

2018 COV&R ABSTRACTS (panels and workshops listed at the end)

ANDERSON, Marvin Lee (Victoria University, University of Toronto) Backlash and Backwaters: Anger and Betrayal in America's Heartland and Beyond

Pankaj Mishra describes our time as “The Age of Anger.” In his recent book by the same title, Mishra cites René Girard’s concept of mimesis (central to his own thesis): “desiring objects because the desires of others tell us that they are something to be desired.” In his book, *Must There be Scapegoats?*, Raymond Schwager writes: “Anger is powerful and blind. Since it is powerful, reason and good will can hardly resist it head-on. But since it is also blind, it easily loses sight of the object...Because of this, anger can be manipulated.” This paper probes the politicized manipulation of anger, rage and betrayal across racial, economic, cultural and geographical lines in America today—in light of the violent cycle of mimetic desire. By juxtaposing Mishra’s analysis with related research on anger and outrage by sociologists Arlie Hochschild and Robert Wuthnow, we will critically examine how the American Right has propagandized the myth of the American Dream and rationalized their sense of betrayal and blame. We will challenge the pejorative stereotypes about America’s Heartland from last year’s U.S. presidential election by *listening* to the painful ‘deep stories’ behind the hostile backlash from rural proverbial ‘backwaters.’ We will clarify the differences between common negative images of (self)-righteous anger (often giving license to blaming, shaming and scapegoating) and non-violent, ‘rightful’ anger fighting on behalf of the vulnerable (i.e., March for Our Lives). When citizens then become *engaged* instead of *enraged*, the prophetic mission of ‘transmuted’ anger leads human beings to love (Rudolf Steiner).

ARCHBOLD, Jason (Independent Student-Scholar) What Colonel Kurtz Sees When ‘Looking at it’: Mimesis, Madness, and the Violence of Honesty

Midway through Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*, the “mad” Colonel Kurtz responds to the charge of murder in a letter to his son. “We acted as soldiers,” he writes. “The charges are unjustified. They are [...] quite completely insane.” In reciprocating one of his two accusations (murder and madness), Kurtz’s words hint at the sacrificial crisis which lies at the heart of the film. The other elements of René Girard’s theory of sacrifice quickly follow. These accusations could have been leveled at anyone else, as Captain Willard (Kurtz’s assassin and double) notes more than once. The reason for Kurtz’s scapegoating, I will argue, is provided later in that same letter home. When Kurtz describes the nature of warfare, he emphasizes the need for clarity and decisions rejects the Army’s “timid, lying morality”. This tension is a variant on the ambivalence with which Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* (1977) opens. Violence is human, but it is equally human to find violence abhorrent, so much so that describing violence as human often provokes a kind of counter-violence which seeks to prevent humans from discovering their own nature. Kurtz is not the only one to be attacked for the clarity with which he observes violence: I suspect a similar motivation lies behind many of the critiques Girard has received. I will therefore focus on the tension between violence and honesty which manifests when thinkers attempt to describe violence with clarity and the scapegoating which comes as a result.

BARBER, Benjamin (Hong Kong Baptist University & Beijing Normal University: United International College) *Mimetic Desire in Shelley's Politics: Spinozian Democracy in A Philosophical View of Reform*

My paper will demonstrate that, in *A Philosophical View of Reform* (1819-20), the poet-philosopher, Percy Shelley, deploys a Spinozian theory of desire that anticipates Mimetic Theory's warnings regarding the escalation of modern politicized violence, while providing a pragmatic method for implementing a Spinozian democracy in nineteenth-century Europe. My argument will respond to and build upon Stéphane Vinolo's recent work, which notes the striking similarity between Girard's *Battling to the End* (2010) and Spinoza's theories of desire (Vinolo, "Spinoza, Girard and the Possibility of a Purely Immanent Democracy," 2016). Vinolo claims that Spinoza's "immanentist" democratic vision may provide a solution to the contemporary escalation of violent political extremes. Immanentist democracies do not evaluate electorates' decisions according to how closely they align with moral values. Rather, immanent democracies defer exclusively to the mathematically determined desires of majorities. By referring to Shelley's extensive engagement with Spinoza's thought, I will elucidate how *A Philosophical View* proposes to use both policy and poetry to rouse a new immanentist sentiment that privileges collective desire of the multitude over transcendent values. Shelley champions poetics and policies that expose desire's mimetic nature to cultivate a united intersubjective desire, which he calls "the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial" and "universal change." Ultimately, I will consider the limits of Shelley's plan as it encounters the tendency for transcendent ideals to persist as objects of mimetic rivalry within the legacy of the surrogate victim mechanism.

BELLINGER, Charles (Texas Christian University): *The Kierkegaard-Girard Option*

There has been much discussion lately of Rod Dreher's book *The Benedict Option*, along with other suggestions such as "The Dominican Option," or "The Marian Option," or "The Pietist Option." I have been reading both Kierkegaard and Girard for many years, and it strikes me that a synthesis of their thought ought to be considered as another option. While Dreher tends to counsel the retreat of traditionalist Christians into enclaves of virtue, preparing for many decades to the soft-totalitarianism of the Left, I suggest that the notion of the "culture wars" being lost by those on the right is not very helpful. Particularly in the wake of the election of Donald Trump, people of moral and theological sensitivity on both the left and the right feel like aliens in a strange land. The synthesis of Kierkegaard and Girard provides the most insightful analysis of the roots of violence in human culture, and communicating that synthesis provides a robust program for cultural engagement, not retreat into enclaves. The fact that Kierkegaard and Girard are respected and read within both liberal and conservative circles provides a basis for culturally transformative conversations. Girard's notion that Christian ideas are at work in modern culture, and shape the rhetoric of "concern for victims," is another way of responding to Dreher's idea that we are living in a "post-Christian age." We are living in a chaotic and confusing age, but the ideas of Kierkegaard and Girard have proven to be very engaging and constructive.

BUIL Zamorano, Unai (Universidad de Navarra) *Girard's Copernican Revolution: Sacrifice as the Origin of the Gods*

In a similar manner as Kant did carry out a 'Copernican revolution' in the field of philosophy, one can consider that René Girard's notion of sacrifice can be regarded as well as a new approach to the nature of sacrifice; it is a new concept in the sense that it counters the commonly held and widespread belief that sacrifices are offered to a divinity or god that demands human beings to

worship them. Girard's argument overturns this traditional idea of sacrifice and defends the opposite: sacrifices create the gods for there is no god before sacrifices. There is no real transcendence-in-itself to which men should offer sacrifice for transcendence and the gods are a projection of human mind and society: when society is threatened by violence, political leaders resort to the sacrifice of a scapegoat to expel violence to a 'great beyond'. Girard tries to explain transcendence and sacred beings from a strictly rational point of view, according to which it is not sacrifices that are offered to god, but gods themselves that derive from sacrifice. When religious leaders murder a scapegoat they are, at bottom, ejecting interior violence. Thus, society and its leaders, somewhat unconsciously, turn to a sacred murder: a scapegoat, representing all the members of the community, is to be found guilty and, ultimately, slaughtered. After this sacrifice, as society manages to recover from its previous instability, the sacrificed victim starts being regarded as divine. Once violence has been 'killed', the peace that ensues is put down to something divine that has brought about calm and order again. In doing so, man erects the world of the gods, which are the murdered victims, and the the great beyond where they live. Being the centre of religion, sacrifice is, in accordance with Girard's thought, more than just a mere ceremony or a purely decorative and secondary aspect of symbolic life. It is, on the contrary, the event from which the very notion and existence of divinity and social order stem from. Only Divine Revelation and the murder of Christ will open up a new scene: that of the true God, the real transcendence and the genuine religion.

COWDELL, Scott (Charles Sturt University) Doubles, Narcissists, Victims, and Philosophers: Truth and 'After Truth' in Mimetic Theory

Today's 'fake news' reveals a turn from sober, evidence-based rationality towards cognitive nihilism. Key questions of moment become less resolvable once facticity is annexed by ideological oppositions, with truth increasingly subjected to power. Spin, propaganda, dissembling, and disinformation are all on the rise, knowingly supplanting the ancient structural *méconnaissance* identified by Girard. History's central truth—that of the victim—was unconsciously yet programmatically repressed until the structuring of texts and cultures by scapegoating was revealed and secular modernity began to discover alternative social arrangements. Indeed, this central insight of mimetic theory can be regarded as bringing its own kind of 'after Truth' moment, 'after' the false truth—that is, the 'official' truth—which suppresses knowledge of the victim. Girard warns of this false truth returning with Nietzsche's principled embrace of the Dionysian, and more recent neo-pagan trends that obfuscate the truth of the victim. Hence today's 'fake news' and 'after Truth' situation in which the old false sacred version of truth is being re-conjured. This paper 1. identifies some pressures on truth entailed by mimetic doubling, ontological sickness, narcissism in particular, and mechanisms of the false sacred, also considering 2. the deconstruction applied to truth as metaphysical presence in some Girard-influenced thought, which points beyond the doubles of ontotheology and cognitive nihilism. It aims to show how a Girardian account of truth might avoid both violent closure and the hidden violence of today's 'after Truth' developments.

