



**TRANSFORMING VIOLENCE:  
CULT, CULTURE, AND ACCULTURATION**



*Bill Traylor: Preacher and Congregation (1939-42)  
from the Collection of Judy A. Saslow*

**COV&R Conference: June 30-July 4, 2010  
University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA**

The 2010 Meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion will be held June 30-July 4 on the famously beautiful campus of the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, USA. The program (posted at <http://transformingviolence.nd.edu> and linked to the COV&R website) currently lists the names of more than a hundred participants, and the number will certainly continue to grow. The co-organizers are heartened by the quantity and quality of the proposals received from COV&R members; by the generous co-sponsorship of Imitatio, Inc., the Raven Foundation, and many different academic units at Notre Dame; and by the many distinguished scholars who graciously accepted an invitation to address the members of the Colloquium in plenary sessions on topics related to mimetic theory and the conference theme: "Transforming Violence: Cult, Culture, and Acculturation."

Evident in the program is the accent on acculturation, inspired both by René GIRARD's idea of mimesis as it relates to (often violent) processes of assimilation and by Notre Dame's

*continued on p. 3*

*COV&R Object: "To explore, criticize, and develop the mimetic model of the relationship between violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture. The Colloquium will be concerned with questions of both research and application. Scholars from various fields and diverse theoretical orientations will be encouraged to participate both in the conferences and the publications sponsored by the Colloquium, but the focus of activity will be the relevance of the mimetic model for the study of religion."*

The *Bulletin* is also available online:  
<http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/bulletin/>

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**COV&R AT THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION ANNUAL MEETING  
IN ATLANTA, GA, 2010**

**First Announcement**

The American Academy of Religion will be meeting in Atlanta, GA on October 30-November 1, 2010. Some days and locations of COV&R sessions have yet to be finalized; however, we have an exciting range of programming planned. Questions about the sessions can be directed to Martha REINEKE, Coordinator, COV&R at the AAR, [martha.reineke@uni.edu](mailto:martha.reineke@uni.edu)

**COV&R Saturday Morning Session, October 30:**

**9:00-10:45 a.m. Book Session:** Jon PAHL's *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence*.

Professor PAHL will offer comments on his book. Kathryn LOFTON of Yale University and Michael HARDIN of Preachingpeace.org will be respondents.

From the publisher: "Pahl traces the confluence of violence and religion in the United States. He argues with scholars who situate religious violence largely outside of American borders, claiming instead that it is a recurrent feature in the formation and development of the United States. Pahl emphasizes the ways in which, throughout U.S. history, the notion of sacrifice has rendered killing justifiable and even holy. Building on the work of theorists like René Girard and Mark Jurgensmeyer, Pahl lays out four historical case studies—about youth, race, gender, and capital punishment—to develop his theory."

**10:45 am. -11:30 Business Meeting** to plan sessions for next year.

**COV&R Session on the Main Program of the AAR (time/date TBA):**

**Theme: Girard, Global Christianity, and Social Conflict**

"Religions as contingent variables in social conflict," Nathan R.B. LOEWEN, Vanier College

"The Maya Tzotzil Chamula of Chiapas, México and René Girard's Anthropology of Mimetic Desire," Miguel ROLLAND, Arizona State University

"What's Justice Got To Do With It?: Truth, Reconciliation, and René Girard in South Africa," Jennifer HECKART, Union Theological Seminary, New York

**Joint session: Psychology, Culture and Religion Group and  
the Colloquium on Violence & Religion (time/date TBA)**

Hetty ZOCK, University of Groningen, Presiding

Theme: Discussion of *Blood That Cries Out From the Earth. The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*, James W. Jones, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Panelists:

Naomi R. GOLDENBERG, University of Ottawa

Martha J. REINEKE, University of Northern Iowa

Responding: James W. JONES, Rutgers University

From the Publisher: "Religious terrorism has become the scourge of the modern world. Research on the psychology of violence [including a chapter on Girard] shows that several factors work to make ordinary people turn "evil." These include feelings of humiliation or shame, a tendency to see the world in black and white, and demonization or dehumanization of other people. Authoritarian religion or "fundamentalism," Jones shows, is a particularly rich source of such ideas and feelings, which he finds throughout the writings of Islamic jihadists, such as the 9/11 conspirators. Jones goes on to apply this model to two very different religious groups that have engaged in violence: Aum Shinrikyo, the Buddhist splinter group behind the sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo subway system, and members of the extreme religious right in the U.S. who have advocated and committed violence against abortion providers. Jones notes that not every adherent of an authoritarian group will turn to violence, and he shows how theories of personality development can explain why certain individuals are easily recruited to perform terrorist acts."

Martha Reineke

## COV&R AWARDS AND GRANTS

### Raymund Schwager Memorial Award

To honor the memory of Raymund SCHWAGER, SJ († 2004), the Colloquium on Violence and Religion is offering an **award of \$ 1,500** shared by up to three persons for the three best papers given by graduate students at the COV&R 2010 meeting at the University of Notre Dame.

Students presenting papers at the conference are invited to apply for the **Raymund Schwager Memorial Award** by sending a letter to that effect and the full text of their paper (in English, maximum length: 10 pages) in an e-mail attachment Ann Astell ([aastell@nd.edu](mailto:aastell@nd.edu)), organizer of COV&R 2010 and chair of the three-person COV&R Awards Committee.

**Due date for submission was the closing date of the conference registration.** Winners will be announced in the conference program. Prize-winning essays should reflect an engagement with mimetic theory; they will be presented in a plenary session and be considered for publication in *Contagion*.

### COV&R Travel Grants

**Travel grants** to attend COV&R 2010 are available for **graduate students** or **independent scholars** who are **first-time attendees** of the COV&R conference and **will normally be expected to present a paper** at the conference. Write a **letter of application** accompanied by a **letter of recommendation by a COV&R member** to that effect to the **Executive Secretary**, Ann Astell ([aastell@nd.edu](mailto:aastell@nd.edu)) until the **closing date of the conference registration**. The board will sponsor the attendance of up to ten persons with a maximum amount of \$ 500 each. The officers of COV&R will award the grant in the order of application.

own colorful history as an immigrant and missionary foundation in an area still famous for its ethnic diversity. Two sessions at the conference: one featuring Amish culture and its response to violence (as studied in Steven NOLT's *Amish Grace*), a second on the Potawatomi people and their survival of trauma, as well as an optional field trip to the Menno-Hof, will highlight the local record of cultural contacts and resistance to assimilation. COV&R members Willard SWARTLEY and Vern Neufeld REDEKOP will serve as formal respondents.

A session on GIRARD and ARENDT, partly inspired by the ongoing research of COV&R's Andrew MCKENNA and Thomas RYBA, calls attention to the "Girardian" life and thought of Hannah ARENDT, a German Jewish émigré to the United States whose social philosophy and considerations of violence still inspire political applications in countries as distant as Iran (as Norma MORUZZI will demonstrate in her lecture). A keynote address by the distinguished sociologist of religion, Rhys WILLIAMS, will focus on the situation confronted by the "new religious" immigrants to the United States.

Marked exteriorly by physical signs of difference, some cannot easily be "assimilated" and have been (and still remain) especially subject to various forms of scapegoating. The plenary ses-

sion lectures by COV&R's Tobin SIEBERS and Margaret BRINIG (as well as several papers given in concurrent sessions) will contribute to disabilities studies from a mimetic, aesthetic, and legal perspective. Another plenary session, featuring the work of art historians Erika DOSS and Mechal SOBEL, will focus on the African-American experience of lynching and its commemoration in painting and sculpture. To DOSS and SOBEL, COV&R's Sandor GOODHART will offer a response.

Other sessions will broaden the consideration of violent cultural contact to global dimensions. At the invitation of the Raven Foundation, James W. JONES of Rutgers University, author of *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* (2008), will speak on mimetic dimensions of contemporary terrorism. COV&R's Charles SELENGUT will offer a response. Discussing the important role of commerce in conditioning peace and violence will be a panel composed of two businessmen (Peter THIEL and Keith ROSS) and two scholars of global economies (Georges ENDERLE and Wilhelm GUGGENBERGER), all of them conversant in mimetic theory.

The opening keynote lecture by Notre Dame's Cyril O'REGAN, a distinguished theologian of apocalypticism, will focus on GIRARD's contribu-

tion, especially in *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (2009), to the apocalyptic as a decisive category in contemporary philosophy and theology. To O'REGAN, COV&R's James ALISON and Wolfgang PALAVER will respond.

A highpoint of the meeting, as in recent years, will be the Raymund Schwager, S.J., Memorial Lecture, to be given in 2010 by Susan L. MIZRUCHI of Boston University, the author of many books, including *The Science of Sacrifice: American Literature and Modern Social Theory* (1998), in which she cites the writings of René GIRARD. Her lecture will focus on the classic novel, *Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. SALINGER (+2010). Responding to MIZRUCHI will be COV&R's William A. JOHNSEN, editor of *Contagion*.

Also honoring the memory of Raymund SCHWAGER, S.J., will be a plenary session at which the winning papers in the Raymund Schwager, S.J. Memorial Essay Contest will be presented. As in the past, the COV&R 2010 Meeting will feature a significant amount of high-quality work by young scholars. COV&R Board members Martha REINEKE, Thérèse ONDERDENWIJNGAARD, and Susan SRIGLEY, together with Suzanne ROSS, will provide an opportunity for graduate students to meet together with them to talk about professionalization concerns.

Besides the many concurrent sessions (including one featuring the winners in the Raven Foundation Essay Contest), this year's meeting will emphasize a new format for scholarly exchange and study: the SEMINAR. One time-block in the program will be devoted to concurrent workshops and seminars, designed to ensure in-depth discussion of recent books by COV&R scholars (for example, GIRARD's *Battling to the End* and Jean-Michel OUGHOURLIAN's *The Genesis of Desire*), engagement with critical theory and critique of mimetic theory (for example, the relationship between mimicry in post-colonial thought and mimesis in GIRARD), and practical mentoring (for example, in the teaching of mimetic theory). Many of the seminars will be team-led. All participants in COV&R 2010 are strongly encouraged to ENROLL in one of the seminars PRIOR TO THE MEETING and to come to the seminar session having done the assigned reading and prepared a short response.

Evening film sessions will allow COV&R 2010 participants to view and to discuss either the newly released documentary film *Romero by Romero* (Spanish, with English subtitles) about the life and death of Archbishop Oscar ROMERO, martyred in El Salvador, or the classic cinematic representation of the historic Stokes Monkey Trial, *Inherit the Wind*. These two films, albeit in different ways, have obvious relevance to the Colloquium's concern with scapegoating, religion, and violence.

Creative writing and musical performance will contribute to the atmosphere at the conference. During the evening meal on Thursday, Anthony BARTLETT's one-act play *Dissing or Kissing* (winner of an honorable mention in the Raven Foundation contest) will be performed. At the closing banquet, Notre Dame poet Henry WEINFELD, a longtime devotee of the work of René GIRARD, will read poetry inspired by Girardian themes.

