or threatened. So we were sore. We were "burned up".... To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got. The usual outcome was that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore. Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our own way, the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only *seemed* to win. Our moments of triumph were short-lived. (*AA* 64, 66)

The first task of the one preparing the inventory is to examine *resentments*. It is often the case that the beginner will deny even the existence of resentment. We have become so convinced that our anger is justified that we are unable, at first, to see that there is no anger that can be justified if a change of mind is contemplated.

I have found only a few references to *resentment* in Girard's writing, but it seems that the emphasis on the re-feeling of perceived injuries is crucial to individual scapegoating. As I review, again and again, my injuries that I blame on you, I feel, again and again, my initial pain. Only as I progress through this step do I come to realize that each mental re-enactment of the initial hurtful event is self-inflicted. I am definitely re-experiencing my initial pain, maybe even greater pain than you originally caused me, but I am doing it to myself. As Girard expresses it:

The conflict of desires results automatically from their mimetic character. This mechanism necessarily determines the characteristics of



what Nietzsche calls *resentment*. The re- of *resentment* is the resurgence of desire colliding with the obstacle of the model-desire. Necessarily opposed by the model, the disciple-desire returns toward its source to poison it. *Resentment* is only truly intelligible if we begin with mimetic desire. ("To Double Business Bound" 91)

The answer to resentment, as Wilson saw it, was only to be found in transcendent mediation, and in Gospel terms, returning good for evil.

We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol. This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God, save me from being angry. Thy will be done."

We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one. (*A.A.*, 66,67)

### **Rivalry over self-esteem, money, sex and ambition**

Step Four shows us that our anger and our fear stem from a perceived loss of worldly and emotional security. When there is no God of abundance to provide for us, when we must rely on ourselves and others for all of our sense of safety, however illusory, we are prey to scapegoating and feeling scapegoated at all times. Any perceived threat to self-esteem, financial or sexual security, or the borrowed desires for our esteemed future produces emotions of terror or rage. Feelings are the hallmark of mimetics. As Kaptein states:

All of our emotional feelings come out of and belong to relationships. Learning that is a long process. For example, excitement has to do with rivalry and scapegoating, depression with model-obstacle relationships as has the constant sense of failure. Being afraid is the fear of being scapegoated. In feelings we are tangled up in relationships. Therefore if we want to escape from our emotional feelings and be delivered from our difficulties we have to enter other relationships and enter another world in which the relations which provoke our feelings have no power. (74)

The inventory is taken by setting down on paper a list of who we are blaming for our perceived losses. We also list the people, places and things we fear. The fear will generally be fear of the loss of one or more of the four "objects" in the Girardian triangle of our desires. The list will contain all those with whom we have been in rivalry. In this inventory process it is hard to tell the models from the scapegoats.

On our grudge list we set opposite each name our injuries. Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal, or sexual relations, which had been interfered with. We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them. (*A.A.* 67, 68)

There are three separate sections in the Fourth Step inventory. All of them relate to the problems that have arisen out of acquisitive mimetic rivalry and mimetic conflict. The first section of the inventory catalogues resentments. The second sections takes inventory is of "fear." The third deals with sexual relations, the most mimetic of human dealings.

We review our conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it. We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing. (*ibid.* 68-70)

Taking inventory is a choice to change one's mind about how life is lived: will I remain a scapegoater or reject scapegoating? It is a choice between life and death for the alcoholic, but is it the difference between life and death for the rest of us? Is it the difference between life and death in a world of escalating violence? Jesus, Girard, and Wilson seem to think so. Kaptein, for example, puts it simply:

The realization that the scapegoat is no better or no worse than we ourselves are turns everything upside down. In many ways it is so disastrous for our lives, that we can hardly grasp it, let alone imagine the consequences for the manner in which we are in this world and live in it. Jesus says: As soon as you say that somebody is "bad" you are scapegoating them, making a difference between them and you which is founded only on the fact of your making it. By saying that "he or she is

bad," there is the ever present implication that I am better or not as bad, so placing myself firmly on the side of the "goodies." In so doing, I am in fact driving out my own bad sides and placing them on the other. It is true that this has gone on since the foundation for culture. It is also true that it made culture possible but countless people suffered through it. (44)

Either violence erupts from our dependence upon the desires of others as Girard tells us, or it does not. Either a little violence will prevent a greater violence or it will not. Either the Gospels are a communication of truth regarding peace and how to get it, or they are an archaic piece of literature that has caused a lot of problems over the last 2,000 years. All of our understandings of violence and peace, resentment and fear, conflict and mimetics, scapegoats and scapegoaters are either topics of conversation or matters of life and death. It is comforting to me to know that the choice to change one's life and to become dependant on a loving God, ceasing to fight anybody or anything is being made on an hourly basis in A.A., around the world and in 40 languages. I may not choose to change my model, but the possibility and practicality of making the change is being proved by millions.

One story from the Gospels is recounted often in A.A meetings. Though generally references to the name of Jesus and religiously-loaded language is minimized because of the damage that "religion" has occasioned for many members in A.A., Jesus' reply to John's question in Luke 7: 22 is quoted with a sense of personal identification: "Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."

### **Good mimesis and the program**

We have learned that at all times we are mimetic. It is neither good nor bad, it is who we are. The difference in a scapegoating life and one not based on scapegoating has everything to do with whom we imitate. If we persist in imitation based on esteemed others, we will fall invariably into violence. Our other choice is for the "good mimetics" of the Gospel. We model Jesus who models a non-rivalrous God. The message of A.A. spreads by means of this same non-rivalrous mimesis. "We first lean on another human being who seems to be finding the answer, and then we lean on the higher Power that stands behind him" (*Pass it on* 264)

In the chapter Five of the Big Book, "How it Works," and in the Twelfth Step of the Twelve Steps, the use of "good mimesis" is acknow-

ledged. "If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps" (see also *A.A.* 58). In Girardian terms: If you desire what I have, you must imitate what I have done. All that I have that is desirable is a relationship of trust in a loving God. If you want the freedom and the serenity (peace) that you see in me, then you can have it, too. If you follow the steps that I took, you will receive the same gift of peace. It is available to all who are willing to "go to any lengths to get it." We need never be in rivalry again. There is enough for all.

This process of "carrying the message" might be another mechanism to create rivalry except that, as is shown in the chapter of the Big Book on working with others and in the Eleventh Tradition, it works, by "attraction rather than promotion" (*Twelve Steps* 192). There is no violent evangelization, which promotes the idea that "I have what you need and I am willing to go to any lengths to convince you that you need it." There is no violence in sharing when one is asked.

While there are no rules in *A.A.*, there are suggestions. The advice on how to spread the message nonviolently seems to provide a road map for sharing without becoming a model and, thereafter, an obstacle.

Don't start out as an evangelist or reformer. ...cooperate; never criticize. To be helpful is our only aim.... Let him ask you that question, if he will. *Tell him exactly what happened to you.* Stress the spiritual feature freely. If the man be agnostic or atheist, make it emphatic that *he does not have to agree with your conception of God.* He can choose any conception he likes, provided it makes sense to him. *The main thing is that he be willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual principles.*

Outline the program of action, explaining how you made a self-appraisal, how you straightened out your past and why you are now endeavoring to be helpful to him. It is important for him to realize that your attempt to pass this on to him plays a vital part in your own recovery. Actually, he may be helping you more than you are helping him. Make it plain he is under no obligation to you. That you hope only that he will try to help other alcoholics when he escapes his own difficulties. Suggest how important it is that he place the welfare of other people ahead of his own. Make it clear that he is not under pressure, that he needn't see you again if he doesn't want to. You should not be offended if he wants to call it off, for he has helped you more than you have helped him. If your talk has been sane, quiet and full of human understanding, you have perhaps made a friend.

Do not exhibit any passion for crusade or reform. Never talk down to an alcoholic from any moral or spiritual hilltop; simply lay out the kit of spiritual tools for his inspection. Show him how they worked for you. Offer him friendship and fellowship. Tell him that if he wants to get well you will do anything to help....If he thinks he can do the job in some other way, or prefers some other spiritual approach, encourage him to follow his own conscience. We have no monopoly on God; we merely have an approach that worked with us. (*A.A.* 89-95)

### **Communal unity and nonviolence**

While the steps provided the mechanism for the individual's change of mediation, the problem of group non-violence became an issue as the membership increased. Our old models of unity have involved collective violence in the form of scapegoating. The first Tradition of A.A. recognized the need for unity in order to spread the message,<sup>9</sup> therefore the problem of collective peace without scapegoating had to be addressed:

...like other societies, we soon found that there were other forces among us that could threaten us in ways that alcohol and sex could not. These were the desires for power, for domination, for glory and for money. They were all the more dangerous because they were invariably powered by self-righteousness, self-justification, and the destructive power of anger, usually masquerading as righteous indignation.

Pride and fear and anger—these are the prime enemies of our common welfare. True brotherhood, harmony, and love, fortified by clear insights and right practices, are the only answers. (*AA Comes of Age* 98)

One of the Traditions that minimizes group rivalry communicates the understanding that the only "leader" the group will have is "a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience" (*Twelve Steps* 132).

Where does A.A. get its direction? Who runs it? This, too, is a puzzler for every friend and newcomer. When told that our Society has no president having authority to govern it, no treasurer who can compel the payment of any dues, no board of directors who can cast an erring member into outer darkness, when indeed no A.A. can give another a directive and enforce obedience, our friends gasp and exclaim, "This simply can't be. There must be an angle somewhere."

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<sup>9</sup>"Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA unity" (*Twelve Steps* 129).

With no leaders to become Girardian "models," but only "trusted servants," the mimetic divisions are less likely. A.A. came to trust the discernment of what it calls, "group conscience." They find that a well-informed group can come up with wiser decisions than the wisest individual member can. There is no hierarchy and no exclusionary rules. As Wilson explained it:

A dictatorship always refuses to do this, and so do the hierarchical churches. They sincerely feel that their several families can never be enough educated (or spiritualized) to properly guide their own destinies. Therefore, people who have to live within the structure of dictatorships and hierarchies must lose, to a greater or lesser degree, the opportunity of really growing up. I think A.A. can avoid this temptation to concentrate its power, and I truly believe that it is going to be intelligent enough and spiritualized enough to rely on the group conscience. (*Pass it on* 373)

Refusing outside contributions and refraining from any opinions on cultural issues minimizes cultural mimetic contagion. Money and property are also seen as threats to the group's unity.

A big factor in our thinking at that time was the philosophy of St. Francis of Assisi. He also began as a lay movement, one man carrying the good news to the next. In his day it was common enough for individuals to pledge themselves to poverty. But it was unusual, if not unique, for a whole organization or fellowship to do the same thing. For the purpose of his society Francis thought corporate poverty to be fundamental. The less money and property they had to quarrel about, the less would be the diversion from their primary purpose. And just like A.A. today, his outfit did not need much money to accomplish its mission. Why be tempted and diverted when there was no need for it? (*AA Comes of Age* 110, 111)

Girard has shown us that order is maintained when differences are maintained, but I believe that he is speaking only of systems with sacrificial order. The Gospels recommend the loss of differences. There will be no distinctions such as "teacher," "Lord," "father," or "wise." All will be one, all will be servants...there will be no need for sacrificial distinctions, yet there will be peace. It seems to me that the prescription of the Gospels for communal unity without scapegoats ("church") is found in the "plans" and the Fellowship of A.A..

### **The Scriptural basis of A.A.**

When Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob formulated the program of A.A., there were no Steps, there were no meetings and the Big Book had not been written. There was no "program" of A.A. Two helpless alcoholics, one having had a spiritual experience, set out to find a healing mechanism that would free them and others of the terrible addiction to alcohol.

Smitty remembered how his father and Bill Wilson worked hard during that period to "formulate a little talk or scheme that would interest the other drunks." Dr. Bob, noting that there were no Twelve Steps at the time and that "our stories didn't amount to anything to speak of," later said that they were convinced that the answer to their problems was in the Good Book. "To some of us older ones, the parts that we found absolutely essential were the Sermon on the Mount, the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Corinthians, and the Book of James," he said. (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* 96)

The Book of James was considered so important, in fact, that some early members even suggested "The James Club" as the name of the Fellowship (*Pass it on* 147). But "Religion" was never to be a part of the program of A.A.

### **"Anonymity is real humility at work."**

Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside the very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in weaving a protective mantle which covers our whole Society and under which we may grow and work in unity. (*Twelve Steps* 187)

To give up the prestige and the power of this world is a frightening thought for most of mankind. To voluntarily remove oneself from any chance for prestige and power by adhering to a precept of personal anonymity seems impossible. Yet, it is being done in an organization of people who believe that they have loved power and prestige more than most (*AA Comes of Age* 128, 129). Wilson summed up the mechanism of the nonrivalrous unity of the community of A.A.:

In our Twelve Traditions we have set our faces against nearly every trend in the outside world. We have denied ourselves personal government.

professionalism, and the right to say who our membership shall be. We have abandoned do-goodism, reform, and paternalism. We refuse outside charitable money and have decided to pay our own way. We will cooperate with practically everybody, yet we decline to marry our society to anyone. We abstain from public controversy and will not quarrel among ourselves about those things that rip society asunder: religion, politics, and reform. We have but one purpose, to carry the A.A. message to the sick alcoholic who wants it... We also give up rights and make sacrifices because we ought to, and, better yet, because we want to. (*ibid.* 288)

### **Joy outside the crowd**

The wonder of this foundation of a new order not based on scapegoating is that life is possible and joyful life is possible outside the cultural structures based upon collective violence. For some A.A. members, this means that Girard is right and the Jesus of the Gospels is correct. To have just a "theory" or an ancient text would have been too little for one to risk the dangers of attempting to live without the protection of violence. Seeing, and experiencing that there is another way, that men and women who are attempting to live along new lines, relying upon the protection of a loving, personal God whom they believe stands with scapegoats and who desires to be understood, is encouraging.

There is far more in the program of A.A. that speaks of the Gospels and of the revelations which Girard and the researchers of COV&R have brought to light. But this is an essay, not a book. I will close with the words of Bill Wilson because I believe that it describes how COV&R is also part of the great work of peace that is in progress:

It is a fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous. There you will find release from care, boredom and worry. Your imagination will be fired. Life will mean something at last. The most satisfactory years of your existence lie ahead. Thus we find the fellowship, and so will you....

Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the



Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you—until then. (*A.A.* 163, 164)

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## DESIRE, EMULATION, AND ENVY IN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

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Our heroine....wandered, as by the wrong side of the wall of a private garden, round the enclosed talents, accomplishments, aptitudes of Madame Merle. She found herself desiring to emulate them, and in twenty such ways, this lady presented herself as a model. "I should like awfully to be *so!*" Isabel secretly exclaimed, more than once....It took no great time indeed for her to feel, as the phrase is, under an influence. (*The Portrait of a Lady* 163)

Isabel considered [Osmond] with interest. "You seem to me to be always envying some one. Yesterday it was the Pope; today it's poor Lord Warburton."  
"My envy's not dangerous....I don't want to destroy the people—I only want to *be* them." (*The Portrait* 251)

Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) chronicles the stages through which Isabel Archer of Albany moves to become Mrs. Gilbert Osmond of Rome. Most critics agree that the transition in Isabel's life is due to her natural disposition and to the influence of the characters around her. But while the nature of this influence can be traced directly to Madame Merle's machinations, Isabel's character itself has elicited a great deal of analysis. L.C. Knights, for instance, finds "wilfulness as well as vulnerability in the attitudes [Isabel] brings to bear on experience" (12); Tony Tanner concludes that "[her] theories and imagined versions of reality

are generated behind closed doors and closed windows" (76); Juliet McMaster perceives an element of perversity in Isabel: "On the one hand, like a true American, she is ardently engaged in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; but on the other she is morbidly attracted by their opposites, and devotes herself to death, and immobility, and suffering" (51); Leon Edel (1968) detects egotism in Isabel—but one "which is limited and damaging to the self" (111)—unlike Osmond's, which is destructive of other people. Finally, in his essay "I Don't Like Isabel Archer," Marc Bousquet calls Isabel "selfish, naïve, ill-attuned to the feelings of others despite her education, an emblem of caprice and poor judgment" (197).