DARCY, Fr. Michael J. (The Oratory of St. Philip Neri) The Type of the One who was to Come: Girard, Sacrifice, and Christianity.

Controversy has continued within Girardian circles concerning the possibility of an authentic Christian sacrifice. Differences of opinion on this matter are easily traced back to Girard himself, who in his earliest works rejects the notion, but later in his career reverses himself and accepts it. Hesitancy on the part of Girardians to follow him in this regard may stem from an incomplete articulation of the rationale for this transition in his thought. This paper will argue that the

needed rationale is found in an intuition that Girard himself provides, namely, that primitive religion and its violent sacrifices form a “type” with Christianity and the death of Jesus. This typological intuition of Girard’s, present in both his earliest and latest works, is, in fact, the heart of his intellectual inspiration. I will argue that nevertheless he develops it incompletely and applies it inconsistently. This lapse leads him away from the realization of what might have been obvious from the outset, that in order to present a complete and effective anti-type of primitive religion, Christianity must feature a sacrifice of its own that forms a counterpart to the violent sacrifices of primitive religion. In sum, this paper will employ a method of “using Girard to correct Girard” in order to demonstrate that this typological approach points directly to the sacrificial nature of Christianity in all its aspects, and can help further illuminate the Christian understanding of conversion and resurrection.

DUGGAN, Paul (Oxford University) How the Shepherd Found His Flock: A “Just So” Story

This 'just so' story about scapegoating is neither science nor myth, and begins by asking why wild dogs sometimes drive an 'omega' dog out of the pack. It's possible that in prehistoric times dogs and our ancestors both developed a scapegoating 'mechanism' as a protection against repeated epidemics. Later, this mechanism could be mobilised against the social 'infection' of conflict and violence in the group. It would interact with, and need to dominate, more human instincts and features - empathy, sense of fairness, and so on. It would also interact with our much older instincts for 'fight/flight' and 'freeze'. These interactions imply the use of 'magical thinking' rather than reason. By biblical times human groups had grown to more than 100 times their traditional size, exposing the fact that the mechanism no longer brought safety to the group, but actually conserved instability and violence. And in the twentieth century, in groups 100 times bigger still, the mechanism has been observed in amplified form, as 'large group regression'. In Girard's reading of the Bible, Jesus completed an Old Testament process of discovery and reform of the mechanism, with his teachings and death. The truth encoded in the gospels is more relevant than ever in our post-Truth era, when new forms of 'disaster capitalism' are emerging.

DUNN, George A. (University of Indianapolis; Ningbo Institute of Technology) Freedom, Equality, and Mimesis (East and West)

Central to Girard’s mimetic theory is the rather counter-intuitive insight that our most intractable conflicts arise not from our differences, as most people suppose, but rather from too much similarity, proximity, or sameness. Our peers are the ones most likely to become our rivals, as our proximity causes us to compete for the same objects, which are often intangibles like honor, recognition, or prestige. Thus, the greatest challenge facing any society is how to minimize and manage these conflicts. Girard focuses on the scapegoat mechanism, whereby antagonists reconcile by redirecting their hostility toward some relatively marginal member of the group who can be blamed for the intergroup strife. But this mechanism is deployed spontaneously in moments of acute crisis; it is executed within the liminal space between the collapse of one social order and the erection of a new one. It’s not a stable institution operating within society for minimizing and managing conflict on a daily basis. My paper will contrast two institutionalized ways of managing our conflict-prone mimetic propensities, one Western, one East Asian. Whereas the modern West, extoling freedom and equality as supreme goods, establishes rules to restrain the resulting rivalries, the Confucian tradition aims at harmonious external mediation through asymmetrical relationships and their accompanying duties. Contrasting the anthropological assumptions of these two approaches can help us gain a deeper understanding of our own values,

shed new light on the meaning of freedom and equality, and foster a truly global dialogue on alternative ways to reduce conflict.

DUNS, SJ, Ryan G (Marquette University) After Truth, Authenticity: The Mimetic Conversion of Ivan Ilyich

My paper explores Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" as a narrative of mimetic conversion. In the figure of Ivan Ilyich, we find an exemplar of the "romantic lie" who, through the slow and agonizing process of dying, comes to grasp the hollowness of his life. Yet in this collapse and breakdown, there is a breakthrough: in the throes of dying, "some force" strikes him and draws him into the presence of a bright light. Suddenly, he perceives his life with new eyes, or with what the Irish philosopher William Desmond calls "posthumous mind," and undergoes a profound conversion. It is in this moment of mimetic conversion, Ivan is freed to live – even if only for a fleeting moment – a life of authenticity. Read through the lens of mimetic theory, we can see how Tolstoy's story is very much our story: we, inundated with fake-news and alternative facts, are easily seduced into self-deception, into believing the "romantic lie." Read rightly, Tolstoy's novella can help to diagnose the pathology of this self-deception and open up the question for each of us: after truth's irruption, what does an authentic life look like? The "novelistic truth" identified by Girard is not a neutral fact but an experience enabling those who perceive it not to live in a different world but to live in the world differently.

ENRIGHT, Lyle (Loyola University Chicago) Postmodernism as Post-Truth Scapegoat

"Want to better understand 'post-truth' politics?" announces a *Huffington Post* headline from November 2016: "Then study postmodernism." In a September editorial for the *Washington Post*, Barton Swaim declares that Donald Trump is "our first full-on 'postmodern' presidential candidate ... If there is such a thing [for him], 'truth' is only rhetorical or rooted in perspective." These are only a few of the headlines demonstrating that, since Oxford Dictionaries declared "post-truth" to be the "word of the year" in 2016, postmodernism has frequently been identified as to blame for our current crisis of truth and legitimacy. To explain the collapse of truth and knowledge in the twenty-first century, a number of those who once lauded postmodernism for its transgressive and liberating potentials have now turned on the movement, viewing it as the slippery slope down which the "post-truth" moment has arrived. The goal of this presentation is to explore these ways in which postmodernism itself has become an ideological "scapegoat" in the post-truth era. The "victimary" status of postmodernism in the media as of late ought to provoke us into revisiting the movement, remembering that it originally resisted fascist impulses by, as Jacques Derrida has said, "thinking two things at once," rather than merely refusing to think the truth at all. The postmodern question of power and knowledge has never been as pertinent as it is now, in the age of "post-truth" politics, and my hope is that a Girardian perspective on postmodernism's recent intellectual reception may allow us to reconsider what in the movement is yet worth preserving.

FITZPATRICK, Joseph (Heythrop University) 'L'homme du train'

'L'homme du train' depicts two apparently very different French men who meet on a train. One of the characters played by Johnny Halliday physically resembles the French musician for his rock star appearance in leather jacket, whilst the other character is older

and is played by Jean Rochefort, who resembles a French fonctionnaire and who lives in an old bourgeois house, where most of the action takes place. It is a most interesting coincidence that even though separated by thirteen years in age both actors died within two months of each other late last year. They make initial contact on the train and begin to see in the other traits of character for which in their minds are ignited sparks and flames of mimetic desire. This paper provides a description of the aspects for which they display mimetic desire in the other with attention to physical and psychological features. In this analysis an attempt to root their desires in Girardian mimetic desire will be made with reference to Girardian texts. Interdividuality will be analysed for both the positive and negative effects which come into play in the relationship between the two men and will be observed for how it may both be uplifting and downcasting thus being both destructive and creative. This film is particularly interesting for how it illustrates interaction between men looking for value and fulfilment in their universe, longing to find it in the other in a world after truth where values are not sure.

FITZPATRICK, Joseph (Heythrop University) How do Military Chaplaincies Serve God in a World After Truth?

This paper will consider the Military Chaplaincy as governed by Canon Law and will look at the Girardian aspects. Constitutional arrangements for the Military Chaplaincy will be considered in relation to *Anglicanorum Coetibus* and *Spirituali Militum Curae* and Canons governing Ordinariates. I will compare the constitutions of Military Chaplaincies to see how they may operate according to Girardian mimetic theory and refer to the works of Rene Girard to examine the notion of Apocalyptic Violence and its biblical origins. I will demonstrate how Military Chaplaincies serving particular nation states and God may operate in a world of post truth. As I intend to focus particularly on Military Chaplaincies of the Roman Catholic Church I intend to assess the extent to which Rome may through the Canon Law have an influence on bringing Christ and the Sacraments to the Military in various countries. This paper will continue by referring to the work of Scott Cowdell on the presence of apocalyptic violence in the bible with particular reference to Girard's 'Things Hidden' and 'Apocalypse and Parable'. The Code of Canon Law 1983 makes little provision for the Military Ordinariates and Chaplaincy, but the position of the Military with regard to Canon Law will be clarified with regard to other Canons and to other canonical texts. The case of the Military Chaplaincy is and has always been of interest with regard to God and in a world after truth it is interesting to observe how Canonical statements on the Military may interact universally.