All in all, we the organizers anticipate a wonderful conference and are looking forward to extending a warm welcome to many COV&R members—old friends and new—to Notre Dame's campus next summer. The Wednesday afternoon session (June 30) spent discussing a chapter from James G. WILLIAMS' history of COV&R should start us off well. The Colloquium is and remains a colloquium—a talking and thinking aloud together about things that really matter. Until we meet again!

*Ann W. Astell (and Margie Pfeil)*

## OBITUARY

On January 6, 2010, the German sociologist Konrad THOMAS has died at the age of 79 in Göttingen, Germany. THOMAS was born in 1930. After WW II he studied Lutheran theology, then worked in the steel industry as a lathe operator. From 1959 on he entered an academic career in sociology, becoming assistant professor in Göttingen in 1968 and full professor in 1972 until his retirement in 1995. During that time he sociologically analyzed the cultural significance of the construction of a steel plant in Rourkela in India. In Hyderabad he held a chair as guest Professor. Prof. THOMAS was an early attendant of COV&R conferences in Germany and showed great interest in René GIRARD's work, as several articles attest.

*Nikolaus Wandinger*

## ONE MORE REASON TO JOIN COV&R

Dear COV&R members,

Imitatio has signed an agreement with Michigan State University Press covering 2010 and 2011 to provide copies of publications in the Studies in Violence Mimesis and Culture series to current COV&R members at the time of publication.

The Imitatio Board believes that COV&R's wide and multi-disciplinary membership makes it the first, most influential readership for the series and that this is the quickest way to get these books on their desks. We owe Robert HAMERTON-KELLY (Board Chair) and Lindy M. FISHBURNE (Executive Director of Imitatio) a debt of gratitude for this foresight and generosity.

William A. Johnsen  
Editor, Contagion

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Like many of you I am very much looking forward to going to our forthcoming conference at Notre Dame University focusing on "Transforming Violence: Cult, Culture, and Acculturation" this summer. This conference will be a great opportunity for COV&R to go for the first time to Notre Dame. With Ann ASTELL, our executive secretary and co-organizer of this meeting, we will be in the hands of our most experienced conference organizer because Notre Dame will be already her third conference after Purdue in 2002 and Koblenz in 2005. Margaret PFEIL, the other co-organizer is specialized in social ethics, especially in peace ethics, helping us to focus more closely on ways to transform different potentials of violence in our world. Notre Dame University also hosts an important peace centre. Notre Dame's "Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies" is one of the leading centres in this world studying the causes of violent conflict and strategies for sustainable peace. It is very appropriate for COV&R to connect its activities with this centre. It will help us to bring mimetic theory into contact with leading approaches in the field of peace studies. By this, mimetic theory can firstly gain from methods and approaches currently used in peace ethics and can secondly also contribute to this field by being introduced to those researchers who have not yet come across it. Let's all prepare ourselves for many fruitful exchanges.

Our growing cooperation with *Imitatio* results also in more and more helpful resources and tools. Just recently René GIRARD's most recent book in English *Battling to the End* together with Jean-Michel OUGHOURLIAN's *The Genesis of Desire* was shipped to all our members. Bill JOHNSEN's editorial work with Michigan State Univer-

sity Press is a wonderful success story of our common work to make mimetic theory widely known in the academic world. The recently established "Imitatio Mimetic Theory Online Library" (<http://www.imitatio.org/online-library/online-library-introduction.html>) is also very helpful. Many English books by René GIRARD have now become easily accessible. Thinking back on the times when I was starting to study mimetic theory eagerly, I encourage especially young scholars to improve our understanding of this theory by taking all this helpful tools as a starting ground for their own work.

Wolfgang Palaver

### MUSINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

If anyone has any doubt about the interdisciplinary character of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, a look at the web-pages (<http://transformingviolence.nd.edu>) for this year's meeting will quickly dispel it. Taking off my hat as the co-organizer of COV&R 2010 and putting on my hat as Executive Secretary, I am pleased to observe not only the number, but also the great diversity of the sessions, which feature papers on anthropology, sociology, law, philosophy, history, psychology, economics, art history, political science, linguistics, literature, film studies, popular cultural studies, commerce, kinesiology, physics, and theology (pastoral, systematic, moral, liturgical, Biblical). The Colloquium is clearly alive and well, and mimetic theory continues to find new applications.

A glance at the poster advertising COV&R 2010 shows a long list of sponsors. Most of these are programs, departments, centers, institutes, and colleges within the University of Notre Dame, the site for this year's meeting. What I

want to emphasize here, however, are the generous contributions to COV&R from three relatively new Girardian organizations: Imitatio, Inc., the Raven Foundation, and Peace and Theology.

Thanks to the efforts of Lindy FISHBURNE and Robert HAMERTON-KELLY, the Board of Imitatio, Inc., will hold its meeting on the campus of Notre Dame on June 29, the day before the start of COV&R 2010. This thoughtful arrangement has helped to make possible on the afternoon of June 30 a special pre-conference session moderated by Diana CULBERTSON, O.P., featuring the work of Robert HAMERTON-KELLY, as analyzed by James WILLIAMS in one chapter of his history of COV&R, and as discussed by Martha REINEKE and Jean-Pierre DUPUY. As in the past, Imitatio, Inc., is generously supporting the Raymund Schwager, S. J., Memorial Lecture, to be given at COV&R 2010 by Susan MIZRUCHI of Boston University. Our "COV&R gratitude" goes to Imitatio and to its co-founder (with René GIRARD and Robert HAMERTON-KELLY), Peter THIEL, who will also speak at COV&R 2010.

Thanks to the marvelous energy, creativity, and resourcefulness of Suzanne and Keith ROSS, Maura JUNIUS, and their friends at the Raven Foundation, the program of COV&R 2010 features an entire session and a mealtime Readers' Theater performance at which winning entries in the Raven Foundation essay contest will be presented. The Raven Foundation has also organized and sponsored one of the plenary sessions on the program: that featuring the work of the famous psychoanalyst of terrorism, James W. JONES. Offering yet another gift to COV&R, the Raven Foundation has arranged for plenary session talks at COV&R 2010 to be aired in the Chicago area through WBEZ Radio's "Chicago Amplified" (a feature of Chicago Public Radio), thus reaching a large public audience.

A third COV&R-related organization, Theology and Peace, founded in 2007, is also represented on the program for COV&R 2010. COV&R members Anthony BARTLETT and Dorothy WHISTON, representing Theology and Peace, have proposed an innovative seminar, at which René GIRARD's book *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* will be studied.

The joyful, enriching cooperation of these three organizations with COV&R for its 2010 meeting is a great sign that the multiplication of Girardian units, each with their own special fo-

cus, need not lead to unhealthy rivalry. When the burgeoning life worldwide of the large Girardian "family" first started to manifest itself in the foundation of new study groups and research institutes, there was concern expressed by COV&R members that COV&R itself would lose, to some extent, its own internationality and internal diversity of fields of interest. While this remains a concern, the working together of Theology and Peace, the Raven Foundation, and Imitatio, Inc., in the planning of COV&R 2010 augurs well for the future. These three organizations have set a good example for others to follow.

My hope is that the programs and posters of future COV&R meetings will continue to be able to list with gratitude the names of additional COV&R-related groups as co-sponsors. United, we can do (and are doing) so much more. Peace!

*Ann W. Astell*

## REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### **'Report from COV&R Activities at the AAR-Meeting 2009 in Montreal, Quebec**

COV&R's first-time ever appearance as a full-fledged Related Scholarly Organization (RSO) of the AAR was in fact so rich that it is hard to report about it in the limited space that I as editor have allotted to myself as author.

In the first part of the COV&R book session, Bruce CHILTON had the opportunity to illustrate the findings of his book *Abraham's Curse* with slides from archeological excavations. Despite the missing respondent, we enjoyed an interesting talk and discussion. In light of later discussions at the COV&R events, the most astonishing element of that was CHILTON's claim that the Islamic interpretation of the Aqedah was the least sacrificial.

Cleo KEARNS explained some of the fascinating ideas of her book *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice*. With the help of Nancy JAY's theory of sacrifice, KEARNS drew our attention to some interesting cross-cultural aspects of sacrifice, namely that child-bearing women are always excluded from the role of sacrificer, but the sacrifice is associated with blood, as is birth-giving. So, in a sense, sacrifice was viewed as childbirth done better, which involved severing the close mother-child bond and superseding it with a close father-son relation initiated by the sacrifice. In this context, KEARNS argued, Mary

was the perfect sacrificial mother. Like other mothers she provided the “material” for the sacrifice: her son. While she did not endorse the sacrifice, she bore witness to it within a Eucharistic sacrificial culture, also in its art and architecture. Her everlasting virginity ascertained that she did not threaten the close relationship between the Father and the son.

Martha REINEKE responded by first expressing her appreciation for the fact that both CHILTON’s and KEARNS’s book were not limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition but went beyond in an interreligious application of mimetic theory. Then she drew our attention to GIRARD’s interpretation of the virgin birth of Jesus as the birth of a new, non-mythical, cultural order. While KEARNS knew GIRARD’s interpretation, she criticized that the supposed cultural transformation had not occurred, rather sacrificial Christianity followed. REINEKE argued that KEARNS’s ideas could be seen as a further development of GIRARD’s thought: as the mimetic rivalry that threatens because of the proximity between God and humans is diffused in the sacrifice of the first-born, which is then criticized in the Aqedah, where God accepts the human lineage and takes himself out of the rivalistic equation, so Mary can be seen as both repairing and critiquing the idea of sacrifice.

The general discussion concentrated on the question of how GIRARD and mimetic theory related to Judaism and Islam. The suspicion that GIRARD was anti-Jewish could be dispelled with reference to Sandy GOODHART’s work, the task is more difficult with respect to Islam.

At the joint session of The Christian Spirituality Group and the Colloquium on Violence and Religion some interesting papers were presented. John ROEDEL looked at the difference between principled and strategic non-violence with the help of mimetic theory, seeing Christ’s positive mimesis of God as a prerequisite for principled non-violence. Gregory W. LOVE gave a rather critical view on GIRARD’s and some of his theological adherents’ view on salvation. The Passion, he claimed, was overemphasized, while the resurrection played too little a role. One of the criticized who was present, Mark HEIM, helped understand his intentions better. I argued that a playing off of the cross against the resurrection would not be fruitful. Rather a dramatic approach along the lines that R. SCHWAGER has proposed

would enable us to see the cross as a direct consequence of Jesus’ ministry, and the resurrection as vindication of his message that could not be separated either from the message of the Kingdom, nor from the cross that was accepted in order to stay true to that very message and the image of God entailed by it. Denise STARKEY gave a paper on the Spirituality of Natality and applied it to the problem of how to deal with severe traumas in survivors of violence.

