Review: René Girard and the Boundaries of Modern Literature

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René Girard and the Boundaries of Modern Literature

William A. Johnsen

The appearance of the English translation of *La Violence et la sacré*, the recent collections of earlier essays published as *Critique dans un souterrain* and *To Double Business Bound*, the forthcoming translation of *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, and the increasing frequency with which René Girard is reviewed, interviewed, and anthologized, will make more widely known one of the most remarkable theoretical leaps of those who work in the human sciences. In moving from his early, influential *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* to *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard evolves nothing less than a single hypothesis for the origin of all culture.

Girard’s insistence that the modern age is fated to understand, one way or another, the pertinence of mimetic rivalry and violence to the dynamics of culture is essential to anyone concerned with how the problematics of modernism and postmodernism, the interminably violent setting and resetting of avant gardes and boundaries, reflects and/or reveals a culture of compulsive modernization. The response that Girard explicitly requests, and so infrequently receives, is not another enthusiastic or skeptical estimation of the likeliness of his all-including hypothesis, but a genuine essay, a trying out.
Girard's enabling insight is the mediation of all desire: desire is never linear, the simple movement of a subject towards a desired object. The subject seeks to appropriate for himself the greater autonomy of another who becomes his model, by desiring what the model desires, possessing what the model possesses. Desire is always mimetic; always, the subject models his desires after another, never choosing for himself which objects are desirable. All desire is mediated, triangular, metaphysical.

In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard locates the modern age at the moment of a fundamental shift in the character of the model. (Boundary situations are at the heart of Girard's work, and all oppositions are related to each other: external/internal mediation, love/hatred, sadism/masochism, reflection of desire [*mensonge romantique*], revelation of desire [*vérité romanesque*], sacred/violence, and primitive/modern.) In the world before the Enlightenment man openly copied the desires of models who inhabited the transcendent world of the gods, royalty, or literature. The crisis of modernism is the promethean promise to deliver autonomy from the gods, mediators external to man's world, unto man himself. Each subject privately discovers that he is no god, but blames himself, not the promise. He feels that he alone is incapable of autonomy, and must therefore secretly imitate the autonomous desires of others, masking his discipleship as an originality powerful enough to enslave others. The illusion of divine autonomy promised to an enlightened world is thus perpetuated; men become gods in the eyes of each other, while remaining disciples in their own eyes.

Mimetic desire intensifies to mimetic rivalry. Imitation of an internal model incites emulation because the other inevitably becomes rival to the self over the objects the other has designated as desirable. In the modern world, rivals are trapped in an increasingly violent reciprocity; they can only become more like each other as they try to assimilate the illusion of each other's superior difference.

The self of external mediation admires his model, and competes with his rival, but the more intense contradictions of internal mediation force the self towards love and hatred of the same person. Masochism, not sadism, is the final truth of metaphysical desire reflected and/or revealed in modern literature: adoration of a superior rival whose violent rejection of intimacy signifies (and increases) his divinity. Sadism is only the mask of godlike autonomy, the pretense that one is not enslaved to the desire of others. The Underground Man's paradoxical attitude towards Zerkov reveals the arrogant illusions of modern desire: transcendency deviated into masochism, deification of violence. The modern *non serviam* to the gods intensifies the contradictions of metaphysical desire to a crisis. Modern literature is a powerful drug, addicting when it only reflects mediation, but curing from the illusions of metaphysical desire when it reveals the truth of mediation.

*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* will continue to influence our un-
derstanding of modernism, but what concerns us here is how Girard uses the truth of modern literature (mimetic desire becomes internal rivalry becomes the deification of violence) to discover l’unité de tous les rites, how the analysis of modern desire from Deceit, Desire, and the Novel doubles its explanatory power for the boundaries of modernism played off its relocation in primitive culture in Violence and the Sacred, triples its power played off its synoptic culmination in Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde.

