

Memory, Origins, and the Searching Quest in Girard's Mimetic Cycle

An Arendtian Perspective

Andrew O'Shea

ABSTRACT This paper offers an interpretation of René Girard's mimetic theory in light of Hannah Arendt's account of St Augustine's philosophy of love. Girard's mimetic theory crosses many disciplines and has been the main inspiration in his *oeuvre* over decades. However, its later application and how it purports to demystify culture and point to the truth of the Christian revelation, sits uneasily with his early confessional position. This paper is an attempt to make sense of Girard the Christian thinker, who seeks to explain Christianity without a continuous searching quest for God and ethical orientation in the world. I examine his early theory of desire and how it claims to lead to the conversion of the hero and author of the novel, and how Girard compares the hero's journey in literary space to the Saint's journey in spiritual space. In explicating Hannah Arendt's work entitled *Love and Saint Augustine* I set out some of the key concepts of Augustine's philosophy of "love as desire" and highlight a number of contexts in Augustine's thinking that refocus his philosophy in the direction of memory in response to the commandment to love God, neighbour and self. I go on to examine whether Arendt's analysis of Augustine might also apply to Girard's journey with mimetic theory. Finally, I attempt to articulate a context for reading Girard in light of Augustine's own searching quest for God, one that tries to bring his personal and confessional stance back into his account of mimesis and human origins.

KEYWORDS conversion; interiority; love; memory; mimetic desire; origins; searching-self

✉ Andrew O'Shea, Dublin City University St Patrick's Campus (DCU), Drumcondra, Dublin 9, Ireland
✉ andrew.oshea@dcu.ie 0000-0002-2630-5131

© 2019 FORUM PHILOSOPHICUM 24 (2019) no. 1, 43–90
ISSN 1426-1898 E-ISSN 2353-7043

SUBM. 30 June 2019 ACC. 16 September 2019
DOI:10.35765/forphil.2019.2401.03

I have become a question to myself.
 – Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 10, Chapter XXXIV

Three-quarters of what I have said is already found in Augustine.
 – René Girard, *Quand ces choses commenceront*, 194

INTRODUCTION

René Girard's theory of mimesis, and the various stages of its application, is compelling not least because of his own personal journey, which he admits involved a conversion to Christianity at the time of the publication of his early elaboration of mimesis as triangular desire.¹ The theme of Christian conversion is explicit in his early critical theory, as it is in the novels he examines: the hero of the novel, in renouncing his desire to be god—what he describes as a “metaphysical desire”—experiences the following set of reversals: “deception gives way to truth, anguish to remembrance, agitation to repose, hatred to love, humiliation to humility, mediated desire to autonomy, deviated transcendency to vertical transcendency.”² Using the comparison with St Augustine's *Confessions* he draws a parallel between the movements of pride as it is revealed though the novel and the movements of the Saint in his attempts to unite with God.³ The novelist who achieves spiritual victory over desire is compared to the Saint who achieves victory over the world. The death and rebirth of the author “is not essentially different from that of a Saint Augustine or a Dante.”⁴ Negative forms of imitation are replaced with positive forms of imitation which highlight a personal triumph: “truth,” “remembrance,” “autonomy,” and “vertical transcendency” are the fruits of a rebirth that comes from renunciation of the hero's previous metaphysical desire. As his theory of mimesis develops to

1. In his analysis of the development of Girard's mimetic theory Wolfgang Palaver charts the three stages, or mimetic cycle, of Girard's theory as it evolves over fifty years. See Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), xiii.

2. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 293–4.

3. “The impulse of the soul toward God is inseparable from a retreat into the Self. Inversely the turning in on itself of pride is inseparable from a movement of panic toward the Other. To refashion St. Augustine's formula, pride is more exterior to us than the external world. This externality of pride . . . makes us live a life turned away from ourselves.” *Ibid.*, 58–9.

4. *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 140.

include a theory of the scapegoat mechanism, individuals appear to have fewer powers of lucidity in the face of the loss of the previously sanctioned channels for directing and controlling mimesis externally in social contexts. The crisis that had consumed the individual hero of the novel but ended in spiritual conversion now engulfs the community with no respite. Short of the revelatory signs of crises and victimhood that appear to prioritize the Christian narrative, it is difficult to identify a loving God who walks with human beings in the world and even seeks a personal relationship. Religious belonging may still be an option for the one caught up in the onslaught of negative mimesis, and indeed Girard recommends religion as the only solution, but what of the searching soul—the soul searching for a meaningful relationship with God?⁵

In Girard's early work we can already detect some problems with Christian themes when we see how authentic human agency comes from the experience of conversion that he elaborates in his critical analysis of the novel. There is little room for an authentic self who searches for God *prior to* the instance of discovering God. Girard's own conversion is in accordance with the conversions he claims are the true meaning of all great novelistic conclusions. This implies that there is also a unity and continuity between the author's lucidity at the end of the novel and the critic's lucidity at the end of the work of criticism. Yet when we consider Girard's subsequent insights into anthropology, and his positing of a scapegoat mechanism, there is no such unity and continuity with the critic (now an anthropologist). This later insight appears to stand independent of his personal experience. What applies to deceit and desire in the novel applies to violence and scapegoating in the anthropological context: mimesis is the common denominator. In other words, two theories emerge in the course of the mimetic cycle: an early theory that is unapologetic for its personal and confessional insights (experiencing the very thing being putatively discovered in the novel), and a later theory that appears wholly impersonal (that lays claim to an objectivity that is offered up by texts themselves). Both the early and later insights present accounts of mimesis that cross between the humanities and social sciences. What is striking about these theories is how they are presented as one theory.

This absence of a spiritual self extends to the absence of an ethical self. As the implications of Girard's account of desire have evolved from local to global contexts, the challenges for ethical mimesis, the ability for being in

5. Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in the Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010).

the world with some degree of agency amidst growing negative mimesis, have increased to the point that a political conservatism of Hobbesian proportions appears as an almost inevitable consequence of Girardian community.⁶ Questioning this conservatism requires a deeper reading of Girard's work in light of his own self-proclaimed Christian faith. Arguably—indeed, I will be arguing that—his mimetic theory owes a great deal to his Christian faith, specifically as it evolves from his early theory of desire as the basis of his literary critique of structure. At the time he develops this mimetic theory in its nascent form as “triangular desire,” he is, as we have seen, reading Augustine's *Confessions* and finding there a correlation between his own reflections on desire and Augustine's reflections on *appetitus*, or the craving desire of the will. In the latter, we find a self that is connected to God through memory—indeed, that is inseparable from interiority and memory as the faculty constituted by the imprint and trace of the Creator.

The movements of desire, of withdrawal and return, that Girard explores in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, and subsequently in *Resurrection from the Underground*, through his examination of works by Cervantes, Stendhal, Proust and Dostoevsky, can also be found in Augustine's philosophical reflections on love as *caritas* and *cupiditas* (albeit without reference to the form of the novel).⁷ Girard's treatment of what he calls “triangular desire” appears in continuity with Augustine's reflections on *appetitus*, and indeed follows the basic inspiration of the *Confessions* in the manner in which it narrates Christian conversion (from death back to life). I will argue however that Girard and Augustine do not sit as easily together as is often thought, for two reasons. Firstly, despite his frequent focus on memory from a third-person perspective, Girard's method of analysis is incapable of articulating the role memory as a first-person faculty that antedates all desire and thereby connects us to God. Secondly, there is a lack of any treatment of a Creator God; of “divine creation” in Girard's lengthy discussions on the origins of human culture.⁸ In order to draw out the apparent isomorphism

6. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversation with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010).

7. It has been commented on that Girard's choice of authors and use of language is sexist. See Golsan for a fuller treatment of this issue. At the same time, it is worth noting that Girard has said that if he were to write the early work again he would include a chapter on Virginia Wolf's *The Waves*, which he believes exemplifies the mimetic hypothesis. Richard J. Golsan, *René Girard and Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 133–4. Given the prevalence of the male pronoun in Girard and Arendt, I have decided to stick closely to each author's text for the purposes of clarity. I occasionally use “one” or “she,” which risks sounding slightly jarring but it serves to remind me, at least, of the otherwise overtly sexist language of my paper.

8. Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 225.

between Girard and Augustine I will examine the early work of Hannah Arendt, whose doctoral dissertation on Augustine provides a remarkable insight into the thinking of Augustine—whom she calls “the only Roman philosopher.” This is one that allows us to examine what Arendt describes as different contexts of Augustine’s philosophy of “love as desire,” for the purposes of comparing some central Christian ideas that both Augustine and Girard appear to share. What Arendt shares with Girard is this: that they are both thinkers of crises. Her analysis of the contexts of Augustine’s thought underscores the importance he gives not only to a concept of Being, but also to the neighbour and the social world, as he attempts to balance the Christian commandment to love God and love thy neighbour as thyself (Matthew 22:34–40). Before turning to Arendt’s Augustine I will, in the first part of this paper, set out some of the main features of Girard’s early treatment of desire as mimetic. My analysis of Girardian theory will be concerned with his phenomenology of desire and how his theory of mimesis, synonymous as it is early on with Christian conversion, has a bearing on the person and his or her deepest longings. I attempt to show the importance of the link between Girard’s early and later work (namely, crisis as loss of differences) as something that could be the basis of a strong synergy between him and Augustine on the matter of origins and world foundations, one that points the way to a rethinking of Girard’s overall work as inclusive of a searching quest for God, rather than the singular application of an albeit powerful mimetic hypothesis.

WITHDRAWAL AND RETURN 1: GIRARD’S MIMETIC CONVERSION

The dynamics of literary space that Girard explores, which is also where his theory of mimesis first takes shape, highlights for the critic the movements of desire as it appears to locate objects in the outside world and thereby confer a sense of fullness and self-sufficiency on the self. However, when the self realizes that its desires are being mediated by an impressive other, it is drawn outward in an attempt to appropriate the status of the other for itself and thereby reaffirm, inwardly, its own fullness and self-sufficiency. It is the “superior Being” of the other that becomes the object the self attempts to possess: “less a real object than a desire to absorb, to become another.”⁹ This is what Girardians call “metaphysical desire.” In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard argues that “desire” is never immediately directed at an object, but is rather always mediated by the other, who thus becomes one’s model

9. Golsan, *René Girard and Myth*, 12.

and eventually one's rival.¹⁰ This process of mediation releases our baser human emotions, doing so in the novel in a concentrated and controlled way. "The inevitable consequences of desire copied from another desire are 'envy, jealousy, and impotent hatred.'"¹¹ These "vices" are thus the "stuff" of literary space. Girard spells out the role of the critic in bringing to light the true course of desire, or what he calls the "mysterious" triangular structure of all human relationships. Thus the novelist, through his art, explores the most charged relationships (emotionally and spiritually). The result is a painful, obliquely gained, knowledge of the emptiness of one's own desires, gained by the author at the end of his "great" work. Girard eschews the traditional understanding of desire as "spontaneous" and directed to its object in a straight line, as it were. An explicit "searching quest" is secondary to the substance of the novel:

The straight line is present in the desire of Don Quixote, but it is not essential. The mediator is there, above that line, radiating toward both the subject and the object. The spatial metaphor which expresses this triple relationship is obviously the triangle. The object changes with each adventure but the triangle remains. The barber's basin or Master Peter's puppets replace the windmills; but Amadis is always present . . . [Hence] the triangle is no Gestalt. The real structures are intersubjective. They cannot be localised anywhere.¹²

The triangular structure (the substance of the novel) has been gradually brought to light by the "great" novelists. According to Girard, structural thinking "assumes that human reality is intelligible: it is a logos and as such, it is an incipient logic, or it degrades itself into a logic."¹³ With the novelist's experience in mind, he tells us that human reality "can thus be systematised, at least up to a point, however unsystematic, irrational, and chaotic it may appear even to those, or rather especially to those who operate the system."¹⁴ Arising from this, Girard's thesis is "that the great writers apprehend concretely and intuitively through the medium of their art, if not formally, the system in which they were first imprisoned together

10. Rowan Williams discusses some of the challenges of mimetic desire for a faith perspective in his book on Dostoevsky. Rowan Williams, *Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Continuum Books, 2008).

11. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 41.

12. *Ibid.*, 2.

13. *Ibid.*, 3.

