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Generative Scapegoating

I

In current usage, the word scapegoat has three frequently confused meanings that should be carefully distinguished: a biblical meaning, an anthropological meaning, and a psychosocial meaning.

1. *The biblical meaning.* In the Mosaic ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), the scapegoat is "that one of the two goats that was chosen by lot to be sent alive into the wilderness, the sins of the people having been symbolically laid upon it, while the other was appointed to be sacrificed" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The word was apparently invented by William Tindale to render the "*caper emissarius*" of the Vulgate, itself a mistranslation of the original Hebrew specifying that the goat is "destined to Azazel," who is the demon of the wilderness. This error is relatively unimportant for the interpretation of the ritual. "Scapegoat" is as good a term as any other to designate, in the Leviticus ritual, the first of the two goats and the function it is called on to perform.

2. *The anthropological meaning.* Beginning with the eighteenth century, or before, analogies were perceived between the Leviticus ritual and other rituals. In his book on India, for instance, Raynal observed that "they have a scape-horse, analogous to the scape-goat of the Jews."[1]

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Frazer and others freely utilized the term scapegoat in connection with a large number of rituals. These rituals, they felt, were based on the belief that "guilt" or "sufferings" could be transferred from some community to a rit-

[1]The English translation is quoted from the *Oxford English Dictionary*; the original French has *cheval émissaire*, *bouc émissaire*.

ually designated victim, often an animal but sometimes a human being, the Greek pharmakos, for instance.

For many years, the notion of "scapegoat" remained popular with a number of anthropologists who took for granted the existence of a distinctive category or subcategory of rituals they named "scapegoat rituals." In recent decades, most researchers have felt that no such category can be isolated and defined with any accuracy. The result is that most anthropologists now avoid any systematic use of "scapegoat," and the word has fallen into silent disrepute. It is reminiscent of an outmoded anthropology.

3. *The psychosocial meaning.* In popular novels, conversations, newspaper articles, and so on, the victim or victims of unjust violence or discrimination are called scapegoats, especially when they are blamed or punished not merely for the "sins" of others, as most dictionaries assert, but for tensions, conflicts, and difficulties of all kinds. In connection with "scapegoat" in this third sense, the English language has forged such words as "to scapegoat" and "scapegoating." In the present essay, I will use these words only when these psychosocial connotations are implied.

Scapegoating enables persecutors to elude problems that seem intractable. But scapegoating must not be regarded as a conscious activity, based on a conscious choice. The very fact that it can be manipulated by people who understand its operation—politicians, for instance—supposes a basic lack of awareness in the passive subjects of such manipulation. Scapegoating is not effective unless an element of delusion enters into it. Proof that we are all prone to that delusion is indirectly accessible through the following paradox: all of us can observe and denounce numerous examples of scapegoating we have personally observed, yet none of us can ever identify past and, above all, present instances of his or her own involvement in scapegoating.

Scapegoat delusion, we can already see, cannot be assimilated with the "unconscious" of the psychoanalyst, whatever its definition. Some kind of reciprocal suggestion seems to be at work in every form of scapegoating. A social dimension is always present. The victim is often in the singular and the persecutors in the plural. Even when the victims, too, are plural, they are less numerous than

their persecutors and, as a result, more or less defenseless. The persecutors are a majority and their victims a minority.

Scapegoating in this sense implies a process of displacement or transference that is reminiscent of Freud. But even though it can have sexual connotations, it is not exclusively sexual, as in Freud, and even though it has a linguistic dimension, it is not purely linguistic, as in Frazer.