Violence and the Sacred begins slowly, discussing the universal incidence of aggression displaced from a potentially violent antagonist onto a victim unable to retaliate. In a move which derives logically from his discussion of mimetic rivalry and the deification of violence in modern literature, yet feels like those leaps Robert Bly reserves for Spanish surrealist poetry, Girard analyzes Cain and Abel as enemy brothers representative of all mythic twins.

The Bible offers us no background on the two brothers except the bare fact that Cain is a tiller of the soil who gives the fruit of his labor to God, whereas Abel is a shepherd who regularly sacrifices the first-born of his herds. One of the brothers kills the other, and the murderer is the one who does not have the violence-outlet of animal sacrifice at his disposal. This difference between sacrificial and nonsacrificial cults determines, in effect, God’s judgement in favor of Abel. To say that God accedes to Abel’s sacrificial offerings but rejects the offerings of Cain is simply another way of saying—from the point of view of the divinity—that Cain is a murderer, whereas his brother is not. (VS, p. 4)

The decomposition of metaphysical desire into masochism reveals the secondary status of the contested object; a sacrificial rite like Cain’s rituel qui tourne mal reveals the secondary status of the gods. The appetite of the gods for blood sacrifice is a myth which screens the real beneficiaries of the sacrificial mechanism: the whole community united in opposition to a surrogate victim onto whom they displace their violence. The scandal of the moderns is their arrogant presumption of divinity: men become gods for each other (not themselves) by razing the difference between human and divine expressly instituted to protect them from the potentially catastrophic confrontation with their own violence.

The social function of all interdiction (exogamy, primo- or ultimo-geniture) is to avoid the double bind of being rival to one’s kin, what Girard will call, in Des Choses cachées depuis la foundation du monde, “le mimesis d’appropriation”: Two drawn into rivalry for possession of the same object (mother, sister, father’s blessing), becoming indis-
tistinguishable as they struggle to achieve mastery, the decisive difference. Interdiction prevents the internal strife of brother against brother, father against son, which can easily draw the whole community into taking sides against each other.

Ritual sacrifice recreates the historically successful resolution of just such a crisis, by repeating, then resolving the loss of differences in a contest that yields a single victim. This sacrificial victim (by definition, someone who cannot reply violently) polarizes everyone against him, unifying the whole community in opposition to a single antagonist. He gives the community the last word, the decisive violence that cannot be returned, that restores peace. To rationalize ritual expulsion, the scapegoat is made to represent all that threatens social stability by encouraging him to violate all the interdictions. But, because he comes to symbolize the techniques of expelling violence from the community, he also is revered, sacralized as he passes outside the community. The scapegoat is despised as a vanquished rival, and loved as the instrument of peace. This is the continuity of violence and the sacred. A god is a scapegoat previously expelled, the mythical father of the next scapegoat victimized in his name. The ontological crisis analyzed in Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, although universal, is suffered individually, or in couples; Violence and the Sacred announces Girard’s real interest in la psychologie interindividuelle: the systematic understanding of the foundation and dynamics of culture.

Girard elaborates his powerful hypothesis from a radical interpretation of modern fiction referred to Periclean Athens and Elizabethan England. Each of these literatures reveals a culture trapped in interminable rivalries over the same object; no one can exercise the definitive violence necessary to the restoration of peace. If the scapegoat mechanism of primitive culture depends on a misunderstanding of human violence, then a calamitous increase in internal violence signifies the failure of that mechanism, and signifies also an increased understanding of the arbitrary designation of the victim and the victorious rival. Oedipus Tyrannus and The Bacchae nearly expose the myth of divinity: that Oedipus and Pentheus are not criminals, but only mimetic rivals who have lost to serve (as scapegoats) the mythical superiority of Creon and Bacchus.

