

THE PYRRHUS PERPLEX: A SUPERFICIAL VIEW OF MIMESIS

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In the interest of knowledge conveyed as experience, a teacher of literature likes to begin with a story:

A man sets out to discover a treasure he believes is hidden under a stone; he turns over stone after stone but finds nothing. He grows tired of such futile undertaking but the treasure is too precious for him to give up. So he begins to look for a *stone which is too heavy to lift*—he places all his hopes in that stone and he will waste all his remaining strength on it.

This exquisite little parable from René Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (176) awaits correlation with Kafka ("Before the Law"), but it can also remind us of the passionate imbroglio we find in Racine's *Andromaque*. I will dwell on the stage play on the assumption that we are even more confused about love than about legal affairs.

The play embodies an essential paradox by dramatizing relations in a way that is contrary to our normal expectations of order and conduct:

Mais parmi ces périls où je cours pour vous plaire.
Me refuseriez-vous un regard moins sévère? (I.iv)
(But among the perils I risk to please you,
Would you refuse me a gaze less severe?)

This is not a vassal or a servant appealing to his master, but a sovereign, Pyrrhus, appealing to his captive female slave. Andromache. Our routine categories are turned upside down.

Pyrrhus has everything going for him: he is the son of Achilles, known to his world (and ours) as the world's greatest warrior, and after his conquest of Troy he is betrothed to Hermione, daughter of Helen, the world's most beautiful woman. There is no matter for tragedy in this, a happy conclusion to the Trojan war. But Pyrrhus spurns Hermione in amorous pursuit of Andromache, whom he counts among plunder of the city he has destroyed. She is the widow of Hector whom his father has slain, which makes her the last person in the world disposed to favor his suit. Andromache is very like the stone which is too heavy to lift, for all the leverage Pyrrhus exercises by threatening to deliver her son Astyanax for slaughter by the still vengeful Greeks. And Racine makes us understand that it is not in spite of Andromache's resistance to his appeals but just because of them that Pyrrhus wastes his life trying to move her.

The treasure that Pyrrhus pursues, which as the son of Achilles he has no choice but to pursue, is "la gloire," the recognized and incommensurate superiority over other mortals. Yet he describes himself plaintively to Andromache as "Vaincu, chargé de fers, de regrets consumé" (vanquished, in chains, tormented by regret). For four acts of the play Pyrrhus mostly cultivates "enslavement, failure, and shame," which is how Girard describes the masochist in the parable he invented to depict him. and in the fifth act he is slain by his Greek allies at the jealous instigation of Hermione, who then stabs herself over his body. Orestes, who lead the Greeks to the assault in amorous obedience to Hermione, goes insane. The quest for glory is a recipe for disaster.

A masochist is someone whom we may describe as preferring pain to pleasure, failure to success, and when I review Pyrrhus's conduct with students, they never fail to arrive at this diagnosis. Then the task is to unpack this reductive term, which since Freud has served to label a clinical perversion.

In my experience, this task is more successfully accomplished with undergraduate students, who are likely to seek an explanation in terms of the information at hand, if only because they are too distracted, too harried to do otherwise. Graduate students, on the other hand, are committed to advanced professional research, which in literature departments typically sends them in quest of the mythological roots of such a story, and no less often favors the kinds of explanations we find in Freudian psychoanalysis. I take it as a measure of the intellectual confusion of our times that we encourage such research. It makes of literature an object of interpretive methods imported from other fields of study rather than an agent of interpretation that could in turn illuminate and strengthen insights drawn from those other fields. The

value of Girard's mimetic model is that it enables us to see literature as a discovery procedure rather than as a predicament, as a scientific resource rather than as a problem for our understanding of human relations.

We cannot psychoanalyze Pyrrhus. He is a character in a work of literary fiction drawn from Greek mythology. We do not know and we can never learn enough about his background, his upbringing, his relations with his parents and all that, to conduct a plausible analysis of any clinical nature. In fact, we will learn more about ostensibly perverse forms of human conduct if we take him as he is, on his own terms, in the rhetoric of his own textuality.