Since the essence of the romantic is desire, I suggest that in order to better understand the central event of *The Portrait*—Isabel's decision to marry Osmond, an action generally characterized as "perverse" or "morbid"—we see Isabel Archer as a subject of what René Girard calls "mimetic desire." According to Girard (1978), "The standard view [of imitation], derived from Plato's *mimesis* via Aristotle's *Poetics*, has always excluded one essential human behavior from the types subject to imitation—namely, desire and, more fundamentally still, appropriation" (vii). Central to Girard's thought is the theory of "mimetic" or "triangular desire," developed in his first book *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (1961) and elaborated in his later works:<sup>1</sup> a character desires an object, not for itself, but for the value lent to it by the desire of another. Don Quixote, for instance, believes that true chivalric existence can be experienced only through a careful imitation of Amadis of Gaul, who seems to him to personify ideal knightly behavior. Don Quixote's desires are thus "mediated": the subject pursues objects determined for him by the mediator of desire. In this respect, the directions taken and influences exerted by snobbery, vanity, jealousy, emulation, envy, rivalry, resentment, hatred, renunciation, and sacrifice form the center of Girard's critical thinking. "This triangle of subject, object, and mediator," Bruce Basso notes, "is similar to Thorstein Veblen's model of 'conspicuous consumption,' where 'keeping up with the Joneses' means desiring what they possess regardless of the real value of the object" (126). For Girard, however, it is not merely a question of desiring what the Joneses possess, but of desiring what they themselves appear to be; Girard calls this desire "metaphysical" because it is aimed at the mediator's being. Veblen describes the phenomenon in its

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<sup>1</sup>See especially the third part of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* and chapters 3, 4, and 5 of *The Girard Reader*.

economic manifestations only, but through an extensive analysis of major literary works by Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoyevsky, Girard unravels the complicated strategies of mimetic desire, explores the depths and ways in which it operates, and provides numerous examples of its powerful effects on human relationships.<sup>2</sup>

When Isabel Archer is first introduced in the story, we are told that she "had no regular education and no permanent home" (James 1963, 40),<sup>3</sup> a lack that leaves the young girl impressionable and her "thoughts...a tangle of vague outlines which had never been corrected by the judgement of people speaking with authority" (53). Her ability to choose or judge may have already been affected because she was allowed to grow up too much the child of her own nature. "In matters of opinion," James states, "she had had her way, and it had led her into a thousand ridiculous zigzags" (53). As Leon Edel (1986) explains, "Isabel has been badly educated. She has no sense of history; no authoritative voices have given her the essential values or structure of civilization" (13). Both James and the critics agree that, with no foundational frames of reference—no permanent home, no regular education, no authoritative voices, no sense of history, and no essential values—Isabel has lacked positive models of behavior<sup>4</sup> in the formative years of her life. This absence, I argue, helps explain Isabel's hypermimetic<sup>5</sup> temperament, one that makes her extremely "open" to new ideas and experiences, even as it invites all the problems that occur when imitation leads to rivalry, competition, and envy.

Richard Poirier, the only critic to raise the question of imitation in the novel, does not fully explore its significance in determining Isabel's actions: "Isabel is surrounded...by the various people whose attitudes she has at one time adopted, momentarily bringing one or another to the center with her, but only to send him back to the periphery, there to represent through the rest of the novel a fixity of attitude from which she herself has escaped"

<sup>2</sup>Girard's theory of mimetic desire has already had a profound influence in anthropology, economics, literature, philosophy, religion, and cultural studies; it is currently being incorporated into the field of composition studies—see Brooke.

<sup>3</sup>Future references are to this edition, the first published book edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*.

<sup>4</sup>Girard (1996) makes clear that mimetic desire in itself is good because it makes possible the opening out of oneself to others—"Cultural imitation," for instance, "is a positive form of mimetic desire" (64).

<sup>5</sup>For example, when she meets the Misses Molyneux, Lord Warburton's sisters, Isabel remarks, "I think it's lovely to be so quiet and reasonable and satisfied. I should like to be like that....I mean to try and imitate them" (73).

(216). What Poirier calls "escape" corresponds to Isabel's different stages of mediated desire, as one model of behavior replaces another in her experiences in America and especially in Europe.

Mediation begins while Isabel is in Albany: Henrietta Stackpole, we are told, "offered so high an example of useful activity that Isabel always thought of her as a model" (54), one who suggests "that a woman might suffice to herself and be happy" (55). But in James' conception of his heroine, Henrietta proves inadequate, for a person who declares, "I'm quite content to be myself; I don't want to change" (107), cannot satisfy Isabel's dreams. "The peril for you," Henrietta warns Isabel, "is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams....You're too fastidious" (185). What Isabel's dreams and ambitions consist of we learn as early as chapter six: "She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action" (53). But, as Tony Tanner observes, Isabel "seems unprepared for any harsh encounter with all that indifferent otherness which is not the self, which is not amenable to the self" (69).

Henrietta is quickly eclipsed by Isabel's eccentric aunt, the Europeanized Mrs. Touchett. The first perceptible change in Isabel is linguistic: "whenever the girl had heard people described as eccentric, she had thought of them as offensive and alarming" (36), but with Mrs. Touchett's arrival, Isabel's consciousness expands to allow for just such an appreciation. (In a well-structured novel, James is already laying the ground for some of Isabel's odd choices later in the story.) "No one certainly had on any occasion so held her as this foreign-looking woman, who...talked with striking familiarity of the courts of Europe" (36), since, to a susceptible mind like Isabel's, judging presumably places the judge above those judged, Mrs. Touchett appears at least equal to European royalty—even though the aunt's enjoyment of her claim to superiority is itself mediated through her niece's recognition of it.

Isabel is struck especially by her aunt's outspokenness. Indeed, Mrs. Touchett's marked pronouncements during her stay alter Isabel's perception considerably, and her blunt criticism of the Albany house triggers a new desire in the niece, who suddenly feels the provinciality of her surroundings. Mrs. Touchett, "this unexpected critic" (35), "finds everything immensely worn" (34), inspects the front parlor "without enthusiasm," and delivers her ultimate judgment: "In Florence we should call it a very bad house" (35). The niece's resigned response shows the

process of mediation at work: "Isabel felt some emotion, for she had always thought highly of her grandmother's house....'I should very much like to go to Florence'" (36). Isabel's reflections attest to the impact of Mrs. Touchett's visit: "there had really been a change in her life...She had a desire to leave the past behind her and, as she said to herself, to begin afresh" (39). When, on her arrival in Gardencourt, Ralph feels sorry that Isabel should have been in the house for a long time without his knowledge, Isabel replies, "'Your mother told me that in England people arrived very quietly'" (26).<sup>6</sup> In her "infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong" (53), Isabel is very attentive to the words and advice of others, and it is in this light that her decision to reject Lord Warburton's marriage proposal is perhaps best explained.

After she has met the Englishman and seen his estate, Isabel is initially delighted, as she tells her cousin:

"I like your specimen English gentleman very much."

"I like him too..." Ralph returned. "But I pity him more."

Isabel looked at him askance. "Why, that seems to me his only fault—that one can't pity him a little. He appears to have everything, to know everything, to *be* everything." (69)

Ralph's rejoinder will carry more weight with Isabel than he may have intended: "[Lord Warburton] occupies a position that appeals to my imagination....But he's all in a muddle about himself, his position, his power, and indeed about everything in the world." The chapter concludes with Isabel's running to her uncle: "'you don't pity Lord Warburton...as Ralph does?' 'Yes, I do, after all!'" (71). The representative of the best aristocracy in the novel does not appear to occupy "the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one" (349); he does not enjoy "the essence of the aristocratic situation" (164), and in light of her aspirations, Lord Warburton is therefore lacking.

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<sup>6</sup> Part of Isabel's understanding of English ways has its roots in the suggestions gleaned from her readings: "She questioned [her uncle] immensely about England, about the British constitution, the English character, the state of politics, the manners and customs of the royal family, the peculiarities of the aristocracy... and in begging to be enlightened on these points she usually enquired whether they corresponded with the descriptions in the books" (57); Isabel also thinks that the English are not nice to girls because "they're not nice to them in the novels" (58). For an excellent analysis of the power of the written word on a character's imagination and conduct, see Andrew McKenna on *Madame Bovary*.

Isabel seeks what Poirier calls "a sort of enlightenment, a spiritual and by no means discernible grandeur" (217). In her desire for a self-expressive mode of existence, Isabel refuses Lord Warburton's proposal because she is determined not to foreclose life's possibilities so early by becoming a wife, but the rejection is also the logical result of the various suggestions made by the Touchetts, the kind of mediation invariably overlooked by readers who choose to see the rejection as a clear indication of Isabel's freedom. When Ralph expresses his surprise at her decision, we begin to realize just how seriously Isabel has taken some of his words:

"What had you in mind when you refused Lord Warburton?... What was the logic...that dictated so remarkable an act?"

"I didn't wish to marry him—if that's logic."

"...nineteen women out of twenty ... of even the most exacting sort would have managed to do with Lord Warburton. Perhaps you don't know how he has been stalked."

"But it seems to me," said Isabel, "that one day when we talked of him you mentioned odd things in him." (130-31)

Isabel's future is determined by the magnitude of her action, as the pressure on her to accomplish something greater intensifies. Mrs. Touchett, who had wished her niece to marry Lord Warburton, is surprised: "I suppose that when you refuse an offer like Lord Warburton's it's because you expect to do something better" (121). In Mrs. Touchett's understanding, Isabel has violated a bond of the Gardencourt community and must now keep up, if not improve on, her performance. But when Isabel explains that she does not love Lord Warburton enough to marry him, Mrs. Touchett is quick to forgive: "You did right to refuse him then.... Only, the next great offer you get, I hope you'll manage to come up to your standards" (122).<sup>7</sup>

To the Touchetts, Isabel's career quickly turns into a fascinating spectacle, especially now that she has performed what Ralph calls a "remarkable act" (130):

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<sup>7</sup>To help us understand the significance of Isabel's rejection of Lord Warburton, James describes him as someone enjoying "the air of a happy temperament fertilized by a high civilization—which would have made almost any observer envy him at a venture" (19). While the description obviously foreshadows Osmond's envy, James' keen sensitivity to the dynamics of the mimetic is striking.

"I shall have the thrill of seeing what a young lady does who won't marry Lord Warburton."

"That's what your mother counts upon too," said Isabel.

"Ah, there will be plenty of spectators! We shall hang on the rest of your career..." (131)

Ralph's language ("thrill," "spectators," and "hang") suggests that the excitement and the interest Isabel's action has aroused in the Gardencourt community need an outlet and will not be satisfied until Isabel is "sacrificed" to Gilbert Osmond. In a profound sense, the spectators have already determined Isabel's future course, for what can be more unexpected and shocking than her decision to marry Osmond?

Caspar Goodwood, Isabel's other, earlier suitor, looms more as a sexual threat: "There was a disagreeable strong push, a kind of hardness of presence, in his way of rising before her" (23). An embodiment of raw will, "he could make people work his will, believe in him, march before him and justify him" (105).<sup>8</sup> But Caspar is too much of a conspicuously constricting force to interest Isabel, and while she might still have retained some of her freedom in Lord Warburton's "system," Isabel would be stifled in Caspar's world. Her rejection of Caspar's proposals follows naturally from her response to Lord Warburton's offer: "The idea of a diminished liberty was particularly disagreeable to her at present, since she has just given a sort of personal accent to her independence by looking so straight at Lord Warburton's big bribe and yet turning away from it" (104). Her strongest objection to Caspar is that "he showed his appetites and designs too simply and artlessly" (106). Because of "his hard manhood" (482), Caspar lacks the graces of civilized social intercourse, and even in his gaze, Isabel detects "his stiff insistence, an insistence in which there was such a want of tact" (271).

Now that Isabel has rejected two proposals, James prepares the stage for her encounter with Madame Merle by removing the other characters from the scene: the suitors take their leave. Henrietta departs for Bedfordshire, while Ralph and his mother devote their time to the dying Mr. Touchett. Convinced that "each new acquaintance would exert some momentous influence on her life" (149), Isabel comes upon a stranger playing the piano in the Gardencourt living-room and sits down noiselessly

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<sup>8</sup>Ironically, Caspar's determination to make others justify him mirrors Osmond's, since both men are "movers" (105) of people.



on the nearest chair: "When [the piece] was finished she felt a strong desire to thank the player...while at the same time the stranger turned quickly round, as if but just aware of her presence" (149). Charmed, Isabel misses the theatricality in Madame Merle's action at the end of the piece. Instead, she finds the new person's manner pleasing and, in her initial rapture, takes Madame Merle at first to be a "Frenchwoman," then a "German of high degree, perhaps an Austrian, a baroness, a countess, a princess" (152). These speculations reflect the hold the stranger has already acquired over her, and although Madame Merle confesses to being a social non-entity—"what have I got? Neither husband, nor child, nor fortune, nor position, nor the traces of a beauty that I ever had" (171)—Isabel remains convinced that she "had never encountered a more agreeable and interesting figure than Madame Merle" (161).

The favorable impressions are, however, not all her own, for two other people in Gardencourt, great admirers of Madame Merle, encourage Isabel's growing friendship with her. When Isabel asks, "Pray, who is this Madame Merle?" Ralph replies, "the one person in the world whom my mother very much admires. If she were not herself (which she after all much prefers), she would like to be Madame Merle" (153). Ralph's usual humor and his half-hearted criticism of his mother, though apparently lost on his cousin, do not really detract from his and James' awareness of the mechanism whereby a character wishes to appropriate the being of another.

Mrs. Touchett, who had earlier declared that recommending is a very "serious affair" (88), has no reservations about urging her niece to get acquainted with the visitor: "she's putting off a lot of visits at great houses ...she has the pick of places.... But I've asked her to put in this time because I wish you to know her. I think it will be a good thing for you" (167). Mrs. Touchett represents Madame Merle as tact incarnate, a queen, whose visits, even when they take place at awkward moments, are smoothly converted into favors. "Your sister Lily told me she hoped I would give you plenty of opportunities," Mrs. Touchett reminds Isabel; "I give you one in putting you in relation with Madame Merle. She's one of the most brilliant women in Europe" (167). Because the question of Isabel's attraction to Osmond constitutes the major interpretative issue in the novel, understanding the significance of Ralph's and his mother's praise of Madame Merle is crucial.

During her stay at Gardencourt, Isabel is offered plenty of opportunities to see why Madame Merle<sup>9</sup> excites so much interest:

Our heroine....wandered, as by the wrong side of the wall of a private garden, round the enclosed talents, accomplishments, aptitudes of Madame Merle. She found herself desiring to emulate them, and in twenty such ways, this lady presented herself as a model. "I should like awfully to be so!" Isabel secretly exclaimed, more than once....It took no great time indeed for her to feel, as the phrase is, under an influence. (163)

The passage is essential to an understanding of Isabel's development and to her seemingly surprising attraction to Osmond; it may in fact be considered the turning point in the history of Isabel's consciousness, for it charts, very self-consciously, the workings of mimetic conduct in the very same terms deployed by Girard.<sup>10</sup> The desiring subject is made to feel her unimportance in the presence of a model who inspires admiration and envy. The image of the subject wandering helplessly by the wrong side of the wall of the model's private garden works well to capture Isabel's sense of loss and exclusion, while the model, in her apparent serenity and autonomy, enjoys her being and her garden all by herself, without the slightest attention to eager onlookers.

Isabel's encounter with Madame Merle is, James notes, "a turning point in [Isabel's] life" ("Preface," 14), since, the young girl who "was always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress" (55) is now made to doubt herself, and this realization is the essence of the lesson Isabel learns from this high authority. Isabel, who has always prided herself on her freedom, is surrendering her fundamental prerogative and will now pursue objects determined for her by the model of desire. That Isabel has already lost some of her independence can be discerned at the beginning of the friendship, when she misses the obvious suggestions of violence in which Madame Merle couches her "praise": "I want to see what life makes of you. One thing's certain—it can't spoil you. It may pull you about horribly, but I defy it to break you up" (162). Instead, "Isabel received this assurance as a young soldier, still panting from a slight

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<sup>9</sup> For the most detailed analyses of Madame Merle's significance, see Joseph B. McCullough (1975) and William T. Stafford (1986).

<sup>10</sup> Some applications of Girard's theory to James' work include William A. Johnsen on *The American*. Kathryn Zervos on *The Wings of the Dove*, and Thomas F. Bertonneau on *The Bostonians* and on *The Golden Bowl*.

skirmish in which he has come off with honor, might receive a pat on the shoulder from his colonel"(162). At this point in the story, their relationship has all the characteristics of what Girard calls "external mediation" (1965, 9): in spite of their increasing intimacy, Isabel, content in her position as a faithful disciple, does not see herself as a rival to the other woman. As James explains, "It is said that imitation is the sincerest flattery, and if Isabel was sometimes moved to gape at her friend aspiringly and despairingly it was not so much because she desired herself to shine as because she wished to hold up the lamp for Madame Merle" (163). Finding the key to someone's value, judging and placing him or her effectively, amounts to what Isabel considers the "aristocratic condition," the highest quality she admires in her new friend: "that's the supreme good fortune: to be in a better position for appreciating people than they are for appreciating you.' And she added that such, when one considered it, was simply the essence of the aristocratic situation" (164). But Isabel's notion is other-oriented because it measures itself against the people being appreciated and derives its sense of superiority from the comparison. Unlike the social fortune of someone like Caspar Goodwood or Lord Warburton, the so-called "aristocratic situation" enables the less conventionally fortunate (like Madame Merle or Gilbert Osmond) to acquire a different and, in Isabel's eyes, a better distinction, a spiritual greatness, based on taste and feeling. Because it seems to have its roots in the mind—and not in the external world of chance, birth, circumstances, and social status—it is a refined, personal, and just way of achieving social significance.

Although Isabel begins to have some reservations about her new friend's "social quality"—she finds, for instance, that Madame Merle's nature "had been too much overlaid by custom and her angles too much rubbed away" (165)—her admiration for the new friend remains high: "To be so cultivated and civilized, so wise and so easy, and still make so light of it—that was really to be a great lady, especially when one so carried and presented one's self" (164). Charmed by this superior air, Isabel is now prepared to "justify" Madame Merle.