Modern literature, written, like Greek and Elizabethan drama, in an age where the rituals of integration are disintegrating, speaks la langage du divin. In “normal times,” ritual sacrifice grants being to society as a whole at the expense of the scapegoat; his inability to retaliate indicates he has no being, until he passes over to the divine. But when the ritual does not function, each person feels that he lacks the being every one else seems to have. Masochism, for Girard, represents a clearer understanding of the dynamics of internal mediation because it directs desire away from the false substantiality of the competitively prized object, towards absorbing directly the superior (contentious, violent) being of the rival. The modern artist’s romantique cherishing of his mythical antipathy to the bourgeois,
which predictably oscillates between sadism and masochism, only reflects modern desire; but his romanesque sympathy with social outcasts reveals a modern literature at odds with all myths of social cohesion founded in differential (sacrificial) mechanisms.

In a world that is acutely embarrassed by the positivism of others (that is, which privileges its own positivism against all rival positivisms), Girard scandalously insists that his hypothesis works, it can be proven, and that its value lies in its ability to explain what no one else can.

Girard’s hypothesis for the origin of all culture derives from his reading of modern literature, and one test is to see what it can say about the boundaries of modern literature. I do not want to seem to suggest that Girard must be evaluated only as a litterateur. He has evolved a remarkable theory, and his work must be judged seriously, carefully, in all areas he claims. A danger far greater than underestimation is to be tempted to out-Girard Girard, to present a rival hypothesis for the human sciences. Let us renounce, for once, mimetic rivalry, and ask ourselves, as boldly as Girard asks us, can his hypothesis work for modern literature?

Girard’s work suggests that the boundary of modern literature forecasts an increase in violence, together with an increased understanding of the sacrificial mechanism. I have suggested elsewhere that the return of the scapegoat is central to the myth of modern literature, but here it is more useful to situate the boundary through a liminal writer who seems at once modern and premodern, who embodies the transformation of modernism. Stephen Crane is the nearly definitive boundary writer, variously understood as realist, naturalist, impressionist, imagist, symbolist.

There are two unmistakable characteristics of Crane which mark him as receptive to Girard’s hypothesis: his recognition of the unanimity of the violence of childhood, the Bowery, and the battlefield, and his scandalous, insistent juxtaposition of violence and the sacred.

Crane’s theoretical leverage on modern culture probably originates in a romantic preference for antithetical postures. Born into a family of American patriots, he domiciled himself in the most intensely English setting in Great Britain, Brede Manor. He scandalized (yet also played to) this family of soldiers and ministers by dissipated acts of antiheroism and impiety, themselves small masterpieces of fervently ironic bravado. Only a writer intent on shocking the middle class audience he has rejected would observe so faithfully and ostentatiously the “low” Bowery dialect of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.

It is difficult not to recognize in this romantic maneuver of outraging the bourgeois the spirit of modernism. Value in the modern age is designated by avantgardism, by achieving the decisive difference from predecessors and contemporaries that makes one a superior rival, a model to others. When others have successfully copied the new, it is time to invent again, to recapture that abrasive difference which reduces rivals to paroxysms of admiration and hatred. Modernist movements have become
progressively more attenuated and more violent, more like each other, more nearly paradigms for Girard’s conception of mimetic rivalry.

What Crane finally discovers through a romantic taste for scandal in such early sentences as “Jimmy was silent, fighting with the face of a sacrificial priest”\(^{11}\) is the unity of violence and the sacred, the universality of the sacrificial mechanism as an instrument of social cohesion. Only Girard’s hypothesis can help us recover the complex understanding of violence and the sacred in Crane’s late story, “The Blue Hotel,” which clarifies the social critique adumbrated in Crane’s early work,\(^{12}\) and more generally, may help us to revise the underestimation of the social consciousness of modern literature.

The Swede, in a manner remarkably similar to the Underground Man, provokes the other inhabitants of the Palace Hotel to violent antagonism. Only one conclusion seems possible:

The corpse of the Swede, alone in the saloon, had its eyes fixed upon a dreadful legend that dwelt atop of the cashmachine: “This registers the amount of your purchase.” (SC, p. 446)

This is the preferred ending which reflects both our practical understanding and our modernist esthetics. We are shown, not told, by an ironic ending which reminds us of the last sentence of \textit{Madame Bovary}, or almost any \textit{Dubliners} story, that the Swede is such an insufferable masochist (we all know such cases) that one can no longer defer giving him what he deserves.