The quest for glory is something that medieval culture, for all its backwardness in so many areas, had the good sense to assign, at least in principle, to its god alone. In French neoclassic culture, glory became again what it was for the ancient Greeks, an object of human desire, a target of worldly ambition. Divinity, in the words of Paul's Epistles, is once again "something to be grasped at," with the significant, essentially modern difference, that now it is something for which both men and women contend in a world bereft of hieratic transcendence. Hermione is Andromache's rival for the love of Pyrrhus, but she is also Pyrrhus's rival to the extent that his sovereign indifference to her devastates her prestige and self-esteem: "Il y va de ma gloire" (II.i) (My glory is at stake), she states to her confidant by way of explaining her rage toward her fiancé, whom he calls her "enemy." It is this degradation or skewed dispersion of divinity that credits Roland Barthes's connection between Racine's world and Dostoyevsky's, in which humans become gods for each other. If God is dead, Nietzsche queried rhetorically, why should we not be gods? Racine answers that question conclusively.

Once Pyrrhus has attained the glory of destroying Troy, he pursues it further in the self-destructive conquest of his captive slave. What explains this preference for humiliation and failure, this perversion of desire? Rather than call in the therapists, we have only to hear the folly of Racine's characters denounced out of their own mouths.

In Act II, Pyrrhus has forsworn his shameful obsession and his confidant Phoenix echoes his presumed triumph in words meant as a balm to his master's torment, but they are also a poison. Pyrrhus asks Phoenix to recognize his mastery of love (rhyming "maître" with "connaître"), and in response he is regaled with language that points to the source of his pride—and of his certain defeat:

Ah je vous reconnais; et ce juste courroux,
Ainsi qu'à tous les Grecs, Seigneur, vous rend à vous.
Ce n'est plus le jouet d'une flamme servile:
C'est Pyrrhus, c'est le fils et le rival d'Achille,

Que la gloire à la fin ramène ramène sous ses lois,
 Qui tromphe de Troie une seconde fois. (II.v)
 (I recognize you, and your just wrath
 restores you both to the Greeks and yourself.
 This is no more the toy of a servile flame:
 This is Pyrrhus, the son and rival of Achilles,
 Whom glory brings back under its laws,
 Who triumphs over Troy a second time.)

These words are laden with tragic irony for they tell us that for Pyrrhus to court Andromache and to renounce that courtship in the name of heroic identity is the same thing. Girard's parable and the paradox of Pyrrhus betoken the same double bind, that the conquest of desire and the desire for conquest are the same.

Let us review the implications of Phoenix's words again in terms of the roles and functions they assign to Racine's characters.

As the son of Achilles, Pyrrhus is actively and passively determined to pursue "la gloire," which for his father too, as we recall from the *Iliad*, weighed more in the balance of values than a long and peaceful life. As his father, Achilles functions as Pyrrhus's model but also as his rival, the one he has to surpass to be worthy of the excellence, the emulation, attached to that name for all time; for even today it means what it meant to Homer's world: the non-pareil warrior, the hero par excellence. But the mythical background to the conflicts of Racine's play is an explicit theme within it. Mythology cannot explain the play, which is instead a compact study of mythical self-delusion.

For Pyrrhus to repeat, replace, and displace his glorious father, he must take his place on the battlefield against Hector, which is to say that he must take from Hector his own glorious place on the battlefield. But Pyrrhus's situation is impossible: only Achilles can slay Hector and Hector is dead and buried. The war is over and we have moved irrevocably from the battlefield to the boudoir, where violence divides antagonists from within themselves as much as against each other. The only way Pyrrhus can effectively triumph over Troy a second time is by possessing Hector's widow, displacing Hector in his wife's affections. And she must consent to this, if only to save her son, for there can be no glory for Pyrrhus in the mere physical conquest of a female slave. The conquest, the desire, is strictly speaking metaphysical.

I have described Andromache as the stone that Pyrrhus cannot lift but the same can be said of Hector, whose second defeat is what Pyrrhus's courtship of Andromache is aiming at. All the engines of war cannot overthrow Hector because he weighs as dust. He no longer exists, yet he bears the entire weight

of Achilles's glory and Pyrrhus's ambition with him to the grave. We could just as well identify Achilles as the stone. In Racine's world, which is already our world, identities are residual, relational to prestige radiating from others.