14. *Ibid.*

with their contemporaries.”¹⁵ In and through his own struggles the author “systematizes” his often-chaotic experience of human reality, thus making it intelligible. Speaking of the critic’s role in recovering this logic, Girard writes: “literary interpretation must be systematic because it is the continuation of literature. It should formalise implicit or already half explicit systems.”¹⁶ Thus the value of criticism depends on “how much literary substance it really embraces, comprehends and makes articulate.”¹⁷ For the critic, human reality is ascertainable as literary substance.¹⁸

One of Girard’s main contributions to French psychology, namely interindividual psychology, comes from his radical thesis concerning desire as a dynamic that “gives rise to the self and by its movement animates it.”¹⁹ The triangular structure of our desire reveals the latter’s true course as it appears to flow from the various protagonists in the novels that he treats, and structure the relationships between them. Our desires are not original: they are aroused, and find their objects by virtue of a model that holds some prestige or fascination for the subject, making the model a mediator, directing the subject to objects, and thereby conferring status on those objects. A self that is brought into existence by desire can have no reliable consciousness of itself: no conscience, and no memory of any worth, prior to the realization that, as with the novelist at the end of his great work, when the hero’s pride is revealed in the knowledge that his desires are not his own. The self and its relationship to being presuppose desire. This modern phenomenology of desire sets itself against Being in the traditional sense as a substantive permanent object of human love and desire.²⁰

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. For fuller treatment of some of main points in this section see: Andrew O’Shea, *Selfhood and Sacrifice: René Girard and Charles Taylor on the Crisis of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 2010), Chapter One.

19. Eugene Webb, *The Self Between: From Freud to the New Social Psychology of France* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1993), 7.

20. Girard is influenced in his account of mimetic desire by Jean-Paul Sartre and Alexandre Kojève. Of Girard’s debt to Sartre, Palaver says: “The two thinkers are in agreement with regard to the fundamental lack of being [without desire], which Girard articulates with his concept of mimetic desire. In Girard’s eyes, however, this lack is not ultimately directed at a tangible being in-itself, as Sartre argues, but rather at the being of a role model—chosen by the desiring subject.” Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, 76. Also, Erving highlights how Girard follows Kojève’s belief that “man’s very being implies and presupposes Desire. The self is constituted as such as a ‘negating negativity.’ It can only seek positive content for itself by ‘negating and appropriating for itself the desire, that is, the being of another.” George Erving, “René Girard and the Legacy of Alexandre Kojève,” *Contagion: Journal of Mimesis and Culture* 10 (Spring 2003): 115.

Girard finds no shortage of cases of mediated desire in the wide array of works by “great” novelists—for example, in Stendhal’s *De l’Amour*, Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, and Molière’s *Don Juan*. Here, I shall advert briefly to two widely divergent novelists (in time as well as in style): Dostoevsky and Cervantes. In Dostoevsky’s *The Eternal Husband*, Pavel Pavlovitch Troussotzkie (the “husband”), out of a peculiar fascination, seeks out his deceased wife’s ex-lover to help him become attracted once again to a new wife:

The *Eternal Husband* ... throws a light on the novelistic triangle so brilliant it dazzles us ... The hero is always trying to convince us that his relationship to the object of desire is independent of the rival. Here we see quite clearly the hero is deceiving us. The mediator is immobile and the hero turns around him like a sun ... Pavel Pavlovitch can desire only through the mediation of Veltchaninov ... [He] drags Veltchaninov along to the house of the lady he has chosen, so that he might desire her and thus guarantee her erotic value.²¹

Girard also discusses Cervantes’ *The Curious Impertinent* which, he claims, portrays a “triangular desire exactly like that of Pavel Pavlovitch.”²² In a similar way to the example just given, the protagonist Anselmo pushes his wife into the arms of his good friend Lothario (who had introduced the couple) in an attempt to excite an ultimately morbid desire.

All the protagonists in the novels reveal a similar insistence that their desires are theirs and not in fact mediated—an insistence that makes them essentially deceived. Each one of them believes in his uniqueness, his self-sufficiency and “totality”—as a unity attributable to his own special essence—that the other’s apparent happiness or fullness disrupts and disperses. Inner division thus prompts him to generate greater degrees of illusion in an effort to excite an unconquerable desire, and to prove once and for all that he is original. This belief in the uniqueness and separateness of the hero, however, is exactly what the structure of the novel will expose as false in the very process of revealing the mediated nature of desire. According to Girard, the *aporia* that traditional philosophies and psychologies encounter in attempting to understand the “self/other” relation stems from the same static understanding of desire as having its source in the subject and attaching itself to objects on account of their inherent worth.

21. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 46–47.

22. *Ibid.*, 49.

Interindividual psychology suggests that a self is always brought into being in the search for a model whose desires it seeks to imitate and take as its own. Girard characterizes the intimate belief that our desires are really our own as the “Romantic fallacy,” a self-deception which he claims is “the dearest of all our illusions.”²³ The “great” novelists have explored the *aporia* of desire and how it can lead to deception and hatred:

We believe that “novelistic” genius is won by a great struggle against these attitudes we have lumped together under the name “romantic” because they all appear to us to maintain the illusion of spontaneous desire and of a subjectivity almost divine in its autonomy. Only slowly and with difficulty does the novelist go beyond the romantic he was at first and who refuses to die. He finally achieves this in the “novelistic” work and in that work alone.²⁴

Only truly “great” novels apprehend the triangular “essence” that literary space yields: “As Girard conceives it, there are novelists and novels that live up to the potential for the elucidation of human reality, and there are others that fail to do so.”²⁵ Great literature is thus a source of genuine knowledge, and those—Girard claims—who read the great works and follow in the footsteps of the novelist “relive the spiritual experience whose form is the novel itself.”²⁶ To do so is to discover what the novelist discovers, which is that our desires are not our own, but rather belong to the models we admire and imitate either consciously or unconsciously (and, of course, these models have in turn other models for their desires). As Eugene Webb explains: “Girard terms such models ‘mediators’ because they function as go-betweens linking us to our objects of desire as well as our aspirations for personal being.”²⁷ Webb goes on to suggest that

in Girard’s analysis there are two basic possibilities in mediation: (1) that which leads almost inevitably to conflict, because the self and its model are both competitors within the same field of action, and (2) that which does not, because the self and its model cannot be competitors, since their fields of action do not overlap. He calls the first one “internal mediation” and the second “external mediation.”²⁸

23. Webb, *The Self Between*, 9.

24. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 28–9.

25. Webb, *The Self Between*, 96.

26. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 221–2.

27. Webb, *The Self Between*, 92.

28. *Ibid.*, 93.

However, internal mediation, or negative mimesis, is the predominant concern of Girard's first two works of criticism because, as we shall see, it is the form that points the way to the "inner division" of the self that nothing short of spiritual conversion can overcome. The social world determines the external mediation of desire by channelling it constructively when roles are clearly defined and social distances clearly demarcated: what Girard refers to as "degree."²⁹ But when such a world is fragmented and hierarchies collapse, as in the modern period, the conditions for rivalry become rife. Thus it is that the twists and turns of rivalry and bitter resentment form the underground terrain mined by many of the novelists Girard examines.

While, in Girard's account of desire, the withdrawal from and return to the world is a dynamic process whereby the movement either stabilizes in clearly defined social relations (external mediation) or destabilizes in self-corruptions (internal mediation), the dynamic itself has a recognisable direction outwards or inwards. As long as imitation takes the form of external mediation, the rivalry between self and other and the likelihood of inter-subjective crisis are held in check (as in the example of Don Quixote and Adamas in Cervantes's novel). However, the problems that beset Dostoevsky's characters occur when the model gets too close: that is, when external mediation turns to internal mediation and "benign" imitation turns to rivalry. The difference between the two forms of desire is sometimes articulated in terms of a distance or lack of distance in space and time.³⁰ As the distance between the mediator and the subject decreases, differences diminish, and

the comprehension becomes more acute and the hatred more intense. It is always his own desire that the subject condemns in the Other without knowing it. Hatred is individualistic. It nourishes fiercely the illusion of an absolute difference between Self and Other from which nothing separates it. Indignant comprehension is therefore an imperfect comprehension—not non-existent as some moralists claim, but imperfect, for the subject does not recognise in the Other the void gnawing at himself. He makes of him a monstrous divinity.³¹

29. For a discussion of the role and significance of degree and "the great chain of being" in mimetic theory, see Girard's commentary on Ulysses' speech in "Troilus and Cressida." René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 51.

30. Golsan, *René Girard and Myth*.

31. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 73.

The critical lens reveals a view of literary space different from what the hero understands. The hero is convinced that he is being original, but in truth he is coming to depend more and more on the other. The critic reveals that “imitative desire is always a desire to be Another.”³² The problem for the Romantic figure, according to Girard, is that he does not see his desires as imitative, but rather as singularly his own. Therefore, he remains unaware that, in all his vain pursuits, he is attempting to appropriate the “Being” of the other, or the other’s desires, which he seeks to maintain as his own. However, when the triangular structure of the novel is revealed, the “originality and spontaneity” is exposed as false, as is the much-prized “separation” between self and other. The “subject,” as he appears in the novels (as protagonist), is simply a negative datum, whose self-deceptions and mistaken desires colour all his intersubjective relationships.³³ The hero’s misapprehension concerning the real source of his desires thus has to do with the object that is valued, and how he sees himself (his very “Being”) reflected in this object, nothing short of whose possession will provide fulfilment: “The romantic *vaniteux* always wants to convince himself that his desire is written into the nature of things, or, what amounts to the same thing, that it is the emanation of a serene subjectivity, the creation ex nihilo of a divine ego.”³⁴ The more the *vaniteux* seeks independence, the more he inevitably fuses with the desires of his model who, no doubt, by proving himself to be in every way superior to his disciple and by barring access to the quasi-sacred object, has become an obstacle to the *vaniteux*’s “divine self-sufficiency.” Girard tells us that the felt need to see our desires as our own grows in proportion to our proximity to the model that we are in fact imitating: “The closer the mediator gets to the desiring subject, the more the possibilities of the two rivals merge and the more insuperable becomes the obstacle they set in each other’s way.”³⁵ This merger or fusion with the other is brought about by an attempt to secure its opposite: separation. And so, it is also a terrifying reminder of the subject’s dependence and his utter lack of “divine” self-sufficiency—indeed of “Being” itself.

Because of the danger that the “Other” poses to the Romantic hero’s ideal spiritual quest, his intra-psychic world—although darkened with uncertainty—becomes a space of constant retreat: a withdrawal into himself.

32. *Ibid.*, 83.

33. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

34. *Ibid.*, 15.

35. *Ibid.*, 26. In his later anthropological work Girard refers to the “model/obstacle” as the “scandalon” or stumbling block. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

This movement inward, as the model approaches, is, for Girard, always at the heart of internal mediation and the dynamics that lead deeper into “the underground” of human reality, where the negative emotions of fear and hatred dominate. Withdrawal is thus a feature of the concealment of desire, and therefore constitutes what Girard calls the Romantic hero’s spiritual *askesis*.³⁶ The paradoxical dynamic of internal mediation leaves the individual seeking his own total and independent being, drawing away in an attempt to hide his desire, while becoming more and more like the other. The one who succumbs to this metaphysical desire “wants to draw everything to himself, gather everything into his own Self but he never succeeds. He always suffers from a ‘flight’ towards the other through which the substance of his own being flows away.”³⁷ The intensity of the hero’s attempts to hide his desire is only matched by the intensity of his attempts to find a model worthy of his imitation. Each failed attempt only disperses and divides him further: “Pride goes always towards dispersion and final division, which is to say towards death. To accept this death is to be reborn into unity.”³⁸ The works that truly “gather”—a gathering that is an integrating and a unifying that occurs in and through writing the novels—are, Girard claims, the ones that reveal the myth of Romantic desire and its fruitless form of “gathering” (which is in fact a scattering and a dispersion). These great works are given the name “Romanesque” or “new.”³⁹

In the final part of this section, I will focus on the meaning of novelistic experience, as evinced in the symbolic death of the principal characters of the novels Girard treats: a death that connects with the author’s and, as we shall see, the critic’s own death and rebirth. At the end of the “work of genius,” Girard contends, spiritual resurrection has been affirmed at the expense of a Romantic individualism that inevitably leads to spiritual death. In and through the physical death of the hero in the novel life is being generated—something he sees as the common culminating motif of all “great” novels and calls the “unity of novelistic conclusions.” Summing up this unity, which the critic believes brought Dostoevsky his own restored humanity, Girard observes: “In the second part of *The Brothers Karamazov* little Ilusha dies for the sake of all the heroes of Dostoevsky’s novels and the communion which springs from that death is Balzac’s and Proust’s sublime lucidity shared by many. The structure of crime and redeeming

36. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 153.

37. Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, 98.

38. *Ibid.*, 140.

39. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 16–7.

punishment transcends the solitary consciousness.”⁴⁰ The last lines in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* are the last lines from *The Brothers Karamazov* that portray a collective scene of jubilation, the Christian themes and symbols of which, Girard claims, are shared by other novelists: “memory, death, love and resurrection.”⁴¹ The authors, through the available index of powerfully mediating symbols, draw together the imaginary plots that all share the same basic meaning: our desires are not our own and a transformation of our life is required in the light of appreciation of this knowledge. What we find with many of Dostoevsky’s characters is that the contradictions caused by internal mediation destroy the individual. The hero’s tireless “sodomasochistic” pursuit of what negates him leads into the most parched deserts, in a paradoxical attempt to find the purest waters of self-affirmation: “The will make oneself God is a will to self-destruction which is gradually realised.”⁴² In the end, all the heroes in all the great novels share the same essential insight into their previously mistaken desire, and the corresponding realization of the mediator’s actual power over them.

The deviated desire of the Romantic hero may indeed lead to death, but according to Girard the novel itself leads to life. At the end of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard claims that there are two sets of conclusions that pertain to novelistic experience: (1) two kinds of death, and (2) two kinds of conversion. Of the first set, Girard gives the following example: “There are two antithetical deaths in the conclusion of *The Possessed*: one death that is an extinction of the spirit. Stavrogin’s death is only death; Stephan’s death is life. This double ending is not unusual in Dostoevsky.”⁴³ Physical death and spiritual death are juxtaposed in a powerfully symbolic way by the author so as to place the regenerative characteristics of novelistic experience in relief. However, the theme of “death as life” becomes the basis of the second set of conclusions that go beyond the novel and encompass the author’s own experience, having traversed the literary space of his “great work.” The two deaths—one of which is in fact life—thus correspond to the two conversions, of which one, Girard argues, represents the hero’s transformation in death, while the other points to the author’s own conversion in the act of writing the novel.⁴⁴

40. Ibid., 314.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 287.

43. Ibid., 291.

44. Ibid., 311.

The first kind of conversion is the one concerning the characters in the novels that Girard treats. The endings of these novels, whether *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Don Quixote* or *The Red and the Black*, all depict a conversion in death: a spiritual conversion, or a death that leads to life. This “unity of conclusions” is denied by contemporary criticism, Girard claims, because it wishes to preserve (in a romantic vein) the “uniqueness” of the work of art.⁴⁵ But for Girard, this denial overlooks the principle that can explain this unity—a principle that relates in each case to a single phenomenon: “The unity of novelistic conclusions consists in the renunciation of metaphysical desire. The dying hero repudiates his mediator.”⁴⁶ This repudiation implies renunciation of divinity and renunciation of pride. As discussed above, the fruits of conversion are experiences: “In renouncing divinity the hero renounces slavery. Every level of his existence is inverted, all the effects of metaphysical desire are replaced by contrary effects.”⁴⁷ Truth, remembrance, repose, love, humility, autonomy and “vertical transcendency” are all achieved by the hero of the novel—and, as it turns out, by the novelist also.

Girard’s comments here have a bearing on the two kinds of conversion, or the second set of conclusions (the conclusions drawn by the critic), since it is not only the characters who give up their Romantic illusions and are reborn, but also the novelist who undergoes a conversion. The principle behind the unity of novelistic conclusions suggests to Girard that there must be a real unity at work in the lives of the novelists. Something is being wrought through the novel that belongs to the novelist proper, constituting a second conversion. Who, then, are the “real heroes” of the novels Girard treats? Who are the beneficiaries of the insight that has been working itself out in the novels through the thwarted desires of the principal characters? “The hero succumbs as he achieves truth and he entrusts his creator with the heritage of his clairvoyance. The title of hero of a novel must be reserved for the character who triumphs over metaphysical desire in a tragic conclusion and thus becomes capable of writing the novel.”⁴⁸ The author, having overcoming the illusions of spontaneous desire, is revealed as the real hero of literary space.

In the end, the heroic characters recognize the power and influence of the mediator in respect of their desires, and thus their dependence on him. The more the protagonists of the novels treated by Girard try to

45. *Ibid.*, 293.

46. *Ibid.*, 293–4.

47. *Ibid.*, 294.

48. *Ibid.*, 296.

separate themselves from their model—that is, the more they attempt to convince themselves that their desires are their own—the more their pride forces them to merge with their model, where the only option left is spiritual death or spiritual rebirth (represented by physical death). This merger between hero and mediator has its counterpart in the unity of the novelist, whose own personal narrative merges with the narrative that culminates in the hero's conversion: "The hero and his creator are separated throughout the novel but come together in the conclusion."⁴⁹ One of the examples that Girard gives of this development is the claim by Flaubert: "Mme Bovary, c'est moi." What is revealed here, according to Girard is, the "miraculous" nature of the novel, whereby the self and other "become one."⁵⁰ This communion with the other is paradoxically what allows the hero to emerge as a new subject. By renouncing their false belief in originality, they are humbled by the actual role that the other plays in their life. Girard describes this paradoxical outcome as follows: "Victory over self-centeredness allows us to probe deeply into the Self and at the same time yields a better knowledge of Others. At a certain depth there is no difference between our own secret and the secret of Others. Everything is revealed to the novelist when he penetrates this Self, a truer Self than that which each of us displays. This Self imitates constantly on its knees before the mediator."⁵¹ By attempting to shore up his own separateness, the Romantic hero was only bringing on more quickly his lack of difference from "the Other." According to Girard, "great novels always spring from an obsession that has been transcended. The hero sees himself in the rival he loathes; he renounces the 'differences' suggested by hatred."⁵²

Describing the inverse journey of the hero prior to conversion, Girard writes: "The impulse of the soul toward God is inseparable from a retreat into the Self ... Inversely the turning in on itself of pride is inseparable from

49. Ibid., 296–7.

50. Ibid., 300.

51. Ibid., 298.

52. Ibid., 300. Shortly after the publication of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard published a shorter essay in which he clarifies the experience of religious conversion as novelistic unity with specific reference to Dostoevsky's own life. This work of criticism/biography entitled *Resurrection from the Underground* was first published in French with the subtitle "Du double à l'unité," or "From the double to unity." In the first chapter he sums up what he had earlier called the unity of novelistic conclusions, with specific reference to Dostoevsky's own resurrection from the underground: "For Dostoevsky, to create oneself is to slay the old human state, prisoner as it is of aesthetic, psychological and spiritual forms." Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, 31.

a movement of panic toward the Other.”⁵³ In the conclusion of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, we learn that the author as subject undergoes a spiritual conversion, symbolized in the conclusion of his great work as a death that the critic believes is in fact life. As already mentioned, Girard describes the significance of this transformation in the context of the death in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* of little Ilusha, who dies for the sake of all Dostoevsky's heroes, and where “the communion that springs from that death is Balzac's and Proust's sublime lucidity shared by many.”⁵⁴ The “sublime lucidity” achieved here—as the light guiding this conversion—is, Girard believes, shared in by the “great” novelists and “many” others who follow in their footsteps. It is a lucidity that stems from the author's painfully won insight into the triangle determining intersubjective relations—an implicit structure governing literary space: one that (when acknowledged) generates an authentic literary community, and one that is fully articulated, as such, by the critic. Transcendence comes from a negative theology associated with “the hero's lost illusions.”⁵⁵

The triangular structure concealed by the Romantic fallacy is the “true” principle governing novelistic experience. At the time of writing *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, there was another, highly relevant, outcome stemming from the “conclusion” drawn by the critic. This has to do with his own conversion at the end of that work. This “outcome” was only revealed much later, in an interview with James Williams. As Girard recounts:

When I wrote the last chapter of my first book, I had a vague idea of what I would do, but as the chapter took form I realized I was undergoing my own version of the experience I was describing. I was particularly attracted to the Christian elements . . . So I began to read the Gospels and the rest of the Bible. And I turned into a Christian.⁵⁶

53. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 58–9.

54. *Ibid.*, 313–4.

55. Robert Doran, “René Girard's Concept of Conversion and the ‘Via Negativa’: Revisiting “Deceit Desire and the Novel,” *Religion and Literature*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Autumn 2011), 172. Speaking of the ending of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Doran says, “the transformative experience of novelistic conversion is not the result of some positive discovery concerning the nature of the divine, of love, or of humility; it results from the inherent negativity of mediated desire.” *Ibid.* It is because desire is “socially mediated” that Being is not “predetermined”. *Ibid.*

56. René Girard, *The Girard Reader* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 285. See, also, Golsan's interview with Girard, for a discussion of the manner in which Girard's conversion is tied in to the genesis of his work. Golsan, *René Girard and Myth*, 29–30.

This confessional account of Girard's own conversion becomes a topic for later interviews; it is an account that remains constant at a certain level of his discourse.

Girard's early work achieves a way of thinking through the developments within structuralism that announce the "death of the author" as part of a peculiarly Western reflection on the self/other relation.⁵⁷ The death and rebirth of the author, he claims, is not

essentially different from that of Saint Augustine or Dante. This is why the structure of *The Brothers Karamazov* is close to the form of *The Confessions* and *The Divine Comedy*. It is the structure of the incarnation, the fundamental structure of Western art and Western experience. It is present every time artists succeed in giving their work the form of the spiritual metamorphosis that brings the work to birth.⁵⁸

What I have attempted to do in this section is to set out the case for what Girard calls "the achievement of the novel"—an achievement that is nothing short of a "spiritual metamorphosis."⁵⁹ Girard's nascent theory of mimetic desire yields a spiritual conversion evident in the symbolism of the novel and realized in the author's own life. What he describes as the inverse movement of the hero prior to spiritual conversion appears to pit the inwardness of the Saint against the outwardness of the hero, yet even post-conversion the hero is still drawn outwards (on his knees before the mediator).⁶⁰ When we consider this early period of his theory we learn that Girard himself, as if to confirm the experience he describes, undergoes his own version of the

57. Girard's account of literary structure entails an account of the death of the author which is markedly different from other literary critics' accounts at the time, notable that of Roland Barthes. For a further discussion on this topic, see Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

58. Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, 140.

59. Speaking of Proust, Girard comments: "Though the Christian significance of *Remembrance of Things Past* remained metaphorical, he viewed this metaphor as his supreme aesthetic achievement. After the naïve biblical symbolism of Combray, after the infernal imagery of *Cities of the Plain*, comes a third dominant symbolism of spiritual metamorphosis. *The Past Recaptured* is a second birth and a last judgement." René Girard, *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 11.

60. Describing Proust's spiritual metamorphous, Girard says: "Almost to the end the dynamic element of the novel is amour-propre, which leads *outward and downward* from the relative high starting point of Combray. This direction is reversed only in extremis, and the change cannot be logically explained. All we can say ... is that this movement had to be pursued in extremis before it could mysteriously reverse itself." *Ibid.* (my italics).

experience attributed to the real hero of the novel, the novelist. Here, in Girard's subsequent appendage to his literary theory quoted above, we find what might be described as a direct "first-person" link to the confessional elements that are brilliantly narrated from a third-person perspective. In other words, we find a vital piece of the account that the Saint manages to include in his inward journey: a form of spiritual *askesis* no less personal for all of its aesthetic achievements. Without such a link, can Girard really claim that the Saint's and hero's conversions are the same?

What is striking about the personal experience that Girard narrates *post-theory* is that it plays no definite part in his later work, when he comes to apply his mimetic hypothesis to what Palaver calls the second and third stages of mimetic theory. The form and the content of literary space are brought into alignment in the personal account of the critic. This permits him to say that the hero's and the Saint's experience are essentially one and the same *because the critic reveals himself as the hero—both the Saint and the hero are searching for God*. But later, in the second and third stages of the mimetic cycle, when the theory becomes more scientific, both the form and content of the theory remain separate: nowhere, in all the interpretative fetes that decode myth and reveal a scapegoat and a victim, do we find an account of a personal quest for God on behalf of the interpreter. This missing personal dimension appears to uproot Girard's overall account of mimesis from the confessional journey. The Saint and the hero once more become third-person characters in a tragedy that culminates in the modern world – what he claims is "almost like a synonym for 'sacrificial crisis.'"⁶¹

To conclude this section, I would add that the argument of this paper is that we can understand Girard's work in a manner more in keeping with the personal nature of Christianity if we consider his overall *oeuvre* as constituting a development pertaining to a spiritual quest. It is not the knowledge wrought through the mimetic hypothesis, but how the heart is moved to understand and accept revelation in the light of the Christian message of love, that makes Girard's philosophy Christian. So can the form and the content of his overall work be brought back into alignment?

WITHDRAWAL AND RETURN 2: ARENDT'S FIRST CONTEXT

In this section, I will examine more carefully the analogy Girard makes between the hero's journey and the Saint's journey. I shall do so by considering Arendt's work on Augustine, along with what she argues are some very different trains of thought in the latter's philosophy of "love as

61. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 188.

desire.” As we shall see, many of the challenges for Christian philosophy can be seen to crystallize around the meaning Girard gives to the central Christian themes in his early theory. For example, I will attempt to show how the withdrawal from and return to the world that forms such a feature of the hero’s travails in literary space requires an adequate concept of memory, if the confessional aspects of the Christian account are to be given narrative coherence.