Decades before Freud began to speak about transference, Frazer used the term in connection with scapegoating. Unfortunately, he defined it in an excessively narrow fashion—in a completely misguided fashion, I feel, that empties it of its universal significance, even though (or perhaps because) it is curiously prophetic of the method advocated by linguistic structuralism:

> The notion that we can transfer our guilt and sufferings to some other being who will bear them for us is familiar to the savage mind. It arises from a very obvious confusion between the physical and the mental, between the material and the immaterial. Because it is possible to shift a load of wood, stones, or what not, from our own back to the back of another, the savage fancies that it is equally possible to shift the burden of his pains and sorrows to another who will suffer them in his stead. Upon this idea he acts, and the result is an endless number of very unamiable devices for palming off upon someone else the trouble which a man shrinks from bearing himself. In short, the principle of vicarious suffering is commonly understood and practised by races who stand on a low level of social and intellectual culture (Frazer 1922: 624).

The scapegoat illusion of Frazer is predicated on a simplistic confusion between word and thing. The "rude savages" would wrongfully extend to the spiritual realm the physical significance of such words as carry, load, burden. The implication is that a correct understanding of these words should suffice to rid us of all nasty scapegoat practices. Modern English gentlemen do not make the mistake of confusing a physical burden with a mental one—except, perhaps, in the case of the famous "white man's burden." If we accept Frazer's definition, we will assume, as he does, that modern gentlemen are immune to scapegoating in any form.

This, at least, is the conclusion suggested by Frazer's linguistic theory. His rather simplistic interpretation of scapegoat rituals

neatly confirmed his cultural prejudices against primitive societies and his concomitant belief in the absolute superiority of modern civilization. *The Golden Bough* shows no real understanding of "scapegoating" in the modern and popular usage, even though that usage antedates Frazer by several centuries. This silence could mean that (1) Frazer was not aware of any propensities to psychosocial scapegoating around him, or (2) he was aware of such tendencies but firmly believed in his linguistic-confusion theory of the scapegoat, which protected him from all subversive speculation concerning the possible similarities between "savage" scapegoating and "civilized" scapegoating.

Should we ourselves avoid that same speculation? Is there a relationship between primitive religion on the one hand, and the modern and popular usage of scapegoating on the other? Can the question make sense to anthropologists? Many, I am sure, would answer negatively. Anthropology, they would say, has outgrown this type of debate. If true, this is a great theoretical achievement. How did it come about? As far as I know, the issue has never been raised. Even and especially if we reject the Frazerian rationale for ritual "transference" (i.e., the confusion between a physical and a spiritual burden), can we deny that some victims, in rituals the world over, are expelled, persecuted, and killed for the sake of the entire community? Can we deny the "persecutory" aspect of certain rituals?

The question of the so-called scapegoat rituals is not settled. We no longer believe in the clear-cut category of former days. The grouping together of these rituals cannot be justified by the simplistic reasoning of Frazer. Have we ceased to feel, however—can we cease to feel—that these rituals belong together? The experience of their kinship is something that cannot be denied, and it remains inseparable in our minds from the idea of scapegoating, not as Frazer understood it, but as we ourselves understand it.

How could it be otherwise? Take the pharmakos ritual of the Greeks, for instance. With its victim a human being rather than an animal, and a human being collectively manhandled before he is killed, this ritual does not merely recall the collective persecution of psychosocial scapegoating: it *is* it. When we read about the pharmakos, we cannot help feeling that it and similar rituals must be the simultaneously crafty and naïve institutionalization of the type of

spontaneous persecution we call scapegoating. The only difference is that the same phenomena that occur in our world underhandedly were then practiced deliberately and systematically, but not necessarily with a greater consciousness of what they really are.

The current meaning of "scapegoating" is not a mere figurative use of the more original and literal concept that occurs in the Leviticus ritual, as dictionaries assert; it is, rather, among other things, a rough-and-ready but coherent interpretation not of that ritual alone, but of all others that resemble it. The Leviticus ritual is only one and not even an exceptionally striking and enlightening example, compared, for instance, with the Greek pharmakos. The reasons for the popularity of the term scapegoat are rooted in our historical relationship to the Bible and have nothing to do with the specific features of any particular ritual.

Is there some value in this spontaneous interpretation? Our first inclination is to deny this possibility. The practice is too popular and unreflective, we feel, to have any scientific future. Frazer's interpretation was a failure, and it probably owed too much, rather than too little, to the popular insight I want to rehabilitate. From vulgar definitions, nothing but a cheap and vulgarized pseudoscience can emerge. But can we afford to reject an insight as irresistible as this scapegoating insight?