As a consequence, Racine's play projects a maddening series of substitutions and displacements and the madness is literal, clinical, as we shall observe in the forlorn destiny of Orestes. For Andromache, the object of Pyrrhus's desire, is also his rival. She is Hector for Pyrrhus, she represents him, takes his place; she symbolizes the conquest that only Pyrrhus's father could achieve in real life. The play is named after her, and not her suitor Orestes, and not her jealous rival Hermione, though her rage is central, axial, to the pathology being explored here: she is loved by Orestes as desperately as she loves Pyrrhus. But Andromache confers her name to the play because she above all symbolizes desire as substitution, representation, repetition of one desire by another. Pyrrhus's desire for Andromache is modeled on her ardent desire for Hector, which alone is truly boundless, absolute, because Hector is dead:

Et quel époux encore! A souvenir cruel!
Sa mort seule a rendu votre père immortel. (I.iv)
(And such a husband indeed! Oh, cruel memory!
His death alone made your father immortal.)

"What a husband!" she is saying to Pyrrhus, who cannot fail to believe thereby that immortal glory lies in every sense with Andromache. She does not weigh much either in this contest, probably about half of the powerful Pyrrhus, and she is immovable, "inhumaine." She is primed by everything that identifies her to repel his courtship and that is just why he pursues her. Her attraction for the son of Achilles is magnetic, irresistible.

What can we recommend to Pyrrhus or the treasure seeker of our opening parable? I doubt psychoanalysis offers the solution. If we can imagine a modern Pyrrhus pursuing Andromache while visiting his analyst two or three times a week to explain his humiliating obsession, we have to imagine his analyst subtly interrogating Pyrrhus's relations with his parents (mother all but unknown). The classical analyst's task is to link those relations to strands of unconscious association in his patient's narrative. Depth psychology wants to get to the bottom of neurosis, to reach down to its basis in childhood relations with parents or parent figures. But in this play, everyone figures as a model and an obstacle for everyone else—except the utterly lovelorn Orestes, whom no one desires. His madness. I shall argue, reconfigurâtes relations of myth, violence and desire that are Racine's contribution to the human sciences.

If we can imagine Pyrrhus trying to master his neurotic obsession as an effort to uncover its unconscious depths, we have to recognize that very effort as the source of the problem, not its solution. After a few months or years, Pyrrhus's analyst may suggest that he abandon this reckless courtship, but we have already seen that that will only intensify his desire for Andromache. We cannot fail to liken his efforts to those of the stone thrower in Girard's parable, especially with the additional information provided by his confidant, namely that Pyrrhus cannot lift the stone because he is standing on top of it.

If our therapy is more versatile and transactional in its methodology, its practitioner might consult Pyrrhus's fiancée about his problem. But he would only learn that Hermione is in the same self-destructive relation with Pyrrhus as Pyrrhus with Andromache, namely that as the daughter of the most beautiful women in the world, she cannot but pursue the son of its greatest warrior. Hermione will only add to the case load. She is a female version of the same obsession with "*la gloire de vous plaire*" (IV.v) (the glory of appealing to you) as she expresses it to Pyrrhus, and as he in turn might just as well express it to Andromache.

In the modern world, glory, along with its cognate values: esteem, recognition, and the like, is not a respecter of sexual difference, which is secondary, ancillary, rather than essential to relations positioned by desire. This is an opportunity to observe that the mimetic model is totally hospitable to any feminism which protests against the adverse position a culture places women in; but it is symmetrically incredulous about notions of essence or centrality identified with any position whatsoever—except that of the victim, Astyanax by name, who remains symbolically absent from the stage.