Madame Merle's descriptions of her friend Gilbert Osmond are deliberately sketched to pique Isabel's interest: Osmond is thus "one of the cleverest and most agreeable men—well, in Europe simply" (206), but not the kind to show off his talents, and only a few people are fortunate enough to appreciate his superiority: "if he cared or was interested or rightly challenged—just exactly rightly it had to be—then one felt his cleverness and his distinction" (207). As if aware of the workings of mimetic desire,

the model, who knows that Isabel has already rejected two suitors, sets up seemingly impossible tasks for the aspiring subject. Eager to prove herself to the model, Isabel will fall into the trap because Madame Merle's diabolical afterthought ("just exactly rightly it had to be") is too enticing to Isabel's imagination to be missed. The trap is ingenious precisely because it resorts to mediation of desire to catch its victim.

Isabel is made to feel that she is not good enough for Osmond, because, as Madame Merle explains, "He was easily bored, too easily, and dull people always put him out; but a quick and cultivated girl like Isabel would give him a stimulus which was too absent from his life" (207). The obstacles and challenges Madame Merle puts in Isabel's way make the girl even more determined to please the man of the highest artistic sensibility in Italy. What a model recommends becomes inevitably desirable: "Isabel said she would be happy to know a person who had enjoyed so high a confidence for so many years" (207). It is precisely such moments that determine the heroine's destiny: her desire to meet Osmond is thus utterly mediated, and her reaction when she meets him is completely predictable.

Concerned with what Osmond will think of her, Isabel fears appearing stupid in his presence, and her first glimpse of him, when he pays Madame Merle a visit, leaves Isabel in awe: "Mrs. Touchett was not present, and these two had it, for the effect of brilliancy, all their own... It all had the rich readiness that would have come from rehearsal" (208). That the performance is meant to affect the girl is clear; the important thing to note, however, is Isabel's fear of disappointing Madame Merle; indeed, her anxiety is so strong that, soon after Osmond's departure, "Isabel fully expected her friend would scold her for having been so stupid" (209). The more she tries to please, the more Isabel enslaves herself to Madame Merle's and Osmond's designs and desires. With Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton, Isabel was doing the judging; with Osmond, she is afraid of being found lacking. On her first visit to his house, Isabel even feels conscious of her "obligations" (210) to him: "A man she had heard spoken of in terms that excited interest and who was evidently capable of distinguishing himself, had invited her...to come to his house" (215). Isabel's strict observance of her words and her fear lest she sound boring attest to the hold of mimetic desire on her imagination—as we can see during her visit to Osmond's art collection:

It would have annoyed her to express a liking for something he, in his superior enlightenment, would think she oughtn't to like; or to pass by

something at which the truly initiated mind would arrest itself...She was very careful therefore as to what she said, as to what she noticed or failed to notice; more careful than she had ever been before. (221)

In the presence of the mediator, Isabel, who has repeatedly insisted on her independence ("I'm very fond of my liberty"), sinks into contrived, mechanical, and unnatural conduct, completely determined by her fear of Osmond's judgement.

Unlike Caspar Goodwood's and Lord Warburton's declarations of love, Osmond's is made with an apparent indifference to its reception: Isabel is given the impression that the decision is hers, for Osmond "had repeated the announcement in a tone of almost impersonal discretion, like a man who expected very little from it but who spoke for his own needed relief" (258). Osmond even stresses his lack of interest: "'I haven't asked anything of you—not even a thought in the future; you must do me that justice'" (259). Unlike the other proposals, Osmond's seems neither pressing nor persistent, and its indifference arouses Isabel's curiosity. By suggesting that he has not actually fallen under her power and that his pride and independence are still his, Osmond, like a coquette, is making himself all the more desirable.

Isabel is convinced by his professions of independence and by his quiet way of life. She believes that he does not care about what others usually worry about, that he has renounced what the multitude considers great. Some years earlier, he had decided "'to be as quiet as possible....Not to worry—not to strive nor struggle. To resign myself. To be content with little'" (222). Osmond presents himself as someone who has, through his "studied [and] wilful renunciation" (223), transcended the passions of the material world. The fact explains, at least to Isabel, Madame Merle's earlier description of him: "'a man made to be distinguished, but [with] no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything'" (169). According to Madame Merle, Osmond lacks social recognition, but he seems to enjoy a different kind of distinction: he has apparently freed himself from the necessity of toil, from the accidents of birth and social status, and, most importantly, from a preoccupation with his public image. Osmond seems to have become what he himself has chosen to be, and to transcend social attachments is to reach the pure form of self: free, autonomous, truly aristocratic—a state that recalls Isabel's famous definition of self:

"Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly the clothes which I choose to wear don't express me; and heaven forbid! ... I don't care to be judged by [the way I dress]." (173)<sup>11</sup>

Osmond embodies Isabel's idea of the independent self, and when the characteristics that make him a superior model are closely examined, we understand why the highly imaginative girl falls in love with him and why her decision to marry him cannot be dismissed as perverse or morbid or as a fraud perpetrated by the author on his readers. With his apparent indifference to worldliness, Osmond may be said to represent what James himself admired in Emerson's vision "of what we require and what we are capable of in the way of aspiration and independence" (9). Like Osmond, the Emersonian character has also turned his back on the world:

It is a sign of our time [writes Emerson], conspicuous to the coarsest observer, that many intelligent and religious persons withdraw themselves from the common labors and competitions of the market and the caucus, and betake themselves to a certain solitary and critical way of living.... They hold themselves aloof: they feel the disproportion between their faculties and the work offered them.... With this passion for what is great and extraordinary, it cannot be wondered at that they are repelled by vulgarity and frivolity in people. They say to themselves, It is better to be alone than in bad company. And it is really a wish to be met—the wish to find society for their hope and religion—which prompts them to shun what is called society. (198-201)

Osmond's renunciation seems so convincing that Isabel is ready to defend him against criticism. When Ralph points out that Osmond has no fortune, Isabel's spirited response clearly puts her cousin in the wrong:

"[H]e's a man to whom importance is supremely indifferent. If that's what you mean when you call him 'small,' then he's as small as you please. I call that large—it's the largest thing I know.... Mr. Osmond has never scrambled nor struggled—he has cared for no worldly prize.... Your mother is horrified at my contenting myself with a person who has none

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<sup>11</sup>Isabel's idea that clothes do not, and should not, express self clearly contradicts her objection to Caspar Goodwood's habit of dressing always in the same manner: "it was not apparently that he wore the same clothes continually.... But they all seemed of the same piece" (105).

of [Lord Warburton's] advantages—no property, no title, no honours, no houses, nor lands, nor position, nor reputation, nor brilliant belongings of any sort. It's the total absence of all these things that pleases me." (286-87)

Isabel is, of course, mistaken in her conception of Osmond, but her ambition remains admirable, and her defense of Osmond is consistent. The nobility of her position lies in her enlightened refusal to define "greatness" only from the perspective of social advantages, in her spiritual conception of the term. Although she may be willfully deviating from conventional expectations and may seem unreasonably non-conforming, her ambition is a comment on someone like Mrs. Touchett, who is unable to see beyond Lord Warburton's possessions. In its scheme of things, the novel is asking us to understand the eager and intelligent niece, capable of nobler imagination than her aunt. Many readers of *The Portrait* overlook this dimension of Isabel's ambition. J. M. Newton, one of Isabel's, and James', harshest critics, claims:

My main proposition is the double one that Isabel's ambition and imagination, which we are led to think of as making a very distinguished as well as a very attractive person and which are only thoroughly satisfied by what she sees of Gilbert Osmond before she marries him, are actually a spiritual disease, and that once the reader does what James doesn't do and identifies them as a disease all the charm of the novel and especially of Isabel begins to fade. (4)

There surely is something admirable in Isabel's faith and in her courage to want a nobler foundation for distinction. Her being deceived by Osmond's façade is not the point; she was deceived precisely because the façade was admirable. As she saw him, Osmond was "not a prodigious proprietor," but a "a very cultivated, and a very honest man" (288), qualities not meant to be abnormal.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>While my focus is on the psychological aspects of Girard's theory as it applies to *The Portrait*, James' own vocabulary does a remarkable job of anticipating the language of modern anthropology: the novel's portrayal of societal hierarchies (especially among the upper classes, but also how certain non-landed people like Isabel, Madame Merle, and Osmond fit into the more traditional—and rapidly eroding—hierarchy); the "taboos" of speech; the "myths" of capitalism and consumerism (the critique of Osmond as a "collector" of depersonalized objects); the "rituals" of exclusion (the garden wall metaphor and Osmond's famous Thursday evenings "held for the sake not so much of inviting people as

When we trace the ways in which one object of desire is shown to be more attractive than the previous one, we see the gradual stages Isabel's life has gone through. After eclipsing Henrietta Stackpole, Mrs. Touchett introduces Isabel to Madame Merle, somebody the Touchetts think highly of. Madame Merle, for her particular reasons, sees to it that Isabel gets to meet Gilbert Osmond, an even more superior model. The logical progression from one mediator to another gives consistency to Isabel's actions and helps dispel the kind of uncertainty typified by Ralph Norman's criticism: "Things happen in James's world, but it is not clear why. Osmond acquires Isabel, but it is not clear whether this is a result of Osmond's and Madame Merle's machinations, or a result of Isabel's own perversity" (177); Arnold Kettle too finds Isabel's decision to marry Osmond hard to accept:

Is it not a little strange that of all the essential parts of Isabel's story which are revealed to us the section of her life most pointedly avoided is that immediately before her decision to marry Osmond?... This is, from the novelist's point of view, the most difficult moment in the book. How to convince us that a young woman like Isabel would in fact marry a man like Osmond? And it is a moment...not satisfactorily got over. And the point is that if Isabel's marriage to Osmond is in any sense a fraud perpetrated upon us for his own ends by the author, the book is greatly weakened. (685)

Kettle goes on to explain that "what is achieved is a kind of inevitability, a sense of Isabel's never standing a chance, which amounts not to objective irony but to the creation of something like an external destiny." To grasp the profound effects of mimesis in Isabel's life is to comprehend what Kettle calls "external destiny," for, once Isabel comes under Madame Merle's influence, the course of her actions becomes indeed inevitable. In short, the traditional dichotomy in criticism between Isabel's "natural disposition" and "external influence" breaks down once we conceive of the character as an interindividual subject.

Even Ralph Touchett, who surely does not wish Isabel to marry Osmond, accepts the logic underlying her decision: "he was...accommodating himself to the weight of his total impression—the

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of not inviting them" [404]); the description of the façade of Osmond's house as a "mask"; Isabel's "capacity for pollution" (356); and her finally seeing certain things in Osmond's life as "hideously unclean" (355). It is striking how James' language is explicitly alluding to what Girard (1997) calls "mimetic contagion."



impression of her ardent good faith. She was wrong, but she believed; she was deluded, but she was dismally consistent" (288). In her quest, Isabel believes that she has married a person who has renounced worldly ambition. But Gilbert Osmond's withdrawal from society is simply a pose, as his detachment from and his seeming indifference to social importance are elaborate gestures designed to deceive.

The process of revealing Osmond's social obsession begins when Ralph perceives that Isabel has begun publishing her husband's style, that she has become a disciple copying and perpetuating Osmond's desires: "Ralph, in all this, recognized the hand of the master; for he knew that Isabel had no faculty for producing studied impressions....There was a kind of violence in her impulses, of crudity in some of her experiments, which took him by surprise" (323). Although Isabel seems to have become Osmond, Ralph is not deluded, and, in what may be considered Ralph's own moment of recognition, the true nature of Osmond's mock renunciation is made apparent:

He recognized Osmond...at every turn. He saw how he kept all things within limits; how he adjusted, regulated, animated [Osmond and Isabel's] manner of life....He always had an eye to effect, and his effects were deeply calculated....To surround his interior with a sort of invidious sanctity, to tantalize society, with a sense of exclusion, to make people believe his house was different from every other, to impart to the face that he presented to the world a cold originality—this was the ingenious effort of the personage to whom Isabel had attributed a superior morality. (324)

James' etymological use of the word "invidious" (in "a sort of invidious sanctity") is significant: while the Latin root *invidia* means envy, the term also derives from the literal sense of "looking in" (or *in-videre*) and works very well in Ralph's analysis of Osmond's exclusionary strategies.<sup>13</sup> Eager for control and power and always conscious of the eyes of the world, Osmond, Ralph's insight suggests, leads a sterile existence, devoid of

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<sup>13</sup> The term also fits in very well with the "garden wall metaphor" where Isabel feels trapped on the outside and unable to penetrate to the core of Madame Merle's self-sufficiency: the same word comes up earlier to describe Isabel's reaction to Lord Warburton's proposal: "What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved" (94); and James applies the adjective even to Ralph. "Isabel's invidious cousin" (253). For a comprehensive treatment of envy, see Girard (1991) on Shakespeare.

naturalness or spontaneity, while his "originality" stems from the deceptive but cheap effects of his theatrical way of life. But, although Osmond—not Caspar Goodwood—is the epitome of will in the story, his will is itself controlled from outside, thereby making his actions thoroughly mediated:

Under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values Osmond lived exclusively for the world. Far from being its master as he pretended to be, he was its very humble servant...everything he did was pose—pose so subtly considered that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse. (324-5)

Osmond's social detachment has consisted in looking without being seen and his apparent indifference to social eminence is belied by his deep resentment. Osmond, who has intensely but secretly yearned, who has always considered himself above ordinary struggles, is revealed in his complete enslavement to the world.

For her part, Isabel sees through her husband's mask when he and Madame Merle ask her to manipulate Lord Warburton's desires. Madame Merle is the first to make the suggestion:

"I want to see her married to Lord Warburton."  
 "You had better wait till he asks her."  
 "...he'll ask her. Especially...if you make him.... It's quite in your power...."  
 (340)

Soon afterwards, Osmond makes a similar request of his wife:

"You must have a great deal of influence with him.... The moment you really wish it you can bring him to the point."  
 "... What have I ever done to put him under an obligation to me?"  
 "You refused to marry him," said Osmond with his eyes on his book.... "I hold that it lies in your hands" (347).

The requests amount to a form of temptation enjoining Isabel to enter the world of means where even desires are used to entrap and manipulate. But a great deal of Isabel's nobility derives precisely from her refusal to stoop to manipulation, a refusal that marks the growth and articulation of her moral character.

Now that the worldly prize seems so near, Osmond can no longer maintain his pretense, but Isabel finds such a desire startling and her husband's conduct inconsistent:

It was Gilbert's constant intimation... that he treated as from equal to equal with the most distinguished people in the world, and that his daughter had only to look about her to pick out a prince. It cost him therefore a lapse from consistency to say explicitly that he yearned for Lord Warburton. (345)

Isabel, who had objected to Caspar Goodwood's tendency to show "his appetites and designs too simply and too artlessly" (106), is shocked by Osmond's insistence that she act quickly lest Lord Warburton "escape." The attempt to draw Isabel into the game of desire jolts her into the moment of recognition, what James himself considers "obviously the best thing in the book":

The suggestion from another that she had a definite influence on Lord Warburton—this had given her the start that accompanies unexpected recognition. Was it true that there was something still between them that might be a handle to make him declare himself to Pansy? (347)

Isabel finds the prospect "frightening" and her husband's request "repulsive." The model, who had seemed so desirable before, is showing unexpected qualities: "Isabel looked at her companion in much wonderment; it struck her as strange that a nature in which she found so much to esteem should break down so in spots" (81-82). The companion in question is actually Henrietta Stackpole in an earlier chapter, but the irony of *The Portrait* is such that Gilbert Osmond, the man of polish and style, turns out to be a fake, desperate for social approval.

Isabel's relationship with Osmond suggests the triumph of faith and trust over artfulness. Isabel had married Osmond because she believed in him:

[H]e opened her eyes so wide to the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance of mankind, that she had been properly impressed with ... the virtue of keeping one's self unspotted by it. But this base, ignoble world, it appeared was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eyes, in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. (353)

Osmond's inconsistency shatters itself against Isabel's steadfast belief, just as her faith ultimately exposes his pretensions:

Osmond had talked to Isabel about his renunciation, his indifference, the ease with which he dispensed with the usual aids to success.... The indifference was really the last of his qualities; she had never seen any one who thought so much of others.... He was unable to live without [society]... (354)

It is also in this chapter that Isabel understands the difference between her and Osmond's notions of the "aristocratic situation:"

They attached such different ideas, such different associations and desires, to the same formulas. Her notion of the aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty and the liberty a sense of enjoyment. But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude.... There were certain things they must do, a certain posture they must take, certain people they must know and not know. (354)

Isabel's view of the aristocratic situation, combining duty and enjoyment, may be regarded as her most articulate definition of virtue. To call her quest "perverse," "morbid," or "unrealistic," as some readers have done, is to overlook the moral dimension of her search. Isabel's appeal is to be traced ultimately to an apparent oxymoron: the moral enjoyment of life. The irony in Isabel's story is that in her search for an ideal form of behavior, she has married the man who combines the exact traits for which she rejected her first two suitors. Besides living in a narrower and more regulated system than Lord Warburton's, Osmond, not unlike Caspar, shows his desires "too artlessly." Isabel, who had admired him with perfect trust, has quickly turned into the critical wife:

The real offense, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own. Her mind was to be his...he expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favour.... He had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences. (355)

James notes that this phase of Isabel's life is pervaded by her "exquisitely miserable revulsion" brought about by Osmond's "worldliness, his deep snobbishness, his want of generosity, etc.; his hatred of her when he finds that she judges him, that she morally protests at so much that surrounds

her" (*The Notebooks* 17). As well as being a repudiation of the once so desirable model, Isabel's protest indicates that while early in the story her judgments were largely aesthetic, toward the end, when she perceives what Osmond and Madame Merle stand for, the moral reasserts itself in her conduct. Isabel's realization amounts to a new beginning, as she now sees that, though honest, her intense desire for an artistically perfect future had distorted her perception; she finds some things in Osmond's life "hideously unclean," just as her vocabulary—that began expanding with the term "eccentric"—is now making room for such words as "justice," "duty," and "decency." And if Madame Merle has made Isabel's marriage, sacrificing Isabel to Osmond, Isabel refuses to sacrifice Lord Warburton and Pansy so as to live in harmony with Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond, her former models of desire.