Another highpoint of COV&R’s program was the panel on *Achever Clausewitz* with Paul DUMOUCHEL, Stephen GARDNER, Sandor GOODHART, William JOHNSEN, and Charles MABEE, chaired by Ann ASTELL. S. GOODHART started out by giving an overview of the book. P. DUMOUCHEL concentrated on CLAUSEWITZ’s two ideas of war: as a concept of a limited duel that tends to the extreme of the ultimate destruction of the other or as an institution that never leads to the destruction of the enemy but to a stable peace because its violence can be limited. GIRARD argues in his book that war as an institution is no longer possible; and that is bad news because it opens the way for unchecked violence. St. GARDNER openly admitted that, while he had no quarrel with GIRARD about us living in apocalyptic times, he felt very critical about this book; his unease was, however, difficult to articulate. W. JOHNSEN related some of the problems encountered in translating the book into English, which was an almost impossible task, given the complicated oscillation of meanings in certain terms. He argued that now GIRARD had done to CLAUSEWITZ, what he had done to many thinkers before: complete and overcome them. Ch. MABEE explained that GIRARD intended to demythologize the power of religion by unmasking its scapegoating nature. The Christ event had shown us that we were all entangled in that violence. This realization liberated us from the morality of separating good and evil and freed us to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. The ensuing discussion again centered on GIRARD’s relationship to Islam. Some members of the audience were concerned of a perceived anti-Islamic bias in the book, as it had been presented. That was partly echoed by members of the panel, who at the same time drew our attention to some problems with Islam, namely that it was related to politics from the beginning, that non-Muslims do not know for sure who speaks for Islam, and that the absence

of a clergy in Islam made the distinction between religion and politics more difficult to draw.

The Teaching Religion Section, which also housed a COV&R-related activity with presenters Martha REINEKE and Suzanne ROSS, unfortunately was concurrent with the aforementioned panel, so I could not attend it. This shows: COV&R's initiation as an RSO of the AAR was rich and diverse. My hope is that this stays so—and also that some more COV&R members but also interested non-members will find their way to this event. Hope to see you in Atlanta!

*Nikolaus Wandinger*

### BOOK REVIEWS

**Bartlett, Robert: *The Hanged Man*.**

*A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonialism in the Middle Ages.*

**Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, xi and 168 pages, ISBN: 0691126046; \$ 17.95.**

I have often found it a strange thing that mimetic theory—in every day research—is hardly connected with historical work, although it seems to me most obvious that modern historical thinking is of enormous importance for the genesis of the mimetic theory, especially when it comes to the hermeneutical foundations upon which it is built. The “biographical” reasons for this—René GIRARD's being trained as a medievalist at the beginning of his academic career—are random and only of minor importance: GIRARD himself regards his training in Avignon to have been dry, formal, very positivist and thus of hardly any influence on the development of his later mindset. Rather, his adopting genuine historical thinking has—paradoxically—been triggered by his scholarly “detours” to literary criticism and especially religious studies. Everyone familiar with GIRARD's views knows how highly he values e.g. the fundamental conviction of every serious historical inquiry into medieval or modern witch-hunting, namely that those portrayed in the respective records as supernatural malefactors are, in fact, scapegoats—i.e. victims unjustly persecuted by a mob (however law- or science-based the purported reasons may be). Modern historical thinking is, hence, in a way heir to the revealing notions brought about by the Judeo-Christian tradition (especially among the human sciences, which sometimes seem to tend to ontological ni-

hilism) in an obviously mostly unconscious process.

Unfortunately, this close relationship between good historical hermeneutics and the mimetic theory has hardly had any visible effects on either side. With only few exceptions, historians are still extremely cautious when it comes to adopting (or just taking into account) theoretical deliberations of whatever origin, and have thus hardly been concerned with the mimetic theory so far. On the other hand, scholars who already work with the tools provided by mimetic theory usually do not deal with history. I am aware, of course, that there has been some great work done on the *reception* of historical “topoi” (especially the impressive study *Joan of Arc* by Ann W. ASTELL comes to mind), but yet, to my knowledge, there has not been any real depiction of historical topics by going *ad fontes*. Girardian thinkers certainly know a lot about history on an abstract and theoretical level (which would be, as stated before, quite seminal for genuine historians), but they seem to tend to neglect the historians' (presumably) dry work in archives and its (presumably) dry results. Yet, among the many historical publications there are, some are worth being noticed—not least from a Girardian viewpoint. A very interesting example of such work is the study *The Hanged Man* by Robert BARTLETT, the renowned historian and Professor of Medieval History at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. Presenting this book, I will, for the greatest part, skip those sections that are of genuine interest only to those who are familiar with and specifically interested in the methodical development of medieval research or medieval history *per se*, and focus instead on a re-narration of the dramatic course of the fascinating incident that is depicted rather circumstantially in BARTLETT's study; for it is, when read from a certain perspective, a wonderful case-study of how the relationship between the dimensions of religion and violence can develop the most intriguing and complex variations.

The story itself, as thoroughly reconstructed by BARTLETT, is quickly told: In 1290, in a hardly known corner of a hardly conquered Wales, a notorious brigand and rebel, William CRAGH, was, along with a nobleman, sentenced to death by his Lord, William de BRIOUZE senior. He was to be executed by a very disgraceful method, namely by being hanged—beheading, in



contrast, was regarded an honourable way of being put to death, and a convict could count himself lucky when he was pardoned from the gallows to the sword. Regardless of the pleas of Lady Mary, the wife of William de BRIOUZE, the gallows were built and properly used. But problems occurred, in the first place only technical ones: the gallows collapsed, so both rebels had to be hanged twice (other sources say, thrice) until finally the sentence had successfully been carried out. Lady Mary, obviously a very faithful woman, decided that now she had to appeal to not only a more merciful Lord than her husband was, but an even more powerful one to get her wish granted. So, immediately after receiving word of the death of William CRAGH, she started praying to the late bishop of Hereford, Thomas de CANTILUPE, who had only died a few years before, "that he give him life". And indeed this bishop—who must have been a specialist on miracles of this kind, since the canons of Hereford later spoke of forty resurrections that were due to the bishop's intercession—successfully did what he had been asked: William CRAGH, who had shown all signs of death (having voided his bowels and bladder, his eyeballs hanging out of their sockets, no breathing etc.) and who, according to the servant who had taken him off the gallows, had "as much life [in him] as there is in a stone," was brought back to life.

Seventeen years later, in 1307, this miraculous incident was one of the most important reasons why a papal commission (including one commissioner who, a few years later, would be in the canonization commission of Thomas AQUINAS, as well as another one who was later appointed commissioner in the infamous inquisition of the Templars) arrived at the conclusion that Thomas de CANTILUPE was in fact a Saint; however, owing to political circumstances, the official canonization of Thomas de CANTILUPE was delayed for quite a while until, in 1320, Pope JOHN XXII officially made him a Saint of the Catholic Church. The respective canonization inquiry (whose documents are to this day preserved in the Vatican Library) is the most important source for the dramatic events of 1290. There were nine surviving eyewitnesses, among them William de BRIOUZE junior (the son of the late William de BRIOUZE), his stepmother Lady Mary de BRIOUZE, and William CRAGH himself, who—apart from his survival—apparently had not profited

from his resurrection: he was a poor man with no fame at all. Lady Mary had not seen him since the events of 1290 and William de BRIOUZE junior was even convinced that he had died a few years earlier, although William CRAGH had lived in the same corner of Wales where he had been sentenced to death seventeen years before.

BARTLETT shows that even in the Middle Ages, miraculous resurrections were rather rare occurrences—but the further the Middle Ages proceeded, the more usual resurrections became. He uses the canonization processes in France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to show that resurrection only accounted for 1.26 percent of the miracles recorded, but increased to 10.2 percent in the fourteenth century. But even more interesting than this change in quantity was the change in the quality of life-saving miracles, which BARTLETT also illustrates by means of statistics. Accordingly, the Saints not only became more active in the life-saving business, they also seem to have become better jurists. The records show that from the sixth to the eleventh century most of those who were saved from hanging due to "saintly" interventions were regarded as guilty. From the twelfth century onwards this changed: now mainly people who were subsequently discovered to have been unjustly sentenced were saved from death. BARTLETT, a well-known specialist on ordeals, thus shows that the Christian God of the later Middle Ages (respectively his Saints) had, along with medieval society, developed traits of a more moral and legally better justifiable conscience.

Still, moral issues do not seem to have played a major role in the canonization process of St. Thomas de CANTILUPE—on the contrary. BARTLETT seems to be fairly astonished when he writes that William de BRIOUZE junior and others, when being interrogated by the papal commissioners in 1307, were still convinced that William CRAGH had been guilty and a notorious malefactor, but at the same time were adamant that nothing but supernatural engagement could have saved him. BARTLETT cannot really explain this from his point of view, although in his eyes, it makes the respective witnesses quite reliable. Although I cannot go into detail, one thing is for sure: anyone with a penchant for exciting and dramatic stories will be captivated by BARTLETT's story.

But there is more to this tale when interpreted from a Girardian point of view: We all know that the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition with its major impact on European history has basically dissolved the inseparable bonds between violence and the sacred—not least meaning that those killed by a lynch-mob could no longer be divinized like it was done in archaic cultures. Instead of having monstrous as well as divine features, they are more usually attributed with repulsive character traits only. Yet, as is shown in BARTLETT's book, death and the supernatural were not entirely separated. There was no extensive congruence any more, but still intensive relations between the two dimensions. The incidents depicted by Robert BARTLETT show a most interesting variation of this kind of relations. As we have seen, the nine witnesses of the resurrection of 1290 were extremely adamant that William CRAGH had not only been saved from the gallows, but had in fact been dead and was resurrected because of the intervention of St. Thomas de CANTILUPE. BARTLETT is right when he writes that saving someone from being executed is something very different from bringing the dead back to life. That does not mean that the first was regarded as less miraculous. BARTLETT refers to the canonization process of St. ELIZABETH OF THURINGIA, where miracles of the former kind were of great importance. Consequently, we can see that for CANTILUPE's process a certain relation between death and sainthood must have been obvious and rather important (although a "mere" saving from death by the Saint would have sufficed for a canonization process); however, these dimensions were not united in one individual (like in archaic cultures), but perceivably divided between the two persons involved: William CRAGH was the dead, Thomas de CANTILUPE the Saint—ironically, the convict was brought back to life, whereas the Saint had already been (and remained) dead. From a Christian perspective, of course, this has to be considered quite differently: While the successfully hanged William CRAGH in a way stayed socially dead, regardless of his miraculous biological condition, Thomas de CANTILUPE had proved by his miracle that he had achieved eternal life in heaven, regardless of *his* biological condition. In this context, it would be interesting to have a closer look at the medieval (and modern) idea of the Christian veneration of Saints—especially when it comes to the question as to what extent dead Saints began to "displace" living Saints like, for example, anchorites.