FRIEDEN, Ken Frieden (Syracuse University) Satire and Parody in Jewish Literature

Responding to the call for papers, I address two questions listed by the organizers: *How do works of art disclose truth, its counterfeits, and their (mis)-appropriation? How can mimetic theory shed light on satire's place in "post-truth" political culture?* Satire (social criticism) and parody (which is a form of intertextual appropriation) have played decisive roles in modern Jewish culture. Authors associated with the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) in Berlin launched a wide-ranging critique of some traditional Jewish practices and customs, which they viewed as superstitious and irrational. The culture war continues to this day—especially in Israel and New York—when liberal, secularly educated Jewish intellectuals question certain aspects of ultra-Orthodox hasidic life. Modern Jewish literature began at the intersection of three competing groups: the *maskilim* (Jewish Enlightenment activists), the *hasidim* and their opponents (the *mitnagdim*). Mimetic rivalry in Hebrew and Yiddish started a battle of the books, involving both satire and parody, that

has marked Jewish literature ever since. I will specifically discuss a sequence of anti-hasidic satires and parodies that were written throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, from Joseph Perl's biting *Revealer of Secrets* (*Megale temirin*, 1819) to I. L. Peretz's *Hasidic Tales* (*Hasidish*, 1889-1909). These works range from harsh social criticism to neo-romantic appropriation, raising difficult questions of scapegoating and mis-appropriation. In the past 50 years, as Americans have moved from the Age of Tricky Dick to the Age of *Trompe-l'œil*, lies have come to permeate our culture. First we came to know "Reality TV," from *Candid Camera* to *Survivor*, and now we find ourselves engulfed by TV Reality. Are we experiencing the last gasps of the Enlightenment? Is it still possible to distinguish between truth and lie, humans and machines, or sincerity and deception?

GARCÍA-RAMOS Gallego, David (Universidad Católica de Valencia) Knowledge or Wisdom? The value of truth in René Girard and Emmanuel Lévinas

In this paper, I will analyze the category of truth in Girard's and Levinas' epistemologies, focusing the civic and political value of truth, its current crisis and possible solutions through education. Both authors have developed in their respective works an alternative path to truth. Revelation, as anthropological and/or philosophical category, and not (only) religious revelation, is the key to understand their thoughts. I will propose an attentive reading of Levinas' *Ethics as First Philosophy*, and a reading of what Girard said in his late works (*When These Things Begin, Evolution and Conversion, Battling to the End, etc.*) as a meta-reflection, or epistemology, on his complete precedent and canonical work (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel, The Violence and the Sacred, Things Hidden...*). We will discover the main role for the comprehension of truth in the authors played by: a) textual objects –from Scriptures to literature and arts–; b) ethical or interindividual perspective. Finally, I will propose a new value or definition of truth, within its civic and political uses, with special mention to education.

GARDNER (University of Tulsa) The Decline of the West and the End of Man: Girard, Post-Modernism, and the Democratic Apocalypse

René Girard's notorious apocalypticism brings to completion post-modernist arguments from the 1960s about the "end of man" and the overcoming of "humanism." His argument reverses standard expectations of a "more perfect union" or democracy, though, defeating the implicitly emancipatory hopes of post-structuralism, deconstruction, and their post-modernist kin. Instead, Girard points simply to the end (το ἔσχατον) in a catastrophic "escalation to extremes" bringing Clausewitz's originally heuristic "logical concept" of war to a nightmare of realization. This is not just the end of a humanist paradigm but an actual end of the human as such. Humanity deconstructs itself. Essentially, this is a consequence of the progress of democracy from Napoleon's time to ours—not its failure, but its success—which in turn flows from the impact of Christianity in history. Girard's end-of-history does not foresee a happier, or even just another, end-state, like Fukuyama's melancholy triumph of liberal democracy and the "last man." Democratic self-destruction (intellectually registered in deconstruction and other forms of post-modernism) amounts not only to the historical self-judgement of "man," driven by the implacable demands of justice in the post-War period. Further than that, it implies the end of "man" simply—at the very least, the self-disintegration of the idea of the human on which the post-War order theoretically now rests. The concept of the "human" is inherently contradictory, and its contradictions are played out in the end of "politics" as a means of keeping the peace. Girard leaves open, though, whether this proves the truth of Christian revelation, as he wants to think, or just shows the end of Western civilization, Christendom and its secular realization. Moreover, he

does not consider how the development of cognitive elites and administrative apparatuses following “democratic” procedures respecting “human dignity” might replace politics with an administrative solution to the human problem.

GERLAND, Oliver (University of Colorado) Fake Piety: A Mimetic Account of Moliere’s *Tartuffe*

This essay explores an issue closely related to so-called “fake news.” It is “fake piety,” the use of behaviors associated with religion for the purposes of personal gain. *Tartuffe*, written by French playwright Moliere more than 350 years ago, has much to tell us today in the United States about fake piety. My argument has three parts. First, I sketch the political-religious climate of Louis XIV’s France with an emphasis on the King’s personal worship practice. Second, I consider how to characterize the relationship between Tartuffe and Orgon. Why does an upstanding middle-aged bourgeois man give a sleazy religious imposter everything that he can, from his wife’s body to deed to his house to a locked box containing a friend’s papers against the King? To answer that question, I use Rene Girard’s concept of the idol as detailed in his first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Finally, I consider the implications of the play’s end, a modern politicized version of the ancient Greek *deus ex machina*. Accompanied by an Officer of the King, Tartuffe returns to Orgon’s house expecting Orgon to be arrested for conspiring against the King. Amazingly, the Officer arrests Tartuffe instead and the play ends happily. Orgon’s locked box, his deed of house, and, presumably, his sanity is safely restored. It turns out that King Louis XIV saw through Tartuffe’s fake piety the moment he met him. As presented by Moliere in *Tartuffe*, fake piety is answered by a comprehensive surveillance state under the direction of a truly religious “Prince of Reason.” How is fake piety answered in the United States of 2018?

GIDLEY, Annika (Hope College) Maternal Models of Desire in *Harry Potter*

J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series has garnered both praise and controversy since its publication; the literary merit of the series and the nature of its connection, if one exists at all, with the Christian literary tradition, has been a matter of debate both within and outside of academia. A mimetic reading offers new responses to these questions and allows for an interpretation of *Harry Potter* as a novelistic portrayal of mimetic rivalry, positive mimesis, and the title character’s Girardian conversion. Maternal models and their habits of mercy emerge as the crucial elements of this conversion; through understanding their impact on both the plot and Harry himself, we can simultaneously open the series to a deeper Christian meaning and make an argument for its place alongside the works Girard asserts to be great literature.

GRUENLER, Curtis (Hope College) Mimesis, Friendship, and Truth

Mimetic theory reinforces the idea that all learning comes through imitation and adds the insight that mimetic violence and its management through the scapegoat mechanism result in the deformation of knowledge by mythmaking. Even the invariant knowledge of mathematics, as Michel Serres argues, is formed only through dialogic agreement over against the noise of the excluded other. What kind of relationship resists the mimetic tendency to bend knowledge toward exclusion and persecution and opens up the possibility of a hospitable and universal truth? Our most time-honored name for this is friendship. Paul Dumouchel’s account, in *The Barren Sacrifice*, of historical changes in solidarity groups under the influence of Christianity and

rise of the nation-state provides a framework for thinking about how ideals of friendship have developed in tension with—and transcended—mere preference for the like-minded. I will explore some moments in the history of thinking about and representing friendship that leave a legacy of positive mimesis oriented toward knowing truth, such as: Aristotle and Cicero on friendship as conscious, self-sacrificing devotion to a model of virtue, including intellectual virtues; the virtue of frankness (Latin *libertas*) as a mean of truth-telling between extremes of mimetic rivalry; the liberal arts as a hospitable framework for intellectual friendship; the connection between literary expressions of friendship and literary pursuit of truth; and representations of friendship as a novelistic contrast to romantic individualism, oriented toward conversion and the intelligence of the victim.

HERDA, John (Lyon College) The Violent Road to a Happy Ending: A Girardian Analysis of David Lynch's *Wild at Heart*

In David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (1990), the viewer sees the seedy side of the American road film: hitmen, cheap motels, prisons, dive bars, robberies, and an abundance of cigarettes litter the topsy-turvy lives of Sailor Ripley and Lula Pace Fortune, the conductors of this atemporal, adrenalized ride. Painted in the golden hues of an unconventional love story, the spectator accompanies the two lovers through the chaos of rivalry, jealousy, and violence. In this article, I interpret *Wild at Heart* through the prism of René Girard's philosophy, which ably explains violence by his pioneering insight on mimetic desire. In the film, triangular desire is perfectly elucidated by the triangle of Lula's mother, Marietta Fortune, Sailor, and Lula. Due to Marietta's overwhelming jealousy of Sailor for capturing her daughter's heart, she plots the murder of the ex-con, illuminating how violence is often explained by rivalry. In addition to mimetic desire, I underscore the role of scapegoating, highlighting how Sailor's criminal record leads to his being ostracized by society, reinforcing his ostensible criminality. Finally, I analyze the use of ritual sacrifice in the film, demonstrating how sacrificial violence mitigates internecine enmity, but only for so long. Consequently, a Girardian reading of Lynch's oeuvre explains important themes that make *Wild at Heart* a profound and meaningful film.