Do phenomena branded as scapegoating really occur? Often, of course, they are alleged to occur when in fact they do not. In our world, the position of a victim is eagerly sought, at least for propaganda purposes. No one, however, can seriously doubt the reality of scapegoating. Minorities are oppressed by majorities the world over, and many genuine modalities of collective persecution must be captured by the vocabulary of scapegoating, judging from the widespread though unsystematic use sociologists make of it.

Could these phenomena be completely unrelated to the so-called scapegoat rituals? Can anthropology dispense with phenomenal insights rooted in everyday life? Do we really possess other means of investigation? Is it not significant that the vocabulary of scapegoating occasionally creeps up even under the pens of those researchers most theoretically opposed to its past use?

Opposition to this past use is sound, I believe, but must not turn into a fetishistic avoidance of a word that could teach us many

things if we carefully examined the implications of current, nonanthropological usage. The Frazerian definition was an impoverished or embryonic version of the insight, right or wrong, that is shared, implicitly at least, by all reasonably perceptive people in our contemporary world. A systematic investigation of this insight is in order, not in connection with ritual alone but in connection with all religious phenomena.

II

In order to be genuine, in order to exist as a social reality, as a stabilized viewpoint on some act of collective violence, scapegoating must remain nonconscious. The persecutors do not realize that they chose their victim for inadequate reasons, or perhaps for no reason at all, more or less at random.

How can the choice of such a victim be perceived as anything but random or arbitrary? How can such a grossly irrational phenomenon pass for rational and legitimate? The answer is within our reach, I believe, but we must be careful. For the truth of scapegoating, our subjective experience obviously does not suffice. As I remarked earlier, this subjective experience hardly exists. We never catch ourselves in the act of scapegoating.

Objective observation is plentiful, but it will not do, either. It is *too* plentiful. Scapegoating by others, scapegoating for which we feel no sympathy, appears to us an evil so stupid, so senseless, and nevertheless so widespread that it arouses our indignation. We cannot perceive it as "sincere" and spontaneous. We cannot believe participants are really fooled by their own scapegoating, and we believe in foul play. Our understanding is blurred. Those we regard as scapegoat-makers, we are tempted to turn into . . . our own scapegoats.

If we understand neither the scapegoating of others nor our own, where shall we turn? The secret of it all must lie in the paradox itself, the paradox of this double impotence in the face of a phenomenon we can never fully apprehend, either objectively or subjectively, but whose reality we cannot doubt. In our most perceptive moments, we suspect that we ourselves cannot be immune to the disease.

Why is our own participation in scapegoating so difficult to perceive and the participation of others so easy? To us, our fears and prejudices never appear as such because they determine our vision of people we despise, we fear, and against whom we discriminate. Our avoidance of them, our psychological violence, like the physical violence of a more brutal world, appears entirely justified by the very nature and behavior of these people. The negative behavior that we perceive as scapegoating in others we always perceive as well founded when it is ours. Whether physical or psychological, the violence directed at the victim appears to be justified—justified by the responsibility of the scapegoat in bringing about some evil that must be avenged, something bad or harmful that must be resisted and suppressed.

Let us suppose, now, that a myth is an account of scapegoating narrated from the viewpoint of the persecutors. Can this myth inform us that its scapegoat is really innocent, that he was chosen more or less at random, or for reasons completely alien to the misdeed he supposedly committed? Can such a text advertise the scapegoat status of its own scapegoat? Certainly not. We can expect from this myth only what we would expect from any account of a violent deed provided by its perpetrators. We can expect the victim to be seen as guilty and therefore to *be* mythically guilty. We can expect the violence of the group to be condoned and justified. This violence will be presented as a legitimate defense against a fearsome monster, as the just punishment of a guilty criminal.