What makes BARTLETT's book so fascinating from a Girardian viewpoint is that (apart from important insights into ecclesiastical and social structures of that time) it casts light on the mentality of ordinary people in medieval Europe. They had no problem believing that a still collectively accepted murder (i.e. capital punishment) and the supernatural were deeply inter-

connected—but neither had they problems with clearly distinguishing these two dimensions. Not even the eventual resurrection of a malefactor who was regarded guilty could make them blend these two dimensions. The resurrected William CRAGH was neither deemed innocent nor was he made a Saint, and St. Thomas de CANTILUPE was not made an evil spirit either, bringing back to life those who had, after all, justly been sentenced to death. Death and sainthood were clearly divided but remained interrelated. In this context, it is remarkable that the records do not tell anything about feelings of remorse of those who had been favouring CRAGH's execution, considering that St. Thomas de CANTILUPE evidently had a different opinion. They still believed to have had perfectly justified reasons to hang William CRAGH, but were likewise convinced that by St. Thomas's intervention, divine action had brought him back to life. Could this be an important feature of what René GIRARD calls "sacrificial Christianity", the emergence of the ability to detect an essential hiatus between collective violence and the sacred, *along* with the conviction that they are essentially interconnected? I tend to think so. Robert BARTLETT's book, in any case, provides most precious insights into a fascinating variation of the relation between collective violence and the supernatural. Girardians—mostly theologians—like to speak of "sacrificial Christianity", especially when it comes to explaining strange detours of Christianity's history from the essence of its revealing origins. What "sacrificial Christianity" actually is, though, is not quite sure; sometimes I think its unquestionably important hermeneutical role has become some kind of rhetorical fetish in the discourse, with hardly any precise content at all. Not least in order to develop a deeper understanding of this matter, it seems to me of utmost importance that Girardian thinking adopts genuine historical issues and questions (or at least their results). This is certainly not a one-way-street: just as Girardian thinkers have to acknowledge historical science, historians should be encouraged to use the hermeneutical tools provided by mimetic theory, to find out if they could help to better understand certain historical phenomena and structures. BARTLETT's book makes clear how promising such a collaboration could be. It gives most intriguing insights, even if BARTLETT does not seem to know anything about mimetic theory.

*Mathias Moosbrugger*

**Celdran Johannessen, Hélène: *Prophètes, sorciers, rumeurs. La violence dans trois romans de Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly (1808-1889)*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, coll. "Faux Titre", 2008. (305 pp.) ISBN: 978-90-420-2353-6; € 69**

"Why is there so much violence in the French Catholic novel?" Even if this question, once asked by liter-

ary critic Joyce O. LOWRIE, is only quoted in a footnote (259) by Hélène CELDRAN JOHANNESEN it seems to be one of the central issues at stake in her convincing (Girardian) close reading of three novels by one of the more original nineteenth century French novelists, Jules BARBEY D'AUREVILLY (1808-1889). Going against the stream of much of Aurevillian criticism—that has mainly stressed the individual characters' predicaments and their (often violent) passions—JOHANNESEN has taken a look at the often violent "inderividual" dynamics and group-dynamics and, most importantly, at collective violence in D'AUREVILLY's literary universe.

In most French reviews of JOHANNESEN's study the contribution of mimetic theory to the difficult case of D'AUREVILLY's often enigmatic novels has been recognized, which is no small merit. By reading three of D'AUREVILLY's more important novels "in the light of human sciences" (274), especially GIRARD's mimetic theory, and by paying close attention to the relation between violence and the supernatural JOHANNESEN has indeed shed new light on the literary work of a difficult author.

Jules BARBEY D'AUREVILLY, whose life-span covers the major part of the nineteenth century has influenced such ("mimetic") authors as Marcel PROUST and Henry JAMES and has received a lot of new critical attention recently. BARBEY is often described as a man of contradictions. He grew up in Normandy (France) in a bourgeois family that had been ennobled a few decades before the French Revolution broke out. Afterwards he lived as a kind of dandy ("a trivial king in a trivial world" in his own words) and a polemic literary critic. At the age of 39 he reverted, at least intellectually at first, to his childhood Catholic faith. (That was, coincidentally, at the same age as a certain René GIRARD who would revert to his childhood Catholic faith more than a century later). BARBEY D'AUREVILLY however seems to have ever remained a very polemical author with something unmistakably dandyish about him. Literary critic Pierre COLA once wrote he was "Catholic in name and d'Aurevilly for everything else." (12) JOHANNESEN does not agree with this statement and I think she might be right. More than once BARBEY D'AUREVILLY would nevertheless shock and fascinate his contemporaries. He could write a very polemic monarchist, reactionary and "extreme" Catholic pamphlet in the vein of a Joseph DE MAISTRE (*Prophets of the past*) and at the same time deliver a novel that for many appeared shockingly liberal by its explicit depictions of evil and disordered passions (*An old mistress*). Later he would have troubles with French justice both for his novelistic "liberalism" and his polemic non-literary writing (against the *Revue des deux Mondes*, for instance). BARBEY himself saw it as his duty, as a Catholic artist, to be realistic in the depic-

tion of sin. About one of his most violent and most Catholic novels (the one that has a special importance in JOHANNESEN's study), *Un Prêtre marié*, (*A Married Priest*), he himself wrote that the novel was "written to the glory of God and banned from all Catholic bookstores". (223)

Next to *Un prêtre marié* JOHANNESEN has studied *Une vieille maitresse* (*An Old Mistress*) and *L'ensorcelée* (*The Bewitched*). In the vein of GIRARD, JOHANNESEN lets literature speak more than she speaks about literature. She very carefully reads her sources and quotes abundantly from the novels. Even more than an impressive close reading, JOHANNESEN's is a "close hearing". BARBEY's literary world is indeed an oral world, a world full of rumors, a world with strange prophets and sorcerers, who chatter, predict and curse. Interestingly, this cursing, predicting, and chattering very often leads to so-called "capital scenes", scenes of some kind of collective violence.

In her introduction JOHANNESEN positions her research in the context of Aurevillian criticisms and also gives a concise and elegant overview of mimetic theory. In her first chapter she shows the unity of important micro-stories in all three novels. BARBEY is famous for the sophisticated intricacy of narratives in his stories. Yet a crucial aspect of these ingenious literary structures that have the micro-stories as building blocks often seems to go unnoticed, which makes it difficult to understand their function. All these "stories in the Story" have a victim in their center, a victim of some mob. Mostly those victims did not receive a proper grave, neither some appropriate funeral ritual after they had been killed. According to JOHANNESEN, the repeated stories function as a kind of tomb, as a ritual. They are the only "monuments erected to the memory" (70) of the killed ones. She calls these stories in the larger story "récituel" (from "récit", story and "rituel", ritual).

Yet those violent micro-stories do not have the pacifying effect one would expect from some ritual. They only further the exasperation of violence in the novels. Without being too explicit about this, JOHANNESEN wonderfully shows how BARBEY's novels are to be read in an apocalyptic context: the old rituals are no longer able to "contain" violence as they once were. In *Un prêtre marié* by the end of the novel all main characters have died a violent death. JOHANNESEN refers to a kind of rage, a violent frenzy that is at work in BARBEY's novels even though this frenzy does not seem necessary from a dramatic point of view. The frenzy is sought to appease violence, but eventually only fuels it. JOHANNESEN speaks of an "aestheticism of the worst" (73).

BARBEY's penchant for the worst, an escalation to the extremes that leads to scenes of collective violence, is not only visible in the novels as a whole but also in the above-mentioned micro-stories. In *Une*

*vielle maitresse* the intriguing and frightening story of the “blanche Caroline” is told. Hermangarde is in Carteret, on the coast of Normandy. It is evening. She is saddened by her future husband’s presumed infidelity since he has contacted his old Spanish mistress again. Hermangarde sees a grand Spanish ship coming, a ship “more beautiful and stronger than all the other” (35). Walking towards the sea she meets some people around a fire. A homeless man, speaking in the local dialect, declares he has seen something white. Could it have been the “blanche Caroline” (“the white Caroline”)? It is believed this white girl named Caroline is haunting the place, looking for the tomb she has never received.

What could be the reason for these supernatural beliefs and legends? Hermangarde asks father Griffon, also standing there around the fire. “Who is this Caroline, father Griffon” (36)? It turns out she was a young Danish lady, whose father had died. She had embarked on a Danish boat. Being the only lady on the ship all fell in love with her. She loved no one, “not even the captain” (37). Her indifference and the rivalry of all men arouse a generalized mimetic desire. Suddenly all become equal. As JOHANNESSEN remarks, the hierarchical distinctions do no longer matter. The captain is on the same level as the others. In his sudden envious rage, the captain kills an officer in the most bloody manner. Two days later, helped by other men, he decides to bury the “blanche Caroline” alive. After this spontaneous “burial” (without ceremony or tomb) it seems that the crisis on the boat has ended.

As already suggested above, the story the people are telling functions as the “tomb” Caroline has never received. For GIRARD the tombstone is the “symbol” par excellence for culture, since it hides the innocent victim on which it is founded. Yet in the case of the above-mentioned micro-story there is no tombstone. It is clear for everyone that Caroline is innocent. The “récituels” (the stories as rituals) also do not really seem to fulfill their function. We have thus arrived at a time in which the old rituals no longer function as they should to expel and hide human violence. Could it be that this is the main reason for the “aestheticism of the worst” in BARBEY’s novels, even more than his sometimes idiosyncratic Catholic ideas (JOHANNESSEN’s hypothesis). In my view the “aestheticism of the worst” seems to reflect something of the “escalation to the extremes” GIRARD’s speaks of in his book on CLAUSEWITZ. JOHANNESSEN had finished working on her book just before *Achever Clausewitz* has been published.

JOHANNESSEN makes a fine observation when she writes that in *Un prêtre marié*, the most violent of all the studied novels, the scene with Calixte’s cross seems to be a scene in which the cross also speaks of vengeance. Here the amount of violence seems to be

generated by BARBEY’s Catholic imagination. *Un prêtre marié* is so violent because its author is so Catholic. The last chapter of JOHANNESSEN’s study is entitled “René Girard against Joseph de Maistre”. There is no doubt that BARBEY has been influenced by DE MAISTRE and has taken over some of his extreme Catholic ideas. Some of this has no doubt had an effect on his novels. Yet I would only follow JOHANNESSEN’s view with some reservations. At least a large part of the violent escalation in *Un prêtre marié* seems to be the outcome of the breeding of the already violent mimetic passions of the characters, more than of its author’s Catholic imagination. God and those who represent His authority according to Calixte (her own father and Néel’s father) are not as important for the action as they appear in the characters’ words. Néel is in love with Calixte, who is told to be the model of purity in the novel. Calixte keeps distance, stressing that their respective fathers stand between them. Yet her actions are, at the very best, ambivalent. In order to explain to Néel that their love is impossible she takes him by the hand and leads him into her bedroom. In order to make clear that she will be living as a kind of religious sister in the future she declares, in her bedroom, that she is already engaged and that her future husband is a jealous one (referring to God!). The whole scene is ambivalent, as are the characters’ (violent) passions. In the context of the severe religious imagery it would seem a near provocation to refer to the self-destructive logic of desire in SHAKESPEARE’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, it seems that in BARBEY’s novel we would only need a Friar Lawrence to warn us that “those violent desires have violent ends.”

My small reservation on a matter that according to JOHANNESSEN herself is open to further discussion does not diminish the quality of her study. Reading *Prophètes, sorciers, rumeurs*, one is literally immersed in BARBEY’s terrifying literary universe. JOHANNESSEN has beautifully demonstrated the interpretative power of GIRARD’s mimetic theory for BARBEY. This becomes even clearer through her often fascinating comparisons with other criticisms and other important theoreticians in the human sciences. Hers is a must read for all who take an interest in mimetic theory and (French) literature.

Simon de Keukelaere

**Scott Cowdell, *Abiding Faith: Christianity Beyond Certainty, Anxiety, and Violence*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009, 232 pp. ISBN 978-1-60608-223-2, \$21.60**

This is a very dense contribution on a valuable topic. We need books like this that spell out in critical fashion ways that we can live our faith in a world where it finds itself, often quite subtly, under attack. More specifically, I think that the spirituality that is implicit

in mimetic theory needs more expositions like COWDELL's.