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# PEACE EDUCATION AND THE NORTHERN IRISH CONFLICT

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The Northern Irish conflict can be interpreted as an anachronism. This is true in many aspects. However, in the last ten years we were confronted with many "anachronistic" conflicts: in former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, Algeria, Colombia, and Afghanistan, to mention only some. In our postmodern times the division of the world into two rather neat halves with two centers of power has gone, the nation state is weakening and in many societies the social glue seems to be losing its cohesive force. We have to live together in pluralistic societies in which we are all a minority at times. Wars between states become less likely, but civil wars are on the increase. Terrorism becomes a power against which the traditional armies and their weapons are quite useless in spite of many technological developments. The ancient laws concerning the protection of women and children in wartime are becoming obsolete. Women are invited to get involved in the armed forces. The child soldier is a well-known phenomenon. In our western society a child's world, which exists in isolation from the adult world, is no longer a possibility.

Some lessons learned in dealing with the Northern Irish conflict might turn out to be worthwhile taking up in other situations. In this essay, I reflect with the help of the mimetic theory on peace work done by some Dutch people on behalf of Northern Ireland between 1973 and 1992. The Northern Irish conflict as such is not the subject of this paper; the mimetic interpretation of this conflict was admirably covered by people such as Duncan Morrow and the late Frank Wright to which I refer the reader in my bibliography. I will concentrate on the educational aspects of Dutch peace work done in the Northern Irish context. Here it suffices to say that the

Northern Irish conflict is not a religious one, though religious labels are being used. It is a conflict between two cultures, an Irish one and an Anglo-Saxon or British one.

## **I. Dutch peace work on behalf of Northern Ireland**

### **A. A short history**

In 1973 I was invited to become a member of staff of a conference for influential Northern Irishmen in the Netherlands. Glenn Williams, then secretary general of the KEK (Conference of European Churches) had asked the Dutch Council of Churches whether it could do something on behalf of Northern Ireland. After some consultation Williams asked the Dutch adult education center 'De Haaf' to accommodate "mixed Roman Catholic and Protestant Irish groups in a quiet and spiritual atmosphere." The director of this center, Aat van Rhijn, a Presbyterian minister, asked me to participate in the conference because he wanted a Catholic priest to make the Roman Catholic Northern Irishmen feel represented on the staff. A laywoman, Hermine Keuning, was the third member of the staff. The Dutch Reformed Church provided money. In April 1973 a visit was made to Belfast and contact was established with the Irish Council of Churches; it soon became our Northern Irish counterpart.

In September a first conference was held, quickly followed by a second one. From participants of the first conference a new request for a conference was made and after this one even more conferences were organized, altogether 18 between 1973 and 1983. We worked with neighborhood groups, politicians, paramilitaries, social workers, police officers, adult educators, social workers, journalists and editors, Catholic and Protestant clergymen. In the conferences of the protestant politicians and the clergy it was not possible to have a mixed group; we had to be content with having some either Catholic or Protestant "observers" at the conference.

In the late seventies the security situation in Northern Ireland improved. The necessity of traveling to the Netherlands to have a conference became less evident. Because our work remained in demand, we organized weekends in Northern Ireland itself from 1981 onwards, mainly in Corrymeela, an ecumenical adult education center near Ballycastle.

Money was coming from several sources, but mainly from the Dutch Reformed Church. To handle the money well we decided in 1975 to become a trust: the "Dutch Northern Irish Advisory Committee." It was typical of this trust that its constitution stipulated that no conference or any



other activity could be undertaken without the consent of the Northern Irish members even when the latter happened to be numerically a minority. The Northern Irish members were, so to speak, the employers, the Dutch members were the employees; they run the conferences and provided the money as well. In this way meddling in Northern Irish affairs by the Dutch members was prevented. The membership of the committee changed a couple of times. In 1992 the committee was dissolved: it had run its course, people in Northern Ireland took over the work with a new organization, "Understanding conflict...and finding ways out of it."

### **B. Educational concept**

Our work was done on the basis of the tradition of Dutch adult education. The starting point of this kind of work is the conviction that every adult is responsible for his or her learning process. The facilitator initiates this process, guards it and tries to shape it. The goal of this learning process is to enable a person to make a contribution to social change and to the improvement of the situation in which he or she finds him/herself. The person is him/herself part of this process.

The learning process takes place in a group. This group represents to a certain extent the social and personal situation in which the participants are living. It is not an arbitrary group such as a school class. It is composed of people who share a similar situation and have the same interests. Though some input from outside the group may be desirable or even necessary, the group itself is often quite knowledgeable. The greater part of any conference is used to communicate to one another the knowledge that is contained in the group itself. The facilitator uses different methods to bring this knowledge to the surface and to promote the exchange of facts, emotions and experience. Every participant shares responsibility for what happens in the group.

The learning process starts by analyzing and defining the common questions and problems of the participants. In this they are already taking their responsibility both for the learning process and for their social and personal situation. The process demands a certain distance from the situation in which the participants live. They leave their home and work for some days and come together in a conference center. They must have an issue, a subject or theme that to some extent unites them, and some awareness of what they want to learn; in the process itself the more concrete aims of the learning process may change. The participants should feel free and secure; a general rule is: "everything said in this room remains

in this room." The conference center must provide a hospitable environment. At such conferences the informal part is at least as important as the official programmed.

The facilitator ought to provide sufficient information for the participants to analyze the situation and to find ways to deal with it. Input from outside the group may be indispensable. The facilitator must have some insight into the situation from which the participants are coming. An intake interview and some general exploration of the situation may be required. However, he or she is learning too; the facilitator is not supposed to have a complete analysis of the situation or to be able to offer solutions. This may even hinder his/her listening to what the participants have to say. At the end of the conference the participants evaluate what they learned and try to find ways of applying their knowledge to the situation where they come from.

### **C. Running a conference**

This educational model was used for our conferences. The issue was always the same: how to promote peace in Northern Ireland. The participants left their country: the security situation often demanded this, but it was part and parcel of the learning process as well. In this way they were able to look at their situation from a distance and to reflect on their responsibility in this violent predicament. Our—certainly at the beginning—very limited knowledge of the ins and outs of the Northern Irish society turned out to be a great asset. By posing our "stupid" questions the participants were forced to profoundly reflect on what was self-evident for them. Going to the Netherlands appealed to the Northern Irish because "King Billy," William of Orange, king of England, is a part of Northern Irish history and mythology. (Most Dutch people are hardly aware of this.)

Being abroad (often for the first time), having been invited free from charge, the working method and above all the presence of the staff made it possible that the Catholic and Protestant participants could have talks, even confrontations, without a polarization that would have made the progress of the process impossible. Feelings of resistance among the participants were used by the staff to bring about change. The fact that the Catholics often used an Irish passport to come to the conference and the Protestants a British one gave an opportunity to reflect on what identity entails.

We always started the formal part of the program by a lecture by a high Dutch civil servant on the way the three groups within Dutch society (Protestants, Catholics, liberals/socialists) had succeeded to live together

as "three peoples rolled into one." The way Protestants, Catholics and liberals/socialists formed their "pillars" in Dutch society never failed to evoke amazement and often gave to the participants the feeling that the way Catholics and Protestants are living together in Northern Ireland is not all that bad, at least not in more peaceful times. Depending on the composition of the group we invited more lecturers, organized meetings with politicians, high police officers, representatives of local authorities, media people, neighborhood workers etc. We always made one or more trips to a place of interest for the group. The purpose never was to show off—look how civilized our police are and how sophisticated our politicians are—nor to suggest that Dutch solutions for Dutch problems could be of use for Northern Ireland. Lectures and trips provided a mirror by which the participants could analyze their own situation and were stimulated to find their own solutions. The Dutch way of doing things was presented as a way of dealing with "social conflict and social change"—the title of our first conference.

On Sundays both a catholic mass and a protestant service were celebrated; all participants were invited to take part in both services but everybody was free to decline.

#### **D. Dealing with conflict**

At the beginning our knowledge of conflict theories was limited. Our purpose was to find a common ground between the participants. Can you as members of the same neighborhood find a common ground in providing playing fields for children and social centers? Can you as members of paramilitary organizations, which have to make money to help out prisoners' wives, have a common interest in the process of building up cooperatives? Don't you have the problem of unemployment in common? We slowly realized that having something in common is the root of violence as well—why have a conflict if you have nothing in common? We learned to distinguish between "associated" (almost messianic) peace and "dissociative" peace—in other words, separating the conflicting parties as much as possible. A solution to the Northern Irish conflict seemed out of the question, but would it be possible to regulate the conflict? For a brief period we tried to look for common symbols, only to soon discover that symbols are of major importance in Northern Ireland and continually are the object of rivalry.

In our visits to Northern Ireland in preparation for our conferences we learned that the more sophisticated the struggle against terrorism became,

the more sophisticated the terrorists became. We noted the weakening of the political center and the rise in power of the extremes, especially when some action or political move seemed to bring some victory to either Catholics or Protestants. We became aware of the strong emotional bonds people in Northern Ireland have with the word "community." We discovered that many people in Northern Ireland had much to lose when peace would come: subsidies for businessmen, impressive technical tools and high salaries for policemen, interest from the international press for politicians, full churches for the clergy. It dawned on us that at the same time we were dealing with two minorities and two majorities in Northern Ireland: the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland is a minority in the whole of Ireland, the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland is a majority in the whole of Ireland. Moreover, while the Catholics do not have any doubts about their Irish identity, the Protestants are uncertain about what their identity as loyalists—loyalty to the British Crown—entails. Generally they feel more threatened and on our conferences they were more defensive than the Catholics. All the Churches in Ireland—so we learned—seem to stand for morality rather than for a spirituality of liberation. They all tend to be rather fundamentalist, either concerning scriptural exegesis or dogma. Though the representatives of the media claimed that they were only reporting events, it became clear to us that the media are a part of the conflict; the terrorists are aware of this and often plan their killings at such a time that a full report could be expected. At one time we were present at the moment that the coffins of two young men, victims of a sectarian killing, were carried out of their houses to be brought to church for the funeral: the women and children standing in the door, the men guarding the street. We 'saw' the division into gender, the women ruling over the house, the men guarding the public space. We always had very few women at our conferences and we now understood why. Subsequently we succeeded in organizing some study days for women in Belfast. Partly through them we discovered that the relationship between mother and son is more important in Northern Ireland than the one between wife and husband. All those insights were taken up in our running of the conferences.

From 1978 onwards we came into contact with the work of René Girard. From about 1981 the mimetic theory became an integral part of our work. It placed all those insights we had gathered into perspective. We saw the mimetic theory "in action" in front of us: mimesis, mimetic desire, model/obstacle, differences, rivalry, escalation, contagion, scapegoating. The theory made us aware of the mythologies of the Irish struggle against

Britain and of the partly pagan and partly Christian background of those mythologies (Kearney). One of the most striking examples is the poster of the Irish nationalist P. Pearse, lying in the lap of "mother Ireland" with the republican tricolor in her hand, which was spread around Dublin after his execution in 1916. This picture is a clear reference to both Christ and to the strong desire to shed one's blood for "mother Ireland" and to become one of Ireland's heroes. The sacrificial character of the spirituality and theology of the Churches in Northern Ireland became clear to us. The mimetic theory helped us to read Scripture with new eyes and to interpret religion, as among other things, a way of finding peace in society. This is very relevant for Northern Ireland where church going and religious symbols are still very important.

This brought about a change in the goals of our conferences, especially of those in Corrymeela center: the introduction of the mimetic theory itself became our educational goal. We offered this theory as a possibility of reflecting on the Northern Irish conflict. We were able to convince high police officials that there was a strong similarity between policemen and terrorists and together we tried to find a way out. During the last years of my activities in Northern Ireland I was active in working with groups reading scriptural texts because some of them are used as shibboleths and are as such a part of the conflict (Lascaris).

### **E. Results**

What were the results of our work? It is difficult to measure this. How does one register a killing not executed, a brick not being thrown, an increase in mutual understanding? Some results were very visible: a community center set up, a more balanced way of reporting "incidents," a smoother running of a peace group. In 1975 the Feakle cease-fire came into being as an indirect result of our third conference; a participant, the Rev. Bill Arlow, initiated those peace talks on the basis of his experience of the dialogue between Protestants and Catholics in this conference. People learned to listen to and to respect those from the other side of the divide. People changed and got a different perspective on the so-called "troubles." How this worked out in their individual lives and in their contribution to society cannot be recovered. The decision of people in Northern Ireland to continue our work in a new way was perhaps the best result of all.

We who ran the conferences were immensely enriched. We learned a great deal intellectually. Being touched by the suffering of people in Northern Ireland enriched our humanity. We met many people from very

different walks of life and every meeting was a challenge, a confrontation, and an enriching moment. The peace work done on behalf of Northern Ireland left many traces in my theological work.

Some conferences were close to a disaster. In one or two conferences, both in Holland and in Northern Ireland, the so-called key people did not turn up. The secret conference with the paramilitaries in November 1975—some of the participants were high ranking in their organizations—went well though we did not succeed in bringing about much informal contact. At the end someone, probably the second in command of the Ulster Defense Association, leaked to the international press. Though everybody stayed and the conference continued it was not possible to achieve anything and to initiate a similar conference later. The journalists of the 1983 North-South Communications conference lost interest when in the middle of it all Margaret Thatcher called for new elections. The Roman Catholic clergy conference (June 1977) failed, partly because of a lack of freedom in the group in which no one dared to take the risk of being seemingly disloyal, partly because they felt attacked by being confronted with the Dutch Catholic Church. We as a staff lost all credibility in their eyes when they thought they heard a Dutch protestant lady using the word "contraceptives" though she only said "family planning."

Another recurrent problem was that afterwards several participants soon changed jobs or got another position or rank; this happened especially to social workers and police officers. They needed all their energies to adapt to their new job and lost somehow what they had discovered and learned on the conference. We often lost contact with them.

Looking back, we do not have the illusion of having made a major contribution to the peace process in Northern Ireland, but we sowed some seeds. One of the limitations of this kind of work is that it is impossible to keep track of the participants of a conference. This is not even desirable: people have to go back to their own situation, of which we do not form a part. Not being native English speakers and not having grown up with the fact that in Northern Ireland the same words often have a different meaning for Catholics and Protestants, we sometimes overestimated the possibility of finding a common language. We clearly underestimated the strength of the mimetic relationship people have with the group they come from: their loyalty to the group and to the past—often invisible and unspoken—their fear of being seen as a defector by family, friends and colleagues.

Peace work is a serious business but we had our hilarious moments as well. At the first conference part of the luggage arrived one day late so that

Protestants had to make use of "Catholic" shavers and Catholics had to wash with "Protestant" soap. After that we prayed before every conference that the same thing would happen again and sometimes the Airways complied. A Catholic priest and a hard line Orange lady getting lost together in the village helped the whole group to cement together. We were impressed by the Protestant politicians who refused consistently to drink alcoholic liquor until after the conference we found numerous whisky bottles under the bed—all of them empty.

## **II. Some reflections**

In the second part of this paper I offer some reflections on Girard's view on education, our educational work on behalf of Northern Ireland, the usefulness of the mimetic theory in conflict situations, peace education in teaching institutions, and the mimetic character of justice and the limits of peace education.

### **A. Girard and education**

René Girard did not write much on education. According to him children are not able to make a distinction between what should or should not be imitated. Children simply imitate. I agree so far. The teacher is pleased, he says, about the progress his pupil is making until the moment the pupil seems to surpass the teacher: then the teacher will become hostile instead of helpful (Girard 314-315). Here Girard seems to rely on his experience of the relationship between a supervisor and a research student in university or even to refer to Socrates and the Socratic tradition. However, this is a very restricted view of teaching that is rightly criticized (Haas 109-118). Most teaching happens in groups. The pupils imitate one another more than that they imitate the teacher. When the class or group is insecure it is more likely that one of the classmates is scapegoated than the teacher. The teacher is far above them as an "external mediator" or a "transcendent figure." A good teacher will accept it as one of his tasks to keep order and to prevent such hostile rivalries between his pupils that chaos abounds and teaching becomes impossible. She/he may try to promote rivalry in order to challenge everybody so as to get better teaching results but he/she will know that there are limits to this. Skilled teachers will be aware of the disastrous consequences for pupils who are being scapegoated by their classmates and will do their utmost to prevent this happening. The teacher will take care that the subject matter remains in the center and will offer interesting material so that he/she acts as a facilitator

rather than presenting him/herself as a model to be imitated. The pupils will imitate the teacher by concentrating on the skill or subject that is being taught.