Can a structuralist account of conversion deliver such coherence? Girard’s later account of withdrawal, associated with Hölderlin whom he claims exemplifies Christ’s movement toward God, is Christian in a manner that the earlier withdrawal of the hero is not.⁶² However his later concept of withdrawal lacks the interiority that forms the conditions of Augustine’s questing search. Arendt highlights different contexts of thought in Augustine’s work that can help us to analyse the withdrawal and return that we also find in the Saint’s philosophical quest for God. Both trains of thought, she argues, chart Augustine’s attempt to grapple with the Christian commandment to love God, neighbour and self. By considering the first of these contexts of thought in this section with reference to the movements of triangular desire, I pick up on the point introduced at the end of the last section and attempt to show how Girard’s analysis of the hero’s *askesis* reflects aspects of the Saint’s *askesis* but misses what is essential: namely, the confessional perspective of Augustine’s Christian philosophy—until, that is, we include the later account of Girard’s own conversion that occurred while he was writing the conclusion to *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. So, do the thought trains explored by Arendt apply to Girard’s thinking, and is there a case for reading the latter, like with Augustine in his own work, as engaged in a searching quest rather than the building of a “scientific theory”?⁶³

At the beginning of *Love and Saint Augustine*, Arendt highlights Augustine’s point that love is a movement that is set by the goal towards which it moves.⁶⁴ The object we crave we crave for its own sake, and this object is a “good”—hence the fact that we desire it for its own sake: “All the independent goods we desire in our questing love are independent objects, unrelated to other objects. Each of them represents nothing but its isolated

62. “The aspect of Christ that has to be imitated is his withdrawal. Hölderlin made this dramatic discovery”. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 50–51. Also see “Hölderlin withdrew for 40 years into a tower owned by a carpenter in Tübingen ... We have to rise to the nobility of this silence.” *Ibid.*, 122.

63. Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, 30.

64. Hanna Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9.

goodness. The distinctive trait of this good that we desire is that we do not have it.⁶⁵ Our cravings aim at the world we know. Since we seek objects for the sake of our happiness, our desire ends once we have our object—unless we are threatened with its loss. In the latter case, the desire to have turns into a fear of losing: “As a quest for the particular good rather than things at random, desire is a combination of ‘aiming at’ and ‘referring back to.’”⁶⁶ In this way, desire is self-reflexive: it moderates its aim in accordance with its achievements. Desire, or *appetitus*, is a human being’s possibility of gaining possession of the object that will bring on happiness—an object that is sought because it is good. Since, for Augustine, we must know happiness or there would be no search, what we seek to gain possession of is most our own.⁶⁷ Happiness consists in possessing our good and being sure of not losing it. However, the fear of loss constantly besets human life. Arendt stresses the importance for Augustine of this fact: “that nothing subject to loss can ever become an object of possession.”⁶⁸ That human beings desire good and fear evil, and that they desire to possess the good that brings happiness and shun the fear that brings evil, is part of the human condition. Her work on Augustine involves an exploration of how well he manages to balance what she sees as two contexts of thought in his philosophy: the demand of the Christian commandment “to love God,” and the demand “to love thy neighbour as thyself.”

It is natural for human beings to seek happiness and to do so through their pursuit of goods that are sought for their own sake. The good must, therefore, be good and attainable as such. However, temporality changes these goods, and human beings are mortal. Arendt describes how, for Augustine, whose every experience is conditioned by death, our striving after future goods is something we must always fear, since time always threatens to strip them from us. What arises from this is that “only a present without a future is immutable and utterly unthreatened.”⁶⁹ It is here, in the “futureless present,” that we find the absolute good, which Augustine calls “eternity.” Yet still human life does not endure. Each day we lose it a little more. While only the present appears real, there seems no way of measuring it—no space in which to take a stand. “Life is always either—no

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*, 10.

69. *Ibid.*, 13.

more or not yet.”⁷⁰ However, human beings do measure time. Arendt puts Augustine’s question as follows: “Perhaps man possess a ‘space’ where time can be conserved long enough to be measured, and would not this ‘space,’ which man carries with him transcend both life and time?”⁷¹ The space that permits us to measure time turns out to exist in our memory, where things are being stored up:

Memory contains the trace of all our past experiences—even our anticipated experiences, and all things imagined whether realized or not. It is here that the true space of the subject opens. Memory, the storehouse of time is the presence of the “no more” (*iam non*) as expectation is the presence of the “not yet” (*nondum*). Therefore, I do not measure what is no more but something in my memory remains fixed in it. It is only by calling past and future into the present of remembrance and expectation that time exists at all.⁷²

It is only in the “now” of the present made possible by memory that the past and the future meet; it is here in the “now” that time is measured backwards and forwards. But what prevents mankind from “living” in this “now”—that is, in eternity—is life itself, which never “stands still.”⁷³ This is so, Arendt tells us, because it takes an object to determine and arouse desire. Life (human existence, temporality, createdness) is defined for Augustine by what it craves because desire, *appetitus*, by drawing us out of ourselves (away from the now), does not permit time to stand still. The good that one knows will bring happiness must therefore be projected into an eternity beyond temporal existence.⁷⁴

Girard is not unconcerned with memory. Indeed his preoccupations in his early literary theory explicitly extend to the work of authors whose writings indicate the role and significance of memory in generating the process that leads to the efficacious conversion he attributes to great novelists able to overcome their negative mimesis. It must be also said, however, that such an elaboration of the role of memory in literary structure is a third-person reflection on the aesthetic achievement of the author, and not identical with her experience. As in Girard’s work on Proust, the critic could never say “I remember Marcel’s experience of eating the *madeleine*

70. *Ibid.*, 14.

71. *Ibid.*, 15.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*, 16.

74. *Ibid.*

cake,"⁷⁵ as we would have to then ask what such a statement would mean? Affective memory in Proust, as brilliantly as it is depicted by Girard, is still akin to a depiction of another person's memory. I can empathise with the person remembering, I may even know what the experience is like, but I can never know the direct and immediate sensation of the one whose memory is recalled. I can never be in what Arendt describes as the "true space of the subject." To figure such an space in language is, perhaps, to share a remembrance and even generate a further experience; it may even be described accurately as an aesthetic achievement, but the ancillary experience, primary as it is for the one encountering it, can never be *from* the space whence the remembrance came. Such is the enigmatic character of the "true space of the subject." Augustine's account of memory, according to Arendt, opens a space not only in the subject but, crucially, in temporality, where the search for God takes place. For that reason, it holds a central place in Augustine's philosophy. It is a radically subjective space that offers a radically first-person-based perspective. The structure of desire that Arendt discusses in relation to Augustine's conception of love, a structure that depends on gaining possession of the object craved, is determined by this interior space of memory where past and present meet.

For Augustine, to return to oneself is to return to one's source made present in memory. The difficulty with the interindividual psychology that Girard devises along with the psychologist Jean Michel Oughourlian is that it gives only a negative meaning to interiority, so memory can have no privileged place in calling the reflective individual inwards and upwards, or even providing that same individual with an awareness of being created.⁷⁶ The whole notion of a personal god calling us inwardly to a relationship is made profoundly problematic.⁷⁷ Oughourlian, building squarely on Girard's mimetic hypothesis, describes how the self comes about: "a self is created

75. The passage of textual criticism I'm referring to here is as follows: "Marcel warily dips the cake into the tea and, as the soaked crumbs touch his tongue, he feels miraculously delivered from his wretchedness. His bed-ridden aunt used to offer him tea and *madeleine* in the days of Combray." Girard, *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 4.

76. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 31.

77. Charles Taylor comments on the centrality of inwardness for Augustine: "For instance, in *de Trinitate*, XII.i. [Augustine] distinguishes between the inner and outer man. The outer is the bodily, what we have in common with the beasts, including even our senses, and memory storage of images of outer things. The inner is the soul. And this is not just one way of describing the difference for Augustine. It is in a sense the most important one for our spiritual purposes, because the road from the lower to the higher, the crucial shift in direction, passes through our attending to ourselves as inner." Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 129.

in the heart of the relation.”⁷⁸ It is a psychological phenomenon that is changeable, and therefore memory is completely unreliable:

When we fall in love we are astonished and say to ourselves “I’ve become a different person.” We are no longer the same; our self has become transformed. The memory that ties together these successive states, along with the forgetfulness that conceals from us the origins of our desires, apparently permits us to believe in the underlying continuity of a permanent identity ... the present self is always different from what it had been. It never ceases to create and recreate itself in the bosom of each relationship.⁷⁹

A little later in this text, Oughourlian comments on “a self that can die and be reborn,” suggesting that the force of the interindividual relationship that gives rise to a self is such that it can, as with falling in love and being disappointed, die and be reborn a number of times, and that each time the new self is different than before.⁸⁰ It is questionable whether Girard could go as far as Oughourlian in concluding that there is no continuity between the previous versions of the self I am today, and that such a death and rebirth is entirely new. Still, it is difficult not to acknowledge the lack of continuity over time within an interindividual self who is fated to die over and over again—unless, that is, the critic’s own inner space brings the much needed continuity that does not usually appear from behind the application of his mimetic theory.

By excluding from view the inner space of memory as a radically first person experience, interindividual psychology also excludes narrative and the possibility of it generating unity in a given life, which, as we have seen from Girard’s literary theory, purports to be the miracle of the novel—the so called “unity of novelistic conclusions.” This highlights an important philosophical issue, which Derek Parfit indirectly brings to the fore in his book *Reasons and Persons*. Charles Taylor’s observations on Parfit’s arguments address this issue.⁸¹ If a self is constituted by “a certain mode of concern”—

78. Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Genesis of Desire*, trans. Eugene Webb (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 32.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, 35–6.

81. According to Taylor, “Parfit defends some version of the view that a human life is not an a priori unity or that personal identity doesn’t have to be defined in terms of a whole life. It is perfectly defensible for me to consider (what I would conventionally call) my earlier, say, preadolescent self as another person and, similarly, to consider what ‘I’ (as we would normally put it) shall be several decades in the future as still another person.” Taylor, *Sources of the Self*,

i.e. that things matter to a self and some things matter more than others, and that this mattering and getting clear on it from the point of view of a self is what partly constitutes a self—and, furthermore, if who I was in the past and who I will be in the future matters in a significant way to me in the here and now (i.e. to who I am), then the self must exist over time, and bringing unity to it is the project of a whole life. Unity could of course be pursued through the novel, but not exclusively.⁸² This is Taylor's point, at least, and it chimes well with what Arendt says of Augustine's concept of memory as the faculty that brings unity for the Lover with her Creator. It also highlights how, when the accent is placed on the novel and the text as the space where a self comes to realize itself fully and lucidly as "autonomous" and not enslaved to another, the self who is suddenly manifest then appears like *a deus ex machina*. Connecting our desires to memory need not lead to an *a priori* self, existing as some already enclosed totality or unity. It need only be the locus of a questing search in light of the fact of our existence in the world: a contingent search in time and memory that may, of course, fail.

Arendt reminds us that the orientations of desire seek permanence in what they seek to possess. Human beings, in turn, help constitute the earthly world by what they crave or love, for "it is the love of the world that turns heaven and earth into the world as a changeable thing. In its flight from death, the craving for permanence clings to the very things sure to be lost in death."⁸³ Here lies one possibility: the self goes out of itself in a misguided search for its essence—the being of things and of the world. The wrong kind of love consists in the wrong object, which continually disappoints and will ultimately be lost in death. Correspondingly, another possibility is that the right kind of love consists in the right object accessible through memory—thereby directing us inwardly on the path beyond, to eternity, and to the ultimate Good. To these two different kinds of love Augustine assigns the terms *cupiditas* and *caritas*, respectively. For him, the "utmost importance" that my craving points to is either God or the world. God, who is beyond being, gives us our basic direction, and by clinging to God we become like God, and therefore eternal. By clinging to the changeable world we become worldly, and in death we lose any seeming permanence achieved in this life. Human beings cannot bear the separation

49. It is an argument that owes a lot to John Locke and frequently gives rise to what Taylor calls an erroneous understanding of the self. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*, 51.

83. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 17.

and isolation that the lack of self-sufficiency brings. They are driven to break out of this by means of love, and so, by what they love they become denizens of this world or denizen of the world-to-come.⁸⁴ Either way, the human being is not at home. Her restlessness sends her out of herself toward worldly things that will appear to compensate for her own lack. The lover who sees that her happiness depends on being at home in the eternal essence makes a desert out of this world because she sees the deep dissatisfaction that this world offers: “Love that desires a worldly object, be it a thing or a person, is constantly frustrated in its very quest for happiness.”⁸⁵ Happiness comes when the beloved is a permanently inherent part of one’s own self. As in conventional marriage, “to have and to hold” is the guiding aspiration of the lover. Although this principle expresses the very condition of desire as craving, in the context of temporality, “having and holding” can only remind the lover of ultimate separation, and for this reason true happiness, relying as it does on possession and enjoyment, is frustrated. Arendt describes the lover’s searching desire in this context as wholly at odds with his happiness. Love as craving thus involves a supreme effort to close the gap between lover and beloved; a search for unity and happiness that strives to take one out of the world (a world that cannot deliver on either): “Since the ultimate goal of the lover is his own happiness, he actually is guided in all his desires by a desire for his own good, that is, for something that is inside himself.”⁸⁶ In this way, the lover naturally seeks self-sufficiency. An obvious contrast with Girard on this last point is the latter’s characterization of the Romantic fallacy as a belief in one’s self-sufficiency, since for Augustine self-sufficiency is a positively disposed self-possession—it abides by the conditions of eternity.⁸⁷ A love of the world can never make me happy, because it drives me outside of myself, where true permanence resides: “In *cupiditas* I seek what is... outside myself and this search is vain even if it is a search for God.”⁸⁸ Indeed, both forms of love testify to one’s separation from whatever might bring happiness—that is, to a separation from one’s very self that has its true home in the eternal essence.⁸⁹ For the lover, the object of one’s love is paramount. Craving ensures human beings are not self-sufficient. The gap between Lover and

84. *Ibid.*, 19.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*, 52.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, 20.

Beloved must be closed.⁹⁰ *Caritas* and *cupiditas* are distinguished only by their object. Arising from this, Arendt says of desire that it “mediates between subject and object, and it annihilates the distance between them by transforming the subject into a lover and the object into the beloved.”⁹¹ The one who loves belongs to what she loves.

The analysis of “love as desire” is implicit in Augustine’s assertion when he says that “I have become a question to myself,” for how can a human being that is in need be the source of its own happiness?⁹² The question, once arrived at, initiates the search for God and one’s own Being. It is what John S. Dunne has called “a search for God in time and memory.”⁹³ Death ties me to time and deprives me of happiness. By loving the goods outside myself I become dependent upon them—on that which is beyond my control simply because I am mortal, and therefore must lose the object of my love against my will.⁹⁴ When I have given my will to such a thing that is beyond my control, I belong to what is “outside myself” (in the sense of being worldly). I am thus enslaved to what is unattainable because it is unattainable, and such enslavement is manifest in fear.⁹⁵ Fear, then, for

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Ibid.*, 18. If we compare this analysis of desire to Girard’s account of triangular desire we can recognise both striking similarities and differences. For Girard, desire also mediates, but only with the help of a mediator. Collapsing the distance—the gap or “degree”—between differences is, for Girard, a source of crisis; in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* it leads to the illusions of self-hatred. In contrast to what he calls the fusion generated by negative mimesis, positive mimesis entails maintaining this gap. When, in Augustine’s metaphysical philosophy, the accent is on desire as mediating, it is difficult to see how a spiritual crisis could occur in the same way it does in literary space; in other words, to see how *cupiditas* and negative mimesis could function in the same way by attaching an individual to the wrong object. Taking Augustine as our standard, we would first have to establish how a good model, such as could form the basis of positive mimesis, could become the right object if it cannot be possessed, or, what amounts to the same thing for Augustine, the distance annihilated between the subject and object. After all, the latter is the very condition of crisis for Girard, while Arendt reminds us that for Augustine “happiness occurs when the gap between lover and beloved has been closed, and the question is whether *cupiditas*, the love of this world, can ever attain it.” *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*, 13.

93. John S. Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1977).

94. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 13.

95. *Ibid.* However, because a mortal being cannot understand eternity, its attempt to achieve it will entail a radical turning away from oneself and the world toward the future in an absolute sense: “This absolute futurity can be anticipated only through the annihilation of the mortal, temporal present, that is, through hating the existing self.” *Ibid.*, 27. Something of a contradiction is at work here, Arendt indicates, as if life’s true goal could be separated from its present existential reality. “No future,” she tells us, “not even an absolute future can deny its origin in ordinary human temporality.” *Ibid.* It ends up being expected like any other

Augustine, characterizes the person who loves the wrong thing, and the outside “world” is bad and slavish because it entails dependence on what is in principle unattainable.⁹⁶ If our freedom rests in possessing what we will, then enslavement entails being tied to what is lost against our will. In losing one’s self through fear, one essentially loses one’s freedom, therefore no one who depends on what is outside can be either fearless or free.⁹⁷ But what does Augustine find when he is gathered within from the dispersion that the world implies? At the risk of simplifying, he finds himself through re-remembrance and re-collection: he becomes present to himself in a way that the unreflective “going-out-of-himself” would not permit. To have a self in the sense of being able to say “I am” is to summon up one’s own unity and identity against the false unity and identity that the world holds—that is, against the dispersion that the world as the wrong kind of love entails. It is to be gathered together in the presence of memory that is always and everywhere in the here and now.

While on a quest for the self, Augustine meets God, a connection that appears indispensable to his very sense of self. About this meeting, Arendt asks: “what is the relationship, or perhaps the affinity, between self and God?”⁹⁸ The answer, she claims, can be found in the question Augustine raises in Book X of his *Confessions*: “What do I love when I love *my* God?”⁹⁹ The words “my God,” she tells us, suggest Augustine’s quest is for the God of the human heart. It is “this God who is my God, the right object of my desire and my love ... the quintessence of my inner self and therefore by no means identical with it.”¹⁰⁰ When I find myself I find my God. It is only then that the real problem of “having and holding” for a mortal human being becomes apparent, for this is where I meet myself and first discover my lack of permanence. By not being identical with my God, who alone is permanent eternal essence, man becomes aware of what he does not

object of craving—except that for Augustine it is governed by *caritas*, and therefore is the right object. Hence, it follows “that man’s own life, insofar as it is a ‘happy life’ has turned into a good expected from the outside.” *Ibid.* This outside is, of course, changeable, and therefore can never satisfy our craving. One who craves permanence cuts all ties with the outside world and flees from fear into himself. There he discovers his essential self and, out of fear he will lose it, cuts his anchor with the mortal, present self, and through self-oblivion becomes entirely absorbed in his “new object.” In this context, transcendence, the going beyond, completes the movement out of the world.

96. *Ibid.*, 23.

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, 25.

99. *Ibid.* (author’s emphasis).

100. *Ibid.*

possess—that is, full Being. “Man loves God because God belongs to him as the essence belongs to existence, but precisely for this reason man is not. In finding God he finds the very thing that he is not: an eternal essence.”¹⁰¹ He can then only anticipate his essence by striving for eternity, and he will be only when he is finally able to “have and hold” his creator. When man begins to search for his essential self in this present life (i.e. when he turns inwards), he first discovers that he is not permanent, that his existence will end, and that his earthly nature is changeable. The moment he discovers this he must “transcend” himself by going beyond time. He must try and “catch” eternity.¹⁰² For Arendt, the first context of Augustine’s philosophy of love as desire is one that crystallizes around the following option: “eternal life” *versus* “temporal life.”¹⁰³

What Arendt’s analysis of Augustine brings out is that “love is a kind of life that binds” in two directions: toward God in *caritas*, and toward the world in *cupiditas*.¹⁰⁴ As we saw above, desire arises out of the will to be happy and thus refers back to the self. It transpires that it must then forget its source in the world and cling to God. Arendt tells us that “desire itself is a state of forgetfulness.”¹⁰⁵ The change of referent from self to object (i.e. from knowledge of God found in memory to an absolute futurity) that occurs in the course of desire, “such that the lover forgets himself in the pursuit of the beloved, is the ‘transit’ (*transitus*) character of all craving.”¹⁰⁶ The question is whether it can meet the Christian commandment of love? It is living for eternity in the here and now that makes us want to strain every fibre of our being upwards in an effort to “catch eternity,” and in doing so to become estranged from the world: “The ‘transit’ indicates the moment when the lover no longer loves with reference to himself, when his whole existence has become ‘loving.’ In a similar way, *caritas*, the craving love of God, achieves the transit to the future eternity.”¹⁰⁷ Augustine’s two pieces of advice are summed up by Arendt as: 1) do not go out of yourself, return into yourself, and 2) go beyond yourself as well. Being and time are

101. *Ibid.*, 26.

102. *Ibid.*, 27.

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*, 18.

105. *Ibid.*, 28.

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

opposed.¹⁰⁸ As a result, she claims, “it is not only the world, but human nature as such, that is transcended.”¹⁰⁹

As a solution to the problem of love as desire, the *transitus* is a sticking point for Arendt. It implies self-hatred for the sake of God, and it rejects the world outright. These consequences for unity with God are not in keeping with the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbour as one’s self: “The difficulty arises from the definition of love as desire and from the definition of man as one who remains always wanting and forever isolated from what gives him happiness, which is his proper being.”¹¹⁰ Of this self-hatred, she says: “it is the last desperate consequence of self-love that desires, but never attains, its own ‘good.’”¹¹¹ Love as desire craves to have and to hold its object, at which point it ends in enjoyment (*frui*). What comes out of this is that all worldly objects can only be enjoyed to the extent that they are used (*uti*) for God’s sake, and not for their own.¹¹² This qualification establishes the proper distance between human beings and the world, “that is the definitive distance between user and used which tolerates no affinity and no belonging. A life governed by *caritas* aims at a goal that, in principle, lies outside the world, and thus outside *caritas* as well. *Caritas* is but the road that connects man and his ultimate goal.”¹¹³ Within this Augustinian context, Arendt tells us that the individual need not fear death. By freely using the things of the world they are not bound by them, even though this freedom as such is provisional.¹¹⁴ Yet, it is this point too, when pressed by Augustine in the direction of the individual’s quest for God, that Arendt finds to be in tension with the commandment to “love thy neighbour.”¹¹⁵ In pressing for a standpoint beyond the world through his conceptualization of desire as “absolute futurity,” she argues, he arrives at “an alienation from the world”—an utterly reified view of the individual

108. Ibid., 29.

109. Ibid., 30.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid., 31.

112. Ibid., 33. Palaver argues that “this differentiation with regard to the potential aim of human desire [*frui, uti*] ... allows one to separate life-affirming forms of mimesis from destructive forms.” Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, 91. My inquiry here has to do with whether there is a comparison to be made between what Arendt sees as being the first context of thought in Augustine’s philosophy, and where Girard ends up at the conclusion of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.

113. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 34.

114. Ibid., 35.

115. Ibid., 30–5.

and its worldly relationships—that is actually “pseudo-Christian.”¹¹⁶ If we apply Arendt’s first context of thought in Augustine to Girard’s mimetic cycle, might the same not be said of Girard’s literary theory? When Girard describes metaphysical desire in the following way “The imitation of Christ becomes the imitation of the neighbour”¹¹⁷ it cannot be taken as the fulfilment of a command to love one’s neighbour. As Doran highlights, this passage refers to the negation of religious transcendence in the idolatrous imitation of the human Other (the neighbour)¹¹⁸ It appears that Girard, like Augustine before him, runs into a problem relative to the neighbour and the Christian commandment to love.

For the Lover who lives in *caritas*, death has “no sting.” The withdrawal into oneself and the return to the world, the movement that brings about the spiritual death and rebirth of the hero, only makes sense in the Girardian scheme if we see this movement along a horizontal axis—that is, in worldly and temporal terms. Here, metaphysical desire is not thought to be associated with a pure desire for God, but only a “deviated” desire to be God. The spiritual death of the false self is a death relative to the object that the mediator’s being generates, and not to God as eternal Being. Unlike Augustine’s concept of death (mortality, sin, worldliness), it cannot strictly speaking be a death relative to eternal life—to a truly “vertical” transcendence—since Girard does not have a concept of being that would give that specific meaning to our mortality. Palaver argues that Erich Auerbach’s major study *Mimesis*, in the context of what Auerbach calls “figural interpretation,” offers a way of understanding Girard’s mimetic theory alongside his biblical exegesis, suggesting it is guided by a vertical truth from above. Palaver quotes Auerbach’s relevant point: “The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved [in this interpretative method]; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which always has been, and which will be fulfilled in the future.”¹¹⁹ The God of victims radiates this truth in

116. *Ibid.*, 41.

117. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 59. Quoted in Doran, *René Girard’s Concept of Conversion*, 170 (translation added by author).