HODGE, Joel (Australian Catholic University) The Sacred and the Holy: An Alternative to Mimetic Rivalry of the Post-Truth World

There is a battle at the heart of modern "secular" culture: between the call to transcend violence in solidarity with the victimized, and those utilizing forms of sacred violence that either seek a return to the archaic sacred explicitly (through extremist violence) or strategically engage in forms of victimization based on expelling unsavory or marginalized others (forms of 'post-truth' democratic politics). The efforts of extremist violence have largely failed in the short term, with ISIS's supposed Caliphate losing most of its territory in the Middle East. The dynamics of mimetic rivalry that sought to bring the concept of absolute war to reality has been repressed by an alliance of nation-states led by the US. The nation-state project in the Middle East remains precarious, however. The prospect of escalating violence remains real, especially with on-going jihadi and civil wars, great power rivalries, and nuclear-armed totalitarian states. Moreover, the ability of Western democracies to restrain their own internal violence remains a fundamental challenge. Fragmentation is occurring along 'identity' lines (which represent a mimetic crisis) and victimization done under the cover of lowering media and political standards. This paper assesses these trends and proposes a more properly 'secular' option (in the sense of eschewing the false sacred) to resolve the modern sacrificial crisis. This path has been called that of "the holy" by

Girard, which he contrasts with the sacred. It can undergird a social system imbued with a sense of the victim through a non-resentful, forgiving ethos, open to the true transcendence.

JONAS, Peter (Our Savior's Lutheran Church) Bearing an Unbearable Truth: Folks are Just Not that into Us

Christianity in North America has engaged in a 30-year exercise of both evading and acknowledging a difficult truth. To paraphrase a saying from popular culture: folks are just not that into us. An accelerating decline in church attendance and financial support has destabilized many aspects of congregational life. We acknowledge reality by our anxious search for a fix. We deny reality by the very assumption that we can fix it. The fix usually involves adopting techniques that mimic the surrounding culture. The first section of this paper unveils various church fads and movements as manifestations of mimetic desire as churches succumb to a survival mindset. The second section of the paper examines more visceral, primitive and thus more revealing responses to this crisis. Parishioners respond to the indifference of society to the Christian narrative with denial and incomprehension. A yearning for the past has created pressures on clergy and expectations among parishioners that are detached from reality. As tension and conflict intensify, congregations identify scapegoats. Acknowledging that solutions based on technique or eliminating scapegoats will not solve the Church's decline opens the door to a deeper theological interpretation. The conclusion of the paper raises the question: What if North American Churches took Jesus at his word when he proclaims, "the truth shall set you free?" Martin Luther wrote, "A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." Can authentic hope be found in truth telling?

LEE, Justin (University of California-Irvine) Online Trolling and Ritual Sacrifice

This paper is adapted from my recently published essay on the strange culture of internet trolls in which I analyze the behavior of an anonymous trolling community, kiwifarms.net, through the lens of mimetic theory. If you or I or any of us is unfortunate enough to become one of Kiwi Farms' targets, we can expect to have every move we've made online screencapped and archived and exhaustively commented upon. These trolls will insinuate themselves into your social media life and provoke behaviors they find amusing. Most targets attract the site's attention because of their outsized internet footprints and certain online behaviors that the trolls deem to be sexually or psychologically deviant. The overwhelming majority are innocent people who have been less than circumspect online; however, some targets genuinely are bad actors (e.g. pedophiles). While much of the site's content is clearly humor-driven, all too often the trolling turns vicious. At least one woman targeted by Kiwi Farms has committed suicide. Many (if not most) of their victims are autistic or mentally ill. Last December, one of the site's users committed a school shooting before killing himself. The site commentary on such events is both appalling and remorseless. Surveying the site, one discovers that this behavior really does forge a kind of solidarity among trolls. And trolling practices that seem to best produce solidarity (through humor) tend to be repeated, almost ritualized. The Girardian implications are rather transparent. The community's first victim, Christian Weston Chandler, even occupies a quasi-sacred place in their memory. Kiwi Farms is a useful case study in how online communities forge solidarity through isolating and victimizing the *other*. It's a pattern repeated throughout social media in different guises, especially in "call-out culture." The impersonal nature of online community produces weak solidarities, exemplifying the weakness of the scapegoat mechanism in a context where the lie of victimage has been revealed. The cycling of online outrage—the multiplication of victims—is to be expected. As Girard writes in *Things Hidden*, "The more radical the crisis of the sacrificial system becomes, the more men will be tempted to multiply victims in order to accede, finally, to

the same effects.” Such a cycle is unsustainable. My paper will examine whether and how the impersonal nature of online community aids or inhibits the production of violent unanimity. My initial impression is that it makes such unanimity easier to produce, but greatly weakens its power and sustainability.

LEFLER, Nathan (University of Scranton) Two Kinds of Unanimity: St. Benedict, René Girard, and Modern Democratic Governance

René Girard’s analysis of the Gospels’ account of the Passion, in light of his theories of mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism, serve to illuminate a long-perplexing and enormously influential passage from Chapter 64 of *The Rule of St. Benedict*, pertaining to the election of the abbot. In turn, St. Benedict’s policy and the spiritual reasoning behind it serve to confirm Girard’s reasoning, not only with respect to his fundamental insight into the exposure of the scapegoat mechanism by the Evangelists (cf. esp. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*), but in connection to the rise of modern political (“democratic”) decision-making via simple majority rule (= the crowd). The theme of *truth* is also central to the argument I am developing, inasmuch as the notion of a *sanior pars* in the context of the selection process leading to abbatial installation implies a small group - as small as one - sounder in judgment than the rest. There is no question that St. Benedict proposes that there is an objectively right, or best, choice for the next abbot, and that the majority opinion within the monastery may not support that candidate. In this case, a minority “however small” may bear witness to the *truth* known absolutely only to God. In its status as a minority voice liable to be embattled if not persecuted within a less-than-perfect monastic community, this testimony to the truth thus identifies its few witnesses with the Victim, and the party that, post-Resurrection, testifies to the innocence of that Victim. This, in turn, points to Girard’s apocalyptic vision of the ultimate expression of the escalation to extremes, as first articulated by Pascal and glimpsed but shied away from by Clausewitz (*Battling to the End*): the war between violence itself and truth itself. As Steinmair-Pösel notes in an article in *Contagion* in 2007, corroborating a crucial element of Girard’s overall project, the only good way through and beyond this impasse is by appeal, both epistemological and existential, to [the category of] grace.

LENEHAN, Kevin (University of Divinity, Australia) Truth, War and Taking Responsibility: Benedict XV and the First World War

In 1758 Samuel Johnson wrote: ‘Among the calamities of war may be justly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages.’ Elected pope in the weeks after the outbreak of war in 1914, Giacomo della Chiesa – who took the papal name Benedict XV after the patron saint of peace in Europe – worked consistently and courageously to transform the Holy See as an international agency of peace diplomacy and humanitarian aid. Central to his controversial position of absolute impartiality among the belligerent nations was his theological refusal to legitimate the war aims of any nation. Based on his own experience in the papal diplomatic corps, and formed in the social teaching Leo XIII, Benedict repeatedly called the leaders of the warring nations to take responsibility for the origin, the conduct, and the urgent cessation of ‘this useless slaughter’. In a conflict that was quickly described in mythic and sacrificial overtones, Benedict refused to attribute the war to God’s will or divine providence, thus providing a counter-narrative to the war theology raging among both Allies and Central Powers, and earning him the suspicion of many, including his own bishops, on both sides. This paper will outline the main themes of Benedict’s theological argument against the war, arguing that for the pope the way to discerning the truthfulness of the situation of conflict lay in all parties’ willingness to take responsibility for their actions in an

escalating conflict. The intersections of Benedict's theology with mimetic theory will be underlined.

