

# English abstracts 36 (2019): 1–2

**Tiina Arppe**, From a Hegelian-inspired model of consciousness to a universal explanation of cultural evolution: The Three Desires of René Girard

René Girard's theory of culture is based on his postulate concerning the mimetic nature of human desire. However, as I will argue, there are three different desires at work in Girard's oeuvre. The first one, dominating his literary theory, is based on a Kojève-inspired interpretation of Hegel, where consciousness and its mirror-like structure stand at the forefront; the second one, characterizing Girard's theory of religion, is heavily impregnated with the idea of affective violence and constructed in explicit opposition to Freud; the third one, at work in his theory of cultural evolution, emphasizes the automatic and reflexive nature of desire, connecting human behavior with what's observed in other primates. The question I am asking is whether we are dealing with the same desire in each case and what kind of consequences these differing focuses will have for the analysis of culture.



**Erkki Vainikkala**, Unstable mimetic desire in Robert Walser's novel *The Assistant*

Robert Walser is an early Modernist Swiss author known for his short prose and three novels, less so for his fairytale-like short dramatic texts and poems. His novel *The Assistant*, which appeared in 1908 (*Der Gehülfe*), is analysed mainly with concepts derived from René Girard's mimetic theory of desire, although non-competitive mimeticism also figures. For the analytical setup, Girard's later theory of the scapegoat is hauled into his early theory of the (mainly 18th century) novel. In these terms, the status, actions and psychological responses of the novel's protagonist are considered as he takes up a position as office clerk at an engineer-businessman's enterprise. He becomes involved in generalized market-driven rivalry without identifiable objects of desire as assumed in Girard's theory. Due to the difference of position, no "internally mediated" rivalry between these two personages can develop, although there are imaginary leanings in that direction. Moreover, as in Walser's work generally, the pro-

tagonist is apt to lying low, without the imitative zeal depicted in Girard's "model" novels. There are, however, elements of *ressentiment* with possible roots in his proletarian background. The functioning of the scapegoat is also looked into, also with regard to sadomasochistic behavior in the novel. In this way, Girard's concepts stand as a foil rather than as a steady framework for the analysis. The particular Modernist narrative features of the novel, too, give it a special mimetic twist deviating from Girard's strongly evaluative account of the mimesis effect. Thus, there is a productive asymmetry at work here, and the article ends with a consideration of the achievement and the limits of Girard's approach in such contexts.



**Hanna Mäkelä**, Novelistic Truth and Narrative Rhetoric: René Girard's Mimetic Theory and the Implied Author of Narratology

René Girard's broadly anthropological ambitions and the boldness of his multi-disciplinarian overtures have made him a force to be reckoned

with within the contemporary theory of imitation, or *mimesis*. However, these same characteristics have alienated many scholars who feel he is too universalizing and reductionist in his emphasis on content over form.

Among narratologists, few have bothered to probe the implications Girard's novelistic analyses have on concepts like narrative perspective structure or the implied author.

This paper will explore the hitherto largely untapped narratological possibilities of Girard's mimetic theory by close-reading two late-twentieth-century Anglophone novels, Morrison's *Sula* (1973) and McEwan's *Amsterdam* (1998). Both novels deal with the very Girardian themes of friends becoming rivals and their surrounding communities facing actual or potential crises. A case will be made for both novels implying at ethical and existential ideals that are not necessarily realized in the plot outcome, but nevertheless seem to be present in the text as placed there by the implied author. I argue that Phelan's definition of this controversial concept first coined by Booth in 1961 is best suited to bridging the gap between Girard's anthropology and postclassical narratology.



**Nana Arjopalo, The Scapegoat in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride***

The article analyses the vicious circle of violence in Bharati Mukherjee's novels *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* through René Girard's concepts of triangular mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism. In the closed and symmetrical reality of Mukherjee's novels, the scapegoating of Tara Lata appears to follow the pattern suggested by Girard.

The novels depict the story of Tara Lata, whose saving grace is her father's decision to marry her to a tree in a small Bengali village in the late 1800s. Like a tree, Tara remains rooted to her father's house, but leads an independent life without restrictions that a husband and children would pose. Tara involves herself with India's struggle for independence and is imprisoned and killed by the British. Tara's story illustrates Bengal's struggle in the hands of parties with differing interests, and suggests that peace can never be built on revenge. Tara is scapegoated twice, but harmony does not return to the surrounding society, and thus the scapegoat mecha-

nism is not fully realized. Instead, the community remains caught in a vicious circle of violence and retaliation.



**Tuomas Kervinen, *Mimetic Theory and the Scandal of Poetry***

The article examines how René Girard's mimetic theory can be applied to the study of lyric poetry. Using theories of lyric genre, such as Northrop Frye's genre theory, where lyric is seen a mode of indirect communication, as well as Hazard Adams's ideas on the offenses of poetry, the article examines how lyric poetry attracts its readers by scandalising them. In other words, poems promise access to some privileged meaning or experience that they simultaneously block. Generally falling within a poem's rhetorical situation, such scandals are the means by which poems both fascinate and repel their readers. In addition, the article offers an interpretation of Eino Leino's romantic and Nietzschean poem "Hyvä on hihtäjän hihdellä" (1900) and argues that Girard's mimetic theory, though suspicious of poetic transfigurations that stem from obsessive or scandalous interpersonal relations, can be enriched by insights gleaned from the study of lyric poetry.

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