118. Doran, *René Girard’s Concept of Conversion*, 170.

119. Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, 273. Arendt makes the point that “Being is, for Augustine, as it was for the Greeks, the everlasting, forever lawful structure and the harmony of all the parts of the universe.” Insofar as it is eternal, it must “possess the same character of original simultaneity ... as the universe.” Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 61. Speaking about the difference between Platonic and Christian metaphysics, she says: “Thus we find in Augustine three factors that account for the universe: the maker, the model and the product. According to Plato, it is the model that has no beginning, is “everlasting” (*aidion*) and without

all occurrences of victimization simultaneously: interpretation directed at truth reveals a prophetic historicity. Yet on closer examination, this vertical and prophetic interpretation may be overly influenced by neo-Platonic categories. If so, it may be at odds with the temporal (no more and not yet) features of Augustine's philosophy that, according to Arendt, bring him into another context of thought concerning the neighbour—something explored further below.

As with the structure of desire found in Augustine's account of "the two loves," it is evident from the structure of triangular desire that there is a "withdrawal into oneself." Internal mediation also involves a withdrawal: a withdrawal away from the outside world manifest in rivalry with a model. However, because Girard places the emphasis on mediated desire and, in particular, the mediator, the withdrawal is given an explicit meaning in the context only of metaphysical desire—a desire to appropriate the being of another. In the early stage of Girard's mimetic cycle this withdrawal is a withdrawal into oneself, for the sake of one's dearly held illusions regarding the nature of one's desires. Fundamentally, it is an attempt to deceive: to hide one's desire to "possess the other's being" from oneself and simultaneously to hold onto one's own false sense of self-sufficiency. But because the hero's dependency on the other is so great, her so-called self-sufficiency dissipates in the flight towards the other, who has become both a model and an obstacle to the hero's desire. Mediated desire is the basis of an interindividual psychology which, as we saw above, makes memory and narrative impossible. The inner space of the subject is, for Girard, a space where ultimately the illusion of self-sufficiency falls apart—despite, if not because of, the hero's best efforts to "gather everything into himself"—a movement that is always directed outward again towards a mediator. When we compare this movement with the Saint's withdrawal, we see just how negative is the meaning Girard gives to interiority, which appears strange in light of his own personal confessional stance.

WITHDRAWAL AND RETURN 3: ARENDT'S SECOND CONTEXT

In Section One, I set out Girard's mimetic theory, and made the case for thinking that the spiritual aesthetic gleaned from literary space involves not only the hero of the novel and the author, but also the critic who underwent a similar experience of death and rebirth when writing the

change. However, the product has come into being, has a beginning, and is also everlasting by virtue of "imitating" the model according to which it was fashioned, but in constant change. In this sense the product is sempiternal Becoming." *Ibid.*, 62–3.

conclusion to the critical work. The experience of death and rebirth of the critic is prefigured in the novelist's spiritual conversion to Christianity. Indeed because novelistic conclusions become the *critical conclusions*, we may ask with justification whether Girard is not himself the true hero of literary space? Without the "ending" that Girard reveals sometime after the work of criticism, it is difficult to see how he could conclude, in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, with an acknowledgement that the Saint's and the hero's *askesis* are "essentially the same." That work is, in retrospect, akin to a confessional text because of his first-person account: it places *him and not the author of the novel on a par* with Augustine. However, the importance of this dimension of Girard's thought is left behind as his theory becomes more scientific; in retrospect, there is a dichotomy between the man and the work—or so I have argued.

In Section Two I have tried to show how, arising from this dichotomy, Girard's structuralist method does not accord with what Arendt claims is Augustine's philosophy of love, despite Girard's claim that the hero's journey and the Saint's journey are essentially the same. I have also set out how Arendt identifies what she sees as a problematic train of thought in Augustine's account of love as desire: namely, that it does not initially meet the Christian requirement to love God, neighbour and self. I have maintained that if we apply this same analysis to Girard, we find something of a comparison—albeit an imperfect one. The point here is to suggest that Girard's early work is not oblivious to the aforementioned Christian requirements. However, even if Arendt's "first context" can be applied to Girard's early theory, she still sees this movement of withdrawal and return as dubious: as not truly satisfying the requirements of a Christian ethic. In this section, I will continue with Arendt's analysis of Augustine in light of Girard's theory. I will explore whether the critic as hero, on a searching quest for God, traverses any of the same ground as the Saint who must confront what might be referred to as the problem of the neighbour—what Arendt herself calls "the second context of thought" in Augustine.

To briefly recapitulate: in the *transitus* to eternity, love, in seeking its highest good, has been defined by its extension into absolute futurity. By hating the world and his worldly self, man anticipates his happiness "and by returning, as it were, from eternity he could objectively establish the order and extent of desire to be bestowed on this world."¹²⁰ In this initial context, as we saw above, Augustine bypasses "original self-love" and "love of neighbour." Arendt maintains that Augustine was aware of the

120. *Ibid.*, 45.

contradiction here and sought a better explanation of the desired “happy life” than the one proffered as a “not yet,” a projection into an absolute timeless future as yet another good that must be expected from outside.¹²¹ Such a route to happiness that must end in self-oblivion is contradictory, since the self must refer back to itself for prior knowledge of the happiness it seeks and does not have: without some prior knowledge, it could not know what to look for in its questing search. “For Augustine, this knowledge is preserved in man’s memory, which he equates with self-consciousness as such.”¹²² It is precisely this prior knowledge that is neglected in the radically future-oriented structure of craving, and once recovered by Augustine it sets the new context of love as craving in relation to the remembered past. The “happy life,” along with the potential for its remembrance directing our future, can only become an ultimate guide for human endeavour insofar as it can be remembered.¹²³ Memory, the remembered past, thus becomes the new context for Augustine’s thought concerning “love as desire,” as well as his working out of the threefold commandment to love God, neighbour and self. Returning again to the world and to the future effects a movement towards *social caritas*.¹²⁴

As regards Augustine’s thought, in moving from “context one” to “context two,” Arendt shifts from a focus on the future orientations of *appetitus* that seeks possession of its object (the craving of the will) to the recollections of memory, where the trace of God can be pursued in fulfilment of the remembered past. The second context reveals the central role origins play for Augustine in the human orientation toward eternity. Girard likewise places a strong emphasis on origins, but such origins remain stuck in historicity. Having argued in Section Two that the role of memory in Girard is made deeply problematic by Girard’s structuralist method, it is difficult to see how Girard’s thought can be brought into alignment with what Arendt calls “the second context” of Augustine’s thought, where the Christian commandment to love God, neighbour and self is vindicated. Are we forced to admit, along with Arendt, that like Augustine’s dalliance in his *transitus* phase, Girard’s dalliance with structuralism is pseudo-Christian? Not if we can show that, despite Girard’s adherence to his trusted method during the different stages of the mimetic cycle (from the early through

121. Ibid.

122. Ibid., 46.

123. Ibid., 47.

124. Social caritas provides a third context in Augustine’s thought for Arendt that is not developed in this paper due to a lack of space to adequately treat it.

to the later work), he is still identifiably on a questing search for God—in other words, still operating out of a confessional stance.

Memory transforms the past into a future possibility, and shows desire to be anchored and “not free-floating”.¹²⁵ “Our craving and the relationships we establish through it only seem to be in our power. In truth, craving and its relationships depend upon a pre-existing reference whose object was forgotten in desire’s exclusive direction toward the future.”¹²⁶ The quest for the God of the human heart no longer turns solely on desire, but rather primarily on memory. Memory refers us to a knowledge not only prior to every specific past but also to a “transcendent and transmundane past—that is, toward the origin of human existence as such.”¹²⁷ To remember is primarily to recollect oneself from the dispersion that the world implies. It is guided not only by desire for God, but by God’s love of us (*amor amoris Dei*), which presupposes a relationship with God that humbles us in our pride, even in our prideful desire for God: “it already presupposes a relation with God that the simple *amor Dei*, the craving love of God seeks to establish.”¹²⁸ In such a way, “to recall the past and to recollect myself from dispersion is the same as to ‘confess.’”¹²⁹ It is guided by the quest for “my God,” the One who “made me.”¹³⁰ When Girard, in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, says that the hero of the novel “attempts to gather everything into himself” but is dispersed in his closeness to the model/obstacle, we can perhaps now notice the absence of “re-collection” in the Augustinian sense: the faculty that could function to gather or re-collect. Yet we know—not from his theory but from his own personal statements—that his experience of seeking God over time did depend on recollection.¹³¹

125. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 48.

126. *Ibid.*

127. *Ibid.*

128. *Ibid.*, 49.

129. *Ibid.*

130. *Ibid.* Commenting on *amore Dei*, which is to be preferred to the negative mimesis of *amore sui*, Palaver says it finds “its highest glory in God and is rooted in humility.” Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, 91. Arendt, however, highlights how this love seeks a relation with God that is presupposed by remembrance. In this way, *amore Dei* still belongs to what Arendt calls “the first context” of Augustine’s thought.

131. Girard mentions in the interview where he discusses his conversion that the experience of conversion offered a point of return in his memory. Speaking of this experience, he says: “I understood immediately that the memory of this experience—should I ever venture away—would offer me support my whole life long, and that is exactly how it has been.” René Girard, *Quand ces choses commenceront ... Entretien avec Michel Treguer* (Paris: Arléa, 1994), 94. It is interesting to note that while the full transcript of Girard’s interview about his conversion is reproduced by Palaver in his book on Girardian theory, in the section of the book devoted

One's dependency on God goes deeper than dependency on an object wrought by desire, which was the initial context of Augustine's understanding of love as desire (*absolute futurity*). Moreover, this changes the decisive fact of man as a conscious being from "something expected from outside" to "something referred back to through memory." Arendt puts it like this: "the decisive fact determining man as a conscious, remembering being is birth or 'natality,' that is, the fact that we have entered the world through birth." This changed context emphasises remembrance and gratitude against anticipation and death, which belonged to the first context of love as desire.¹³² Desire governed by a mediator, whether good or bad, must be drawn outside the self: it must cut its ties to the past as the source of a new beginning. For this reason, mediated desire could never deliver a new concept of love that would solve the problem posed by the Christian commandment to love God, neighbour and self.

The decisive fact determining man was death or mortality, the fact that we shall leave the world in death. Fear of death and inadequacy of life are the springs of desire. In contrast, gratitude for life having been given at all is the spring of remembrance, for a life is cherished even in misery ... what ultimately stills the fear of death is not hope or desire, but remembrance and gratitude.¹³³

The miracle of birth, the createdness of human beings (*initium*), is the decisive beginning that permits man's remembered past to become present again. The relation, or reference back, of the lover to her origins is actualized in imitation: "To imitate, as well as to refer back to one's origin, is a general characteristic of human existence before it becomes a consciously adopted way of life."¹³⁴ It is a constitutive feature of human life and, Arendt tells us, "is indifferent to human conduct."¹³⁵ Furthermore, imitation both governs

to Augustine's thought where—he claims—Girard finds the "archetype of conversion" there is no mention of the faculty of memory or its significance in the Saint's philosophy. Palavler, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 88–93.

132. "Fear of death and inadequacy of life are the springs of desire. In contrast, gratitude for life having been given at all is the spring of remembrance, for life is cherished even in misery ... What ultimately stills the fear of death is not hope or desire, but remembrance and gratitude. ... This willing to be under any circumstances is the hallmark of man's attachment to the transmundane source of his own existence." Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 50–1.

133. *Ibid.*, 52.

134. *Ibid.*, 53.

135. *Ibid.*

human conduct and can be actualized explicitly only through love.¹³⁶ It must be actively taken up, and until one does so one inevitably falls into pride, which is a perverse form of imitation “because it wants to imitate God instead of serving Him.”¹³⁷ To properly imitate God is to imitate God’s love, (“the love of Thy love”).¹³⁸ What follows from this for a created being is ever increasing resemblance to God.

Arendt emphasizes “the second context” of Augustine’s philosophy of love as the remembered past: that is, the context of love as desire that comes from and is directed by memory. Speaking of memory as the primary faculty that gives unity and wholeness to life, contra the Heideggerian assertion of “expectation” as the fundamentality modality, she argues that

in making and holding present both past and future, that is, memory and the expectation derived from it, it is the present in which they coincide that determines human existence. This human possibility gives man his share in being “immutable;” the remotest past and the most distant future are not only, objectively speaking, the single twofold “before” of human life, but can be actualized as such while man is still alive. Only man, but no other mortal being, lives towards his ultimate origin while living towards the final boundary of death.¹³⁹

As with the problem of desire, the Lover faces a twofold challenge with respect to origins. Since the Lover is in the world as a creation that has a beginning (in a Christian sense) akin to the Lover’s own createdness, and since eternity comes before the world, the Lover’s quest for a personal identity (in response to the question “who am I?”) must reckon with two sources or origins. But desire does not reveal any original interconnectedness. If neither *caritas* nor *cupiditas* reveal the original interconnectedness between man and God, how, for Augustine, can we come to know of this most significant relationship? By interpreting sacred scripture in a radically historical way for the human subject, Arendt argues that Augustine anthropologises the Judeo-Christian creation myth in such a way as to break with the Greek concept of Being as it pertains to existential origins¹⁴⁰ and

136. *Ibid.*, 54.