By describing the book as "dense" I mean that it covers, both conceptually and historically, a lot of ground in little space. An overview of its contents will make that clear.

*Abiding Faith* is composed of two parts. Part I, titled "Faith in the Crucible of Modernity" is an aetiology of the problems that make the living out of faith in today's world difficult, while Part II, "Belonging, Believing, and Behaving" is more prescriptive of this living out.

COWDELL begins with a kind of phenomenology of what it feels like to have faith in the early part of the twenty-first century. He holds that for people in developed countries faith has become "a matter of individual choice and bricolage" (p. 2). He explores the ways that secularization and consumerism have further attenuated faith's impact on our lives.

COWDELL's account of modernity is heavily indebted to Stephen TOUMLIN's "revisionist account of modern origins" as outlined in the latter's work *Cosmopolis*, although COWDELL pushes the story further back, before Descartes rationalism to the nominalism of the late Middle Ages.

Although the whole book is informed by the anthropology of GIRARD and the theology of ALISON, the third chapter, "The False Sacred: Modernity and Its Victims," contains the most explicit analysis of modernity in mimetic terms. That is, COWDELL sees the West as a "system" and analyzes it in terms of the concept of the "false sacred" or deviated transcendence. Modern society manages its anxieties through the scapegoating of a range of "others." In addition to GIRARD, he uses FOUCAULT's analysis of deviance and foreignness, as well as post-colonial theory, environmentalism, feminism and Queer theory to specify the particular way in which the "others" get identified precisely as other.

COWDELL's response to the situation that he has outlined in Part I is a particular type of mysticism he calls "abiding faith." He defines this as "integral Christian belonging that is rational but not rationalistic, inseparable from the experience of Christian life but not purely experiential, affective but not necessarily emotional, self-involving and self-transforming but not centered on the self, and entirely ecclesial and sacramental though with more spark than the typically dry formalism of modern 'organized religion' normally delivers" (p. 134). As one can see from the structure of the definition, COWDELL is trying to walk a fine, indeed an important line here. He does not want to surrender rationality to the skeptics, experience to the existentialists, affect to the romantics, nor the self to the narcissists but he also wants to avoid the opposite pitfalls. He uses mimetic theory as a kind of balancing pole as he walks this tightrope. Thus, he

sees the process of conversion as a process of learning (rational) new desires (affect) from new models (community) so that a new self is formed. He gives answers to skeptics like Richard DAWKINS by showing that it is their notion of rationality that is restricted. The cognitive basis for faith is a kind of "participatory knowing." One knows Christ by being incorporated into his life, death, and resurrection through the mediation of the community, the Church, and its liturgical and sacramental practices. Abiding faith becomes a form of life.

For COWDELL correct assertions of the Creed are not enough in themselves to constitute abiding faith. The Creed has its place but unless the acknowledgment of its truth gets cashed out in a consistent way of living, the Creed becomes another weapon by which to oppose the other.

There is much in this book to praise. Perhaps most importantly, as I mentioned above, is the giving expression to a distinct spirituality that flows out of an understanding of the life of faith when that understanding is deeply rooted in mimetic theory. COWDELL engages a number of counter-positions in respectful dialogue. He is trying to describe a life of faith that transforms the world at the same time as it accepts the modern world for what it is—secular, individualistic, expressive, free.

My criticism of the book goes back to my characterization of it as "dense." First, I would like to make clear what I am *not* criticizing. COWDELL uses an extremely wide range of thinkers. There is nothing wrong with this. Although I am not competent to judge the use of each one; where I am competent, I felt his use was accurate. With any survey like this much is left out. Again, I have no problem with this. But in this case I felt that COWDELL's use of his sources runs the danger of replicating what he is criticizing.

Let me try to make this more concrete. TOUMLIN sees a critical moment in the rise of *Cosmopolis* occurring when Restoration England takes over a "set of provisional and speculative half-truths" from Cartesian and Leibnizian philosophy, which then form a "Newtonian oral tradition" and confer "Divine legitimacy on the political order of the sovereign nation-state" (Toumlin, *Cosmopolis*, 117 and 128; quoted on 67). I fear that COWDELL is helping to spread a set of "provisional and speculative half-truths" contained in a narrative that traces so many of modernity's problems back to late-medieval nominalism. This is beginning to form a new oral tradition of good guys and bad guys in the history of thought and, while it may not confer legitimacy, it does allow for looking for someone or something to blame for how we got here. 'If only DUNS SCOTUS hadn't been born; that's where all our problems began.' To engage the tradition is to struggle to give it a coherent shape, first, in one's own

*continued on p. 15*



**EUROPEAN SUMMER SCHOOL MIMETIC THEORY**  
July 12–25, 2010 The Netherlands

**Crisis and Truth**

An interdisciplinary introduction into the thinking of René Girard

The first Summer School Mimetic Theory will be held from 12 – 25 July in Leusden, The Netherlands. The course will give a systematic introduction to Mimetic Theory as developed by René Girard and his students, and aims at offering participants a new insight into the relationship between culture, violence and religion.

**Mimetic Theory**

The recognition of ‘imitation’ as a fundamental motivational force in human behaviour is the point of departure of mimetic theory. While enlightenment thinking and the human sciences have no problem accepting the role of imitation in learning processes, they have disregarded the importance of imitation in both the way we make our intimate individual choices and in the genesis and persistence of violent conflict. Instead they have promoted a belief in the uniqueness of the individual. Our failure to understand crises, both in our individual lives and in the world at large, might be attributed to this misapprehension of the autonomous self. Girard shows that in great novels the futility of the search for a unique self is exposed as a ‘romantic’ illusion.

Girard also opens our eyes to violence as the source of social order and consensus. Existing or potential divisiveness is externalised as violence against a third party – an enemy, scapegoat or other presence marked as evil. This so-called scapegoat mechanism is a self-regulating mimetic process that has to remain hidden from those involved in order to function. Our blindness to this violence has archaic religious roots, which, according to Girard, have been progressively exposed in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

For Girard the concept of mimesis is the key to understanding other fields of cultural knowledge ranging from myths, Greek and Shakespearean tragedy and biblical scriptures to human evolution and the crisis of our post-9/11 world. His innovative contribution to the human sciences is increasingly being recognised. (see Girard Network). Mimetic theory offers a challenging new playing field for reconnecting the various academic disciplines that study human relations and culture.

**Teaching programme**

Leading scholars in literature, psychology, Bible studies, anthropology, political science, etc. many of whom have closely worked with René Girard will be teaching the course. Following Michael Kirwan’s (2005) observation that Girard’s work reads as a ‘thriller’ the Summer School course offers students a journey through Girard’s texts, his debates with other thinkers and his reflections on violence and religion in the world of today.

The course will consist of lectures, discussions of cases and reading and writing assignments both individually and in groups. Writing assignments may eventually serve as a building block of a larger project or a credit in the home university. Core texts will include chapters of Girard’s *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* and other key texts.

Participants will be expected to have read an introductory text before arrival in Leusden.

**Student Profile**

The Summer School will be taught in English and aims at:

- top undergraduates who have just or almost finalized their Bachelor study
- graduate students
- PhD students

The number of participants is 25 max.

## Venue

The International School of Philosophy (ISVW) in Leusden, 50 kilometres from Amsterdam will host the Summer School. This location offers an inspiring climate for learning and reflection.

## Tuition fee and grants

The European Summer School is generously funded by Imitatio. Therefore we are able to keep the tuition fee at € 1500 to cover the costs for tuition, course materials and administration only. The costs for accommodation and meals are taken care of by Imitatio. The tuition fee has to be paid in full before 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010 via bank transfer. Participants should arrange their own travel and insurance. **If you want to participate and finances are a problem, note that grants are available.** Contact Therese Onderdenwijngaard [todw@xs4all.nl]

## More information and application

If you wish to apply, please, download the application form [http://www.bezinningscentrum.nl/teksten/girard/ess2010/Application\\_Form\\_ESS2010.doc](http://www.bezinningscentrum.nl/teksten/girard/ess2010/Application_Form_ESS2010.doc). The application deadline is 15<sup>th</sup> May 2010. For updated information about the programme keep track of MT Summer School 2010.

If you have questions, feel free to contact:

Thérèse Onderdenwijngaard

Organizer European Summer School Mimetic Theory

Secretary Dutch Girard Society

The Summer School Mimetic Theory is organized by Dutch Girard Society and has been generously funded by Imitatio.

mind and then to share that limited vision with others. To simply take over someone else's narrative is not only spare oneself that struggle (which may be necessary, we can't all do everything), but also to strip the original vision of its context, that is, of its viewpoint and partiality. And therefore it is to strip of its beauty. This makes for easy consumption on the one hand, and a certain hollowing out of the tradition on the other. To "fast-forward," as COWDELL puts it, through abiding faith in Christian history does not, I fear, render us any the wiser (p. 134 referring especially to pp. 122-133). Rather, it encourages the very superficiality and flattening of meaning for which abiding faith is meant to be a counter. Such contradictions in form and content mar this work.

*Jeremiah Alberg*

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**Grande, Per Bjørnar: *Mimesis and Desire: An Analysis of the Religious Nature of Mimesis and Desire in the Work of René Girard*. Köln, Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009. (220 pp.) ISBN: 978-3-8383-0239-3; € 79**

Although "mimetic theory" has won widespread acceptance within the world of COV&R as the most appropriate designation for the cluster of conceptual insights associated with the work of René GIRARD, it nevertheless seems that the term *mimesis* has been eclipsed for many by the term *scapegoating*. Indeed, one can detect, on the evidence of the sessions at COV&R meetings, a certain tendency towards a division between literary critics exploring the implications of mimetic desire and theologians and scholars of religion more preoccupied with religious/political violence rooted in scapegoating.