Moreover, in many schools pupils work in small units in which cooperation rather than competition is promoted. This kind of teaching makes the children partly responsible for their learning process and for the learning process of the group. They are free albeit within limits to learn in their own way. The pupils thus are placed on the road to adulthood. The child discovers that something outside and above him/herself—in this case the subject matter and the learning process—is desirable rather than becoming like a fellow child or like the teacher and to end up in rivalry.

We may mourn the loss of close educational relationships between teachers and pupils and between parents and their children. In many families children have their own TV set, computer and computer games. Parents hardly know what the children learn at school, watch on TV and the Internet and which games they play. However this loss may be a profit as well. Children will have more models to be imitated and, though it may take more time to become an adult, they will have more space to make choices and to be free from double binds; they will rival less their parents and teachers. They may become more creative. This creativity that originates in the meeting with a variety of models will be much needed. For in our postmodern time education cannot pretend to prepare pupils to enter a world, which is more or less like the world in which their parents and teachers live. The world in which they and their children will live may be very different and reveal great ruptures with the past.

In today's world the personal integrity of parents and teachers is at least as important as their educational skills. If parents and teachers who try to live in a responsible way become worthwhile models to be imitated, their children may be able to view themselves as active, historical subjects and to accept their responsibilities for peace, justice and the preservation of life (Vriens 410; Haavelsrud 264). After all, the latter is the true purpose of any education.

## **B. Our educational work**

Looking back at our conferences, it was possible to work with rival parties within one group because there was some kind of "transcendence" or "external mediator." This "transcendence" was formed by several different factors. The whole process was initiated and guarded by an "external mediator:" the invitations came from abroad, a staff composed of



foreigners who lived outside the conflict, going abroad in exile so to speak, meeting people who did not always understand English and had to be interpreted; the learning process involved discovering new methods of learning, being confronted with the strange solutions of a foreign country to regulate its conflicts, meeting with strange, even shocking habits such as eating raw herring, discovering they have quite a lot in common over against those foreigners and their culture. It was not an evil "transcendence:" a hospitable place to stay, a staff that guaranteed security so that it was possible to speak in relative freedom with people who were interested in the "troubles." Even when we worked in Northern Ireland, being foreigners was an asset: we remained almost literally "external mediators."

The staff was of course scapegoated but this was a cultural event, not a personal one. It drew feelings of insecurity, hostility, respect and gratefulness towards itself and made it thus possible for the group to work together in relative peace. It was not possible to drive this "scapegoat" out with verbal or even physical violence because the distance between participants and members of the staff was too great. Moreover the staff always pointed away from itself towards the responsibility of the group and of each participant for social change in Northern Ireland.

Every culture is based on violence. Education is a cultural activity. It may make a contribution to the transformation of society, but it cannot place itself outside culture with its violent past. By being transferred to a place outside their country, people were partly placed outside their culture. Their language, customs and identities traveled with them, but a small distance was created over against them. Dutch society may be as violent as the Northern Irish one, but it was different. The adult education center "De Haaf" provided a "spiritual" place where at least people were aware that there is a promise of a world to come without violence. In Northern Ireland the adult education center "Corrymeela" tries to be such a place. Such places always have difficulties to balance accounts for they do not fit in our society. Having such centers offers rich opportunities of making a contribution to social change.

### **C. Usefulness of mimetic theory**

Our work suggests that interventions, based on mimetic theory, that promote peace and overcome conflict can be made on a personal level. Because individuals change, groups may change as well. Institutions, however unassailable they may appear, are populated by individuals and

can be changed too, though the road may be long and weary. We soon discovered that it was possible to convince, for example, high police officers to do something unexpected so as to break the vicious circles of violence, but concerning decision making they were always dependent on many other people, such as British and Irish politicians, who again felt dependent on other politicians and on the electorate. The practical effects of peace work based on the mimetic theory are thus limited, at least in the short run. However, this is probably true of any peace work. In the gospels Jesus shows himself to be a master in the application of the mimetic theory and in finding paradoxical solutions, but his success was very limited in his lifetime.

#### **D. Peace education at school**

As far as I know peace education is not a regular teaching subject in schools and universities anywhere in Europe. When peace education takes place explicitly, it is nearly always as part of the curriculum of religion, history or sociology. Racism may be a special theme within a larger subject. Other themes may be: information about a conflict such as in Northern Ireland, political and economic relationships, and the richness of cultural differences. On the basis of my work in Northern Ireland I suggest that teaching the mechanisms of conflict and violence and especially the mimetic theory should form the heart of any peace education. It may well have an immediate impact. Children have to deal with conflicts all the time, conflicts with fellow pupils, with teachers and parents. Scapegoating in the class may easily occur. Many children carry weapons with them at school because somehow they feel threatened or they hope to make some impact on their rivals. They are confronted with violence in the streets. Where religion is taught the gospel stories can contribute a lot of educational material. Religion has more to offer to peace action than mere motivation (Jeurissen). For teachers in religion this has the extra advantage that they can show that those stories are often about conflict and peace and as such can teach us something about conflict in today's world.

#### **D. Justice and forgiveness**

Reflecting on our work in Northern Ireland, I have come to the conclusion that the source of violence is the thirst for justice. People always try to justify their use of violence by appealing to their right to reparations for injustices done to them in the past or in the present. Justice reveals itself to us as mimetic reciprocity. Children and adults alike want to pay back

both the good things received and the injuries incurred (See Boszormenyi Nagy). We always are involved in a kind of accountancy. When the child's debts to his parents and other members of the family or when their debts to the child are not settled in childhood, all the people involved will try to take this out on other people, their partner, their children, on colleagues, neighbors and strangers. The latter become their scapegoats by which they try to find inner peace and justice. The dimension of justice is fundamental for human life in such a way that when something goes wrong between people, it always entails the question as to whether justice was done. Justice and injustice trickle down into the deepest layers of a person and either cleanse or poison the source of life. In case of injustice all other relationships are disturbed, those with oneself, with other people and with God.

Justice is based on mimesis. The mimetic character of justice is well expressed in the ancient formula "you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound" (Ex 21,23-25). Originally this "law" already regulated violence and set bounds to it: the victim is not allowed to ask for more than the eye, the tooth or the hand he lost himself. In the Old Testament revenge—a word that is much closer to "justice" in biblical Hebrew than in modern languages—only entails the death of the perpetrator in the case of murder, of manslaughter and of bearing false witness that results in the death of the accused. In all other cases the perpetrator is not punished with bodily harm but has to pay a fine and make good the damage.

Justice is fundamental to human life. If justice is impossible, life becomes meaningless. Violence is the denial of the right of existence; somehow this right has to be restored. The rightful demand that justice should be done often results in a new act of violence. A circle of endless retaliation starts. However, it is possible to renounce taking revenge and instead to forgive. The victim cannot be forced to forgive, for this would be another act of violence. Forgiveness is rather a liberating vision to be offered to the victim. Actually, many victims do forgive, often surprisingly so.

Violence becomes superfluous when forgiveness is a real possibility. Forgiveness is an antidote to violence. In both the Old and New Testaments injustice is not an isolated act of some individual; injustice is a word that denotes a broken relationship. Forgiveness is not a feeling but is the creation of a new set of relationships. It is saying to the perpetrator: in spite of what you have done to me and in spite of my anger and grief and though

I hope to never meet you again, go in peace and lead a fruitful life. Forgiveness is recreating the world, putting an end to violence, bringing about new and just relationships.

In and after the exile forgiveness increasingly became a central theme in the Old Testament; we do not know why this is so (Koch 184-206). The Old Testament is convinced that forgiveness can be granted, albeit on certain conditions: justice has to be done and justice entails reciprocity. The guilty person has to admit his or her guilt, must make good the damage and has to pay an extra one fifth of the value of the damage to the injured party. Subsequently, receiving forgiveness is confirmed in a sacrifice in the temple (Lev 6,1-7; see Sanders 1992, 47-145).

Jesus was one of those wandering preachers who hoped for a restoration of Israel. For him, as for every Jew, sinners were people who violated the order of justice and made human life meaningless. In this Jesus did not differ from his contemporaries. Modern scholars agree that Jesus only departed from the religious and social practice of his time in one aspect: he forgave unconditionally (Sanders 1985; Dunn). He granted forgiveness so that people would change their ways. This seems to be a minimal change; most scholars note it but do not realize that this is the turning point between Old and New Testament. Jesus, for example, accepted tax collectors—they were both political collaborators and extortionists—into his group that was supposed to be the image of how the new and restored Israel should look. Many tax collectors were excluded from the believing community for ever because they were not able to fulfill the conditions laid down in Lev. 6,1-7.

Granting forgiveness, and above all unconditional forgiveness, is beyond ordinary human possibilities, for human beings grow up and become adults, having learned to act on the basis of mimetic reciprocity. Anthropologically speaking, Jesus refers to the situation between parents and infant: in this situation an infant is cared for without demands on him or her to pay back this benefit in any way.

From a theological point of view unconditional forgiveness sets people free from violence. Injustice is not responded to with violence according to the law of reciprocity. A new set of relationships is created.

Therapies can empower people to manage once again their lives after terrible traumatic events, but they cannot give people the ability to forgive. It is impossible to require the power of forgiveness by education or by doing a therapy or by forcing oneself to it because the Church tells you to do so. In preaching the emphasis is often placed on the fact that God

forgives people; this is true and it often becomes a stepping stone to the gift of being able to forgive. However, the ability to forgive unconditionally is the greatest gift of the gospel to this world. It is the true antidote to violence.

Nations as such cannot forgive, but individuals can, and thanks to mimesis they can inspire other people to forgive as well so that an influential group emerges that is able to forgive and can change the course of history of a nation. In Northern Ireland forgiveness is slowly appearing on the religious, social, and political agenda (The Faith and Politics Group).

### F. Limits of education

Education will not save the world for it is itself a cultural reality. In Northern Ireland both parties use it as an instrument for the preservation of their social and religious order. Both culture and education have to be transformed; this can only happen in a long process of social change. People may think that peace education is superfluous when a social conflict has been regulated and seemingly "peace" has descended on the land. The institutes that provide peace education may belie this work through their institutional violence and the violence of teachers and pupils. The ability to forgive may be a theme of discussion in teaching but education cannot give this ability. Peace education can give to people insights into the mechanisms of violence, make them reflect on their cultural and social situation, and try to convince them to take their responsibility for peace. However, this modest contribution may be worthwhile devoting one's life to.\*

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\*I am grateful to Aat van Rhijn for refreshing my memory on many points in this paper.

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## THE MOB AND THE VICTIM IN THE PSALMS AND JOB

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I recall a passage from Elie Wiesel's novel, *Night*, where, looking at the frail body of a young boy writhing on the gallows—his body weight was too light to kill him outright when he dropped through the trap door—someone asks the narrator, "Where is now your God?" This question is often on my mind, not least because for the last seven years of my tenure at Stanford I studied ethnic conflict and filled my mind with the most discouraging images. I found myself saying on occasion that I felt ashamed to be a human being, which was only a slight exaggeration. I noted with wry amusement that a few years ago it was reported that the wolves were fleeing from the Caucasus in great numbers because of the human violence there, a sad irony in the light of Thomas Hobbes' motto, *Homo homini lupus*. I had long suspected that that was an insult to wolves, and now I had the proof. Lately we have Philip Gourewitch's new book on the Rwanda holocaust of 1994, where they killed one million people in ten weeks, not with weapons of mass destruction but with machetes and clubs primed with six-inch nails, and Rwanda is a Christian country.

The voice of conscience cries out, "Where is our God?" in all this; why does He spend his time causing statues to ooze oil in suburban Massachusetts rather than defending the children of Kosovo against depraved nationalists.<sup>1</sup> It is some comfort that the psalmist cried the same question and thus provides a convenient way into a meditation on violence in the Psalms. It occurs first in 42,3: "I have no food but tears / day and

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<sup>1</sup>I refer to the phenomena reported in connection with the comatose teenage girl, Audrey Sosa, who is believed by some to be a channel for miracles.

night:/ and all day long men say to me,/ Where is now your God?" and again at 42,10, "Nearly breaking my bones / my oppressors insult me / as all day long they ask me / Where is now your God?" In 79,10 it occurs in a national lament, "Why should the pagans ask, Where is their God?" and this recalls two prophetic oracles, in Joel 2,9, "Spare your people Yahweh!/ Do not make your heritage a thing of shame, a byword for the nations./ Why should it be said among the nations,/ Where is their God?" and Micah 7,10 "When my enemy sees it (my vindication)/ she will be covered with shame,? she who said to me: Where is Yahweh your God?" So there are two classes of such sayings, one by an individual and one by the nation.

Much ink has been spilled on the questions, Who is the victim?, and Who are the enemies? The answers have canvassed all the possibilities from the lone individual beset by spiritual temptations, or David himself in his days and nights as a fugitive, to the nation beset by rival nations.<sup>2</sup> The victim surrounded by persecutors is clearly a major category in the Psalms, present in two thirds of the collection; one hundred out of the one hundred and fifty explicitly or implicitly refer to a victim surrounded by enemies.<sup>3</sup> Let me cut to the chase and recall that according to René Girard's mimetic theory, which I take as a point of departure, the situation of the victim surrounded by a mob of enemies is a structural not an historical situation.<sup>4</sup> The deep structure of human history is a victim surrounded by the mob, a lamb slain since the foundation of the world. This deep structure controls the shape of emergent history but that emergence conceals its deep structure by turning history into myth.

Myth covers up the blood stains and stifles the voice of the victim, myth accuses the victim, presents the victim as guilty or willing and the persecutors as innocent. To this day much that claims to be history is really myth. History happens only when the voice of the victim comes to word, and for that reason the gospel is irreducibly history and not myth. The

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<sup>2</sup>Raymund Schwager (53ff) gives the following information about the victim psalms: in one hundred of the one hundred and fifty psalms the enemies are mentioned, and there are ninety-four different designations for them in the individual psalms of lament (where the victim refers to himself as I). The enemies are numerous (25.19; 38.20; 55.19; 56.3 etc.: they are conspiring. (22.12-17; 31.13), and they are ganging together (3.7; 17.9; 27.6; 35.15; 48.5; 62.4; 71.10; 83.4; 86.14).

<sup>3</sup>See 69.3: "More people hate me for no reason, / than I have hairs on my head." Either paranoia or a structural element is speaking here.

<sup>4</sup>Elsewhere I have called it the generative mimetic scapegoating mechanism (GMSM); as generative it structures history and texts.



gospel does not need to be demythologized; on the contrary the gospel demythologizes the mythic "history" of the world, by bringing to word the structural victim, the slain lamb upon whom all things are founded. James Alison calls this knowledge of the deep structure of history "the intelligence of the victim" and regards it as an epistemology in its own right. I do not regard it as a separate epistemology but simply as the truth. It is not a different way of knowing but simply accurate knowledge as opposed to inaccurate, the truth as distinct from the lie. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the life, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Gospel is truth, myth is mendacity.

What is this Gospel truth? On its negative side it is the disclosure of the innocence of the victim. The "victim" Psalms are Gospel because in them the victim comes to voice in a way unparalleled in the OT, with the possible exception of Job. The church loves the Psalms because we hear in them the voice of Jesus who is both the victim and the vindicator of victims, the slain lamb and the Good Shepherd. For this reason Jesus quoted the Psalms more than any other biblical texts. This is the reason why the NT quotes explicitly from Psalms 186 times. The next most frequently quoted source is 2 Isaiah, the prophet of the suffering servant of Yahweh, 79 times. In this practice, I believe, the NT reflects the usage of Jesus, whose favorite biblical passages were those about the victim surrounded by the mob, and the suffering servant of God. Thus the structural disclosure of mimetic theory enables us to see that the victim Psalms are irreducibly evangelical, that they reveal the real structure of human history, which alas is the structure of original sin, of the victim surrounded by a mob of persecutors.

On its positive side the Gospel truth is the history of salvation. The Psalms reveal the structure of the history of salvation. I find it easiest to describe this divine history by means of the parable of the lost sheep where we are told that the shepherd goes in search of the one out of a hundred that has strayed from the group. The structure of the situation is again the one over against the many, the deep structure of mob and victim. The shepherd takes his stand with the victim. A most telling detail in the parable is that the shepherd does not make provision for the safety of the group before he goes after the one that is lost. We are told explicitly that he leaves the 99 in the wilderness; "What man of you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it?" (Luke 15, 4). Well, most of us would not leave the 99 at risk for the sake of the one. My bourgeois heart would calculate that it

is makes more sense to have 99 safe, and to regard the loss of one as just part of the cost of doing business to be included in the amortization column of the ledger. So the parable is not about God's care for all, for the group as a whole, not about the ethical imperative to include everybody so as to make the community complete; those are not bad goals in themselves, but I do not think we need God to come from heaven to teach us natural ethics. We do, however, need revelation to uncover the structure and function of the scapegoating mechanism, the history of original sin beneath the myth of human goodness, and to show us that God takes his stand with the victim. This is the answer to the question, Where is now your God? God is with the victim, on the gallows, out in the wilderness, on the Cross.