The second ending, in an unmodishly discursive manner, critiques the first. The difference between the cowboy’s superstitious belief that chance has forced the gambler to serve the Swede’s paradoxical motive for self-destruction, and the Easterner’s “mysterious theory” that all are responsible for the Swede’s death, is the revelation of the sacrificial mechanism. The Easterner’s admission of guilt for not taking sides with the Swede is a modern, \textit{romanesci} account which fully reveals rather than reflects the efficacy of the sacrificial mechanism for preventing the spread of contagious violence, yet threatens the success of ritual sacrifice by encouraging sympathy for the one person who cannot be forgiven: the scapegoat. It is not hatred of the Swede which causes the Easterner to side with the others, but fear of the contamination of violence.

For a time the encounter in the darkness was such a perplexity of flying arms that it presented no more detail than would a swiftly revolving wheel. Occasionally a face, as if illumined by a flash of light, would shine out, ghastly and marked with pink spots. A moment later, the men might have been known as shadows, if it were
not for the involuntary utterance of oaths that came from them in whispers.

Suddenly a holocaust of warlike desire caught the cowboy, and he bolted forward with the speed of a broncho. "Go it, Johnnie! Go it! Kill him! Kill him!"

Scully confronted him. "Kape back," he said; and by his glance the cowboy could tell that this man was Johnnie's father.

To the Easterner there was a monotony of unchangeable fighting that was an abomination. This confused mingling was eternal to his sense, which was concentrated in a longing for the end, the priceless end. Once the fighters lurched near him, and as he scrambled hastily backward he heard them breathe like men on the rack. (SC, p. 437)

Only Girard's hypothesis can recover the insight behind Crane's otherwise extravagant description: the loss of difference between antagonists in a ritual (artificially limited) combat, the danger of violence contaminating the rest of the community, the unanimity of bestial, martial, and personal violence, the identity of violence and the sacred ("this confused mingling was eternal to his sense"), and the longing for the priceless end which restores peace. Like all great modern narrators, the Easterner can explain the story from the point of view of the scapegoat because he has barely avoided victimization himself. If the pivot of the Easterner's revelation is that Johnnie was cheating at cards, then their first glimpse of Johnnie arguing with a farmer over a cardgame is an ominous insight into the dynamics of Fort Romper. "They reflected in the silence of experienced men who tread carefully amid new people." All three strangers know, in some way, that they must be careful to avoid victimization.

What separates the Swede from the Easterner is the Swede's mistaken idea that he can forestall violence by unmasking the scapegoat mechanism. The Easterner knows better than to quarrel with the town's misunderstanding of their own violence that makes sacrifice possible, when he carefully answers Scully's challenge to say what these boys have been doing to disturb the Swede. "The Easterner reflected again. 'I didn't see anything at all,' he said at last, slowly" (SC, p. 425).

Scully does not seem to recognize the motives for his boisterous hospitality, which grows hysterical in proportion to the Swede's anxiety. Blind to his own violence, he angrily denies that the Swede would be victimized in "modern" Nebraska; at the same time, he encourages the Swede to assume the scapegoat's momentary privileges of total license, to belligerently transgress those interdictions which normally prevent violence. Violence and the Sacred likewise observes religiously the modern prejudice that a judicial system is superior to and renders obsolete primitive ritual...
violence, and therefore this book is largely silent about those insights so pregnant with implication for modern culture, and does not openly acknowledge its implicit sympathy with a literature so preoccupied with exiles and victims.