LYNCH, Paul (Saint Louis University) Revealing Rhetoric: The Truth/truth of Mimetic

In a 2004 essay, rhetorical critic and scholar Martin Medhurst called for the development of a distinctly Christian rhetorical theory. As he suggests, the roots of such a theory could be found in the canonical tradition: in the rhetorical prowess of Paul; in Christianity's most famous rhetorician, Augustine; in the nineteenth century rhetorics of clergymen such as Whately, Campbell, and Newman. Though these roots are important, Medhurst also suggests that something timelier is needed. "Don't we need an explicitly Christian theory of rhetoric for the twenty-first century that does, in fact, engage the revealed Truth/truths of Christianity?" This paper seeks to answer Medhurst's challenge by interpreting Girard as a rhetorical thinker. Though Girard was at best indifferent and at worst dismissive of rhetoric, his understanding of both the dynamics of desire and the formation of communities resonates deeply with ideas in rhetorical theory. His understanding of Christian revelation, however, will likely scandalize rhetorical studies, which is largely a Nietzschean discipline skeptical of upper case "Truth" in favor of its context-specific, lower-case counterpart. Given his claims to the empirical nature of his ideas, Girard seems an unlikely rhetorician. According to his own characterization, he has discovered a Truth that lurks behind smaller truths (whether the enduring revelations of scripture and novels, or the obscured insights of myth and Greek drama). But whether a discovery or a persuasive interpretation, Girard's central claims points the way toward a twenty-first century Christian rhetoric, one that operates by inviting imitation rather than seeking assent.

LYONS, Scott Richard (University of Michigan) Taking Flight: The Conversion of Sherman Alexie

Sherman Alexie (b.1966, American, Spokane-Coeur d'Alene), one of the most critically and commercially successful Native American authors of all time, has one novel to his credit that no one seems to like very much: *Flight* (2007). At first glance this unpopularity can be perplexing given that in many respects it is classic Alexie in terms of style and subject matter. It features an alienated, mixed-race teenager named Zits who becomes, in his own words, "a time-traveling mass murderer"; it combines genre elements of young adult fiction and science fiction to comment extensively on Native American history and politics; it is wildly hilarious and deeply sad. Although literarily consistent with the rest of Alexie's fiction, it seems to speak directly to his earlier novel (also featuring a mass murderer), *Indian Killer* (1996), which has enjoyed a more favorable critical reception. But perhaps it is the differences between the two novels that explains *Flight*'s relative unpopularity. Indeed, I will argue that *Flight* evidences a "conversion" on the part of its author that, as René Girard describes in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, involves some sort of commentary on his earlier literary works (especially *Indian Killer*). Novelistic conversions typically feature protagonists who "utter words which clearly contradict their former ideas, and those ideas are always shared by the romantic critics." This seems to be the case with *Flight*'s critics, as I will explain in a discussion addressing racialism, mimetic rivalry, and Native American literature today.

McCALLUM, Felicity (Charles Sturt University) Sacrifice et Sagesse: Truth Telling from Eastern Australia, 1788-1842

In a recent National Press Club address, one of Australia's foremost authors, Richard Flanagan, exposed the 'astonishing perversity' of Australia that denies the profound truth of our Indigenous origins, snubs facts of the war of extermination that killed perhaps 65000 of Australia's original inhabitants, and resists constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people. He warned of the urgent challenge to face these truths of our history or risk entrapment in authoritarianism stoked on lies. To probe these truths of Australia's history between 1788 and 1842 using Mimetic theory, is the subject of my PhD dissertation. In this paper, I will highlight two stories from Colonial New South Wales, aided by mimetic theory. One is the sacrifice of 'mixed race' offspring conceived in a context of sexual violence, whose presence recalled the threat of mimetic doubles. I myself am something of a double: both an Indigenous (Awabakal) & an Anglo-Celtic Australian woman. The other story is of a remarkable friendship between Missionary L.E. Threlkeld and Awabakal leader Birabahn, which bore significant fruit - not least in Threlkeld's monumental anthropological accounts. I wish to explore such 'doubles' and argue the urgency for Australia to emulate positive doubles so we can step boldly towards National Reconciliation.

McKENNA, Andrew J. (Loyola University Chicago) Conrad's "Outpost" reads his "Heart of Darkness" Mimetically

The controversy over racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, first sparked by Chinua Achebe's scathing critique of the novel, has been reanimated by Nidesh Lawtoo's close reading of his works, where the writer's anti-sacrificial *logic* is shown to compete with baleful implications of his Western imperializing *psyche*. It's as if Conrad's abhorrence of crowd behavior, pilloried in his short story, "An Outpost of Progress" (1897) is overshadowed by the cloudy metaphysics of evil deployed in his anti-colonialist novel (1899). The pathologies of desire and rivalry rigorously explored in his short story bring us closer to the truth of the Western idealist Kurtz's inexplicable conversion from the prospect of god-like beneficence he drafts for his colonial mission to the nihilistic genocide that he prescribes in a postscript to the selfsame draft ("Exterminate all the brutes"). The enigmatic, bathetic "horror" evoked by the dying Kurtz is better understood in terms of the all-too-human events leading to the murder/suicide of mimetically violent doubles (Kayerts/Carlier, degraded versions of Kurtz/Conrad) that is coherently recounted in the short story, whose direct narrative style betrays none of the "foggishness of H of D," which is how Conrad himself later characterized his "awful fudge" of a novel. In sum, the short story discloses a truth that his later "masterpiece," if it is one, counterfeits or misappropriates--because scrupulous narrative of human interaction (Girard's "vérité romanesque") outperforms the ambitions of metaphysical speculation.

NUECHTERLEIN, Paul (Discipleship Seminars in MT) "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" and Tree of the Crucified Messiah: Symbols of Original Untruth and Its Healing

From the perspective of Mimetic Theory, humankind is formed interpersonally and culturally in several key misrecognitions, untruths — which help to interpret the Christian idea of Original Sin. This paper will weave together work from James Alison, Raymond Schwager, Richard Rohr, and Brian Robinette (and others) to interpret sin as living in foundational lies; and that the only remedy for beginning to live in truth is the repentance, metanoia, unleashed through Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. Further, the appearance of unfolding truth in the world over the past two thousands years looks more like scientific method than typical church doctrines (which often

stand in opposition to the findings of science). This is because, as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolizes, the original untruth stems from a dualistic interpretation of the 'One Thing,' or 'What Is.' Scientific method brackets out the dualistic interpretations and seeks to provide more or less faithful interpretations of simply What Is. Spiritually, scientific methodology can be paralleled by meditatively prayerful unlearning, often referred to in contemplative traditions as "unknowing," a practice which also brackets out the dualistic thinking from our origins in misrecognition of the truth of human violence, seeking instead the Oneness of What Is. In practice, scientific methodology can be paralleled by movements of nonviolent resistance, which bracket out the dualism of us-them and unveil the truth of human violence.

OKRYZNSKI, Jason (First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Wilmette, Illinois) Mimesis, Cultural Narratives and their Transformation in Post-Truth Praxis

In this paper I wish to bring my work on cultural narratives into conversation with Girard's Mimetic Theory. I define a "cultural narrative" as a story created and passed on by a culture and internalized in the minds of human subjects both consciously and unconsciously to both further and justify the pursuit of cultural desires. In this paper I wish to deepen and sharpen my theory of cultural narratives through correlation with Girard's understanding of mimesis and mimetic contagion as well as its effects on truth. Finally, I wish in brief to offer some humble suggestions for the transformation of mimesis towards the mutual care of the creation through the works of 4th century thinkers St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine of Hippo.

PACKER, Matthew (Buena Vista University) Reputations, Rankings, and Nosedives: The Coming Social Credit Systems, West and East

"Goodbye to the Information Age," writes Gloria Origgi, "it's all about reputation now." We are facing a paradox in hyper-connected society, she explains: "the greater the amount of information that circulates, the more we rely on so-called reputational devices to evaluate it." So the vast increase in knowledge today ironically "does not empower us or make us more cognitively autonomous. Rather, it renders us more dependent on other people's judgements and evaluations of the information with which we are faced." Such recognition is nothing new to mimetic theorists, but we are witnessing in U.S. politics, particularly, and in dystopian science fiction and China's 2020 plan for a new national "social credit" system, the increasing manifestation of the unstable "reputation culture" that Origgi describes. This paper would examine the British TV satire *Black Mirror* (the "Nosedive" episode), in which a futuristic but all-too-realistically precarious social network drives the frenzied ambition of practically everyone in society. Ratings out of five, given for every economic and interpersonal moment of the day, rack up into an individual's "net worth", and the drama that ensues captures the mimetic contagion and panic described in the work of Girard and Jean-Pierre Dupuy. It's funny. But scary, too, and in a real-world move, familiar now after Cambridge Analytica, China will soon be adopting a similar ranking system to control its 1.4 billion citizens. Given the intended contagious effects of such a system, this paper will consider the likely rate of breakdown and revelation concerning its sacrificial design, as well as some of the other pertinent lessons mimetic theory has to offer.

PALS, Luke Nelson (Independent Scholar-Writer) Can the Popular Imagination Transcend Violence?