In an enormous number of myths, we find a cluster of themes that, despite the extremely diverse variations they can undergo, always remain compatible with the pattern I have in mind, the pattern of a scapegoating delusion narrated from the standpoint of the deluded persecutors. My first example is a myth of the Yahuna Indians:

> From the great Water House, the Land of the Sun, there came, many years ago, a little boy who sang so beautifully that many people flocked from near and far to see and hear him; and the name of this boy was Milomaki. But, when those who had heard him returned to their homes and ate fish, they all died. Hence their relatives seized Milomaki, who meanwhile had grown to manhood, and because he was so dangerous, having killed their brothers, they cremated him on a great pyre. Nevertheless, the youth con-

tinued to sing beautifully to the end, and even while the flame was licking his body. . . . He died and was consumed by the flames, but his soul ascended to heaven while from his ashes there grew, that very day, a long, green blade, which became steadily bigger and bigger, spreading out, until the next day it was already a tall tree—the first paxiuba palm in the world (Koch-Grundberg 1910; cited in Campbell 1959: 292-93).

Milomaki is a victim of collective violence. He was cremated by the united relatives of the people whose death he supposedly caused. People who listened to his music and then ate fish died as a result. Apparently it was possible to listen to Milomaki and survive if one did not eat fish; it was also possible to eat fish and survive if one had no contact with Milomaki, but the combination of the two was mysteriously fatal. Why should this be? We are not told, but the amazingly selective nature of Milomaki's destructive power over the local population is presented as something unquestionable. All this is exactly as it should be if the myth were really an account of nonconscious scapegoating. Indeed, we would regard scapegoating as a good explanation for this story if we felt it had some relationship to a nonmythical reality, if the death of Milomaki were not accompanied by events too fantastic to believe—if the story were not a myth, in other words.

Deadly epidemics break out easily in a tropical climate, especially when hygiene is primitive. Accidental deaths could result from some bad fish eaten by some of the natives and not by others. It is unbelievable that the mere presence in a community of a young stranger with a talent for the flute, even a talent as uncanny as Milomaki's, might be responsible for such an epidemic. It is quite believable, however, that such a belief could arise, especially among primitive people in a state of panic. Such a belief would spread like wildfire and become so strong and unanimous that the community could only remember it as an established and unquestionable fact, even if there were no proof whatsoever.

The fantastic aspects of our myth are not all fantastic in the same manner. There may be a rational approach to the interpretation of at least some of them in a first phase, and maybe to more later. It is clear that Milomaki could be a "scapegoat," not in the obvious, deliberate, and flat-footed style of the old anthropology but in the nonconscious manner just defined: the manner of all majorities

holding minorities responsible for whatever goes wrong in the community, and notably for outbreaks of contagious disease.

III

Is the possibility of a nonconscious scapegoating genesis present in other myths beside Milomaki's? Can it shed light on the organization of these myths? Let us examine a second myth, the best known of all Greek myths, perhaps, the myth of Oedipus.

Oedipus, like Milomaki, is responsible for an epidemic of plague. And we observe in both myths the same contrast between the first, highly favorable impression made by the hero, and the later discovery of a harmful influence. Milomaki charmed the Yahuna with his music; his Greek counterpart outsmarted the sphinx and freed Thebes from this monster. The Thebans were so impressed with Oedipus at first that they put him on the throne, but then the epidemic broke out that the new king proved unable to curb. After being synonymous with good luck, his presence alone spelled disaster.

Our two myths very much resemble the distorted remembrance a mob would have of its own hasty violence if it were absolutely confident it had acted justly. It is in the nature of mobs, of course, to have such confidence. The presentation of the "culprit's guilt" as an unquestionable fact, the complete lack of proof notwithstanding, provides a possible indication of unshaken faith in the perspective that triggered the violence.

In the Milomaki myth, we see an actual lynching mob spurred into action by a contagious belief in the hero's responsibility for what might or might not be an outbreak of food poisoning. In the Oedipus myth, there is no physical violence, there is no mob, the hero is not killed. But the king who replaces him banishes him from Thebes. The citizens are unanimous in their horrified rejection of Oedipus, and Creon acts in their collective name when he pronounces Oedipus's sentence.