What the boy symbolizes is the sacred center, whose displacement to the periphery constitutes the agon of the drama, its *peripeteia*. When all reach for the sacred, anything is sacred which eludes their disconsolate grasp. The sacred is the substitute for the violence wrought by competing, mimetic desire, and to grasp for it is to call that violence down on oneself. This is why in the end, Pyrrhus will take the child's place at the hands of the Greek mob lead by Orestes at the instigation of Hermione, who identifies her victim as sacrificial: "*Avez-vous pu, cruels, l'immoler aujourd'hui?*" (V.iii) (How could you be so cruel to sacrifice him?). He is not the victim of divine wrath but of jealous rivalry, which a properly sacrificial order is meant to allay by concentrating the violence that mimesis foment in a single direction, on a single victim. Racine's use of religious metaphor is not rhetorical hyperbole, but an exact translation of how profane desire generates sacrificial substitution.

There are no sacred mysteries here, nor anything but imagined centrality. There are no mythic foundations that are not undone by the efforts to retrieve them. Still less are there any foundational motivations available to causal explanation from within the individual psyche. Everything works here on the magnetic surface of desire, whose attractions and repulsions are only governed by those of other desires. Andromache survives the imbroglio because of the self-destructive conduct of all those around her. Her survival symbolically counterpoises their ruin. She only desires the life of her son, which is a physical reality, not a metaphysical ambition, still less a psychic puzzle.

Perhaps it is unfair to subject psychoanalysis to discussion in this way, but there is no denying that literature has been massively subjected to psychoanalysis in similar ways. There is no denying the existence of countless books, beginning with Ernest Jones's analysis of Hamlet, that more or less put the imaginary character on the analyst's couch and try to get at the secret of his neurosis. My aim is not primarily to discredit Freudian psychoanalysis—though I think a work like Racine's, among others, seriously calls it into question—but to pursue the larger issue of the resources of literary studies for understanding human interaction. *Pace* deconstruction and all its textual ingenuity, I take this to be more fundamental category than being or presence. Even if we take representation to be the fundamental issue for philosophy or criticism, we cannot convincingly subordinate subjective imitation, mimetic desire and its behaviors, to questions of objective imitation, the linguistic representation of objects and relations. The pristinely neoclassic economy of Racine's theater, comprising a dramatic vocabulary of no more than 2,000 words, is instructive in this regard. There is no "thick description," no furniture here to obscure our gaze on a world in which the only objects are objects of desire, in which there are no characters who do not configurate desire relations. His theater exhibits the formal elegance of an architectural blueprint, in which only structural lines appear. We can say that desire is the foundational category of the structure as long as we recall that desire has no foundation or source except in another desire that it imitates. Everything we need to understand about Racine's characters—and, I submit, basic human interaction—resonates at the surface of his language.

The problem I see for psychoanalysis is its contradictory commitment to sounding depths and tracking relations. There is an obliquity in its method which compromises its integrity and coherence while ensuring, as Freud and his followers have observed, that it would be interminable (23: 209-16). Psychoanalysis wants to move down deep into the psyche via unconscious associations that ostensibly conscious speech makes available to its free

floating attention (12: 109-21), and it wants to attend as well to lateral, proximate relations on the horizon of the patient's involvement with others. This includes, and sometimes hugely, the patient's involvement with the analyst, as the vast literature on transference attests. This methodological zig-zag issues in a labyrinth of relations, associations and agencies—consider the fairly panic multiplication of psychic agencies toward the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Such daunting complexity ensures a scholarly production that increases in inverse proportion to its capacity to explain anything simply and clearly about human behavior. The mimetic model, with Racine's help, is more at home with such a task.

Of course I am being unfair to psychoanalysis by not examining it in its own textuality. But Michel Borch-Jacobsen has already done that at great length. In *The Freudian Subject* he uncovers mimesis and rivalry in the dreams of Freud's patients and in Freud's own relations with others, that is to say, just about everywhere that Freudians look for the contortions of *lust-prinzip* and *jouissance*.

In *And romaque* there are no depths to plumb for an explanation worth pursuing past Pyrrhus's determined identification with his father's glory, his father's example, his father as model, which is explicit in the text. We can say, like good Freudians everywhere, that he wishes to slay the father, to dig him up as Hector to lay him low himself, and that this desire for Hector's widow symbolizes incest. But it is more to the point to observe that incest especially symbolizes rivalry. Had he ever existed, Pyrrhus could just as well have hated his father as adored him to find himself in this predicament. It is reasonable to speculate that he would have both hated and adored him, since the role of the model is to designate the place he occupies as the only one worth striving for, worth killing for, or, as in the symbolic relation to Andromache, worth kinning for. In good psychoanalytical fashion we can blame the father for this dilemma, but that would only lead us in turn to blame Achilles's mother for encouraging his ambitions by dunking him upside down in a river.