This paper attempts a broad critique of narrative practices to ask the question: Can the popular imagination transcend violence? Narrative truth is trapped in layers of genre rules which favors a Hero's Journey to slay deserving monsters. Similarly, the echo-chambers of identity politics dwell in the sacred symbolism of the scapegoat, without a clear way toward the reconciliation of doubles. Therefore, the modern romanticism of empathy only impels the Hero to a moment's self-reflection, and slavishly proceeds to slay that monster under the "necessary" metaphysics of violence. Taking some conventional story patterns from Aristotle, Joseph Campbell, and Otto Rank, this paper adapts the archetypes of Hero, Ogre-tyrant, Shadow, and Thresholds to the mythic cycle and mimetic desire. For each critical step against the conventional pattern, recent films – *American Sniper* (2014), *Chi-raq* (2015), *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017) and *Brazil* (1985) – provide a path to the wider cultural theater, suggesting a connection between our Heroes, our soldiers, and our active shooters. In order to overcome the Elixir of the sacred necessity of violence, narratives must demand new sobriety from the audience.

PARK, Cheongsoo (Texas Christian University) David Cuts Off a Corner of Saul's Cloak: Reading the Cave Encounter between Saul and David as Mimetic Rivalry

This study aims to read the Saul and David narrative in 1 Samuel 24 and 26 as anti-mimetic reprisals. This inquiry is not only to revisit Girard's foundational claim that the Bible in its entirety denies the mechanism of single victim but also to offer a more detailed interpretive work that may expand his observation drawing on a discourse about mimetic rivalries. To put it differently, this study questions if the Bible still offers *an insight* into a cure for the mimetic reciprocity and its outcome, the single victim mechanism. I contend that the Bible is still a reservoir of insights into a cure for mimetic relationships. In particular, the Saul and David narrative contains a rich discourse in regard to the mimetic desire with which the characters wrestle hard. A close reading of the narrative through the mimesis lens reveals the dual dimensions of David's cutting a corner of Saul's cloak (24:5): the mediated desire of Saul's craving for power and a retrogressive movement against the violence-generative relationship. David decides to cut a corner of Saul's cloak, instead of stabbing him, in his tenacious reliance on God (24:6, 12, 15; 26:9, 10, 24). In this way, David manages to break out an intense mimetic impulse, and thus David becomes the locus where a reader may find a valuable insight into a resolution for the mimetic reciprocity and its outcomes, which Girard affirmed to have found across the Bible.

ROLLAND, Miguel, O.P (Dominican Friars) Maya K'iche' Hero Twins--a Tale of Timetic Desire, Rivalry and Violence.

Historically, it is nothing new that Mesoamerican communities have long had to live with "after-truths" and have struggled to reconstruct new identities from a "post-truth culture". Ubiquitous but also not new is the desire to search after the Truth -- to look for what once existed. This is the situation of the colonial era K'iche' Maya of Guatemala, whose sacred book *The Popol Vuh* depicts a perennial yearning for identity. This is not an historical question about Maya ruins, but an existential question about the ruined Maya. In the face of widespread trauma, the K'iche' strive to make sense of who they were, who they are, and who they imagine themselves to become. This paper examines the mythic tale of two Heroes, Hunaphu and his twin Xb'alanque. However, re-reading the archtypal struggle against the Lords of Death as a "text of persecution" and

interpreting it in the light of imitative or appropriative desire, (Girard's mimetic theory), we can better understand the formative role of violence for the K'iche', both among themselves and with their neighbors. The Hero Twins and other tales from the Popol Vuh reveal a creative remembering of K'iche' historical origins but also a collective forgetting, ever veiling how shared identity actually emerges from a violent, victimary *modus operandi*.

RYBA, Thomas (University of Notre Dame University / Purdue University) Post-Truth and the Antichrist

The Antichrist *stereotype* opposes the Antichrist's slander, deception, and hypocrisy to Jesus Christ's identification with the truth (John 14:6). Across the history of Christian interpretation of this stereotype, this opposition is constant. In this paper, I will consider ways that (what, in our times, has been characterized as) "post-truth" *might* be employed by future antichrists. To accomplish this, I will argue that: (1) post-truth is not a new thing, except in its pervasiveness and false claim to be a defensible epistemological position; (2) post-truth is an attitude and practice; (3) this attitude and practice are instrumentalist and (to a limited extent) coherentist, but intentionally cut off from the other two complementary groundings of truth: correspondence and dialectic (as the encounter with arguments or nature); (4) the totalitarian application of post-truth is rhetorical strategy that relies on *mimēsis* to undermine claims of competing truths; (5) future antichrists may use this totalitarian strategy to scapegoat Christians, who dispute varieties of post-truth; and (6) the massacre of Christians and Armageddon (as depicted in the *Book of Revelation*) are types anticipating ultimate, future scapegoat sacrifices. This, I hope, will be the last installment in my ongoing project, *Optics of the Antichrist*.

SETTE-CÂMARA, Pedro (State University of Rio de Janeiro) Méconnaissance and Cognitive Psychology

When René Girard speaks of *méconnaissance*, he usually implies that a subject either makes a wrong judgement about something or makes no judgement where some judgement would be due. Not only that, Girard assumes that the possession of knowledge can help the subject understand how such judgements arose in themselves as well as others. On the other hand, what still appears as a bold claim in the Humanities is nothing less than the starting point of cognitive psychology, which, using knowledge considered as certain to investigate misjudgements, could be seen at least as a major chapter in a general theory of *méconnaissance*. An examination of a few examples from cognitive psychology can show how attention is drawn to specific points of a common reference, and also make clear how it could be useful for bolstering the case for mimetic theory. Still, cognitive psychology has so far been working with small pragmatic contexts (small tasks, brief questionnaires), which help to isolate and classify acts of *méconnaissance*, but mimetic theory could aim to provide (in designed experiments) or at least discuss broader pragmatic contexts for the production of misjudgements. In discussing the possible relationship between the claims of mimetic theory and the methods of cognitive psychology, we would also like to recall the subject's ethical responsibility to "sacrifice" themselves for knowledge — a need that is covered in different ways in both fields.

SKIDMORE, Simon (University of Queensland) A Mimetic Reading of Exodus 4:24-26

The curious exchange of Exodus 4:24-26 has puzzled exegetes throughout history. This text interrupts the main narrative to describe a mysterious incident, in which YHWH attacks an unidentified male figure. Within the context of the overarching narrative, this figure could be either Moses or his son. By circumcising Moses' son and touching another unidentified male character Zipporah stays the attack. While previous interpreters have sought to identify these male characters, and their roles within the narrative, this paper interprets these enigmatic details through the lens of mimetic theory to generate a fresh reading of Exodus 4:24-26. When read within the context of YHWH's violent attack and the excessive rivalry between YHWH, Pharaoh, and Moses throughout Exodus, the lack of differentiation between male characters in Exodus 4:24-26 suggests a mimetic crisis. As I argue, YHWH is drawn into this mimetic crisis, and confuses Moses for his double, Pharaoh. This confusion leads YHWH to attack Moses (and/or his son) instead of Pharaoh and his son (cf. Exod 4:22-23). Fortunately, Zipporah stays the divine attack by restoring a modicum of order and differentiation within the mimetic crisis. The circumcision of Moses' son serves a semiotic function, which allows YHWH to differentiate Moses and his son from Pharaoh and his son. Having seen the sign of circumcision, YHWH relents from his attack. The importance of signs throughout the Exodus narrative, including the blood of the Passover lamb (Exod 12:13), for distinguishing the Israelites from the Egyptians (cf. Exod 8:23) and, thereby, avoiding divine violence supports this reading.

SOLARTE, Mario (Javeriana University) Post-Truth and Apocalypse

The context of post truth in which we live has as a characteristic the emergence of political/social figures who promise salvation for their communities and nations. Because of this, politics has become the arena to discuss proposals for salvation confronting the threat of imminent catastrophe, resulting on various emotions clouding the minds of electors while increasing conflicts among brothers and nations. It is an apocalyptic environment. I propose to assess this context from the interpretation Girard does in *Achever Clausewitz* about the apocalyptic texts in the Gospels, particularly the role of "messianic" figures who promise salvation confronting the call for the patience resistance to violence and to the confusion:

Then Jesus began to tell them, "Take care that no one deceives you.

Many will come using my name and saying, 'I am he,' and they will deceive many.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed,
this is something that must happen (Mark 13, 5-8).

TRACHMAN, Matthew (CUNY-Queensborough) What We're Doing When We're Talking about the French

This paper uses mimetic theory to examine the centuries old love/hate relationship that Americans have with the French. Simply stated, the French have functioned as mimetic models for Americans. Americans have admired and imitated, among other things, French romantic/sexual prowess, French fashion, French food, and French thought. Yet as mimetic theory teaches us, what Americans really desire is not the French things themselves, but the fullness of being that we imagine the French have access to through these things. As what we desire is, in a sense, French desire, we are brought into conflict with the French who come to be seen first as a rival, then as an obstacle, and sometimes even as a scapegoat. Here, the mimetic relationship that Americans have with the French will be examined as it appears in popular culture representations of the French. The strangely conflicted views of Americans, these simultaneous feelings of love and hate

are in fact central to how the French are represented in American television and film. The focus here will be on how the French have functioned as the model of the erotic life for Americans and particular attention will be paid to one of the most widely circulated popular culture representations of the French; the Warner Bros. skunk Pepé le Pew.