Oedipus, therefore, is a victim not of the same physical violence as Milomaki, but of a legal violence that may ultimately rest on the same collective delusion as the Yahuna myth. Oedipus, too, could be a scapegoat, not in the sense of Leviticus, not in the Frazerian sense, but in the nonconscious and psychosocial sense to which we

all spontaneously resort when we speak about political or racial witch-hunts.

The resemblance between Milomaki and Oedipus extends to other features of the two myths. Both hero-victims are strangers to the two communities they unknowingly endanger. Oedipus was born in Thebes, to be sure, but this fact is unknown, even to Oedipus himself, and he never lived in Thebes until he became a king. For all practical purposes, Oedipus, like Milomaki, is a visiting stranger.

A nonconscious scapegoat genesis can never appear explicitly and unambiguously in the myth that would result from it. If it did, it would not be effective, it would not be the real genesis of the text. There is nothing esoteric or mystical about this impossibility. Unjust persecutors will never picture themselves as unjust persecutors, but they will always think and act as unjust persecutors; they will always see their victims, and themselves and their actions, in the same stereotyped manner. No group addicted to scapegoating will knowingly publicize the fact. Its arbitrary scapegoats will be presented, if not as culprits deliberately bent on evil, at least as individuals unwittingly responsible for some disastrous event.

We cannot expect a scapegoat-generated myth to be explicit about the arbitrariness of its victim's choice. But there may be indirect clues, and the more numerous they are, the more probable the scapegoat genesis becomes. We can expect only indirect clues of the victim's innocence.

In both the Milomaki and the Oedipus myth, the identification of the hero as a visiting stranger may be such a clue; the contrast between the initial popularity of the visitor and the sudden about-face demonstrated by the collective violence that follows may be another. Both clues point in the same direction. In times of stress, people in groups tend to embrace almost anyone as a potential savior, especially someone totally unknown and thus easily endowed with a certain exotic prestige. If things do not rapidly improve, however, the new man's instant popularity is likely to turn into its opposite, and yesterday's idol becomes today's scapegoat. Taken in isolation, of course, the identification of the two heroes as "visiting strangers" means next to nothing. The same is true of their rapid changes of fortune. Yet these two details must be viewed as only two in a series

of indirect clues that, taken together, cannot fail to mean a great deal.

Changes of fortune that appear astonishing from the individual's standpoint are, in reality, determined by the instability of the group and the heightened contagiousness of feeling that goes with it. Contemporary politics provide perpetual examples of these reversals, but many people are not fully aware that each episode is one more instance of the same basic phenomenon. The horrible crimes of the hero immediately come to mind when the Oedipus myth is mentioned. There is nothing comparable in the case of Milomaki. The great Freudian ado about parricide and incest might lead us to believe that the absence of these crimes in the Milomaki myth should make a real difference, but I don't think it does. In their basic outline, the two myths are very much alike, because the parricide and the incest in the Oedipus myth are not essential but secondary themes.

The Yahuna myth could very well include patricide and mother incest, or other, similar crimes, such as sister incest, adultery, or bestiality. Examples are numerous—so numerous and so diverse, as a matter of fact, that they cast doubt on the special significance Freud conferred on the two particular instances he so passionately espoused, the patricide and mother incest of Oedipus. Myths are remarkably eclectic in regard to the crimes of sex and violence attributed to their heroes.

The important question is not the absolute significance, if any, of these crimes, but their significance relative to the myths in which we find them and, above all, the function that goes with this significance in the overall system of the myth. The answer is not difficult. The answer lies in the word that must be used when we mean none of these actions in particular and all of them in general. That word is crime. These actions are all crimes from the standpoint of the myth itself, even if they are not labeled as such. They are invariably sanctioned by death, expulsion, ostracism, or some other form of punishment.

