
REVIEWS

Reviews are published in alphabetical order according to the name of the author reviewed.

Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb, eds. *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: René Girard and Literary Criticism*. East Lansing: Michigan SUP, 2015. 303p.

JOHN HERDA
LYON COLLEGE

In light of René Girard's passing in 2015, the year which marked the fiftieth anniversary of his influential work, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, it is certainly useful to reflect on his significant contributions to literary criticism. Girard is best known for his theory of mimetic desire, which claims that desire is not original but imitative, based upon models. By analyzing the works of Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky, and Proust, Girard demonstrates in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* that literature reveals how our desires are not linear but triangular (subject-model-object), often leading to intense rivalry. In *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel* we are given the opportunity to discuss the merits of Girardian theory, and also see the application of the theory to specific texts. The result is an essay collection that is nuanced enough for seasoned Girardians, and at the same time, pleasantly straightforward for scholars who are not as familiar with his work.

The discussion of Girard's theory in Part I is effective, providing both a compendious explanation and thoughtful examination for the reader. Not only do the critics ably analyze the nature of mimetic desire, they also develop other well-known Girardian subjects, namely the origins of violence, scapegoating, and sacrifice. Thus, the forum moves beyond the humanities and into the social sciences. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the discussion is the analysis of Girard's unique Christianity, which made him unpopular with academics and theologians alike. The authors correctly underscore how Girard's approach to Christianity is more anthropological than theological, as evidenced by his interpretation of the Bible. Karen S. Feldman's essay on sacrifice and scapegoating through a Girardian lens is exceptional, as she skillfully streamlines a complex subject, Girard's non-sacrificial interpretation of Christ's death, into a readable analysis. Furthermore, it is refreshing that this section is neither a glowing endorsement of Girardian theory, nor is it an ideologically-driven criticism of his work. The concise essays in Part I, coupled with deft insight and legitimate criticism, make the analyses appealing to scholars in a broad range of disciplines.

The application of Girardian theory to various works in Part II successfully highlights how mimetic theory is transhistorical, as the readings cover literature from the medieval period through the postmodern era. Drawing heavily from *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, the authors analyze various types of triangular desire in works ranging from Dante to Dickens to Dostoyevsky. In addition, the inclusion of contemporary writers is stimulating, as it reinforces the applicability of Girardian theory to the modern novel. In particular, the essays on novels by Pamuk and Franzen are tailor-made for the literature professor interested in germane topics such as multiculturalism, religious fundamentalism, and gender identity. Such essays serve as an indispensable tool for classes introducing Girard to advanced undergraduate or graduate students,

where one not only becomes familiar with theory, but also sees the theory specifically applied to a text. Thus, the majority of the essays are as illuminating as they are pedagogically useful.

Fittingly, the collection concludes with an essay by Girard from 1998, in which he discusses the inextricable nature of his theory and his faith: “Great literature led me to Christianity” (281). He expertly critiques the fashionable “post” patois that has dominated literature departments for the past few decades, and convincingly answers why we are still dissatisfied after we get what we want: “[w]e are totally disenchanted and cannot find any new model. This is the worst kind of frustration, the one that experts call post-modern and post-Christian, perhaps even post-mimetic desire” (282). Thus, the organization of the collection is manageable, as the reader can enjoy the text as one unit, or choose to selectively use the book as a reference guide.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of the book, it does come with flaws. Some of the essays that apply Girardian theory spend too much time summarizing the plot of novels, consequently pushing Girard to the periphery. Moreover, additional Girardian themes, such as scapegoating and sacrifice (which are illuminated in Part I) should have been developed more fully in Part II. However, due to its content, organization, and readability, *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel* is a solid resource for research as well as instruction, and serves as a valuable guide for understanding an important literary theorist.

Brian Attebery and Veronica Hollinger, eds. *Parabolas of Science Fiction*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2013. 312pp.

Geoffrey Wright
SAMDOR UNIVERSITY

Parabolas of Science Fiction is an ambitious collection that sets out to do nothing less than re-define the terms in which scholars, critics, and fans speak about science fiction. The editors, Brian Attebery and Veronica Hollinger, are well qualified for the task. Attebery is the editor of the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* and the author of two books on science fiction and fantasy, while Hollinger is coeditor of *Science Fiction Studies*, as well as multiple anthologies on science fiction. The eponymous term around which Attebery and Hollinger seek to redefine science-fiction studies is *parabola*. Though Attebery asserts that the term “is not just a fancier alternative to *story arc*” (3, author’s italics) he does propose that there “is something about this shape that fits the way we imagine adventures” (3). Attebery opens up the incredibly evocative potential of the term *parabola* when he observes that “with its echoes of orbits and equations, [it] not only matches the generic décor but also more suggestively describes the way certain shared narrative patterns integrate narrative needs, scientific information, and metacommentary on the genre itself” (3). Attebery posits this image of an open-ended arc as a genre-defining alternative to the traditional concepts of trope or formula.

This is where the volume’s premise runs into trouble. In order to make this case, Attebery and Hollinger claim that sf (literary science fiction) is unique among genres insofar as it “never developed a single fictional formula or reading protocol of the sort identified in Westerns and detective stories” (vii). The claim that sf is immune to generic formulas runs contrary to