TRAYLOR, Anthony (Assumption College) Reflections on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art"

This presentation explores Martin Heidegger's seminal 1935 essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art." Heidegger's reflections on the origin of the work of art need to be placed in the context of an ontology of Dasein (the human being) and Dasein's relation to the question concerning the meaning of being as such. This involves a reinterpretation of the traditional notion of truth as *adequatio* (i.e., the correspondence theory of truth) as something grounded, in the end, in what Heidegger calls *alētheia* or "unconcealment" (the Greek word for "truth"). In this respect, Heidegger offers us an experience of truth which is "after truth" as traditionally understood. Furthermore, integral to Heidegger's account is the notion that what he calls "untruth" is just as much a part this experience of truth as truth itself is. There is both the untruth of "dissembling" (falsehood) and, at a deeper level, the untruth as the counter-moment of "concealing" which without exception belongs to every possible disclosure of beings. In addition, there occurs the famous analysis of the Greek temple as the home of the "god" and the site for the "strife between world and earth." In short, "The Origin of the Work of Art" provides a highly accessible and provocative introduction to the thought of the later Heidegger, and, as I hope to show, invites continued reflection on the thought of Girard and Heidegger.

VANHULST, Elsa (Dominican University College) Exploiting the Positive Capacities of Politics: Public Policy, Environmental Assessment and Mimetic Theory

Appreciation of complex systems and of the dynamic and normative elements in human affairs have led to an expanded understanding of uncertainty, one that goes beyond risk and probability to include knowledge gaps, ambiguities and even indeterminacy. The "post-normal science" approach developed for the use of science on issues where "facts [are] uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high and decisions urgent" (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993) seeks to work more productively with uncertainty, value plurality and epistemic plurality. This paper concerns itself with methods for preserving an open and critical sphere of public debate and collective identity formation while drawing from work in the domain of environmental impact assessment and public policy. It positions mimetic theory in relation to different conceptions of politics and of knowledge (*e.g.*, realism, constructivism), emphasizing the creative aspects of mimetic theory. It ends with the capacity to act autonomously within the world as a basic human, and in fact biological, property, and politics as a realm of power and inevitable struggle but also realm of openness and self as well as co- determination.

VANSLYKE, Stephanie (First Congregational Church, UCC, Wilmette, Illinois / Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary) The Defeat of the Devil and the Revelation of Truth in Early Christian Theology: A Review of the Sources in Conversation with Girard

In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, René Girard claimed that "Western theology, in rejecting the idea of Satan tricked by the Cross, has lost a pearl of great price in the sphere of anthropology."

This paper will examine those patristic sources referred to implicitly by Girard as he made this claim, particularly his secondary references to Origen of Alexandria. Further, it will engage a more exhaustive search of the primary sources in addition to Origen, including Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine of Hippo, as well as homiletical and liturgical material from the second through fifth centuries. Finally, it will offer some suggestions for reclaiming a theology of the Devil defeated by the truth of the Cross for a Christian anthropology and soteriology faithful to the history of the church and resonant with Girard's thought.

VARGAS CASTRO, Iván Camilo (Pastoral Social / Caritas Colombiana) Justice, Reconciliation and Post-truth: Peace Agreement in Colombia.

This presentation will show the link between justice, reconciliation and Post-truth, analyzing the current Colombian context of implementation of Peace Agreement. First of all, it will focus in the specific topic of Justice, in the context of post-conflict, and the importance of this to generate conditions to a sustainable peace. After, it will explain the role of the Post-Truth in the current context of Colombia and, specifically, the use that the politic discourse of Post-Truth makes about the Justice. Discourse about Justice is reflex of a mimetic spiral that paralyzes attempts of build peace and reconciliation in the Colombian conflict context. In this context, the notion of Justice is reduced to a requirement of non-impunity, understood as a punishment for the perpetrators; but that does not imply essential aspects such as the truth, the reparation of the victims and the reconciliation of those who most suffered the consequences of the conflict. In that sense, the claim of Justice is a simplification of the exigency of retribution of people has not been victimized and, in other hand, the real victims have no the possibility to communicate their need of justice and reconciliation. Finally, I will also show the Communitarian Justice as a way to put the victim in the center of discussion of Justice and, in consequence, how this reflection illuminated by Mimetic Theory has contributed to inspire communitarian initiatives of reconciliation, resilience and social fabric building.

WANDINGER, Nikolaus,(University of Innsbruck) “Wicker Man” Paganism versus sacrificial Christianity – and the Converted Biblical Alternative

In the 1973 British horror film “The Wicker Man”, starring Edward Woodward, Christopher Lee, and Britt Ekland, directed by Robin Hardy, a policeman investigates the case of a missing girl, and comes to suspect that she has been abducted to be sacrificed by worshippers of a pagan fertility cult on the remote island he had to visit. But in the end it turns out that he was manipulated to become the cultists' “voluntary” sacrifice and is to be sacrificed himself. By showing and analyzing some scenes from the movie I want to present how it depicts mimetic processes between the pronouncedly Christian policeman and his pagan detractors (the Sergeant at the same time is repulsed and extremely tempted by the sexual liberty exhibited by the cultists), and how his Christianity is in the end shown as being merely a “sacrificial Christianity”, because he has nothing in store for his persecutors than hate and prayers for revenge. I want to argue how a person living a converted biblical Christianity or Judaism could react differently in the situation proposed by the film. A short comparison with the movie of the same title published in 2006, starring Nicholas Cage, Ellen Burstyn and Kate Beahan and directed by Neil LaBute, will show that this version has edited out any form of Christianity and only shows modern secularism confronted with a kind of feminist paganism.

WILSON, Eric (Monash University) “Brothers in the Breed of Cain”: Monstrous Doubles and *Le Deux au Folie* in Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*

The paper takes up with arguably the greatest ‘true crime’ novel ever written, Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. Not the least notorious of the many contentious aspects of Capote’s master work is his fabrication of a totally false ‘ending’—in order to provide his ‘true tale with closure, Capote invented a fictional encounter within a Kansas cemetery, one that carries remarkably Girardian implications. *In Cold Blood* will be subjected to a close Girardian reading, focusing on two key themes. The first is the reversibility, or exchangeability, at work in the scapegoating mechanism: just as the entire Clutter family is the sacrificial victim of the victimizing ‘monstrous doubles’ of Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, so are the two murderers the scapegoats of the community striving to expel its internal propensity towards violence through the public ‘ritual’ of law and capital punishment. The second is that the personalized violence of the deviant criminals (*deux au folie*) and the impersonal violence of the ‘law-abiding community’ are both governed by the exact same psychological processes: *mimetic desire* and *mimetic rivalry*—the same ‘curse’ of the boys from another great novel of dis-placed violence, *Lord of the Flies*. The ‘fake’ ending unifies both of these themes beautifully well, suggesting, in an artfully disguised manner, that the youngest murder victim, Nancy Clutter, is nothing less than a sacrificial victim, whose violent death and forcible descent into the Underworld imparts a regenerative power to those around her.

WRIGHT, Susan (Theology & Peace) Respect for the Law in an Age of the Escalation to Extremes

In *Battling to the End*, René Girard says that “the truth about violence has been stated once and for all.” Our denial of that truth both individually and collectively, “exposes us to the return of an archaic sacred world... a world of total destruction.” Since the publication of that text, one can’t help but feel that now, more than ever, the leveling effects of the Enlightenment ideals as determined in the modern democratic state, have irreversibly accelerated towards a war of all against all. No doubt the threat has never been more real. Even in this eleventh hour, however, is it possible that concepts like “liberty and justice for all” possess a kind of mimetic force, an interruptive power, capable of extracting us from a descent into total violence? This paper, reading Jacques Derrida’s key texts on justice and the law, will explore his interpretation of Kant’s “respect for the law,” in hopes of restoring a moral pathway through the present predicament as it was predicted by Girard.

BOOK PANELS

Paulo Diego BUBBIO, *Intellectual Sacrifice and Other Mimetic Processes* (MSU Press 2018)

Panelists:

Jeremiah Alberg (International Christian University)

Paul Dumouchel (Ritsumeikan University)

Martha Reineke (University of Northern Iowa)

Respondent: Paulo Diego Bubbio (Western Sydney University)

Intellectual Sacrifice and Other Mimetic Paradoxes is an account of Paulo Diego Bubbio's twenty-year intellectual journey through the twists and turns of Girard's mimetic theory. The author analyzes philosophy and religion as "enemy sisters" engaged in an endless competitive struggle and identifies the intellectual space where this rivalry can either be perpetuated or come to a paradoxical resolution. He goes on to explore topics ranging from arguments for the existence of God to mimetic theory's post-Kantian legacy, political implications, and capacity for identifying epochal phenomena, such as the crisis of the self, in popular culture. Bubbio concludes by advocating for an encounter between mimetic theory and contemporary philosophical hermeneutics—an encounter in which each approach benefits and is enriched by the resources of the other. The volume features a previously unpublished letter by René Girard on the relationship between philosophy and religion.