In many myths, these crimes of sex and/or violence within the family are the sole cause of the hero's punishment. Prajapati, for instance, the Indian god of sacrifice, has committed incest with one of his daughters, and the gods, his children, unanimously decide he

must be put to death. Since Prajapati is the creator and father of all creatures, the possibility of some sexual union that would not involve incest is completely excluded, but that does not seem to count as an excuse. In the view of the other gods, his children, incest is such a horrible deed that it must be punished.

In many other myths, crimes of sex and violence do play a role in the overall definition of the hero as a troublemaker, but they are not his primary crime. They are adjuncts, so to speak, to some more fundamental misdeed. The hero is responsible for some great social, natural, or even cosmic disaster. And contrary to what the Freudian mystique suggests, this is the case with the Oedipus myth. The plague comes first; the crimes Oedipus commits against his next of kin serve primarily to bolster the argument in favor of making him responsible for spreading the disease.

This view sounds paradoxical to the literary critic and the psychologist, but it is routinely evident in an ethnological context. In primitive culture, the belief is extremely widespread that parricide, incest, bestiality, and other transgressions destructive of elementary forms of human kinship can bring about deadly epidemics. Contagious disease is not clearly distinguished, it seems, from acute internal discord. This type of transgression is punished with a view to forestalling possible disasters. If some epidemic breaks out first, logic demands that the reverse order be followed: some "culprit" must be discovered who caused the disease, and, in order to restore its health, the community must take appropriate sanctions. In the Oedipus myth, as in many others, the parricide and the incest have a function that no psychological mystique, Freudian or otherwise, should be allowed to obscure. These two crimes clinch the case against a man whose rapid social rise could easily make him a target of jealousy.

What kind of a logic is it that finds the cause of an epidemic in one man, but only after it was decided that this man had secretly murdered his father and committed incest with his mother? It is mythical logic, we are often told, and we should leave it at that. There is nothing more to say.

It is certainly not the logic of civilized and well-informed men. But is there nothing more to say? Such logic is imaginary, but not in the sense of a pastoral poem. It is outlandish, and yet there is a familiar ring to it. We would immediately recognize it if our minds

were not paralyzed by the quasi-religious respect that still surrounds mythology. This respect is especially intense in the case of the Oedipus myth, which for many years has held the status of almost a Sacred Scripture in the world of our cultural sciences.

The causal link between family crimes and "the plague" belongs to the logic of mobs on the rampage. Whenever any of these crimes is mentioned in the midst of a mob—and some are likely to be mentioned whenever mobs congregate—the collective rage gathers strength and tends to focus on the first available or most visible object (perhaps, too, on some habitual object). The violent impulse becomes so intense that it silences all other considerations, and the mad logic we see here takes over, the logos of human groups in a state of disarray. The innumerable crimes of sex and violence in the myths of the entire world suggest that the mob and its logic play a role in the genesis of mythology, and the myths themselves seem to confirm that suggestion when they show us, as they often do, the collective expulsion or death of those who supposedly committed these crimes.

The Yahuna myth dispenses with crimes of sex and violence, and the reason is obvious: it does not need any. The community is of one mind in regard to Milomaki. There is nothing fishy about Milomaki's responsibility for the fish poisoning. No additional "proof" is required. In the Oedipus myth, the parricide and the incest function as an additional "proof." Between the vast dimension of the social disaster and the smallness of one individual, the Greek myth needs the mediation of crimes dreadful enough to magnify the evil-making potential of the hero.

There has been so much exegetical effervescence around Oedipus, from Sophocles to Freud, and so little around Milomaki, that the basic similarity and simplicity of the two myths escapes us. But we must not allow secondary differences to sidetrack our interpretation. At their core, the Oedipus myth and the Milomaki myth are the same. The same logic is at work in both cases, and it is the logic of the mob; and the logic of the mob is at one with the logic of nonconscious scapegoating in its most brutal form. The mob is highly visible in the Yahuna myth, but it is not completely invisible in the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles. At the end of the tragedy, the chorus tends to speak more and more like a mob in search of a victim.