Since Jude Lepine<sup>5</sup> has already dealt with the problem of the divine vengeance as it appears in some of the Psalms of the victim, and the interpretation of those passages in the light of the Cross, I shall not repeat what he has said. I endorse this interpretation as well as the interpretation of the enemies as representative of the mechanism, and so the opposition to them in the Psalms is legitimately seen as the opposition to violence itself. The problem of an apparent violent opposition to violence, what Girard in a different context calls, "driving out bad violence by good violence," the essence of the sacrificial system, is adequately dealt with by interpreting this violent hostility to the enemies as a spiritual struggle against original sin as it assaults us through temptation, a struggle with one's own passions, sacrifice as self-sacrifice. Since Lepine has dealt so well with these matters I would like to spend some time now on the Book of Job, which Girard regards as an extended Psalm, and a decisive turning point in the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

Job is a clear disclosure of the scapegoating mechanism in the deep structure of history; but the astonishing thing about this instance of the structure is that the friends, whose cold comfort lacerates the prostrate victim, are not foreigners or unbelievers, but representatives of the ordinary religion of Yahweh the God of Israel. The enemies are within. They maintain that the righteous prosper in this world and that the wicked suffer the divine punishment, with the corollary that, if one is suffering one must

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<sup>5</sup>Paper on the victimary Psalms read at the Orthodox Theological Institute, Holy Resurrection Parish, Claremont, NH, at which an earlier version of this essay was also presented. <sup>6</sup>"The highest inspiration—and the only inspiration that is specifically biblical— is that of Job, the only one that has no real equivalent in the Greek world or elsewhere" (Girard 1987, 58).

have committed a particularly egregious sin; sufferers must be guilty. This is the essence of the Deuteronomic theology, represented in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings and Chronicles, and of the early wisdom tradition represented in Proverbs;<sup>7</sup> it is also the essence of myth. Myth accuses the victim of being guilty and vindicates the persecutors. By protesting his absolute innocence Job puts himself outside of this religion, in effect shows it up as myth rather than history. How shall we understand this?

First we must affirm with Girard that Job is a disclosure of the structural scapegoating mechanism, a victim surrounded by the mob. Second we must accept that this religion used in this way is an instance of what Girard calls mythology; it is religion functioning to cover up the fact that an innocent victim is being sacrificed for the sake of the solidarity of the community, that group envy has destroyed a worthy man. Girard regards Psalm 73 as an example of the envy that drives Job's friends (Girard 55-58). The speaker is troubled by the prospering of the wicked and rejoices at their downfall. This is the fundamental rhythm of the Deuteronomic theology, which biblical scholars call history, but which I suggest is more properly to be called myth, because it conceals rather than reveals the mechanism. It justifies the extermination of the seven nations of Canaan. The book of Joshua, it seems to me, is a charter for ethnic cleansing and genocide. This, of course, raises acutely the question of the proper way to interpret the OT, a question to which I shall return, after a further look at Job.

At the conclusion of the dialogues we read as follows: "When Yahweh had said all this to Job, he turned to Eliphaz of Teman. 'I burn with anger against you and your two friends for not speaking truthfully about me as my servant Job has done.'" What was the truth about God that Job spoke, and what was the friends' lie? In the Yahweh speeches God had told Job that he was simply unable to understand the ways of the divine, was out of his depth in this regard, to which Job replied, "I have been holding forth on matters I cannot understand, on marvels beyond me and my knowledge. I knew you only by hearsay; but now having seen you with my own eyes. I retract all that I have said, and in dust and ashes I repent" (42.3-6). Is it this repentance that Yahweh is praising in Job; the fact that Job recognizes the divine ineffability, adopts the apophatic attitude, while the friends prattle

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<sup>7</sup>I shall for the sake of brevity refer to this religious system as the Deuteronomic theology, with the understanding that it includes wisdom and prophetic traditions also.

on glibly? Possibly, but this last statement of Job's is not about God but about himself, and the text specifically says that Job has spoken truthfully about God.

What precisely did Job say about God? By refusing to accept the role of scapegoat Job in effect said that God does not accuse the victim, that God does not stand with the mob, God stands with the victim. Job spoke the truth about God by saying essentially the same thing as Jesus says in the parable of the lost sheep: God breaks the sacrificial mechanism by leaving the mob and taking His stand with the victim. In this macro-context the personal shortcomings of the individual victim are irrelevant by comparison with the enormity of the mechanism. The incommensurability between the sin of the individual and the violence of the mechanism is the difference between actual sin and original Sin, between sins and Sin. Job spoke the truth about God when he said that God's real and primary work is to redeem us from Sin, not to punish us for our sins. "O Lamb of God that takest away the Sin of the world!"

Gil Bailie makes much of this difference between sins and Sin.<sup>8</sup> He points out that the sacrificial system based on the mechanism deals with sins; it uses the good violence of sacrifice to conduct the bad violence of rivalry out of the community, and thus to keep a lid on sins. The death and resurrection of Christ, however, deals with Sin, original, structural Sin, because it uncovers the victim hidden since the creation and exposes the mob skulking behind the institutions of religion, politics and war. Job's faithless friends are dealing with sins and so make Yahweh an agent of sacrifice and the mob, one who joins with the accusers to torment the victim, thus to make envy look like piety. This Yahweh is a myth of mob violence, and that is why the biblical Yahweh "blazes with anger" (Job 42,17) against the friends; they make him into an idol, they identify him with Satan, the accuser. Job spoke the truth when he insisted unwaveringly that the real God has no part in this cruel game of accusation.

Job glimpsed the truth and he clung to it tenaciously, but he only broke free of the myth of the mechanism when at the end of the book he stops his mouth and repents. Job's conversion was twofold: first Job thinks that Yahweh is part of the blame game of Deuteronomic religion and that if he could face God in open court he could prove his innocence and put God in the wrong. As long as he thinks this he is still within the orbit of the mechanism, but he has the great merit of refusing to be the scapegoat; he

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<sup>8</sup>Seminar communication: the article arguing this will appear in *Communio* at a future date.

insists on his innocence and refuses the victim role. By doing this he upsets the orbit of Sin and the myth of the mechanism begins to unravel; all it requires is for one child to say that the emperor has no clothes and the charade is over. Job says, "I am innocent, I do not deserve this!" The second stage of Job's conversion comes when he realizes the ineffability of the divine and falls silent before the mystery. "I have been holding forth on matters I cannot understand, on marvels beyond me and my knowledge. I knew you only by hearsay; but now having seen you with my own eyes, I retract all that I have said, and in dust and ashes I repent" (42,3-6).

So the truth that Job spoke, for which God praises him, is twofold; he refused to be a scapegoat and thus stymied the mechanism. This great refusal was Job's first breakthrough. His break-out occurred when he fell silent before the divine ineffability, gave up the notion of God as accuser altogether, and broke free of the orbit of the mechanism. Thus he acknowledged that the mechanism is not the way of God, that the way of God with the victim makes no sense to us who live within its orbit and for whom the divine grace must always be a break-in and a surprise.

The essence of this surprising grace is that Yahweh does not accuse, Yahweh saves. He is not Satan, the prosecutor, He is the Paraclete, counsel for the defense. Grace should not be surprising; it is our natural state, when we live beyond the mechanism. When Job finally repents, it is not a confession of his sins, but a confession of his participation in Sin, his living within the graceless world of the mechanism. His silence signals that he has left the world of accusation and entered the world of affirmation, the natural world of divine grace. Now Job knows that the ineffable God is savior, that he need not have challenged God so urgently to appear and defend Himself against accusations of injustice, because God was not with the accusers but with the accused on his ash heap all along. Every wound Satan inflicted on Job fell also on God; "Where is now my God?" Job kept asking, while God was the very passion of that cry.

The rejection of the Deuteronomic theology by the book of Job raises acutely the question of interpretation. If the Deuteronomic pattern of crime and punishment is mythic we face an acute challenge to the integrity of the Bible. One could say of the case in point that the Wisdom tradition that speaks in Job deliberately misunderstands the Deuteronomists for reasons of rivalry, that the God of the Deuteronomists is not as crassly violent as Job avers, and that the Deuteronomic history is not a myth. One could offer theological reasons for the violence; for example one could say that Israel was indeed the fragile bearer of the divine revelation and so warranted the

divine protection in a way commensurate with the circumstances of the time. It was a time of mutual extermination and so it was necessary to exterminate the seven nations in order to keep the chosen people alive. It could also have been necessary to protect the chosen people against the mimetic power of idolatry. Israel was vital to the divine plan and for this reason other nations were expendable. For these reasons the seven nations deserved extermination. I am not being sarcastic here; there are explanations possible short of having to set aside these parts of the OT as outrageous, but I must say I have not heard any that convince me, and all the ones I can think of come out sounding like myths.

I suppose one has to decide whether one accepts that the divine has an absolute prerogative of violence, has like Max Weber's state a monopoly of violence, and that violent destruction is the just deserts of sinners. I cannot accept this; I share with Raymund Schwager a deep dismay at what he calls "the violent Yahweh." "Approximately one thousand passages speak of Yahweh's blazing anger, of his punishments by death and destruction, and how like a consuming fire he passes judgment, takes revenge and threatens annihilation...No other topic is as often mentioned as God's bloody works" (55). Yahweh Sabaoth, war god of the armies of Israel, is fundamentally different from the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and from the God of Job, and from the God of the Psalms, of the sufferer surrounded by enemies. Yahweh Sabaoth is far from the God of Jesus, who did not defend his own son but allowed him to suffer the full measure of the violence of the scapegoating mechanism. Jesus lived without the protection of the mechanism and thus became its victim, and because of who he is destroyed the power of the mechanism once and for all, coming back from the dead to forgive his murderers and inaugurate the new world of the Kingdom of God. This God of Jesus seems to me to make the God of the Deuteronomists a myth, in the technical Girardian sense; an idol fighting idolaters, the mimetic double of his enemies.

I cannot describe a fully articulated hermeneutic here, or perhaps anywhere because of my own limitations, but there are a few principles that guide my reading of the Bible. One is that the Bible is a series of different traditions that are often in conflict with each other, and that that conflict itself is essential to the interpretation. Interpretation cannot be without conflict, just as there can be no cessation of the struggle for the right interpretation of the Christian religion, or the struggle among the religions for the right account of the divine. The truth enters the world as controversy. Post modern point-of-viewism gives up the conflict and thus

gives up the concept of truth.

Another principle is that the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the absolutely authoritative center of our knowledge of God. Christians do not believe in God apart from Jesus; the only God we worship is the one whom Jesus called Father, the one who raised him from the dead. This God is, of course, none other than the Holy Trinity. The God of Moses is a problem for me only because he is the God of Jesus; otherwise I would not be dismayed at his violence, merely uninterested.

We are already at the third principle, that the God of Moses is the God of Jesus, and the question that presents itself is, How can the one who exterminated the seven nations be the same as the one who gives his only son to die undefended at the hands of sinful men? The revelation in Jesus Christ discloses the divine nature to us in such a way that everything that has been known of Him before needs to be corrected. It is not that it was all wrong—there are the Joseph story, the Judgment of Solomon, the victim Psalms, the book of Job, the prophecies of 2nd Isaiah, and other disclosures of the true God—but for Christians they are validated as such in the light of the revelation in Christ. For that reason they are called prophecies of Christ, prefigurations, allegories, types, and shadows of the glory to come.

Let me leave it there; I feel acutely the inadequacy of these scribblings on the margins of a great theme. I regret if I have given affront to anyone. I wish it were different, but controversy is inseparable from the struggle for truth. Let me end by quoting the Apostle: "My friends, I do not reckon myself to have got hold of it yet. All I can say is this: forgetting what is behind me, and reaching out for that which lies ahead, I press towards the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3,13-14).

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## REPENTING OF RETRIBUTIONISM

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**R**etributionism refers to the universal common-sense belief that the wicked will suffer and the righteous will receive reward. "Theodicy" is the problem of the justification of God in the light of the fact that retributionism is not borne out by our experience. These two concepts have so scandalized the church that theologians can think of little else; and as with most true scandals, we have been unable to resolve them, in spite of our best efforts. Yet, also as with most true scandals, the solution to the problems they present lies in simply choosing not to be scandalized. It is entirely reasonable and faithful to abandon our retributionism. In so doing, we find that the scandals of retribution and theodicy simply evaporate, and new horizons for theological exploration suddenly open up for us.

Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.  
The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.  
(Ps 1,1-6)

We read these opening words of the psalter with a mixture of comfort and scandal. We are comforted to read these assurances that there is order to the cosmos God has created; but we are scandalized by the nagging awareness that our experience contradicts the psalmist's claims. In fact, the psalter itself reflects this awareness: "...Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches" (Ps 73,12). The biblical wisdom tradition, as it matured over time, reflected a growing awareness and a deepening disturbance over the breakdown of retribution. Since God is the obvious enforcer of retribution, the failure of retribution becomes an indictment against God: "Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)" (Job 31,35).

This never-quite explicit indictment against God gives rise to the classic problem of the justification of God, also known as the "theodicy problem." It consists of three incompatible affirmations:

1. God is righteous (conforms to retribution and is committed to maintaining it);
2. God is powerful (powerful enough to enforce retribution);
3. Injustice exists in creation.

Any two of these claims can coexist, but it is logically impossible to maintain all three claims at once. The trouble of course, is that we are committed by faith (our faith in retribution that is) to the first two points; and our experience requires us to acknowledge the third. Therein lies a scandal.

All the strategies to resolve the scandal of theodicy are based on attempts to weaken one or more of the three affirmations.

### **Strategy one: Relativize our experience of injustice**

There are basically three versions of this idea.

First of course is the claim that *in the afterlife* there will be punishment for the wicked and reward for the righteous. This approach discounts our lived experience as secondary to a postulated retribution that is beyond our experience.

The (second) Eastern version of this is *reincarnation*, the notion that retribution is fulfilled by the working out of karma in the cycle of rebirth. If you're bad in this life, you'll be reborn as a goat or something; if you're good, you'll get to be a yogi.

Third, there is the *apocalyptic* view that there will be a break in time,

or a future time, when retribution will be fulfilled, but the present time is merely preparation for that day.

The trouble, of course, with attempting to relativize our experience is that experience keeps intruding. We see how postulates of afterlife, or the next life, or the apocalypse, are used to excuse murder. Krishna does it directly; in the *Baghavat-Gita*, he explicitly instructs Arjuna to kill the Kauravas, assuring him that they'll be reborn to another reincarnation. In this, we see reflected Christendom's own justification of inquisition and war through notions of afterlife. But if this weren't enough, surely the experience of the holocaust has driven a stake through the heart of any effort to claim that the afterlife is enough to justify God.

### **Strategy two: Relativize God's righteousness**

This is where we claim that the righteousness of God, which is "true righteousness" is quite different from what we benighted mortals might think it should be. This is used as a strategy when certain Christians will say something like "what we see only *looks* like injustice. God's righteousness doesn't correspond to our experience. The suffering of an innocent child is actually true justice in the inscrutable mind of God."

The religious crisis of the modern world is rooted in questions about God's righteousness. Many educated moderns, unable to resolve the theodicy issue and suspecting that God may not be righteous at all, preserve retribution by turning away from God.

### **Strategy three: Relativize the power of God**

After the Holocaust, no other effort to preserve retribution is tenable. This is, no doubt, the reason that Process Theology is so popular these days among professors of theology. I am ignorant of the nuances of Process Theology (except to notice that it seems to have an awful lot of nuances); but its essential claim is that evil is possible because God's power is not yet fully realized. If God's power is limited, then the concept of the righteous God can be compatible with the existence of evil.

### **Pastoral issues**

In the meantime, a pastor in Des Moines calls on a widow who serves him, along with the coffee and cookies, a generous helping of resentment toward God: "Why did God allow my husband to suffer for so long before he died?" And a chaplain in an Atlanta hospital stands a death watch with a young couple over their 10-year-old with leukemia: "How could God let

this happen?" A pastor meets with a recently divorced woman in his study; she is drifting back to the church after a long absence, but insists that she won't adhere to a church teaching that claims that only Christians or Catholics or "the elect" or "good people" will be saved. Another pastor hears elements of fatalism in a parishioner's comment "it's God's will and I'll just accept it as best I can" (subtext: "I'm morally superior to God").

Notice two things about these comments: They are expressions of resentment, and they use retributionism against the church as a means to continue to be resentful. In these circumstances, retributionism is of no pastoral value whatsoever. If a pastor is to be effective at all here, she must respond to the resentment, without attempting to answer the "why" question directly.

### **Cultural issues**

Retributionism is found with deep and subtly tangled roots throughout human culture. Probably it originated in the need to identify victims for sacrifice and to justify their immolation. With this assumption as a basis for a hermeneutic, common words take on startling new significance, each of which could require an essay (or a book) of its own: "punishment" is probably just a term for revenge; "reward" is a myth to justify punishment; "suffering" is a cultural category imposed upon certain forms of distress in order to exploit them for sacrificial purposes; "evil" is a term we use to justify scapegoating; "innocence" is a double-negative ("not-guilty") used to make resentment legitimate; and "justice" is a notion derived from retributionism that should be replaced with "mercy."

So given the pastoral issues, the theodicy conundrum, and retributionism's sacrificial origins, it seems appropriate that we consider giving up on the retributionism that underlies these problems. This is not to say that there will be no more issues: how shall we speak of God, salvation, and repentance without reference to words like good and evil, right and wrong, heaven and hell? Jesus himself spoke freely of hell, did he not? The Apocalypse is surely a vision of punishment for the wicked; and, of course, how shall we enforce order in a society without the fear of retribution?

I can only begin to suggest some responses to these questions. I offer three quick suggestions, under the headings: Salvation, Gospel, and Theodicy.