Sandor GOODHART, *Möbian Nights: Reading Literature and Darkness* (Bloomsbury 2017)

Panelists:

Ann Astell (University of Notre Dame)

Sarah Pessin (University of Denver)

Martha Reineke (University of Northern Iowa)

Respondent:

Sandor Goodhart, Professor of English and Jewish Studies, Department of English, Purdue University

The Möbius strip is a powerful metaphor for truth and deception. It appears to have two distinct edges that cannot be crossed; however, a 90 degree turn, followed by a "walk" in either direction along the strip, exposes as inaccurate the notion of an "other side." No non-traversable boundary divides the Möbius strip. Locating in the Möbian structure model for difference or otherness that, in fact, attests to continuity and sameness, Goodhart suggests that Möbian logic is endemic to all literary critical discourse. On Goodhart's watch, the "doubling back of language on itself" in a dark night makes all writing "the story of my death." As a consequence, "I died, therefore I am" becomes the cogito of post-Holocaust existence *and* the premise of the literary in any era. Tracing in Möbian fashion an autobiographical line extending from Homer to Beckett, Goodhart shows that we never stand outside the drama the literary presents to us. *Möbian Nights* is a stunningly timely book. Darkness at the heart of the literary is demonstrated by a twenty-first century collapse of boundaries that has eradicated distinctions between war and non-war, leaving us, according to Goodhart, in a permanent state of war. Whereas previous generations speak or write in order not to die, Goodhart observes that today we "speak or write in order to die, in

order to live after or in the wake of death. In this way the Möbian is “the structure of the sacrificial in our culture.” An interdisciplinary panel will discuss this strikingly original contribution to post-Holocaust literature.

PANEL SESSIONS

DEUTSCH/KAPLAN: Mimetic Theory in Dialogue with the Concept of Revelation in Catholic Theology

This panel explores how mimetic theory can build a new paradigm for understanding the category of revelation as it has been received and developed in Catholic theology. It proposes three papers on the subject, by Robert Ryan (Catholic University of America), Grant Kaplan (Saint Louis University) and Thomas Deutsch (Catholic University of America).

Thomas DEUTSCH

This paper focuses on how Girard’s mimetic theory, and its insight into revelation, theory helps in a similar way to better understand the problem of freedom. Too often accounts of freedom reduce the phenomenon of freedom to a personal autonomy that neglects humanity’s dependence on the Creator for life. Discovering true freedom only comes from being in a relationship with God who serves as the ground of freedom. Knowledge of freedom does not exist apart from the experience of this freedom that come from being in relationship with God. In a Girardian terms, a person trapped within the cycle of mimetic rivalry possesses freedom in the reductive sense. Through the process of evangelical conversion, the human being comes to know true freedom after an experience that allows the person to see participating in the rivalry as unnecessary due to God’s offering a new relationship of freedom. This insight forms the basis of Raymund Schwager’s Christology, as expounded in his most important works, as well as more minor works that have flown under the radar. In my paper I will explore the connection between the new experience of freedom gained in the process of salvation and the implicit theology of revelation in both Schwager and Girard. Here a theology of revelation bleeds into Christology: Jesus is the Revealer, not because he objectively discloses information or provides an inner, subjective experience, but because he converts the way the person sees by being in relationship with that person, and, in this way, serves as the hermeneutical key.

Grant KAPLAN

This paper takes as its springboard the insufficiency of accounts of revelation that focus us on revelation as data, while ignoring its hermeneutical elements. Curiously, one of the more innovative approaches to revelation comes from the French phenomenologist, Jean-Luc Marion. Already in *God Without Being*, Marion explored how phenomenology might enrich understandings of the revelatory experience. More recent work has dealt more explicitly with revelation. Although conversant with mimetic theory, Marion fails to bring any of its insights to his discussion of revelation. This paper, in addition to summarizing Marion’s insights as representative of theology-friendly phenomenology, also highlights what is missing from his account: a hermeneutical approach to revelation understood as conversion. This conversion, as hermeneutical, not only makes one read everything anew, and see both past and future phenomena in the proper light, as the apostles describe on the way to Emmaus.

COX/ROBINSON/REINEKE: Technologies of Scapegoating in the Age of Trump: Mimetic Theory and “Alternative Facts” in American Race Relations”

John COX (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

Julia ROBINSON MOORE (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

Martha REINEKE (University of Northern Iowa)

In an age where objective facts hold less weight in the public eye than the emotionally loaded presuppositions of personal beliefs, the ‘post-truth’ politics of our day have produced new and often “monstrous imaginings” of those deemed “other” in American society. Indeed, “tweets,” “instagrams”, and other forms of online media now operate as the authoritative beacons of “truth” and signals of social-political “power” in the United States. The work of René Girard and his assertions on contentious binaries, subjugation, and mimesis offer provocative insights by which to disclose the roots of such social phenomena like “alternative facts” and “fake news”. In answer to one of the major questions posed by this year’s Colloquium on Violence and Religion—“How do contemporary media technologies accelerate mimetic contagion and abet the scapegoat mechanism?”—this panel addresses how the production of “alternative facts” and “fake news”, terms inspired by the Trump Administration, have eventuated in the reproduction of new imaginaries of the scapegoating mechanism in America’s cultural consciousness. As such, this panel seeks to demonstrate the profound importance of engaging mimetic theory in relation to the social constructions of race, the power attributed to political space, the imitative places of “othering” that often gives rise to the “machine” of scapegoating, and psychological processes associated with disgust that bound off persons or experiences as contaminants. Our panel offers an interdisciplinary approach to this most salient topic in light of mimetic theory.

WORKSHOPS

Boring Through Desire: Prayer as a Balm for Mimetic Rivalry

Stephanie VANSLYKE, M.Div., Ph.D., Senior Pastor, First Congregational Church, UCC, Wilmette, Illinois

Jason OKRZYNSKI, M.Div., Ph.D., Director of Mission and Education, First Congregational Church, UCC, Wilmette, Illinois

Starting with James Alison’s assertion that liturgy “*is supposed to be boring, or at least seriously underwhelming...the build-up to a sacrifice is exciting, the dwelling in gratitude that the sacrifice has already happened, and that we’ve been forgiven for and through it is, in terms of excitement, a long drawn out let down,*” we propose a practitioner oriented workshop for religious leaders, educators, and lay people. We will explore the necessary boredom of liturgy and contemplative prayer as practices of what Girard calls ‘external mediation,’ which train us to become aware of our desires, become ‘un-excited,’ and thus draw us into caring for, rather than mimetic rivalry with, our neighbors. Using case studies from our own context of ministry, we will open a conversation about the intersection of liturgy, contemplation and mimetic theory, inviting

discussion of practices of liturgy and contemplative prayer in parish settings; considering people's stated hopes for and unspoken resistance to liturgy and contemplation; and strategizing about ways to counter such resistance and lead parishioners more deeply into contemplative practices.

Girardian basics and the conflicted congregation

Peter JONAS (Our Savior's Lutheran Church)

What do we do when all is not well in Lake Wobegon? This workshop will explore a case study of an intervention in the life of a conflicted congregation in the upper Midwest of the United States. Participants will learn how René Girard's thought can inform diagnosis of a community's struggles. Then they will be offered practical ideas for implementing Girardian concepts into preaching, pastoral care, and working with a congregation's governing body and committees. While this workshop is rooted in the life and experience of a specific Christian community, insights developed will hopefully be useful for practitioners working with communities other than Christian Churches. Topics and issues to be explored include:

- Communicating mimetic theory in a way that is intelligible for a non-specialist audience
- The role and power of truth-telling in pastoral work
- How the stance of a settled or called pastor and the stance of an interim pastor impact leadership
- The intersection of Girardian thought with other modalities and thinkers, including Bowen Family Systems and Carl Jung
- The role of judicatory leaders and/or consultants in conflict resolution
- How key community leaders can both contribute to and hinder the healing process, with attention to the art of not turning hinderers into scapegoats

Participants will have the opportunity to respond to the case study and offer their own insights and experiences related to implementing the concepts of mimetic theory into the task of peacemaking in a community.

Living with Mimetic Desire through Meditation

Andrew Marr, OSB (St. Gregory's Abby)

Girard's insights into mimetic desire pose many challenges for living by their implications. Religious practices from many traditions give us resources for living up to this challenge. A practicum workshop on meditation connects us with an important resource. First there will be a brief introduction to the subject with a stress on how the practice can be helpful for *living* the challenge. This includes ways that meditation puts in touch with truth, even if that cannot always be put in to words. There will also be a brief explanation of the most basic techniques to help people get started. There should be time for short questions at this point. A period of silent meditation will follow. As a group, we can decide on how to use the remaining time: questions and answers and perhaps a second period of meditation.