But in the first section of Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde, "la anthropologie fondamentale," Girard puts aside this prejudice, and suggests that our history is the pattern of traces left from the successive, imperfect erasures of the sacrificial origin of culture. "Le curieux paradoxe, c'est que l'effacement des traces ramène le meurtre fondateur. Pilate et Macbeth ont beau se laver les mains, les traces reparaissent toujours; elles reparaissent même de plus en plus et la meurtre fondateur est sur nous" (CC, p. 73). The climate of precise misunderstanding which permits sacrifice (the sacrificed is/is not us) never stabilizes, perhaps because only a prior and full understanding could misunderstand in the right way. The etymological history of the word prejudice itself records such erasures tracing the returning presence of la meurtre fondateur: the praebidicium was the Roman court to which one referred cases so obvious that judgement by precedent yielded the "just" decision. Prejudice has come to mean the collective mechanism for falsely accusing and expelling those who are "supposed to" defile themselves and others by behavior tabooed to the community. Here we fold Girard's hypothesis, which begins in modern literature, and develops through an analysis of the origin of human culture, back on itself, to better understand the pertinence of the sacrificial mechanism to modern masochism. The scapegoat resolves the ontological crisis: the masochism which we discover in others certifies our superior being. Our modern judicial system allows the most violent and aggressive psychological scapegoating as long as it does not "break the law." But if the law is broken, the criminal is sanctimoniously scapegoated to atone for the prejudice of all, which is the religious way of saying he allows us to deny our own prejudice by the judgement that he alone is guilty of prejudice.

Fort Romper is contentious because it refuses to be victimized by the snobbism of Eastern refinement. Scully's choice of the color blue for his hotel is at one with the collective violence of Fort Romper:

It is true that on clear days, when the great transcontinental expresses, long lines of swaying Pullmans, swept through Fort Romper, passengers were overcome at the sight and the cult that knows the brown-reds and the subdivisions of the dark greens of the East expressed shame, pity, horror, in a laugh. But to the citizens of this prairie town and to the people who would naturally stop there, Pat Scully had performed a feat. With this opulence and splendor, these creeds, classes, egotisms, that streamed through Fort Romper on the rails day after
Scully's feat is to respond to the religious exclusiveness of eastern sacrificial "cults" with an exclusiveness even more contentious and sadistic. East and West are mimetic rivals trying to excite an envy greater than the other. Even Scully's hospitality is contentious; he captures his clients and drags them back to a hotel which "seemed to be merely a proper temple for an enormous stove, which, in the center, was humming with godlike violence" (SC, p. 419). Modern commerce is itself a sacrificial victimization, a judicial violence sanctioned by the law, or an opportunity to exonerate society as a whole as innocent consumers in opposition to a single merchant or "interest," when the law is broken.

Yet the Swede is not killed in the Blue Hotel. Johnnie is only an apprentice gambler; the professional, who can perform the sacrifice which benefits the whole community, sits in the saloon. When the Swede violates custom here, the others encase themselves in reserve as if they know the ceremony has begun:

[The gambler] was, in fact, a man so delicate in manner, so judicious in his choice of victims, that in the strictly masculine part of the town’s life he had come to be explicitly trusted and admired. People called him a thoroughbred. The fear and contempt with which his craft was regarded were undoubtedly the reason why his quiet dignity shone conspicuous above the quiet dignity of men who might be merely hatters, billiard-makers, or grocery clerks. Beyond an occasional unwary traveller who came by rail, this gambler was supposed to prey solely upon reckless and senile farmers, who, when flush with good crops, drove into town in all the pride and confidence of an absolutely invulnerable stupidity. Hearing at times in circuitous fashion of the despoilment of such a farmer, the important men of Romper invariably laughed in contempt of the victim, and if they thought of the wolf at all, it was with a kind of pride at the knowledge that he would never dare think of attacking their wisdom and courage. Besides, it was popular that this gambler had a real wife and two real children in a neat cottage in a suburb, where he led an exemplary home life; and when anyone even suggested a discrepancy in his character, the crowd immediately vociferated descriptions of this virtuous family circle. Then men who led exemplary home lives, and men who did not lead exemplary home lives, all subsided in a bunch, remarking that there was nothing more to be said. (SC, p. 444)
As the one most susceptible to contamination (his craft is regarded with fear and contempt), the gambler, like the sacrificial priest, is considered both part of and apart from the community. He unifies the entire town in opposition to his judicious victims, whose vulnerability clarifies by contrast their own superior being. It is clear from this passage that potential rivals in the community reconcile themselves to each other by reciting the mythical attributes of the gambler.