### Salvation

Salvation from sin is usually interpreted to mean salvation from *punishment* for our sins. But the orthodox formula—that "salvation" is from "sin, death, and the devil"—implies that it is not God's punishment from which we are rescued, but from slavery to sin itself. Without retributionism, there is still an urgent need for salvation, salvation from mimetic violence and its causes, including resentment and retributionism. We are saved from *retributionism*, rather than from *retribution*. Suddenly repentance, *metanoia*, makes sense as it never did before.

Although it is true that Jesus speaks of hell, this need not be (I would argue *must* not be) read in a retributionist way. Jesus' most common term for hell, "gehenna," refers to the Valley of Hinnom, a place notorious in Israel's history for its pagan sacrificial violence. The other term he uses is "hades," a pagan term for the place of the dead, which reflects pagan death-obsession rooted in sacrifice. Jesus' warnings about these things may be more in the manner of cause and effect than reward and punishment: if you step off a cliff, you will fall to the rocks below; if you engage in scandal and sin, you will be caught up in a mimetic crisis.

### Gospel

But aside from the details about hell, the central affirmation of the gospel, mercy and forgiveness, runs directly contrary to retributionism. Mercy is scandalously unjust. Forgiveness defies the demands of retribution. Paul's proclamation that we are justified by grace rather than works is in effect a redefinition of the notion of justification, and a negating of the principle of retribution. The New Testament calls us to read it—and our experience—in a nonretributionist way. The fact that we do not do so may reflect a refusal on our part to hear "what the Spirit is saying to the churches." The problem with the effort to justify God is that it tries to contain God within retributionism. The moderns who have turned away from the church are partly correct: The one point in the theodicy problem that we are most concerned with protecting—God's righteousness—is precisely the one we must eliminate first. But the moderns throw out God in order to preserve righteousness. Instead, the solution is to see that God is neither "good" nor "evil." God is simply altogether uninterested in retribution. God has nothing to do with retribution, because God is love and grace.

**Theodicy**

Traditional interpreters seem not to have noticed that what Yahweh says to Job at the end of that book is not an answer to the issues Job raises—at least not on the level upon which Job raises them. Yahweh does not engage in theodicy; God *transcends* resentment, retribution and theodicy by *appearing to Job* and speaking to him directly. This anticipates how God would take away the sin of the world by likewise *appearing incarnate in Jesus Christ*. The issue of theodicy is not resolved by discussion of right and wrong, nor by power and suffering, but by *nonrivalrous relationship* that completely sets aside issues of reward and punishment.

The end of retributionism is something of truly cosmic significance. We will discover a need for a new language. We'll have to learn how to use the term "evil" without meaning "that which must be cast out." We'll find it necessary to rethink our soteriology, our ethics, our hermeneutics, and our eschatology, among other things. Thank God for that, because Christian theology has become as stale as dust. Repenting of our retributionism will not only save our souls; it will save theology, too. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

# GAUGUIN: THE OSCILLATING STRUCTURE OF DISGUISE

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In this essay we will examine Gauguin's self-portraits as ritualistic activity. Through them we will attempt to determine the formal and iconographical consequences of his extensive use of disguise and how this use can illuminate the nature of art in general.

## **The ritualistic function of disguise**

Within the framework of a given social order, disguise functions as a ritualistic activity. Ritual is a *framed* event where concepts—which in a non-ritualistic context are strictly differentiated and which take their meaning from this very differentiation—become undifferentiated. In *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard studied the function of mask in ritual activity: he concluded that within the function of ritual, which is to reinforce the cultural differentiation through a repetition of its undifferentiated origins, the mask introduces undifferentiation between the self, (the human being wearing the mask), and the other (who or what the mask represents):

Masks stand at that equivocal frontier between the human and the "divine," between a differentiated order in the process of disintegration and its final undifferentiated state—the point where all differences, all monstrosities are concentrated, and from which a new order will emerge. There is no point in trying to determine the "nature" of masks, because it is in their nature not to have a nature but to encompass all natures. (168).

Disguise as a form of ritual activity is the *representation* of undifferentiation or non-representability. It is then a fundamentally paradoxical

activity; an act of undifferentiating which has its condition of possibility in differentiated meaning. In turn differentiated meaning has its condition of possibility in a transcendental undifferentiation which the disguise represents. The mutual determination of the two, the totality of meaning and its negation, which is the condition of possibility of meaning as such, is represented through disguise both as a synchronic state and as a diachronic process. Thus, disguise is one of the forms of synchronic condensation leading to diachronic oscillation. This structure/process of condensation/oscillation is posited here as the universal underlying principle of ritual and in extension of art in general.

The structure/process of condensations/oscillations are seen most clearly in Gauguin's letters and the self-representations put forward in them where he liked to call himself a "savage." It is also seen in his self-portraits of 1888-1890, where he alternatively disguises himself as Jean Valjean, as Jesus Christ, and as a Breton priest, among other roles. A study of the paintings where these disguises occur will allow us to make the connection between his self-representation, as seen through his letters, and its consequences on the formal and iconographical level of these and other paintings. This in turn, will allow us to see how the structure/process of condensation/oscillation affects the form and iconography of his two most complex works; *La Vision après le sermon* [Fig. 1], and *Van Gogh peignant des tournesols* [Fig. 2], both of which were painted in 1888. This choice of paintings will allow us to examine some fundamental generative aspects of Paul Gauguin's work during that period.

### Self-Portraits as tropes

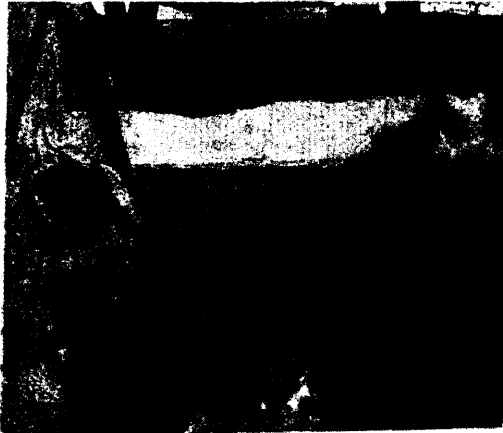
In 1888 Van Gogh, who was interested in creating a colony of artists, and as a means of preserving his ties with the painters of Pont-Aven whom he considered as likely candidates, wanted to exchange his self-portrait with a portrait painted by Paul Gauguin representing Émile Bernard and one by Gauguin representing Bernard (Sugana 94). Gauguin, who had trouble painting Bernard (*Correspondence* No. 165, 230), painted a self-portrait instead with an outline of Bernard's profile on the background, entitling it *Les Misérables* [Fig.3] after Victor Hugo's novel. Simultaneously, Bernard painted a self-portrait with Gauguin's profile.

Gauguin's *Les Misérables* [Fig. 3] is typical of his self-portraits, where he is usually disguised, in this case as Jean Valjean. The picture shows Gauguin looking straight at the viewer, his prominent arched nose—which he considered as a sign of his "primitive" origins—emphasized. The





*La Vision après le sermon* [Fig. 1]



*Van Gogh peignant des tournesols* [Fig. 2]



*Les Misérables* [Fig. 2]



*Le Christ au Jardin des Oliviers* [Fig. 4]

background is painted yellow with decorative designs vaguely reminiscent of Persian carpets, except for a green area on the top right of the canvas that contains a linear portrait of Emile Bernard. In a letter written to Shuffenecker in October 1888, he describes this painting and its intentions:

...I did a portrait of myself for Vincent who had asked it of me. I think it is one of my best things: so abstract, it is completely incomprehensible....At first impression, the head of a bandit, a Jean Valjean (*Les Misérables*) which also personifies an impressionist painter, unconsidered and always carrying a chain for the world. The drawing is very special, complete abstraction. The eyes, the mouth, the nose are like flowers from a Persian carpet also personifying the Symbolist side. The color is different from that of nature ....the room of a pure young girl. The impressionist is a pure human being, unsoiled by the putrid kiss of the Academy. (*Correspondence* No. 168, 248)

In this letter, written before having gone to Arles, and before having received Degas' unfavorable opinion during his stay in Paris in early 1890, Gauguin still identified himself against the academy as an impressionist; the influence of G. Albert Aurier the symbolist critic whom he had already met, probably during that summer through Émile Bernard (*Townly-Mathieus* 10), is also present in it. This letter clearly shows that, in the context of his self-presentation, the structure of disguise (the oscillation between being himself and being Jean Valjean) is directly related to the formal structure of his painting, since the disguise he is wearing—including his "primitif" nose which he analogically compares to the decoration on the wall—is presented on the formal level as a citation from a Persian rug. What we propose to do is to study the underlying structure of disguise in relation to the formal and iconographical dimensions of his paintings.

When Gauguin writes that Jean Valjean personifies him, he is saying, "I am *like* Jean Valjean, I unjustly suffer *like* him." This likeness implies both sameness and difference, Jean Valjean and Paul Gauguin are the *same* in terms of suffering, but they are irreducibly two *different* human beings. Gauguin is the one painting this self-portrait and writing the letter, he is the "self" and Jean Valjean is the "other" in relation to that self.

Through the use of disguise, Gauguin is using trope as a means of rhetorical expression. The condition of possibility of trope is the mutual determination of difference and sameness. At the core of every trope there is a condensation of two mutually exclusive classes. The very use of trope implies this, since the tropic expression of a given concept through another

implies as its condition, an essential core of difference between these two concepts. That core of difference is what we will define as the two mutually exclusive classes of a tropic expression. But obviously, in the trope, these exclusive classes are also connected by a zone of ambiguity which belongs *to both and neither*, since the very condition of tropic expression demands that they are the same in some way—in the case of Gauguin and Jean Valjean that similarity is the suffering they both experience. This adds a new dimension in our description of the structure/process of condensation/oscillation; the oscillation between the self and the other implies not only two mutually exclusive classes but also zones which in synchronic terms belong to both, and in diachronic terms can only be perceived as belonging to one class at any given time, thus constituting zones of passage between the two. These zones of passage are the conditions of possibility of ritual as a representation of undifferentiation. This condition of possibility is the space of art as such, where the very act of mimesis, i.e., the transportation of a given reality into the framed or separated space of art, is the transportation of differentiated reality (i.e., non-art) into the ambiguous undifferentiated space of ritual (art). The separation between art and non-art is the same as we find between ritual and non-ritual—the framing of art/ritual into prescribed boundaries functioning as an obstacle to the spread of condensation/oscillation into the world. It functions as a means of preserving the violence that underlies ritual within prescribed boundaries.

The use of the Christic analogy which Jean Valjean represents occurs again in a more literal form in Gauguin's *Le Christ au Jardin des Oliviers* [Fig. 4]. In this painting Gauguin disguises himself as Jesus Christ meditating in an Olive Garden outside Jerusalem before being captured and lead to his death. This moment is presented in the Bible as being the most psychologically painful for Jesus, the moment when he realized the immanence and inevitability of his death and engaged God in a conversation to try to avoid it. The analogy with Gauguin's position as an avant-garde artist is obvious. Christic self-representation is directly related to the valorization of societal victimization within the avant-garde where this victimization is considered as a sign of artistic quality and genius. This self-representation as a victim, and its religious undertones, has a structural resemblance with the function of the image of the artist in art history.

Gauguin's use of disguised self-portraiture occurs again in the figure of the Preacher on the lower right of *La vision après le sermon* (see Demont 36, and Pollack 54) of 1888 [Fig. 1]. A study of this painting will help us understand the structure of disguise, as the condensation of exclusive

concepts, in relation to its formal expression.

***La Vision après le sermon* and the consequences of the structure/process of condensation/oscillation**

*La Vision après le sermon* is one of Gauguin's most complex paintings. A comparison with some of its immediate predecessors such as *La Ronde des petites Bretonnes* [Fig.5] shows the enormous influence Bernard's *Les Bretonnes dans la prairie verte* had on Gauguin. It also shows a move away from naturalism—a move that was already inherent in the primitivist subject matter of *La Ronde des petites bretonnes* and the mythological vision of Brittany that underlies it.

*La Vision après le sermon* is constituted by two discontinuous zones; the Breton women on the foreground and the vermilion area where Jacob and the Angel are fighting. The separation is twofold, iconographical and formal. Iconographically we have two scenes whose juxtaposition together on a same painting is illogical on a narrative level; one of these scenes represents Brittany during the XIXh century and the other represents pre-Christian Canaan in a historically undetermined period during biblical times. This iconographical separation is reinforced formally by an abrupt passage from the blacks, whites and ochres of the foreground, the zone which the Breton women constitute and occupy, to a big area of vermilion red where the battle between Jacob and the Angel is taking place.

Zones of ambiguity connect these two historically and formally discontinuous zones, which belong to both and neither. This includes the tree's trunk that seems to belong to both the women on the foreground and to the vermilion area of the battle between Jacob and the Angel. The ambiguous nature of the tree is deducible from the fact that the tree can be seen as both going parallel to the bi-dimensional plane of the surface, thus belonging wholly to the area of the women on the foreground, and as penetrating perspectively into the tri-dimensionality of the painting, i.e., into the area of the distant Jacob and the Angel.

This three-dimensional perspectivist penetration is reinforced by the cow on the left, which is a lot smaller than it should be if we calculate its distance or if we compare it to the two Breton women on the left. This exaggeration of the cow's distance reinforces the penetration of the vermilion area by the tree trunk because the animal and the plant are merged together by their similar colors and by the fact that their juxtaposition as two independent objects is, in chromatic terms, barely suggested by Gauguin. Even the color the painter uses to create this

separation—a mixture of black and white—is the same as the one he uses to suggest volume on the cow's head and neck. The lower portion of the animal's body which is painted in white is not only chromatically similar but is actually in advance over that of the tree. This offsets the perspectivist advance of the later. So to interpret the animal as either solely being prospectively in retreat or as solely being chromatically in advance in relation to the tree is arbitrary; it is both. Yet we cannot help but choose one of these two interpretations since they are mutually exclusive. So, interpreting the animal as being behind the tree tends to suggest that the tree is parallel to the picture plane. Interpreting the animal as being chromatically in advance in relation to it aids in the suggestion that the tree is penetrating the illusionistic three-dimensional space of the painting. Which means, paradoxically, that a perspectivist interpretation implies its opposite, i.e., the surface, while a chromatic and purely bi-dimensional interpretation, implies the illusionistic three-dimensional space of the painting.

The green zone on the top area of the painting—specifically the light green parts of it—also contributes to the transformation of the tree into an ambiguous element. Depending on where one starts looking, this area can be interpreted as either the tree's foliage or as grass on the ground: looking at it from the vermilion area above the angel's wings, it would tend to be seen as an extension of the ground, as grass. But seen from the intersection of the branches, its description is likely to be foliage. Furthermore if we consider the green zone to be foliage, depending on whether we consider the tree to be parallel to the surface or penetrating into the vermilion zone, we will consider it to be either a part of the Breton women's area or part of the area where Jacob and the Angel are fighting. This ambiguity of the grass/foliage is reinforced by the dark-green forms, which obviously belong to the tree as foliage and are in a relation of figure-to-background towards the lighter greens, thus defining them as possibly distant. Yet, at the same time, the fact that the lighter areas are chromatically more advanced than the darker ones, makes such a figure to background interpretation problematical.

The ambiguity of Gauguin's work has given rise to a lot commentary which in some cases was generalized to include the whole of the Symbolist movement. Robert Goldwater described an ambiguity between the three-dimensional perspective and the bi-dimensional plane found in the works of several Symbolist artists, using it as a means of separating works of the later kind from those of *Art Nouveau* (18-20). Jean-Paul Bouillon describes

this ambiguity as "montage" also describing it as one of the fundamental traits of Pictorial Symbolism:

Even more than their evident double extension in the first abstraction and in Surrealism in its two principal modalities ("the form" of Gauguin and the Nabis, "the image" of the Rose+Croix), it is perhaps, for the artworks, the notion of "montage" that emerges from the diverse modes of approach such as that found in the objects studied here: It corresponds, in practice, to a conscious search for ambiguity.(8)

Jirat-Wasintinsky describes the *Vision après le sermon* as the first radically discontinuous image painted by Gauguin, characterizing this discontinuity as

...one of the immediate results of the use of imagination and memory, rather than the technique of documentary realism, in the production of the work of art. Gauguin's landscapes of 1889 and 1890 are particularly interesting in this respect, because they represent a radical departure from impressionist *plein air* images. (123-24)

In fact Gauguin's use of discontinuity can be traced back to such early works as *Le Sculpteur Aubé et son fils* of 1882, a pastel which in many ways is even more radical than the *La Vision après le sermon* in its use of discontinuities. In fact this is an influence of Degas' compositional techniques on the artist, so it cannot really be described as a departure from Impressionism. What does constitute a departure is the coincidence of this formal discontinuity with an iconographical one—something we never find in the works of Degas—and the effect this has on the narrative of the painting.<sup>9</sup> G. Pollock proposes a description of this effect:

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<sup>9</sup>In the introduction of his book Jirat-Wasintinsky proposes allegory as an alternative means to narrative in the creation of meaning: "Paul Gauguin's *Vision after the Sermon* has a meaning or narrative: Breton women, accompanied by a priest, have stepped outside a church after hearing the sermon, probably based on the Biblical story of Jacob wrestling with the Angel, and they experience a 'vision' of that biblical event, perhaps stimulated by the sight of a cow capering in the meadow. The above narrative, setting out the meaning of the painting, cannot be separated from its presentation, that is, from the pattern or composition forming it. (...) Narrative unfolds in time and uses description; however, meaning can be conveyed by other, less naturalistic means, including allegory." (9). However it is not very clear in his text exactly how this allegory functions in the *Vision après le sermon*. Later on in his book he slightly changes his theory, reducing the way this painting creates meaning

Gauguin's *Vision after the Sermon* both contains and destroys narrative space by positing within one image two orders of space, two levels of reality and imagination (...) It is unprecedented to demand that a painting manage to function as both an image of a possible gathering of women from a specific French region and the projection of their overheated religious experience. (56)

To elaborate on what she says, we can conclude from her interpretation that the containment of narrative is on the local level of each discontinuous zone; its destruction is on the level of the painting as a whole. We would like to suggest that instead of destruction we have ambiguity. The whole of the painting functions as an *implicit* zone of passage between the two partial and discontinuous narratives that constitute it. Since the relation between the women and the vision is the space of the painting as a whole, their very juxtaposition on a single framed space indicates them as being part of a same ensemble. The relation of this whole, which functions as an implicit zone of passage between the two discontinuous zones, to the zones of ambiguity we have discussed earlier—functioning as localized zones of passage within it—is the relation of the implicit to its explicitation. This unification makes the painting explicit as a self-contained (i.e., framed) whole containing disunities instead of simply being disunities arbitrarily juxtaposed on a framed space. Why is the unification of the whole its explicitation? Because its unification through the localized zones of ambiguity places it in a *signifying opposition* with its constitutive disunity.