137. *Ibid.*

138. As with the loves proper object, Arendt tells us, “recollection is not simply guided by a desiring love for the highest good, which is God, but by ‘the love of Thy love,’ which neither is nor could be the object of desire.” *Ibid.*, 48.

139. *Ibid.*, 56.

140. *Ibid.*, 59, 61, 69.

begins to place the emphasis instead upon “this-world” and temporality as the key to eternity.

Augustine’s concept of the “twofold before” of creaturely existence is central to his concept of origins. In effect, his plural concept of origins essentially refers to the world and the creator. Only when we grasp our origins as the twofold “before” can we understand the full significance of “returning” in search of permanence—a journey that begins in time and memory and ends in eternity. It is a looking backward that is at the same time a looking forward. Arendt describes how the “returning” to one’s origins, which is constituted through memory, can simultaneously be an anticipating reference to one’s end: “Not until beginning and end coincide does the twofold ‘before’ acquire its proper meaning. For the person who turns back to the absolute past, the Creator who made him, the Whence-he-came reveals itself to be identical to the Whither-he-goes. Thus the postulated eternity of Being makes beginning and end interchangeable in terms of the temporal creature’s reference to its own existence.”¹⁴¹ His search for the God of the human heart that begins with an awareness of the “no more” and the “not yet” sends man back into himself in search of origins: “by virtue of man’s quest for his own being, the beginning and end of his life have become exchangeable.”¹⁴² Once the quest is activated (*quaestio mihi factus sum*), the lover must gain orientation. In responding to the question “What do I love when I love my God?”¹⁴³ Augustine is directed to the origin and source of Creation itself, which antedates the human world. This connection to the Creator through memory goes beyond Being as order and harmony in the Greek sense. As a Christian, Augustine believed that the Creator stands apart from his created order. Within the Greek model, perfection is found in the order of the whole, and so the “part of a whole has no beginning to which it could refer back.”¹⁴⁴ For Augustine, imitation

141. *Ibid.*, 56.

142. *Ibid.*, 57.

143. *Ibid.*, 25.

144. *Ibid.*, 62. The cosmic order of the universe “is not an origin but the higher order into which the part is integrated.” *Ibid.* Therefore, with no direct relationship to his creator, man cannot “return” to his origin. Arendt argues that Augustine is indebted to Plato and, of course, Plotinus, for their speculations about everlasting Being; however she claims that he parts company with both these thinkers on the view that the universe is ordered eternally through imitation, thereby guaranteeing it its everlasting Being—though in the form of sempiternal change. *Ibid.*, 63. “It is only in Augustine that the ‘imitation’ indicates dependence upon the Creator, whereas in Plato it indicates clearly the dependence upon the model that is above both the maker and his product.” *Ibid.*

can never be identical with Becoming, nor can it be eternal.¹⁴⁵ Imitation, as an explicitly human trait, becomes the basis of man's personal relationship to God.

According to Arendt, Augustine's view of the cosmos, derived as it is from the Greek tradition, "deflects" his concept of the world (*mundus*). The created world does not exist by chance, and so it follows, for Augustine, that what is done in the world is done partly by God and partly as a function of human will: within the world, the relationship is "half and half."¹⁴⁶ The events of the world are partly constituted by human beings who inhabit the world. In response to the question "What is the world itself?" Augustine replies:

For the "world" is the name given not only to this fabric which God made, heaven and earth; but the inhabitants of the world are also called the world ... all lovers of the world are also called the "world." So the world consists of those who love it. The concept is twofold: first, the world is God's creation (heaven and earth), which antedates all love of the world, and second it is the human world which constitutes itself by habitation and love (*diligere*). What "happens by our will" turns heaven and earth into the world in the second sense.¹⁴⁷

Human beings turn the divine fabric into the "self-evident home of man."¹⁴⁸ Man, as a created being, is called out of the world, but can nonetheless make his home in the world. Augustine bids him to make his home in "the Builder" and not the building.¹⁴⁹ Human beings establish the world by making themselves at home in the world, but this does not ease their feelings of estrangement from what they make and what they desire. "When living man finds his home in the pre-existing creation he is born into, he turns the fabric of creation into the world."¹⁵⁰ Man is thus constantly directed back to his origins in his search of permanence. It is in seeking himself as one who is after the world that man seeks the "wrong before."¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, what makes man what he is (his essence) comes before the world.¹⁵² In seeking

145. *Ibid.*, 63–5.

146. *Ibid.*, 65.

147. *Ibid.*, 66.

148. *Ibid.*

149. *Ibid.*

150. *Ibid.*

151. *Ibid.*, 77. Such futurity, in its structure, is a return, since its anticipation recalls the past as an origin that also stands before man as a future.

152. *Ibid.*, 68.

himself he seeks what is prior to himself, since he is “later than his own being,” and in seeking this “before” man seeks himself.¹⁵³ The “right before” is man’s home, the eternal essence, where he meets his true and “original” self.

Because Creation had a beginning, it is tied to becoming, and in Augustine’s ontology becoming is a mode of imitation proper only to man.¹⁵⁴ When we give ourselves over to pride, we fall into habit, which imprisons our will, thereby making us dependent on the world. Since the world is always before man, love of the world is never a choice, strictly speaking. The choice reveals itself when man’s mortality dawns and he is confronted with the prospect of death—of how he will completely lose possession of the object of his love; his self-possession, his self-sufficiency and his happiness. Arendt explains the role of imitation in this process for Augustine as follows:

As an ontological structure imitation is independent of man’s attitude toward it, and it leaves man in his inherent freedom as long as this function (which he himself is) has not been expressly taken up by him ... within imitation he is free, though only for himself and not for God. As the determinant of all man’s actions and omissions, God cannot even be discovered as long as man leaves imitation objective, that is, as long as he does not expressly take up imitation and thereby once more seal his dependence on something outside him. It is only when imitation is taken up explicitly that the demand of “being as God” appears.¹⁵⁵

Arendt claims that it is only *caritas* that allows man to live in accordance with God, and to imitate and appropriate his Being in the present. By leaving the world as such behind, by returning to his source, man’s individualism and isolation are destroyed.¹⁵⁶ This destruction marks a total annihilation of man as a worldly being. But by returning the love that the Creator freely gives, man can return properly to the world, a world that he has spiritually withdrawn from for the sake of God.¹⁵⁷ By being in the world again, and by seeing his own existence as indicative of the human condition as such, he comes to dwell properly with others in the world: he effectively fulfils the command to love God and to love one’s neighbour as oneself.

153. Ibid.

154. Ibid., 65.

155. Ibid., 79.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid., 95.

Imitation is central to this process of withdrawal and return. In becoming more like God, all individual distinctions vanish, since they pertain to createdness.¹⁵⁸ Arendt maintains that only then does the human being confront her maker as Maker:

In performing this imitation, the reality of which is the absolute denial of the self found in the world, man comprehends his existence as the outright opposite to God, expressed in the absolute impossibility of equality between him and God.¹⁵⁹

While on her perpetual search for unity in God, she leaves behind the differences that belong to the world and through which desire itself made her worldly. By clinging to God as the source of her being, she once again confronts difference as the claim of her eternal happiness, only this time her “boasting” is “in the Lord” (Romans 5:11). The wrong form of dependence on the world, and the differences generated there (differences that are quite naturally a source of pride) are substituted for the right kind of dependence and a new structural difference based on the right imitation of God. In loving for the sake of her Creator and not for her own sake, the individual withdraws from the world: “This ‘being out of the world,’ like death, makes everyone the same, because the disappearance of the world removes the possibility of boasting, which came precisely from the individual’s worldliness in comparing himself with others. As man advances in *caritas* to Being as such ... he casts off all that belonged to him as a specific individual.”¹⁶⁰

We have already seen how, in Girard’s mimetic cycle, “indifferentiation” is a source of crisis for the individual and the community. It becomes an explicitly religious problem in his analysis of modern culture, since the loss of differences is not merely a source of pride: it becomes a source of mimetic contagion—of violence, scapegoating and sacrifice.¹⁶¹ It makes the consequences of sin and death for human beings grave, most notably, here on Earth. The element that Girard appears to add to Augustine’s account of unreflective mimesis is one that suggests that sin, like a pandemic, must be contained. But precisely because the mechanism to contain the contagion

158. *Ibid.*

159. *Ibid.*

160. *Ibid.*, 79. However, since man’s concrete existence is governed by temporality, human equality with God is a perfection that can never be attained; all that is possible is an “ever-increasing resemblance.” *Ibid.*, 80.

161. René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

no longer functions due to the revelation of the innocence of the victim, the community of the world today is threatened at its foundation. Moreover, the foundation of the world has an explicit meaning in Augustine's philosophy: it becomes part of the solution to the problem of the neighbour missing from his initial thought on "love as desire" as a *complete withdrawal* from the world.¹⁶² This, according to Arendt, is the source of a profound tension when it comes to the Christian commandment to "love thy neighbour," that Augustine is ever mindful to resolve. How, for example, does the person isolated in God have a neighbour at all?¹⁶³ Since, according to Augustine, our neighbours cannot bring us "happiness" (for happiness is determined by the nature of desire), our neighbours are in constant danger of becoming "obstacles to our fulfilment"—something we are reminded of time and again by Girard's explorations in the universe of the novel: human happiness is frustrated by mimetic obstacles.

In attempting to shed some light on Augustine's dilemma, Arendt broadens the context of her analysis, which up until this point has mainly concerned the structure of love as craving. She suggests that Augustine was preoccupied from early on with the question of what makes us fellow believers who share a common faith, as those early followers of Christ did who "had not seen."¹⁶⁴ How do I hold this faith in common and, at the same time, answer the call of God who demands a total response from each individual?¹⁶⁵ Our individual commitments, however "God-directed," do not bring about a community of the faithful. Arendt points out that while individual faith is tied to divine grace, the community of faith is tied to a distinct and concrete historical past,¹⁶⁶ which becomes the basis of a common bond. Once again, the "twofold" before of the world as a concept is employed. As well as the source of a divine community, the human community, as a distinct historical fact, is also the foundation of God's plan for salvation, as this fact alone could make Christ a historical and effective reality. This foundation or historical fact

is the common descent from Adam, the foundation of a definite and obligatory equality among men ... what unites all people is not an accidental likeness (*simultudo*). Rather, their likeness is necessarily founded and historically fixed

162. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 94.

163. *Ibid.*

164. *Ibid.*, 98.

165. *Ibid.*, 99.

166. *Ibid.*

in their common descent from Adam and in a kinship beyond any mere likeness. This kinship creates an equality neither of traits nor of talents, but of situation. All share the same fate.¹⁶⁷

The prerequisite of the “worldly interconnectedness” of the human community is equality, “neither of traits nor of talents but of situation.”¹⁶⁸ Each finds him or herself in the same situation and all share the same fate. They are not alone. Their kinship exists in their mortality, but this equality was never established thematically when society was established on Earth:¹⁶⁹ “This situation of men is not explicitly equal as long as death is a mere fact of nature rather than the indication of sinfulness, that is, as long as the individual does not know what equality really means.”¹⁷⁰ The equality of situation means that all are sinful, and that humanity’s common descent is its common share in original sin.¹⁷¹ At our foundation, the equality established by human beings is an equality in sin—it is the bond of the worldly city.

There are obvious similarities between Augustine’s and Girard’s concepts of origins, in terms of the manner in which each thinker attempts to elucidate the role of sin, pride, worldliness and foundations in human relationships. Nevertheless, the origin that we find in Girard’s later work as foundational violence, and the origin that we find in Girard’s early literary theory as self-sufficiency, do not refer us back to “the right before” of human existence. Unlike what Arendt calls Augustine’s “twofold concept” of origins, both origins in Girard’s mimetic theory are false: each is “the wrong before” of human existence, to the extent that each tells a lie about the latter—the first at the level of the individual self and the latter at the level of the community. Both are forms of myth in the sense of hiding or veiling an originary truth. The *en soi* of the individual maintains she is her own foundation and origin, while the myth of the community ensures the conviction of its origins at the expense of a victim who is deemed guilty of the crimes that in truth belong to the community. One’s self-sufficiency seems as mythic as the very bond of the community, its identity. But such an apparent isomorphism between the Romantic fallacy and the mythic bond of the community does not hold up when we consider that there is no continuum of memory in Girardian theory that would bring us back to “the right before.” For Girard, the individual is

167. *Ibid.*, 100.