Per GRANDE's rich and thoughtful analysis of the religious dimension of mimetic desire in GIRARD's work offers us an important corrective to such a tendency. He makes the argument that far from belonging only or primarily to the domain of literary studies, mimetic desire is the most fundamental and comprehensive concept in GIRARD's thought for illuminating *religious* phenomena. Against any tendency to regard mimetic desire as the necessary precedent to the victimage mechanism but dispensable thereafter as an explanatory concept, GRANDE insists on its continuing indispensability, especially when what needs explaining is the religious dimension of modern secular culture. Since ours is a post-sacrificial culture, the victimage mechanism becomes a rather attenuated and therefore labored explanatory concept compared with the more elastic concept of mimetic desire, especially when the latter is able to penetrate the guises under which an "idolized sacred mentality" persists in modernity.(184)

GRANDE's argument for the paramount importance of mimetic desire goes further than making the case that it is central to GIRARD's account of religion, before and after sacrificial culture. He attempts to demonstrate, further, that the concept of mimetic desire itself has a religious origin—that, specifically, it is rooted in GIRARD's christology. To quote the author: "My aim ... is to interpret mimetic theory as basically worked out from christological reflections and driven by Christian belief." (15)

This ambitious argument as to the religious import and origins of mimetic desire in Girardian thought is developed in four parts. In the first part, GRANDE offers an overview of the major stages in GIRARD's work on mimetic desire and scapegoating, (though he stops, without explanation, at *Things Hidden ...*). Af-

ter then considering the discussion among prominent Girardians, including Raymund SCHWAGER, Gil BAILLIE, and Andrew MCKENNA, he concludes that GIRARD himself and most Girardians have indeed given priority to the scapegoat mechanism—with the exception of Eric GANS, who has questioned this priority, taking mimetic theory “back to basics” with a greater emphasis on the mimetic. GRANDE’s own return to the basics is exemplified in the second part of the book, in which he explores in detail the term *mimesis*, with a particular focus on the differences and connections between mimesis as acquisition and mimesis as representation. Here he carefully considers the permutations of GIRARD’s thought in relation to other major interpreters of mimesis and desire, especially PLATO and ARISTOTLE among the ancients and HEGEL and DERRIDA among the moderns. This section ends with an interesting discussion of GIRARD’s debt to Denis de ROUGEMONT’s analysis of the religious-heretical origins of western desire in *Love in the Western World*. The third part of the book is devoted to situating GIRARD’s mimetic theory within the tradition of twentieth-century science of religion. GIRARD himself claimed that his theory could be read as a “social scientific vindication” of the Gospel insight, and by lining him up with the likes of Emile DURKHEIM, Rudolf OTTO, Mircea ELIADE, and Peter BERGER, GRANDE goes a long way towards justifying the claim that mimetic theory (with the emphasis on *mimetic*) deservedly occupies a place among the other grand theories of religion in modern social science. GIRARD’s christology, implicit and explicit, as the foundation of his understanding of mimetic desire, is the subject of the fourth and final part.

In addition to the significance of the basic argument itself, there are several reasons why this book should be of great interest to various orientations within COV&R, especially scholars of religion and theology. First, it is immensely informative in situating GIRARD’s thought on mimetic desire and religion in relation to the intellectual tradition preceding and contemporary with him. GRANDE sets up a dialogue between GIRARD and other significant thinkers that is careful and balanced, yet not afraid to call for revision of mimetic theory where warranted. I would highlight by way of one example the section on PLATO in which the author argues cogently that GIRARD’s dismissal of PLATO on mimesis is too quick. (Given the richness of the intertextual dialogue orchestrated in this book, it is regrettable that there is no index for easier access to writers of particular interest to various readers; in addition to those already mentioned in this review, there are many others of importance).

A second strong feature of the book lies in the way it suggests and provokes subjects for further reflection. Here I must restrict myself to two examples (there are many more). GRANDE points out that Gi-

rardian mimesis focuses on imitation in and of the present, while much human activity and desiring can be understood as an imitation of past experiences. What is needed, then, is an extension of the analysis of mimesis into past time, a sort of “retroactive mimesis.” (59) Taking the dimension of past time more into account would extend the range of mimetic theory psychologically (in regard to personal identity) and historically (in regard to cultural identity), as well as rendering it less dependent on literally present mimetic models. This seems to me richly suggestive.

My second example of enticing suggestions broached in *Mimesis and Desire* is that Girardians, especially scholars of religion and theology, would do well to revisit GIRARD’s first major work, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, and look at it with fresh eyes, rather than assuming that the literary and psychological insights there have been superseded by the later anthropology. This brings us back to the book’s chief argument as to the continuing centrality of mimetic desire to GIRARD’s analysis of religion, particularly in societies in which individual desire has been emancipated by the disappearance of explicit sacrificial protections. In my view, GRANDE is persuasive in making the case that there are worthwhile possibilities here for further investigation. The other part of his argument, that the concept of mimetic desire itself has a religious origin, might also be expressed as a call to return to *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, this time with a new appreciation of the christology underpinning its analysis of desire. While the direction indicated here might be suggestive, there is really very little to work with because the christology is so undeveloped in this early work, and it remains thin in GIRARD’s later works. GRANDE strives to deepen Girardian christology by relating it to the theological tradition, particularly the *imitatio Christi* motif; but he concludes that GIRARD’s view of Christ “cannot be fixed within a specific theological tradition.”(167)

Perhaps, however, the place to look for the deeper resonances of GIRARD’s christological reflections is not among the formal theologians at all, but among Christian visionaries such as DOSTOEVSKY and TOLSTOY. Indeed, one of the most intriguing aspects of GIRARD’s mimetic theory is that he turns so strongly to the former on the subject of mimetic desire, but when it comes to the *imitatio Christi* in the face of worldly violence, instead of DOSTOEVSKY’s emphasis on participatory imitation within the support of an agapic community (that is, the church), he seems closer to TOLSTOY’s ethic of an individual response on the basis of the rational will.

Bruce Ward



**Kirwan, Michael: *Girard and Theology*: London – New York, T & T Clark 2009. (165 pp.) ISBN HB: 0-576-0326-4; £ 60; PB: 0-567-03227-2; £ 17**

As already with *Discovering Girard*, so again with *Girard and Theology* Michael KIRWAN has succeeded in a remarkable task: this time laying out GIRARD's and the mimetic theory's links to theology in a broad and inclusive manner, and that within a—considering the task—relatively thin and very readable book. In 12 chapters and an epilogue KIRWAN walks the reader through GIRARD's encounter with theology, his developments in the process, and on the way also shows how mimetic theory is still in a process of further development.

In the Introduction, “The Man on the Train”, KIRWAN gives a first glimpse on GIRARD and asks whether he should be called a philosopher or a critic. Chapter 2 lays out GIRARD's “Life and work”, recommending to read *Things Hidden* and *Evolution and Conversion*, which frame twenty years of development of GIRARD's thinking, in order to get to know his theory. Chapter 3 provides a first overview of the theory, characterizing it as tripartite: “First, the mimetic [...]—and therefore potentially rivalrous and violent—nature of desire [...]; secondly, the scapegoating mechanism as the source of group cohesion and social order [...]. The third topic [...] is the power of the Judeo-Christian revelation as the vehicle of our enlightenment concerning the first two.” (21) KIRWAN follows the development along the line of GIRARD's most important publications and connects it with topical critical thinkers like R. DAWKINS, and all that in just a few pages—brief and concise but not in an oversimplifying way. Argumentation for the scientific status of the theory, drawing on FLEMING and HAMERTON-KELLY provides theoretical underpinning.

To my joy, the whole Chapter 4 is devoted to GIRARD's “Innsbruck Connection: Dramatic theology”, and there especially to GIRARD's longstanding collaboration and exchange with Raymund SCHWAGER, introducing the main theological themes to be then treated in more depth in later chapters. KIRWAN tells about a process of mutual enrichment by GIRARD and SCHWAGER and relates the latter's five-act-model in a concise way, coming to the conviction that “Schwager's dramatic soteriology represents the most thorough application of GIRARD's concept of the scapegoat mechanism to Christological questions” (39). KIRWAN here also displays one of the great strengths of his book: he places SCHWAGER's theological use of mimetic theory in the discussion that it engendered. Despite the relative brevity of the book, it allows the reader to glimpse the development of mimetic theory and its theological applications as an ongoing process of discussion in research groups, symposia, and—not to forget—the yearly COV&R conferences. The

names of important interpreters (e.g. J. NIEWIADOMSKI and W. PALAVER and critics (e.g. J. GALVIN and G. BAUDLER) are part of the story, and KIRWAN manages to relate those of their thoughts and quote those passages that propel his introduction forward. As a scholar, one knows, how much research that requires, and still it looks very light-handed in KIRWAN's book.

Chapter 5, “A theological ‘anthropophany’”, tries to lay out GIRARD's mimetic anthropology spanned out between the themes of creation, original sin, and grace. Anthropocentric and theocentric approaches are seen as the two great poles, exemplified by Catholic Jesuit theologian Karl RAHNER and the Reformed theologian Karl BARTH. KIRWAN sees problems with both approaches and argues with the help of James ALISON that a theology in league with mimetic theory can offer a third way which avoids the others' pitfalls. For me this chapter of the book is somewhat problematic. Here I sometimes had the impression that huge theological enterprises were too easily subsumed under a heading (this concerns not only RAHNER and BARTH, but also BALTHASAR, KÜNG, SCHILLEBEECKX, LUTHER, CALVIN, PANNENBERG and MOLT-MANN). Although KIRWAN acknowledges in criticizing RAHNER that “often the problem lies, not with Rahner necessarily, but with some of his adherents” (54), I find RAHNER's treatment here not satisfactory. On the other hand, this chapter illustrates that, surprisingly, scholars working with mimetic theory, which started out as an anthropological theory, still have fundamental disagreements in the field of anthropology, as we have also witnessed at several COV&R conferences.

Chapter 6 places GIRARD's contribution to “The drama of salvation” in the context of contemporary theology and also of inter-religious dialogue, especially difficult with Islam because of its finding fault with the cross. KIRWAN does so by pointing to two dilemmas of the theology of salvation: first, he shows the dilemma between God's wrath and God's love by referring to SCHWAGER's historical-systematic essays on soteriology (*Der wunderbare Tausch*), then he opens up the range of possible interpretations of the incarnation by juxtaposing two completely differing views on it: St. Ignatius of Loyola views the incarnation as a remedy for human sin; it only became necessary because of human wickedness; however, for his almost contemporary, St. John of the Cross, “the Incarnation takes place so that the Son may be united with his radiant bride” (59), the creation. KIRWAN points out, with ALISON and W. LOWE, that the first approach, making Christ only a tool to fix things and spelling out redemption with a negative prefix only, is not satisfactory. Is mimetic theory's understanding of the Christ event “caught in the same pattern” (60)? KIRWAN argues that GIRARD did for our time, what ANSELM OF CANTERBURY had done for his, namely

“expressing dissatisfaction with one of the key images of salvation”, providing “a framework which allows the different picture and images to be placed in a meaningful pattern”, and providing a new starting-point in “one of the most evident and widely acknowledged social phenomena of our day, namely the victimization of men and women in the name of religious or quasi-religious institutions and ideologies” (63). With ALISON, KIRWAN concludes that mimetic theory does not prefix salvation with the negative because the realization of the negative happens retrospectively, looking back from salvation.

Chapter 7 discusses three metaphors of atonement that are of high importance for Western theology: Christ’s victory over the devil, the justice of God, and sacrifice. It concludes that “a mimetic analysis would acknowledge the importance of these three metaphors and arrange them in a very compelling narrative (perhaps a drama, to be more accurate)” (80). Chapter 8 is devoted to “Girard and the Bible”. KIRWAN explains that “Girard distinguishes three phases of scriptural interpretation: first, the creative reworking of myths and legendary material” in Genesis and Exodus; “secondly, [...] the prophets [...]”; thirdly, the Gospel and other New Testament records of [...] Christ”, which “confirm the ‘de-sacralizing’ tendency of the Old Testament writings” (84). KIRWAN discusses its merits and critics’ reservations, referring, among others, to J. WILLIAMS, R. HAMERTON-KELLY, S. GOODHART, G. BAILIE, R. SCHWAGER, R. NORTH, and W. BRUEGGEMANN.