Clearly there is plenty of blame to go around for everyone even remotely related to Pyrrhus, and if we ever got to the end of assigning it, we would still find him on the couch two to three days of the week and pursuing Andromache all the rest of the time. For if he is not responsible for this neurotic pursuit, there is no reason for him not to persist in it. He is acting out a destiny, not making decisions. He cannot help himself; he should be told not to feel guilty—however much such counsel binds him further to his folly and attendant guilt feelings.

What Pyrrhus is supposed to do, what in fact Andromache asks him to do (in I.iv) is to be a hero in the style of a former time, the time of Racine's

spiritual and cultural fathers, the time of Corneille's Augustus in *Cinna*, who exclaims:

Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers.
Je le suis, je veux l'être. (V.iii)
(I am master of myself as I am of the world.
That I am and I wish to be so.)

Augustus's words express a declaration of absolute independence, of sovereign indifference to the forces of rivalry and resentment circulating beneath him. The "dessein si beau, si généreux" Andromache ask of Pyrrhus is to renounce the glory of displacing or becoming Hector for the greater glory of aristocratic generosity, as that term came to represent the abdication of personal feelings for benefits transcending them. What Racine makes us see, what even Andromache cannot see, is that just such mastery as she projects to Pyrrhus only strengthens the force of her attraction for him. Andromache is of the generation of Corneillian, physical heroism, of the kind that in *Le Cid* conquered Spain and in the *Iliad* conquered Troy. When she asks Pyrrhus to give up on her, she is unwittingly inviting her pursuit the more. She is never more desirable than when she begs him to rise above himself, which is just what attracts him to her conquest in the first place.

If I am stretching a point here at the expense of psychoanalysis, it is in the interest of an important epistemological and methodological issue as it bears on the dynamics of human interaction. We naturally look outside ourselves for the cause of trouble we have not deliberately chosen. Some one else is to blame. This explains the reciprocal accusations of Oedipus and Teresias—you are the source of the city's pollution!—who reinforce symmetrically each other's blindness to the contagion of enmity besetting Thebes. If we believe Teresias only and not Oedipus, we are subscribing to the myth that foregrounds Sophocles's tragedy and that the latter is trying to comprehend and elucidate. In sum we are not seeking a sound, rational solution to the problem but an end to the search, a short-cut settlement, a scapegoat.

The confusion wrought by psychoanalysis may just consist in the cross purposes it has set for itself in this regard. It seeks to relieve crippling feelings of guilt by blaming father, mother, phallus, patriarchy, etc., and in so doing it secures its hermeneutic, scientific credentials by its punctual determinations. "Thou art the man!" as the biblical Nathan declares to his adulterous king, and as Poe took to be the archetype of detective utterances. On the other hand, psychoanalysis in and by its labyrinthine quest conveys a concomitant suspicion that casting blame in any direction just will not do. The epistemological point, if I may call it that, is that the punctual assignment of

blame by the narrow apportionment of causal connection to a single entity or agency breaks the complex chain of human relations. It satisfies our need to bring matters to a close so as to get on with others compelling our attention, but it is not a true reflection of how things really are among people, of how our complex interaction affects us.

There is a paradox here: we cannot doubt the rationality of cause and effect but we cannot trust it either because we cannot control its valences and implications in human relations. The cause we assign to certain effects satisfies rationality to some degree but it does not reflect its fullest exercise, which is relational through and through. In sum, rationality is relationality, which is the term I would coin for what we are seeking to understand here: desire is positional, not personal, punctual, or particular to the subject or object. This is a point frequently acknowledged in Lacanian psychoanalysis, but it is never pursued to its fullest consequences. Owing to Freud's Achilles-like prestige for the human sciences, it is too often the case that the unconscious, or some one of its many agencies, is allowed, by divine right or aristocratic privilege of its progenitor, to occupy one or several key positions. A great literary text, by contrast, is a far more controlled experiment in which to explore human relations, to uncover patterns and structures in which alone we can find meaning.