The iconographical and formal condensation/oscillation of this painting coincides with the structure/process of disguise. Within this structure/process, Gauguin's use of self-portraiture is explicitly a disguise. He is both priest and painter, giving us the structure of trope of which disguise is but an expression. Gauguin is saying, "I am like the priest" while simultaneously implying, "I am not like the priest." This mutual determination of difference and similitude makes the trope possible. In explicit terms, both figures in this disguise functions as the generative element of the painting: as a priest, Gauguin creates what the Breton woman are seeing through his sermon, as a painter he creates the vision we as viewers of the painting are seeing. This role of the priest as the creator of this vision is

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to the level of an allusion or a metaphor, which according to him, is possibly derived from Zola's novel *L'Oeuvre*, and expresses the struggle of the artist with his medium. It is hard to see exactly what he means or how he reached this conclusion.



made clearer in a letter Gauguin wrote to Vincent Van Gogh:

A group of Bretons pray. Costumes of a very intense black. The bonnets yellow blue, very luminous, very severe. The cow under the tree is very small compared to reality and is bucking. For me, in this painting, the landscape and the struggle only exist in the imagination of the praying people following the sermon, this is why, there is a contrast between the people in nature and the struggle in its non-natural and disproportional landscape. (*Correspondence* No. 165, 230)

The Breton women in the midst of which Gauguin places himself are the representatives of "savagery" and "primitivism" and by representing himself as a Breton priest, he is disguising himself as a "primitive." That disguise implies two mutually exclusive classes, the avant-garde European painter and the primitive church priest. The zone of passage between himself and the priest is the vision created by the latter through his sermon that implies Gauguin as a painter creating a vision for us the spectators. The Breton women and their vision become the primitive counterpart to a spectator implied as both male and Parisian. Gauguin oscillates between being the creator of the vision of the Breton women and the creator of the painting as such. Thus he becomes the zone of passage between the spectator and the Peasant women, two orders of reality as separate as the two found in the painting which is itself in a structure/process of condensation/oscillation. Through the oscillation of the painter between being the creator of the spectacle to being a part of it, we have a passage from the spectator as a *subject* perceiving, to the spectacle or the painting as *object* of perception—two mutually exclusive classes. The oscillation of Gauguin into the priest lead us to the Breton women which as we have seen are in a formal and iconographical discontinuity with the scene of the vision as such, but which are connected to it through the formal strategies we have discussed earlier. This lead us to the scene of the fight itself which, if examined carefully, present the same structure of oscillation/condensation as the one found through all levels of the painting.

The ankle and the hand grabbing it, visible in Gauguin's painting, are in this case the focal point of the traditional story of the battle.<sup>10</sup> It is the

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<sup>10</sup>The text from Genesis that this scene represents goes as follows: "The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. And Jacob was left alone: and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When

place where the two opposing forces of Jacob and the angel concentrate and eventually resolve their opposition. But until that moment of resolution, the effort of the two fighters are in opposing each other's very effort, thus reciprocally stopping the continuity of each other's actions which tend towards the destruction of the opposing force. So the action of each fighter is geared towards stopping the continuity of the other's while aiding his own. Which means that every fighter creates a discontinuity in the continuity of the other, the place where one of the fighter's action end being the place where the other's begin. Jacob's refusal to release the ankle of the angel in the traditional story is equivalent to him appropriating it—the word release being very adequate since it clearly indicates the action of Jacob as one of appropriation. By doing this Jacob creates a zone of ambiguity in the fight, an area that, in the context of the combat, belongs neither to Jacob nor to the Angel, but to both and neither. Thus, in Gauguin's work the fundamental underlying violent dimension of tropic expression is made explicit. Ritual/art is nothing more than the expression of this fundamental undifferentiation between sameness and difference, between self and other, which occurs through the violence of mimetic rivalry.

But *The Vision after the Sermon* still transfigures one of the combatants into an angel. By defining one of the combatants as an angel—i.e., as transcendence—and the other as a human being, Gauguin transforms Jacob into a zone of passage between the angel, as non-human, and humanity as exemplified by the Breton women. This passage leads to the disguised Gauguin who simultaneously belongs to the mutually exclusive classes of

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the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Tell me, I pray, you name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him" (Gn 32, 23-30). The parts about Jacob grabbing the ankle of the angel in order to force him to surrender and even the angel himself, were added later on by a tradition which modified the story contained in this text in order to consider this man as an apparition of God. It is this modified version that Gauguin is illustrating as is evident by the wings he gives to one of the fighters and by the hand of the other—Jacob—which is grabbing his opponent's ankle. Jack Miles theorized that Jacob's opponent is in fact Esaü, his brother (74). If that is true, we have in the traditional story a historical evolution of the interpretation of a theme found in many mythologies, the enemy brothers or what René Girard calls the *doubles*, a case of mimetic escalation of rivalry which can lead to the divinization of the defeated opponent.

the peasant women and the Parisian spectators that perceive the painting and creates, through their perception, its possibility as a signifying agent. In essence the way the painting signifies relies on a basic opposition between the transcendence of the angel and non-transcendence of Jacob. In effect Gauguin made explicit the way the differentiation that creates transcendental pre-meaning produces meaning through the structure/process of oscillation/condensation which is essentially the undifferentiated structure of mimetic violence. The painting of Gauguin stops one step short of the undifferentiation of the mimetic rivals—the basic sameness of Jacob and the angel—and the instability of meaning it implies. The same undifferentiation is what leads to the expulsion of one of the antagonists into transcendence and his subsequent divinization—in this case as an angel. The condition of possibility of the meaning of this painting is the opposition between transcendence and non-transcendence, a condition which it makes explicit. This basic opposition is what differentiates him from the anti-utopianism and anarchism of a Seurat or Pissarro,<sup>11</sup> generating both the form and content of his painting, and leading to his disguise as both implicit civilized and explicit primitive.

Through the matrix of the mimetic theory Gauguin's work becomes an explicitation of ritual—ritual being the representation of pre-meaning within the framework of meaning. Gauguin's explicitation does not have to be deliberate or self-conscious since it is the result of an outside point of view—ours—which is structured by a very specific methodology. But seen from this outside point of view, Gauguin's explicitation is inscribed within the conditions of artistic practice, and can be defined as the condition of these practices coinciding with themselves as their object. This coincidence is self-referential, but in a manner that has nothing to do with that defined by formalism. A self-referentiality conditioned by the reference of an observer to the conditions of possibility of his very observations, the generative function of pre-meaning. This explicitation of ritual is expressed

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<sup>11</sup>Pissarro was opposed to Gauguin's synthetism because of his extensive appropriation of other peoples styles, including Pissarro's own. a feeling of resentment which expressed itself in political terms as seen in his two letters of 1891 and 1893 to his son Lucien (Sugana 12). A complaint echoed by Cézanne who claimed that Gauguin stole his brush stroke and later on by Émile Bernard who claimed that he did nothing more than imitate his synthetism. This shows the proprietary way the achievement of innovation was perceived in the avant-garde. Pissarro, Cézanne and Bernard resented Gauguin because of the way he successfully appropriated their styles which inspired in them mimetic rivalry. A rivalry Bernard would bitterly feel throughout his life.

through ritual as such which in turn is the condition of possibility of this very explicitation.

### **The Undifferentiating practice of citation**

Within that paradoxical process of explicitation, Gauguin's reference to the *Wrestlers* of Hokusai (Sugana 92) in *The Vision After the Sermon* is a means of putting the painting, as a totality constructed of different parts, in a relation of condensation/oscillation with another, the citation functioning as a zone of ambiguity belonging to both the Japanese print and to the painting.

In an Article entitled "L'Original et l'antérieur: Paul Gauguin," Alain Buisine pointed out how extensively Gauguin used citations throughout his career:

We find everything in Gauguin's work, distortions from Corot, Millet, Courbet, Manet, pieces from Pissaro, fragments from Degas, compositions and attitudes imitating Puvis de Chavanes, "pastiche" of Cézanne. It should be stated that we are not talking here of influences: the elements borrowed are too massive, too frequent, too evident, going as far as direct citations and paintings within paintings that explicit them.(114)

Buisine also postulated a possible relation between Gauguin's self-presentation as a savage and his aesthetic project, pointing out the possibility of a relation between Gauguin's self-portraits and his practice of citing works from other painters. According to him the relation between the two is an effort to reconnect with his personal origins:

In my perspective the esthetical work of Gauguin will, before all else, be conceived as a constant effort to rejoin himself as a subject, to rejoin his specifically individual origins. Going back to primitive culture only has meaning in as much as he is simultaneously going backwards in the course of his own life.(104).

This leads, according to Buisine, to the expansion of the self-portrait into the totality of the effigies used by the artist:

If we take into account that so many masculine and feminine figures have a tendency in Gauguin's work to become full-blown idols because of their massive proportions, their sculptural treatment, their simplification and their stylization, we can then ask if the figure Gauguin himself is not

constantly implied in all of his representations of Tahitian and Marquisian men and women, projections of a painter in search of an identification with the Origin. The self-portrait would then be the only palimpsest of his pictorial enterprise. (113-114)

This large syllogism transforms the self-portrait into the generative principal behind Gauguin's work. So it is interesting to note that the way this author defines it is in fact another version of the traditional description of Gauguin's self-portraits as a search for identity. This causes a contradiction, which Buisine himself points out:

Henceforth, there remains to be understood this curious ambivalence that constitutes Gauguin's whole painting: a priori, it is completely closed upon itself in as much as it is elaborated narcissistically as an irresistible expansion of the self-portrait that ends up representing the unique palimpsest of all the painted figures. Nonetheless, it is intimately compelled to always pass through the other, on the chance of turning itself into the other of its own productions; always compelled to cite or elaborate on anterior works that are used as mediations in the same way works of others are used. (119)

The contradictions Buisine is faced with at the conclusion of his article are retraceable to a basic supposition that describes Gauguin's portraits as a search for an identity, i.e., a search for a unity of the self. This supposition is almost universally held in art history circles. The contradictions can only be resolved by abandoning this supposition and examining Gauguin's self-portraits as disguise, which is not the fundamental *generative* principal but one of the *generated term* of the structure/process of ritual.

The ritualistic nature of this strategy of citation is exemplified and taken to the extreme in Gauguin's, *Vincent Van Gogh peignant des tournesols* [Fig. 2], executed during his stay in Arles. On the right side of the painting we see Vincent Van Gogh sitting. He is holding a pallet in his left hand and in his extended right hand a brush. Next to him on a table there is a vase containing a number of sunflowers. By the position of his head we can assume he is looking at—although his eyes are half closed and we really don't see the pupils. Above those sunflowers there is something which we can assume to be the easel, and behind on a wall there is what appears to be a painting.

In this painting there are two mutually exclusive points of view; Van Gogh and the sunflowers are seen from above, while the wall with the

painting is seen from a frontal angle at eye level<sup>12</sup>.

The interpretation of this painting we believe hinges on one detail; the fact that the brush in Van Gogh's right hand can be interpreted as touching the sun-flowers in the vase—Gauguin's direct citation of Van Gogh's work—and not the canvas that is supposedly on the easel. We can only assume that the brush touches the canvas by virtually projecting the line formed by the brush, but this is not what we actually see. Even the canvas itself is invisible, its existence is wholly the product of an interpretive construction on our part.

The sunflower/brush contact is further reinforced by the angle of view of Gauguin which frames and depicts the pose of Van Gogh and the angle of the sunflowers from above. And also by the fact that Vincent's body touches the lower and left side of the painting. Both these formal strategies contribute to his flattening on the surface thus placing his hand on the same level as the flowers.

An important point needs to be made here: I am not saying that the brush does touch the sunflowers. What I am saying is that along with the possibility that the brush is touching the canvas there is another possibility, reinforced by formal elements of the painting, and which states that the brush in Van Gogh's hand is touching the sunflowers themselves. Simply stated, both interpretations are correct yet mutually exclusive.

Van Gogh's brush touching the canvas would mean that the sunflowers are inscribed in the mimetic three dimensional space of the painting, that his act of painting is a representation of the flowers—a transcription of its three dimensional reality into the bi-dimensionality of his canvas, the one we do not actually see. It is worth noting that such an interpretation would function only on the iconographical level since the material reality of this mimetic three-dimensional space is bi-dimensional.

The second interpretation, i.e., Van Gogh's brush touching the sunflowers themselves, could mean that the title of the painting, *Vincent Van Gogh peignant des tournesols*, refers to the *actual sunflowers we are seeing*—Gauguin's citation from Van Gogh's work—and not the hypothetical ones on Vincent's hypothetical canvas. This would mean that this Van Gogh on this canvas is painting something that has the same reality as himself. In that same token, Vincent painting the actual sunflowers we see in front of us, defines the rest of the room and himself as a product of that

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<sup>12</sup>Bernard Demont. in "L'Ambiguïté dans la Peinture de Gauguin entre 1885 et 1894," also describes this ambiguity as it relates to the still-lives of Gauguin (32).

same constructive action of painting. In essence Vincent Van Gogh is constructing the reality that is constructing him.<sup>13</sup> The bi-dimensionality of the painting behind Van Gogh becomes the literal indication of the bi-dimensionality of the canvas.

What these two interpretations imply is a passage between two mutually exclusive ensembles, from iconography (and the three-dimensionality it implies as seen from the high angle) to the painting's material bi-dimensionality (literally indicated by the painting within the painting which is seen from a frontal angle); from Van Gogh painting the sunflowers sitting in a room with a picture behind him, to Van Gogh painting Gauguin's citation of these sunflowers and painting the picture on the wall which implies the bi-dimensionality of the canvas by making its own explicit. Citation is then a point of passage between Gauguin's work and someone else's, a means of ritually undifferentiating both within the confines of representation. It follows the same structure/process of disguise that functions through an undifferentiation of the self/other dichotomy.

In a culture threatened by undifferentiation of meaning and of societal roles, a paradoxical evolution can occur; the undifferentiated can be made explicit and is reinforced in its stature as undifferentiated through ritualistic cultural manifestations. By entering the undifferentiated *as other* into the structure of meaning which defines the differentiated self, the "otherness" of undifferentiation is reinforced—thus excluded. The explicitation and reinforcement of undifferentiation reaffirms that which underlies the differentiated definition of the self, that against which the *meaning* of the self is defined. Art as ritual is the representation of undifferentiation which is separated from differentiated meaning through a tautological opposition to non-art. Thus art negates the differentiations of meaning while negating itself from it.

Within this activity, the image of a primitive Brittany, as opposite to that of modernity, allows Gauguin to operate a series of condensations/oscillations on the levels of his self-representation and on that of form and of iconography, and just as importantly, on the level of the actual and perceptual constructive process of the painting. The structure underlying his contradictory self-representation is found in pictures which are apparently unrelated to it, and is not a psychological "search for an identity" but a

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<sup>13</sup>This phrase is directly inspired by Edgar Morin's remark that "we create the world that creates us" in *Order and Disorder, Proceedings of the Stanford International Symposium* (108), although we are not wholly in agreement with its radicalism.

ritualistic undifferentiation of the self-other dichotomy.

#### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Gauguin, Paul. *La Vision après le sermon, ou La lutte de Jacob et de l'Ange*, 1888, Oil on Canvas, 73 X 92 cm, Edimbourg, National Gallery of Scotland.
2. Gauguin, Paul. *Van Gogh peignant des Tournesols*, 1888, Oil on Canvas, 73 X 92 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Vincent Van Gogh.
3. Gauguin, Paul. *Autoportrait, dit Les Misérables, à l'ami Vincent*, 1888, Oil on Canvas, 45 X 55 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Vincent Van Gogh.
4. Gauguin, Paul. *Le Christ au Jardin des Oliviers (Self-Portrait)*, 1889, Oil on Canvas, 73 X 92 cm, West Palm Beach, Norton Gallery.

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