Chapter 9 is dedicated to “Political theology”, dealing with “Violence and the sacred in the modern world”, the interpretative category of the “*katechon*”, Girardian readings of Th. HOBBS and C. SCHMITT, and “The ‘apocalyptic feeling’”. Chapter 10 provides “Views from the South” confronting mimetic theory and liberation theology with each other and looking at the problems of “witchcrazes” in today’s Africa. Chapter 11, “Girard and the religions”, points to the still underdeveloped capacity of mimetic theory to engage in dialogue with religions other than Judaism and Christianity. KIRWAN relates experiences and discussions from the COV&R conference at Boston College, and judges: “The 2000 Colloquium was a watershed for mimetic theory and the religions, though it seems to be as significant for its limitations and stuttering beginnings, as for the insights achieved and shared.” (128) Chapter 12, “GIRARD and the theologians”, discusses GIRARD’s often rather critical theological reception around three major themes: “The slaughter bench of historical Christianity”, “Girard’s God”, and “Girard’s gnosticism” (134)—the question of sacrifice already having been dealt with extensively in earlier chapters. The Epilogue casts a quick look at very recent developments, organ-

izational (the founding of *Imitatio*), as well as theoretical (GIRARD’s interest in CLAUSEWITZ).

I think Michael KIRWAN has succeeded in an almost impossible task: to provide (on 165 pages!) a brief, yet comprehensive overview of the interconnection between mimetic theory and theology, René GIRARD and many important theologians (KIRWAN mentions many more than I do in my review). Apart from that the biggest asset of the book is, as I mentioned already, that it shows how mimetic theory is still developing and how this process is carried on in so many institutions or informal meetings of like-minded persons. It shows that mimetic theory is alive and kicking! My only reservation, the too easy labeling of Rahner’s theology, is a minor matter compared to that. There is only more one thing, which does not concern the content of the book but its materiality: the paperback came apart in several places after one thorough reading, while the hardback is very stiffly priced. But can one put a price on ingenuity at all?

*Nikolaus Wandinger*

**Nordhofen, Jacob: *Durch das Opfer erlöst? Die Bedeutung der Rede vom Opfer Jesu Christi in der Bibel und bei René Girard*. Wien-Berlin, LIT 2008. (297 pp.) ISBN 978-3-7000-0876-6 (Österreich), 978-3-8258-1627-8 (Deutschland) (Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie, Bd. 26). € 29.90**

Considering the importance of notions about sacrifice for the theological reception of R. GIRARD, it seems reasonable to relate these to biblical statements about sacrifice. This is what J. NORDHOFEN does in his book, whose structure corresponds to its subtitle: first biblical texts about sacrifice are analyzed, then GIRARD’s understanding of sacrifice is presented. The confrontation of the two leads to a critique of mimetic theory. In this review I want to present NORDHOFEN’s most important theses but also intend to critically question them.

NORDHOFEN’s analysis commences from the multiple kinds of sacrifice in the Old Testament and emphasizes how soon the critique of sacrifice becomes very important. This brings about an ethization and a spiritualization of sacrifice; cultic rituals become less important, giving oneself over to God in trust and ethical behavior becomes the decisive factor. This line of thought is taken up in the New Testament, especially in talking about Jesus’ sacrifice. This expression does not merely relate to Jesus’ death on the cross—not even in Hebrews—but to Jesus’ whole life. That is one of the most important results of this work. The traditional interpretations of Jesus’ death, namely seeing it as satisfaction or substitutional propitiation, thus have become so obsolete that they are merely mentioned in passing and then rejected. It is very interesting to see the links NORDHOFEN shows between the Great Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur,

the Pessah Feast, and the New Testament understanding of sacrifice. Here the author's Judaic studies bear fruit. He emphasizes that sacrifice is by no means the only or decisive category for the New Testament to describe Christ's salvific act. Moreover the variety of sacrificial discourses has to be taken into account; they contain divergent elements leading into different directions that cannot be integrated into a unified understanding of sacrifice.

In discussing GIRARD and the mimetic theory, NORDHOFEN joins appreciation with criticism. He points to the hiatus between GIRARD's original, purely negative judgment on sacrifice and his later, more differentiated, positive view, first published in the 1995 Festschrift for Raymund SCHWAGER. He concurs with G. BAUDLER's criticism on this article's vagueness. However, it is this self-correction that makes it possible to link up the New Testament's usage of the term "Jesus' sacrifice" with mimetic theory. GIRARD, according to NORDHOFEN, succeeds in relating Jesus' sacrifice to God in a way that does not betray God's non-violence (cf. 11). Here NORDHOFEN emphatically agrees with GIRARD and stresses his significance for biblical exegesis and theology. Still, he also criticizes GIRARD and mimetic theory—its biblical exegesis, the "dubious" relation between structuralism and mimetic theory (cf. 238ff), the treatment of other major religions. NORDHOFEN claims that GIRARD merely dogmatically posits the uniqueness of the biblical tradition and that he has continually refused to follow up traces of enlightenment about the scapegoat mechanism in other religions (cf. 245). I cannot discuss this criticism here, yet I think it is at least partly justified or points toward problems that needed to be discussed in more detail.

However, I want to expressly reject NORDHOFEN's criticism of the universal claim and the "exclusivity" of mimetic theory (p. 224). He opines that mimetic theory insists on being able to portray the whole biblical truth (cf. 252). Against that assertion he argues that the categories of mimetic theory cannot comprehend the biblical message adequately. The Bible is concerned with love, not only with refraining from hate; for the Bible, revelation is an integral, personal act, much more than an intellectual enlightening about the scapegoat mechanism. NORDHOFEN sums up: If GIRARD had claimed to just portray part of reality, his theses would be more meaningful (cf. p. 224)

However, GIRARD's exclusivity in reality is a focus and a self-restriction to a specific kind of question. He is certainly convinced that this question has paramount significance for anthropology. GIRARD's emphasis on mimesis claims that this dimension of human behavior has not been taken seriously enough in the past. Thus the meaning of this focus is rather inclusive than exclusive: whatever is anthropologically relevant, it has a mimetic aspect. Modern an-

thropology and the humanities, theology included, ought to pay attention to the insights of mimetic theory and bring them to fruition in their respective fields of inquiry. Whatever questions they might follow in detail, they will encounter mimesis. Just think about R. SCHWAGER: As closely as he was connected to GIRARD on an academic and personal level, in his theology mimetic theory was one element alongside others—albeit a very characteristic and profile-enhancing element. NORDHOFEN has not overlooked that; yet he separates SCHWAGER's and PALAVER's open method from GIRARD's allegedly exclusive approach (cf. 226, 232-33; 244-45; 262).

Equally problematic is that NORDHOFEN judges GIRARD's claim of universality, i. e. his aim to make universally valid anthropological statements, to be a symptom of an absolutist way of thinking (cf. 274). NORDHOFEN generally tends to suspect universal statements as being ideological and fundamentalist (cf. 237). Yet, abuse does not justify giving up warranted use. How should science and scholarship, also Christian faith and theology, be possible without universal perspectives and statements? Moreover, in the age of the theory of evolution, GIRARD's effort to develop a general anthropology must be seen as his strength rather than his weakness. For a critical discussion NORDHOFEN would have to draw a much wider circle and to argue in a much more differentiated fashion than he does—and can do—in this dissertation.

As a consequence of his distaste for universal statements, NORDHOFEN remains stuck with the emphasis on the diversity, the polyphony, of biblical sacrificial language. Yet, theology lives by the creative tension between the wealth of aspects provided by Bible and tradition and the effort of systematic theology to dig out the universal structure of revelation and faith from them. It is systematically insufficient to merely state the relatedness of the biblical language of sacrifice to the language of self-giving. The concept of giving oneself is considerably wider than that of sacrifice. Giving oneself over can mean joy or even lust, yet it can entail strong efforts and hard suffering as well. Therefore the relationship between sacrifice, self-giving, and violence has to be clarified. Only that way can the relationship between the Christian faith and violence be clearly determined. The redemption of humanity from violence does not mean that Christians have simply been relieved of it.

Whatever else has to be said in this regard: The modern use of the term *sacrifice*, whose difference from traditional sacrificial terminology is addressed by NORDHOFEN (cf. 33, 188), indicates a situation demanding a decision that human persons encounter ever again: They have to decide how to handle the negative sides, the burdens, the sufferings that come with life. Should they be shifted onto one's neighbor,

thereby making him/her a victim or should they be shared and borne together? In extreme situations this kind of giving oneself over can entail the sacrifice of one's life. And incredibly complex entanglements can occur. Self-giving does not exclude violence, as many self-sacrifices in the past and present have shown. It was not NORDHOFEN's task to unravel these entanglements, but the relationship between sacrifice and giving over oneself needed to be described with more systematic precision, exactly because NORDHOFEN's book is a relevant contribution to the theological discussion on sacrifice. His criticism mirrors some reservations widely held among—at least German—academics.

Bernhard Dieckmann,  
Translation: Nikolaus Wandinger

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Roberta BARANOWSKI's review of Rosemary ERIKSON JOHNSEN's *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction* in the last issue of the *Bulletin* elicited some controversy, which led to the following letters: a Letter to the Editor by Martha REINEKE, and an exchange of letters by Ann ASTELL and the reviewer, who have asked me to publish this exchange in the form of open letters. While I regret the occasion for these letters, I am happy to publish them here, and hope that some good will result from them—and maybe this opens the *Bulletin* for a literary genre we haven't had so far: the Letter to the Editor. Many thanks to all involved.

Nikolaus Wandinger, *Bulletin* Editor

#### To the editor:

A feature of the COV&R *Bulletin* that I most appreciate is the book reviews, which typically summarize key themes, evaluate an argument, and situate a book in the context of current issues in a field and within a specific theoretical tradition or school of thought. Given these longstanding features of *Bulletin* book reviews, I was taken aback by Roberta BARANOWSKI's review in the October 2009 *Bulletin* of Rosemary ERIKSON JOHNSEN's *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction*. BARANOWSKI inexplicably neglects most of the typical goals of a review, choosing instead to take JOHNSEN to task for not writing the book that BARANOWSKI would have written were she to have elected a like topic of study. BARANOWSKI chides JOHNSEN for including in her book "a mere six references to Girard," and she describes as "cherry-picking," what is actually the author's nuanced approach to selecting representative crime fiction authors for study. Moreover, instead of sharing with readers JOHNSEN's argument, which is all but invisible in BARANOWSKI's review, BARANOWSKI lists seven areas of exploration on which she

would have focused were she to have written a book on feminist historical crime fiction.