Pyrrhus's father is dead so it is safe for the analyst to blame him, but for that matter we could just as well blame Hector for being what he is, namely the Trojan warrior whom only Achilles could defeat. For Hector, as Achilles's warrior twin, just as effectively occupies the place or position of the model rival for Pyrrhus as his own father does. Conflict is a function of rivalry. It takes, as we say, two to tango, and if we have seen it done expertly we recognize it as a highly stylized, ritualized agon, a symmetrical duo of forces pulling and pushing against each other in exquisite simulation of mimetic strife. The essential paradox that the tango enlivens is that rivalry is a function of identification with and not difference from the other; it is a function of embracing the other's desire rather than pursuing one's own. The austere economy of Racine's dramatic vocabulary and prosody has something of the tango about it.

The mimetic model is also concerned with obliquity, but of a different and I do not hesitate to say superficial kind. Its superficiality is positive in the sense that it locates the nexus of human problems on the surface of the world, in our interactions with others, and not in any psychic depths. It does not believe the tale that any treasure is to be found hidden under a rock or under anything too heavy to lift. It does not believe Don Quixote, it believes Cervantes, who tells us right at the beginning that the Don is mad to take

Amadis de Gaula or any heroic or literary model seriously. The mimetic hypothesis is superficial in the sense that it limits its purview to triangular relations among desiring subject, desired object and the model-rival-obstacle who is the mediator for the subject's desire. Relations of desire are indirect, oblique, but they only follow the path of an unconscious to the extent that the subject's fascination with the object keeps him or her unaware of the model's mediating role in designating it and in directing his or her desire. When fascination transfers to the model, objectivity is destroyed altogether. Freud has told us that this is bound to happen at some point with respect to the analyst, without suspecting that this is where, to paraphrase Karl Kraus's famous quip, his science translates into the pathology of identification that it seeks to understand.

Instead of the several and conflicting models of psychic life, such as the economic, the topological, the geological, that psychoanalysis proffers, the mimetic hypothesis never departs from this triangular structure, except to observe where the object of desire doubles as the obstacle to desire. This is the case with Andromache for Pyrrhus, as it is the case for our heroic stone thrower. If he ever lifts that rock to find the treasure beneath it, we can be sure that it will crush him entirely.

Among the several models projected by Freud for the unconscious, he figured the psyche as an iceberg, whose tip alone represents consciousness. This figure allows us to imagine a deep-sea monster lying in wait to tear open the sides of any human vessel approaching it unawares. To locate potentially nefarious agency in the unconscious in this way is to exculpate us and blame another impersonal, monstrous thing floating about within us and all around us in the vast and unfathomable seas of culture and history. This is integral to mythical thinking, reminiscent of the ghastly minotaur whom the ancient Greeks installed somewhere—and therefore anywhere—in their labyrinth and to whom they allegedly sacrificed their children. It is a form, however unwitting, of scapegoating, in which a substitute or imaginary being is sited as the cause of our problems. It is about time for us to recognize that if Greek mythology, with its Oedipal and other sacrificial stories, finds a home in psychoanalysis, it is because the latter is only too hospitable to the monstrous imaginings of the former. The Freudian pantheon of psychic agencies reminds us of nothing so much as the array of divinities to which the Greeks ascribe motivations unavailable to their dawning psychology. The Homeric Greeks whom Bruno Snell writes about in *The Discovery of Mind* would be at home with almost any *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*.

Psychoanalysis is a precious contribution to our understanding of sacrificial processes, including mental ones. It does not function as an

explanation for them however, but as an exhibition of their self-deceptions. In engaging our imagination in a substitutive mechanism, it illustrates the link between mythical thinking and sacrificial practices. In its blindness to the structuring role of mediation, modeling, and mimesis, institutional psychoanalysis figures as a cult dedicated to propitiating an imaginary monster. It is a behemoth conjured out of an all-too-human compulsion to repeat the assignment of blame elsewhere, to repeat the gestures of a reductive rationality in quest of a punctual cause, where only relations matter, where all positions are relative to the desires they imitate. In this regard, the relocation of the unconscious in the other's desire is mimetic theory's greatest challenge to twentieth-century thought. It agrees with Freud that the "ego is not master in his own house" but deprives us of an alibi for our misfortunes and misunderstandings that a fathomless unconscious provides.