A judicial society can accommodate the failure of ritual sacrifice. Normally the gambler chooses victims who will not incite illegal violence. But when he fails, he becomes the scapegoat of the mechanism he administered. The Easterner is maddened because he didn’t know what to do. To have exposed Johnnie ran the risk of spreading violence by equalling the sides or, worse still, taking the Swede’s place, like a police officer interfering in a domestic quarrel. It seems impossible to argue against violence without becoming violent. (Indeed, the Easterner and the cowboy argue violently about the scapegoating of the gambler and the Swede.) Yet it is also impossible to avoid being killed without complying to an act of ritual murder.

The problematic nature of Crane’s narrative suggests the problematics of modern literature itself. To what service can modern writers put their sympathy with the scapegoat victim? How can we imagine a manner of identifying with the victim without triggering a sacrificial crisis of taking sides? The thing most needful, as I have suggested before, is an act of identification that is more than a simple loss of differences: for Girard, this calls for nothing less than the substitution of the Logos of violence (mauvaise reciprocité) with the Logos of love (bonne reciprocité).

Girard has steadfastly maintained the superior speculative power of certain literary texts over the texts of the human sciences. To his concern for those texts which clarify cultural crisis (modern fiction, Greek and Elizabethan drama) he adds, in the second section of Des Choses cachées, entitled “L’Écriture judéo-chrétienne,” The Bible. For Girard, the Bible exceeds the current limitations of the human sciences to suggest a fundamental anthropology and an interindividual psychology (sections I and III of Des Choses cachées). It also provides a means of expressing the radical situation of The Easterner, Stephen Crane, and all modern writers who understand victimization. “... Au paroxysme de la crise, celui qui prête l’oreille au commandement d’amour, celui qui interprète rigoureusement la loi, se trouve confronté par un choix crucial entre tuer ou être tué” (CC, p. 253).

The two prostitutes who solicit Solomon’s wisdom (1 K 3, 16-28) summon up for Girard the progression the Bible traces from a social order founded in human sacrifice towards a non-sacrificial reconciliation that doesn’t exclude anyone. The “bad” prostitute’s intent to possess what the “good” prostitute possesses (the child) so involves the two in contentious reciprocity that they can no longer be distinguished. While the bad prosti-
tute would accept Solomon’s radical “justice” of dividing the child in two (presumably satisfied to have no child if the other has none), the good prostitute refuses a reconciliation of this crisis of differences based on sacrifice, and risks Solomon’s wrath, risks taking the child’s place, to save it.

... on doit s’interroger sur les motifs de la passion et y reconnaître une conduite homologue à celle de la bonne prostituée. Pour comprendre l’attitude du Père de Jésus, il suffit de réfléchir aux sentiments qui animent le roi dans toute cette affaire. Le roi ne souhaite ni le sacrifice de l’enfant, puisque l’enfant ne mourra pas, ni le sacrifice de la mère, puisque, c’est à elle que l’enfant sera remis, afin que l’un et l’autre vivent ensemble dans la paix. De même, le Père ne souhaite le sacrifice de personne; mais, à la différence de Salomon, il n’est pas sur la terre pour mettre fin aux querelles entre les doubles; sur terre, il n’y a pas de roi Salomon pour faire régner la vraie justice! La situation humaine fondamentale, c’est justement le fait qu’en l’absence de ces Pères et de ces rois toujours sages qui feraient régner la justice sur une humanité vouée à l’éternelle enfance, la seule conduite vraiment humaine, la seul moyen de faire la volonté du Père, sur la terre comme au ciel, c’est de se conduire comme la bonne prostituée, c’est d’assumer les mêmes risques qu’elle, non dans une sombre volonté de sacrifice, non dans une attirance morbide pour la mort, mais au contraire par amour pour la vie véritable, pour assurer la triomphe de la vie. (CC, p. 265)