168. *Ibid.*

169. *Ibid.*, 101.

170. *Ibid.*

171. *Ibid.*, 102.

saved only by being drawn out of herself towards another, and the origin of the community *in its explanation* advances further and further into history, temporality and a futurity that is in essence apocalyptic.¹⁷² This *wrong* “twofold before” in Girard’s mimetic theory arises from a misunderstanding of the self from a Christian perspective.

Girard’s account of the originality of the hero in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* as self-sufficiency makes little allowance for the fact that self-creation is simply a feature of human beings’ worldliness *prior* to their turn to their origins. For Girard, man’s desire for “originality” is the very basis of pride, but in triumphing over his false desires, man actualizes a spiritual transformation. In Arendt’s reading of Augustine’s concept of the “twofold before,” man’s “original self” is essential to his search for permanence. While man’s will can become corrupted by *cupiditas*, it is not the individual’s desire for “originality” *per se* that is the cause of worldliness and sin; *cupiditas*, like *caritas*, only mediates. Rather, insofar as the Romantic individual’s desire for “originality” is not that of God his Creator, it points only to the “wrong before” of his existence—the wrong origin. The real problem, then, with the Romantic hero is that he is not nearly being original enough. He clings to the “before” of his worldly existence when, in reality, he should cling to the “before” of his eternal essence actualized in the present through memory and fulfilled through *caritas*.

The link between Girard’s early and later work was discussed above as the issue of “indifferentiation”—the loss of differences that generate violent reciprocity and crisis, first in the hero of the novel and later in the community. This is where Girard’s work connects with what Arendt describes as Augustine’s concept of foundations and his twofold concept of origins. What Augustine’s reflections on the neighbour bring out when one is first directed inwardly to truth is the way in which a loss of differences becomes the basis of “love of God, love of neighbour and love of self.” In other words, it becomes the very basis of *right relations* in the City of God. What is interesting for our current discussion is how Girard interprets such equality of situation (the flattening of worldly distinctions) in purely negative terms as a source of crises. For Girard, positive mimesis is based in secure differences that are threatened by equality. The forms of

172. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *Politics and Apocalypse: Studies in Violence, Mimesis and Culture* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007). Hamerton-Kelly distinguishes between the non-violent and the vulgar apocalypse. The former he ascribes to Girard’s mimetic theory. *Ibid.*, 15.

external mediation and positive mimesis that he discusses arise from his generative anthropology and the hierarchies that are installed as contingent social distinctions—distinctions that may well be viewed as necessary when equality is seen as the condition of crisis in the worldly community. This last point, as Hamerton-Kelly reminds us, has political implications. It is a point that Arendt argues needs to be understood in light of a Christian understanding of Being. Girard's analysis of "the loss of differences," as with his treatment of other Christian themes that we have compared to Arendt's analysis of Augustine, is based on a contingent universe and a worldly city. This analysis appears impoverished without a concept of Being and God as one that stands above the world as Transcendent *and* Creator.¹⁷³ As suggested above, in the section "Withdrawal and Return 2," such a concept may involve a "vertical interpretation" like the one introduced by Auerbach and hinted at in Girard's biblical exegesis.¹⁷⁴ However, this may not be enough if it remains part the Greek concept of Being and the structure of simultaneity associated with sempiternal change, because such a "vertical interpretation" precludes God, not as Eternal Being, but as *Creator and Source of all Creation*. With respect to the searching quest of the Saint and the hero for the God of the human heart, it therefore precludes memory as the journey inward in time—as the recollection of Being that also brings us face to face with our neighbour.¹⁷⁵ The misunderstanding of the self that I am attributing to Girard's theory is, of course, due to this same absence of an adequate concept of memory as the inner space of the subject that could bring us beyond our false self and our false worldly origins. Yet despite this absence in the theory, Girard still arrives, just as Augustine had done on his questing search for God, at a profound reflection on human

173. This point is meant as a critique of Girard's generative anthropology. For a discussion of the theological relevance of "figural prophecy" and "vertical interpretation," and how they correspond to the importance of true "transcendancy" for the mimetic theory, see Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 272.

174. Girard's claim that a Christian prophetic religion is tied to an identification with the victim "whatever their date in human history" suggests that a certain reading of simultaneity should override temporality as such. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 128.

175. Arendt identifies what she calls "the echo of Platonic Being" in Augustine's otherwise Christian philosophy in the way in which he is dominated by "the concept of the universe, and of man as the part encompassed." Regarding this point, she comments: "Obviously if man is nothing but part of the universe and has no direct relationship to God as his Creator, he cannot very well 'return' (*redir*) or 'refer back' (*referre se*) to his origin ... If man and his life are parts of some encompassing whole, they cannot be said to have an origin and their mortality has become irrelevant." Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 61–62.

origins and the foundation of the world. So, are we not now in a position to re-evaluate the author and his work in the light of Christian philosophy?

CONCLUSION: THE RETURN OF GIRARD

Girard's contribution to scholarship and knowledge has been immense. His vision, extending as it does into the Christian story, provides astonishingly fresh insights into the complications of the human heart and the workings of revelation in human history. His bold interdisciplinary spirit of enquiry has generated a dialogue across many fields of endeavour that continues to percolate around and inspire in the hugely important field of mimesis as it articulates the significance of the role of models in human life. Yet, for all of his acknowledged debt to Augustine, the "three-quarters" that the Saint contributes to mimetic theory, there appears to be a crucial piece of the Augustinian philosophy missing. That missing element, I have argued, is the faculty of memory as the inner space of the subject which, along with desire, gives meaning to all of the movements of withdrawal and return that the Saint and the hero undergo and at times undertake. What I have attempted to do in this paper, with the help of Arendt, is to recover that missing piece and restore it to its rightful place in Girard's mimetic cycle. In the process, I have sought to bring Girard back from his sojourn in the social sciences and, in so doing, to begin to reconcile the solitudes of the man and the work: in other words, to understand his work as a searching quest for God. None of this should detract from his achievements in the social sciences, but it is hoped that it will give him a firmer footing in Christian confessional philosophy.

One of the problems raised by Girard's method of analysis concerns not just the manner in which a spiritual self can gain its bearings in relation to God, but also how an ethical subject can take a stand in the world. These problems are not independent—at least, certainly not for Augustine, though perhaps more so for Arendt, who was concerned primarily with how withdrawal from the world necessitates a return to the world.¹⁷⁶ Arendt's explication of the tensions in Augustine between love of God, love of neighbour, and love of self reflects a preoccupation with "withdrawal and return" evident in her own work. Her analysis of these terms involves an attempt to overcome the "fallacy of Platonic withdrawal that reifies the otherworldly as the place we must go to escape the hindrances

176. Lauren Swayne Barthold, "Towards an Ethics of Love: Arendt on the Will and St Augustine," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 26, no. 6 (2000).

of this world."¹⁷⁷ To the extent that the fallacy is overcome by Arendt and Augustine, it marks a movement away from the Greek concept of Being, but not away from Being as such.¹⁷⁸ The Christian idea of a Creator posits an origin as the source of Creation. For Arendt the withdrawal inward presupposes a prior relation to the worldly community, a concept that she finds already developed in Augustine.¹⁷⁹

Girard's structuralist method, and the systematizing of his hypothesis, forces us into an impasse in terms of the capacity of the self to meaningfully search for a personal God.¹⁸⁰ We know from Arendt that Augustine's search for God comes from a personal existential dilemma. When the self realizes it is mortal and will die, it is prompted to ask the question "Who am I?" which initiates the return whereby memory recalls the Lover into herself. Without a concept of memory we are lost with respect to understanding how triangular desire brings the self into a searching quest to find God. When, in Girardian theory, the interindividual self becomes the dominant self, we must ask how such a questing search can even begin. However, the personal traces of such a spiritual quest are still ascertainable, if not from the novelistic conclusions that Girard details then from the critic's own confessional stance when he admits that he underwent a conversion to Christianity at the time of writing the ending of *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. It is the Saint and the critic who are most alike. To the extent that highlighting this likeness attempts to recover Girard's confessional position and restore its first-person perspective, this is no mere *ad hominem* point. Girard's first-person account of his own conversion at the time of writing *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* gives him a greater claim to spiritual transformation than that yielded by the spiritual aesthetic he claims to uncover: it is he, and not the novelist, who is the true hero of literary space.

By returning Girard to a search for God in time and memory, we ourselves are opened up not only to the primordial origins of the world, but also

177. *Ibid.*, 15.

178. "First withdrawing from the world and turning to oneself (or to God or to one's source), and then returning to the world in order to love one's neighbour." *Ibid.*, 12.

179. Arendt, however, sees withdrawal as something that necessitates a future involvement in the world; something not generally understood by her within an explicitly religious context. *Ibid.*, 13.

180. For a valuable discussion of original sin, and Girard's thinking about origins and creation, see Palaver's comments: "Girard's thesis regarding the creation of order out of original chaos does not refer to the act of divine creation, but rather the origins of human culture." Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 225.

to the origin and source of Creation. Augustine's twofold concept of origins is derived from his twofold concept of love as a kind of life that binds. This life, as Arendt explains, binds in one of two directions: inwardly in *caritas* or outwardly in *cupiditas*. Only inwardness, and a memory that recollects our origins, leads to "the right before" of our existence, which paradoxically stands outside (beyond) and above us. However, inwardness, when fully actualized on earth, presupposes a loving community whose "power to love" each individual comes from an equality of situation passed to each and every human being through generation since the foundation of the world. Such an equality of situation is actualized through imitation when it becomes part of one's choice for God. In articulating another context of desire in Girard's thought with the help of Arendt, one that prompts a withdrawal and a return to the world in accordance with the Christian commandment to love, I have been attempting to rediscover in Girard's mimetic cycle the faculty of memory in its deep Christian sense.

So how might we now begin to understand the mimetic hypothesis as it evolves into a theory of collective violence and scapegoating? Such a new approach would, I believe, have to involve viewing the application of Girard's mimetic hypothesis at least as much as a personal quest for truth along the lines of Augustine's *Confessions*: as a loving search for God, with all the challenges that Augustine meets as he attempts to balance God, neighbour and self. Furthermore, if we were to consider his work from *Violence and the Sacred* onwards as somehow tied to memory and recollection of God as the source of Creation, what might we then say of his theory of the scapegoat and foundational violence, that purports to unmask the revelation of the living God in history? In light of what has been said about Augustine's quest—"the twofold before" and his return to the world and to the neighbour, to the foundation of the worldly city, the community of fellow believers, and the equality in sin that binds every individual into a community of believers—we might surmise how Girard's searching quest for God would lead him, as it led Augustine, to "the wrong before" of human existence: the foundation of the world and an equality of situation for all humanity. By attempting to see God as the source of Creation and valuing the inner person in the first instance we can surely understand Girard's work as opening up the possibility, for believers, of "the right before" of human existence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arendt, Hanna. *Love and Saint Augustine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Barthold, Lauren Swayne. "Towards an Ethics of Love: Arendt on the Will and St Augustine." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 26, no. 6 (2000): 1–20.
- Burke, Seán. *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- Doran, Robert. "René Girard's Concept of Conversion and the 'Via Negativa': Revisiting Deceit Desire and the Novel." *Religion and Literature*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Autumn 2011): 172.
- Dunne, John S. *A Search for God in Time and Memory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1977.
- Erving, George. "René Girard and the Legacy of Alexandre Kojeve." *Contagion: Journal of Mimesis and Culture* 10 (Spring 2003): 111–25.
- Girard, René. *Battling to the End: Conversation with Benoît Chantre*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010.
- . *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965.
- . *The Girard Reader*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999.
- . *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. Translated by James G. Williams. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
- . ed. *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962.
- . *Quand ces choses commenceront ... Entretiens avec Michel Treguer*. Paris: Arléa, 1994.
- . *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*. Translated by James G. Williams. New York: Crossroad, 1997.
- . *The Scapegoat*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- . *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- . *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Golsan, Richard J. *René Girard and Myth*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Hamerton-Kelly, Robert. *Politics and Apocalypse: Studies in Violence, Mimesis and Culture*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007.
- O'Shea, Andrew. *Selfhood and Sacrifice: René Girard and Charles Taylor on the Crisis of Modernity*. New York: Continuum, 2010.
- Oughourlian, Jean-Michel. *The Genesis of Desire*. Translated by Eugene Webb. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010.
- Palaver, Wolfgang. *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*. Translated by Gabriel Borrud. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013.
- Stump, Eleonore. *Wandering in the Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Webb, Eugene. *The Self Between: From Freud to the New Social Psychology of France*. Washington: University of Washington Press, 1993.
- Williams, Rowan. *Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction*. London: Continuum Books, 2008.