But the most disappointing feature of the review is BARANOWSKI's failure to situate the book within the field of literary criticism and in the specific tradition out of which JOHNSEN works: feminist literary criticism. Although BARANOWSKI expresses "a certain amount of discomfort with the methodology" she demonstrates no knowledge of feminist literary criticism. For example, BARANOWSKI writes that JOHNSEN "contextualizes her feminist reading with references to contemporary literary criticism." But JOHNSEN's reading of the texts properly is identified as a sub-field *within* contemporary literary criticism. As a consequence, were she to have portrayed the author's approach accurately, BARANOWSKI would have stated that the author "contextualizes her reading *within* feminist literary criticism, a key critical method within the larger field of contemporary literary criticism." For BARANOWSKI, feminist literary criticism means "lining up individual authors as good, better, or best feminists." If BARANOWSKI's comment is meant as a derisive caricature of the field, it is not worthy of the *Bulletin*; if she offers it in good faith, BARANOWSKI's ignorance of feminist literary criticism is all but inexplicable. After all, this field dates from the mid-1970s and is currently represented by encyclopedias and dictionaries of feminist literary criticism (holdings at my university library feature ten weighty tomes), numerous academic journals, and thousands of books. Were BARANOWSKI to have researched this field before penning her review, she would have recognized that even though the word "feminist" has almost innumerable meanings, "feminist literary criticism" is defined and shaped by the scholars who work in this sub-field of contemporary literary criticism. BARANOWSKI describes herself as a "feminist" and "crime fiction fan." But neither of these roles qualifies her to define, contribute to, or analyze works of feminist literary criticism (just as the beautiful paintings that adorn the wall of my home do not prepare me to evaluate critical works written by an art historian nor does my active participation in Democratic politics in the Iowa caucuses qualify me to offer a review of a book on the caucuses penned by a political scientist).

A fair and informed review of *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction* would have made at least some of the following points. 1) At a time when critics such as Patricia MERIVALE suggest that crime fiction constitutes an increasingly arid environment for feminist literary criticism, the book is an innovative contribution that draws on crime fiction criticism, feminist historiography, and narrative theory to make its case. 2) Redressing previous neglect of a subgenre, JOHNSEN successfully demonstrates how representative works within it employ feminist

historiography to link women's writing with political awareness. Her argument is drawn with precision, insight, and careful attention to textual evidence. 3) The author also brings serious attention to important issues in feminist narrative theory, to which the book makes an illuminating contribution. Advancing a thesis grounded in the theory of feminist materialism, the author asserts that the texts she examines not only facilitate female readers' understanding of the world but also promote agency. 4) In exploring how women become "agents" (persons who initiate action autonomously and experience their lives as filled with choices), JOHNSEN's scholarship embraces the theoretical (philosophical treatments of agency) and the empirical (ethnographic studies). Indeed, what BARANOWSKI typifies as the "highly personal preface" to the book actually is the author's report on ethnographic research that she conducted among girls in order to augment her theoretical insights with empirical inquiry. 5) The book is on the forward edge of feminist literary criticism not only in its explorations of a key question that is shaping the field today—the nature, limits, and possibilities for the expression of agency—but also in its highly integrative method, which links historiography, feminist philosophical theory, and ethnographic inquiry with feminist literary criticism.

Martha J. Reineke, University of Northern Iowa

**Dear Roberta** (Baranowski),

For years I have enjoyed hearing Rosemary ERICKSON JOHNSEN present papers at our COV&R meetings. I was eager, therefore, to read your review of her book, *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction*. As a trained historian, a feminist, and a fan of crime fiction, you seemed the perfect reviewer of her work.

When I read your review in the last issue of the *COV&R Bulletin*, however, I confess that I was somewhat disappointed. I was hoping for a chapter-by-chapter summary of the book and also a comment on how her study contributes to the critique and development of mimetic theory. Instead you offered over-arching remarks about the book as a whole and expressed disappointment that there were relatively few direct references to GIRARD's mimetic theory. Your criticism made me wonder what those citations were. I also suspected that, being relatively new to COV&R, you had failed to notice more subtle, pervasive uses of mimetic theory throughout ERICKSON JOHNSEN's book. My curiosity piqued, I sat down and read *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction*. May I share some observations with you about mimetic features of the book that you overlooked?

As you mentioned to me in conversation (but did not actually state in the review), you enjoyed (as I did) the book's preface, entitled "Hystory Girls," in

which ERICKSON JOHNSEN describes her service project with "six girls, ages nine through twelve," who allowed her to record their responses to history-mysteries written for young adults. The girls' enthusiasm for book series like *American Girl* and their preference for strong female models confirmed ERICKSON JOHNSEN's own preference for such models, as well as her expectation that adult fiction in the same genre could and does spur similar responses in older readers. Reading ERICKSON JOHNSEN's preface reminded me of Gwen Athena TARBOX's study of the Nancy Drew mysteries (books my friends and I read in grade-school, alongside Trixie Beldon mysteries), and, more importantly, of TARBOX's argument—similar to ERICKSON JOHNSEN's—that books like these have actually changed women's lives by allowing them to imagine and to desire roles of greater agency in the world as problem-solvers. Perhaps the seven women authors whom ERICKSON JOHNSEN studies in the book were also, in their youth, readers of Nancy Drew?

You are right that ERICKSON JOHNSEN refers to René GIRARD by name only six times, but a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, measure of his influence on her book shows that she has been guided by his thought throughout. Her abiding feminist concern to identify proper models of female agency in the books she studies surely reflects her conviction that readers are mimetic, that their behavior follows fictive as well as contemporary real-life models.

Her choice to focus on historical crime fiction, beginning with novels set in the Middle Ages, is also arguably Girardian. GIRARD's own Ph.D. was in French medieval history (Indiana University), and he has looked to the past—the archaic and the medieval past—as a mirror for understanding modernity. In his own way, he has been a history-mystery reader, searching for clues that the most likely suspect of crime—the scapegoat—is actually an innocent victim of prejudice and persecution. As ERICKSON JOHNSEN observes, "These [historical] texts of persecution bear an important relation to narratives of crime."

Like ERICKSON JOHNSEN and her favorite authors, GIRARD also tends to read fiction scientifically, as providing data for understanding real-life mysteries. "Which is the greater mystery," ERICKSON JOHNSEN asks, "who killed mill owner Osbert Newbiggin? Or, why are women not entitled to vote?" For ERICKSON JOHNSEN and GIRARD alike, the realms of the fictional and the historical interpenetrate one another. For this reason, ERICKSON JOHNSEN groups together works of historical crime fiction that comment on specific eras: Chapter Two, "Medieval Women in Context," focuses on the Middle Ages; Chapter Three focuses on mid-nineteenth-century America; Chapter Four, "(Re)presenting Sherlock Holmes," moves slightly forward in time to consider fiction that mir-

rors “historical social structure in Victorian and Edwardian England”; Chapter Five, “Suffragette Disruptions,” features novels set in the early twentieth century; Chapter Six, “Women and the Ever Present Past,” combines contemporary settings with themes of historical research.

Like GIRARD, too, ERICKSON JOHNSEN makes it a point to highlight references to religion and to spirituality in the novels she studies. In this way she and the authors she admires challenge historicist trends to deny the crucial role that religion has played and continues to play in shaping history.

Apart from a single, telling mention in the introductory chapter, the direct citations of GIRARD in *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction* are concentrated, as you note, in Chapter Three (a version of which was previously published in *Contagion*), where ERICKSON JOHNSEN focuses attention on Miriam Grace MONFREDO’s *Seneca Falls Inheritance*. In this strong chapter, ERICKSON JOHNSEN uses GIRARD’s mimetic theory in a very effective way to analyze plot and characterization. She shows that a change in the law—specifically, the passing in New York State in 1848 of the Married Women’s Property Act—suddenly made a woman, Rose WALKER, the mimetic rival both of her half-brother and of her husband, and, in the end, a murder victim. Equal to men under the law as an inheritor of property, WALKER was not equal to them by social custom in the courts of her day, which routinely discriminated against women. Caught in that in-between stage between the (new) legal enactment of equality and the (old, still-lingering) legal practice of inequality, WALKER and the other women involved in the case occupy a precarious, life-threatening position, ERICKSON JOHNSEN argues, similar to that experienced (in GIRARD’s description) by adolescents in ancient rites of passage.

You are right, Roberta, that additional chapters on fiction set in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries would be welcome, to bridge the jump from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. The chronological arrangement of the chapters does, however, trace in interesting ways the shift in attitudes toward the historical record from trusting acceptance toward a more suspicious, demythologizing stance similar to GIRARD’s own.

In the chapter on medievalist fiction, for example, ERICKSON JOHNSEN points out that history becomes part of the fabric of the fiction through references to known historical characters and through epigraphs that quote from actual medieval texts. This authorial use of the past, she notes, makes the fiction “realistic,” enhances the author’s claim to authority, and increases the fiction’s power to affect contemporary readers. The past, in short, works for these medievalist novelists similar to the way that citing ancient authorities worked for medieval writers: it gives them

credibility and *auctoritas*. In Chapter Four, however, ERICKSON JOHNSEN calls attention to how the authorial mixture of factual and fictional framing devices can either enhance or undermine the feminist message of real-life, public agency for women. In Chapter Six, the feminist critique of the transmission of historical knowledge and its call for alternative sources of knowledge seem to challenge even the possibility of writing history in the postmodern present. ERICKSON JOHNSEN’s endorsement of a historical methodology that includes “minority reports” on what actually happened and that draws on unofficial as well as official sources arguably seeks to give a (Girardian) voice to those who have been silenced, to victims like Katie WYLER, kidnapped by the Shawnee Indians in 1779 and then, after her escape from them, killed by her own fiancée.

ERICKSON JOHNSEN quotes Mark CARNES, who calls “historical fiction ‘inescapably a contradiction in terms: a nonfictional fiction; a factual fantasy, a truthful deception.’” Not all readers will be drawn to the genre. ERICKSON JOHNSEN has, however, certainly whetted my desire (as I know she has yours) to read at least some of the historical crime novels she discusses and to do so with a critical eye for the authors’ mimetic and feminist agenda, to discover (if I can) what “past” actions are being proposed as desirable for imitation in the present, and which ones marked for avoidance.

Rosemary ERICKSON JOHNSEN has made me think about how mystery-fiction functions as a commentary on other mysteries—social, political, historical, and theological. To the extent that fictional detectives solve murder mysteries, they seem to be perfect “under-COV&R” agents to enlist in our investigation of the causes of violence. The Colloquium owes her gratitude for highlighting the importance of this genre. Don’t you agree?

With thanks for your review, which prompted my reading and writing,

*Ann W. Astell*

**Dear Ann,**

I’m glad you took the time to comment on my review. You filled in some gaps in my analysis with your valuable insights on the Girardian character of the material. And I think you pointed out some elements of JOHNSEN’s work that make it easier to see how her contribution fits into the general framework of mimetic theory. I agree that my enthusiasm for JOHNSEN’s subject matter was probably less apparent in my review than my quibbles with her methodology.

I really want to underscore my respect for what JOHNSEN has done in showcasing an understudied literary genre and posing a number of significant theoretical questions. I found myself thinking hard about a variety of intriguing issues and I am grateful to

Rosemary ERICKSON JOHNSEN for giving all of us the benefit of her wide-ranging knowledge of historical crime fiction.

As I said in my review, I come to the subject matter as a historian, and therein lies the rub, I believe. As a non-specialist in literary theory or Girardian analysis, I took a very simple approach—could I be convinced by the arguments presented without having to know more about the topic than what appeared in the chapters in front of me? I wasn't totally convinced by the book, but I have a strong suspicion that if I ever have the welcome opportunity to speak directly with Rosemary ERICKSON JOHNSEN we will find our-

selves agreeing on a number of points. I very much would like to read more of her work and see how she develops the topics in *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction* to their natural conclusions.

I feel JOHNSEN's book has begun to map out new territory and I want to see more of what lies within the unexplored terrain she is charting for us.

With thanks for engaging me in the COV&R conversation,

Roberta Baranowski

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