Thus Des Choses cachées speaks at once to the great enigmas of Girard’s two major works, (1) the unspoken alternative to modern masochism in Deceit, Desire, and the Novel and (2) the unacknowledged pertinence of the scapegoat mechanism elaborated in Violence and the Sacred to an understanding of modern society. Girard’s answer to the deviated transcendence of the modern period, where all men are gods for each other and masochists for themselves, locked in an interminable sacrificial crisis, is the mediation of Christ, whose divinity is accessible to those who turn away from violence and all his works by loving their enemy twins. Justice is no longer seen as a superior technique for ending violent reciprocity, but a stage in the progressive decomposition of deified violence, influenced by the presence of l’Écriture judéo-chrétienne, which scandalously narrates texts of persecution and expulsion from the scapegoat’s point of view.

The modern period is the culmination of this progressive decon-
We will have learned nothing from Girard if we cannot see that his faith derives from his work, and not the other way around. Our own faith in a future must derive from the same source. Yet can we not sense, in Crane’s late story “The Monster,” the reconciling spirit of la Logos johannique, present also in Stephen and Bloom’s refusal, never before understood, to return violence for violence? Modern literature’s relation to l’Écriture judéo-chrétienne is not yet written, but can we not hear, in Joyce’s insistence that his stories were the first step in the spiritual liberation of his country, the voice of social consciousness in modern literature?

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NOTES


5  Three interviews are of special interest: “A Colloquy with René Girard,” *The Gypsy Scholar,* Volume 1, 2, pp. 5-23; “Discussion avec René Girard,” *L’Esprit* (Novembre 1973), pp. 528-63; “Interview,” *Diacritics,* 8, 1 (Spring


“The Pharmakos of Myth is the Naked Lunch of Mode: Modern Literature as the Age of Frye and Borges,” boundary 2.


I have previously discussed the relation of romanticism to modernism in “Madame Bovary: Romanticism, Modernism, and Bourgeois Style,” MLN, 94, 4 (May 1979), pp. 843-50.


Crane’s fiction as social critique has been recognized at least since 1940; see Russell B. Nye, “Stephen Crane as a Social Critic,” Modern Quarterly, 11 (Summer 1940), pp. 48-54. Yet “The Blue Hotel” is rarely recognized as fundamental to Crane’s social critique.

“A guest under my roof has sacred privileges” (SC, p. 430).

See my “Pharmakos” essay.

See “Narcissism: The Freudian Myth Demythified by Proust,” Psychoanalysis, Creativity, and Literature: A French-American Inquiry, ed. Alan Roland. Indeed, Crane’s Easterner seems fully aware of the heuristic power of the analogy of linguistic structure to social structure: “We are all in it! This poor gambler isn’t even a noun. He is kind of an adverb. Every sin is the result of a collaboration” (SC, p. 448).

“Le fait vraiment nouveau, c’est qu’on ne peut plus s’en remettre à la violence du soin de résoudre la crise; on ne peut plus faire fond sur la violence. Pour que la violence puisse accomplir son cycle et ramener la paix, il faut un champ
écologique assez vaste pour absorber ses ravages. Ce champ, aujourd'hui, est étendu à la planète entière mais sans doute n’est-il déjà plus suffisant. Même si ce n’est pas encore vrai aujourd’hui, demain certainement le milieu naturel ne sera plus capable, sans devenir inhabitable, d’absorber la violence que l’homme peut déchaîner (CC, p. 282).