It has not been my intention to scapegoat psychoanalysis for the intellectual confusion of our times, which differs not a whit from the intellectual confusion of former times, when, for instance, people targeted entities like humors or the passions of the soul as the source of our problems. It was not even my original aim, when setting out to draft some generic reflections on Girard's work, to bring Racine into the picture at all. But literary masterpieces have a way of imposing themselves on even our theoretical imagination. This is not accidental; it is integral to their mastery, which I would provisionally define as theory wrought by images, figures, and dramatic configurations whose rigor, economy, and coherence anticipate our theoretical reflections.

The mimetic model opposes psychoanalysis according to a methodological principle that is deliberately superficial. It does not seek the truth of our interactions and conflicts by looking deep down into our unconscious past or present. It does not believe in sea monsters or minotaurs, nor in their metaphorical avatars. The burden of proof lies with theories that betray such beliefs, yoked as they are to imaginary and unfathomable depths. In its confident attention to the unconscious, we find in psychoanalysis the man who has found a stone which is too heavy to lift and who dedicates his children remorselessly to the same task. But this heroic effort cannot succeed. The mimetic model believes that icebergs are simply too heavy to lift and it does not even begin to try. It does not look down for the truth, it looks over, it looks around for the pseudo-demons and mock-divinities besetting us, the devil-gods as Roel Kaptein describes them in *On the Way of Freedom*, and it only discovers rival doubles in an all-too-human world. It does not credit their unwieldy, cumbersome primordiality, their *interminable* capacity to torment

us, and it does not require a specialized or technical vocabulary that certifies their power over us.

The mimetic model does not ask us to see within ourselves at all really, to the extent that it urges us to recognize that our so-called selves are just a network of myriad relations with others, relations whose real and uncontrollable complexity and imponderability alone make each one of us unique. It is not a panacea for all psychic and cultural ills, but it is a powerful antidote to mythical thinking that is all the more virulent among us for the scientific labels adorning it.

Let us review Racine's contribution to understanding culture, myth, and the madness participating in it.

Pyrrhus's desire for Andromache precipitates a crisis of difference: between Greeks and Trojans, masters and slaves, masculine and feminine, fathers and sons, piety and sacrilege, honor and shame. It is a crisis that inhabits glory—but how different is this from contemporary ideals of autonomous self-esteem?—from the outset, internally and structurally, as a principle that encourages rivalry among all humans with each other and against themselves, and that engages both sexes, and that dissolves rather than consolidates identities. The result is internal scission, scissiparity, as we witness in the madness of Orestes, which appropriately closes the play: "Est-ce Pyrrhus qui meurt? et suis-je Oreste enfin?" (V.iv) (Is it Pyrrhus who dies? and am I really Orestes?). His madness is diagnostically proper to the forces of desire propelling Racine's tragic characters toward their sacrificial destiny. Otherwise stated, Racine conceives madness in terms of the contradictory relations structured by desire.

The crisis is properly religious, sacrificial: it climaxes in the immolation of a sovereign prince, the principle of sovereignty altogether, and, just as inevitably, in the generation of a monster, Orestes by name: "Je deviens parricide, assassin, sacrilège; . . . Elle l'aime! et je suis un monstre furieux!" (V.iv) (I become a parricide, murderer, sacrilegious; . . . She loves him! and I am a raging monster). His expulsion into madness, as madness, hallucination, indifferentiation between living and dead, between self and other, epitomizes and consummates this crisis of difference, culminating in the eternal return of his successful rival: "Mais, que vois-je? A mes yeux Hermione l'embrasse? / Elle vient l'arracher au coup qui le menace?" (V.v) (But what do I see? Hermione kisses him before my eyes? She has just saved him from the fatal blow?) His insanity takes its definitive form as the indifference between the infernal furies sent to punish him and the irretrievable object of his desire:

Hé bien! filles d'enfer, vos mains sont-elles prêtes
 Pour qui sont ces serpents qui sifflent sur vos têtes?
 A qui destinez vous l'appareil qui vous suit?
 Venez-vous m'enlever dans l'éternelle nuit?
 Venez, à vos fureurs Oreste s'abandonne.
 Mais non, retirez-vous, laissez faire Hermione;
 L'ingrate mieux que vous saura me déchirer;
 Et je lui porte enfin mon cœur à dévorer. (V.v)
 (Well, daughters of hell, are you ready for me?
 For whom are these serpents hissing on your heads?
 For whom do you intend the instruments in your train?
 Are you come to take me off into eternal night?
 Come on then, Orestes gives himself over to your fury.
 But no, stand back, let Hermione do the work;
 The ungrateful woman can tear me apart better than you;
 And I bring my heart to her to devour.)

It is not, in Racine's theoretic imagination, monsters, fiends, and furies who need pursue Orestes. "Mais non:" in this compact little anthropological *explication de texte*, such creatures are but a figure, a mythic representation or projection, of Hermione and his thwarted desire for her. Her only identity is her love of Pyrrhus and horror of him, her embrace of his rival and utter disgust with him. The furies configure that disgust as one with which he cannot fail to identify.

It is hard to say even in many words what Racine gets across in so few: with the spectacle of your dead but always successful rival always before you in amorous embrace, you do not need monsters to go around hating yourself, seeing double, and damning yourself to hell for it. We need to discard monsters as figments of our imagination, but not before seeing, with Racine's help, just exactly how they figure in our lives, that is, how they at once configure and disfigure our desires, which is no more than to say just how mimetic desire can monstrously disfigure our relations with others.

It is hard to avoid such chiasmic formulations as the above, which simulate the compact dynamics of Racine's metaphors. Their logic is not reducible to normative differences between a literal, actual meaning and a figurative, virtual one adorning and hyperbolizing it. He is describing a world very much like our own, in which people subordinate the actual world to metaphysical ambitions, and in which the figurative or unreal sense is consequently the true one. Rhetoric is realism for Racine because metaphorical and mimetic substitution go together, complement each other, which is what I take Girard to mean when he says in his essay on *Phèdre* that the esthetic unity of Racine's work is not available to an esthetic point of view

alone (506). One word stands in for another as does one object of desire (such as Andromache) for another (Trojan conquest, or Hector, or heroism *tout court*). As this process reaches its paroxysm, the objective reality of the real world is left behind, which is just what Orestes's madness symbolizes in significant detail. At this point to say that the Furies are a figure of Hermione's wrath toward Orestes and that Hermione is a figure of Orestes's self-hatred is all one maddening identification or identity crisis. The Furies and Hermione both figure as ecstatic images of Orestes's unbearable self-regard. It is a good bet that, as of the nineteenth century when madness is institutionalized clinically, Orestes will tell his guardians: "I am Hermione," when he is not telling them "I am Pyrrhus," or yet another. Gerard de Nerval, who was suicidally insane, responded to his image drawn on paper by his guardians, "Je suis l'autre."

But the significance of Racinian anthropology doesn't end here. Orestes's hallucination may even be the bearer of historical information. For it should remind us of Girard's structural reading of Nietzsche's madness, as it takes final shape in the unbearable spectacle of Germany's endless embrace of the late Richard Wagner, the philosopher's rival for cultural ascendancy ("*Double Business*," ch. 4). The entire scenario of Nietzsche contra Wagner may be seen as an historical replay of Orestes contra Pyrrhus. After his collapse in 1889, Nietzsche wrote to Jacob Burckhardt, "What is disagreeable and offends my modesty is that at bottom I am every name in history." Read in the light dawning from Racine, his entire letter provides more information about *Identität und Differenz* than most adepts at "Seinsfrage" are prepared to receive. Recalling Nietzsche's love of the brutal, remorseless Greek masters, the *gennaios* extolled in *Genealogy of Morals*, we can see in his works a replay of Pyrrhus contra Hector/Achilles as well. Considering what Hitler's Germany got around to loving in Nietzsche, there is more than a little hell to pay in that connection too.

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