Let us recall, at this juncture, the amazing number of myths con-

cerning murders collectively planned and/or enacted by human or divine groups, usually for the most "urgent" and "legitimate" reasons, but sometimes, too, for no stated or apparent reason, except that *it must be so*. Entire clusters of myths, the Dionysus saga, for instance, happen to have as their common denominator one scene only, and it is a veritable lynching scene. In view of the theriomorphic nature of mythology, of its lack of differentiation, rather, between men and animals, it must be significant, too, that in all parts of the world, animals living in herds, schools, packs—all animals with gregarious habits, even if completely harmless to each other and to man—appear in the role of the murderous Walküre of Germanic mythology, which is always the same, at bottom, as the role of those who lynched Milomaki in the Yahuna myth.

This role can be held by animals everywhere: the horses and wild boars of Greek mythology, the kangaroos of Australia, the bison and buffalo of the American plain, or the water buffalo of India. Remember, in the first *Jungle Book*, the lynching of the evil tiger by the water buffalo, led by Mowgli; remember the almost innumerable scenes of collective violence in both the first and the second *Jungle Book*. Remember, also, the almost countless scenes of collective hunting, murder, or expulsion performed by animals against other animals or human beings in mythology, by human beings against other human beings or animals. My own inclination is to interpret these scenes as transpositions of the collective murder, rather than the collective murder as a transposition of the collective hunt. In that context, and without attempting to be exhaustive, I will mention the vultures and many other birds, in many parts of the world, and more particularly in the American myths studied by Lévi-Strauss; and also in these same myths, we may recall the deer, the fish, and several species of insects, including flies that buzz around a mythical corpse not without a violent purpose.

IV

At the time of the Black Death, foreigners were killed, and Jews were massacred, and a century or two later, "witches" were burned, for reasons strictly identical to the ones we found in our myths. All these unfortunates were the indirect victims of internal tensions brought about by epidemics of plague and other societal disasters

for which their persecutors held them responsible. The imaginary crimes and real punishments of these victims are the crimes and punishments we find in mythology. Why should we have to believe, in the case of mythology only, that if the crimes are imaginary, the punishments and the victims themselves cannot be real?

Every sign points the other way. The texts that document historical atrocities—the judicial records of witch-hunts, for instance—offer the same fantastic charges as myths, the same indifference to concrete evidence, and the same unexamined and massive conviction that everything is true, a conviction often voiced, if not actually shared, by the scapegoats themselves. All the clues to the scapegoating of imperfectly assimilated people—outsiders of one type or another, the physically or otherwise handicapped—are present in these records, just as they are in mythology, as far as we can ascertain, and to us modern observers, they give away the true nature of what happened.

We do not doubt that some real persecution took place, triggered or facilitated by collective heresy. It struck innocent people, for complex psychosocial and historical reasons we cannot fully analyze, but the imperfection of our knowledge does not deter us from interpreting these documents as reliable evidence of some kind of collective madness that resulted in real events, in real "scapegoating."

Far from discrediting an entire document, the fantastic nature of the accusations increases the probability that it also contains solid information. These Jews and witches are not imaginary; they are real people, no doubt innocent people, who suffered unjust persecution. The more obviously false the stereotyped slander against them and the more distorted the vision of the persecutors, the more certain we feel that real collective violence lies behind the text—provided, of course, that the distortions due to scapegoating are interspersed with what we regard, not unjustifiably in such a context, as trustworthy indications of the violence that took place.

All these features are present in mythology, and here, too, some could be real precisely because others are unreal in the manner typical of persecutors everywhere. The attribution to Milomaki of the deaths by food poisoning is certainly fanciful, but not in a gratuitous and poetic sense; it is fanciful in a sense we would judge sinister in a historical context, because it increases the likelihood that a

real victim was burned on a pyre. The perpetual recurrence of this typical combination of themes cannot be any more fortuitous in mythology than it was in the fifteenth century.

Our view of mythology remains dominated by a global true-or-false alternative that fails to attain the level of finesse that our handling of historical persecution attained centuries ago. We have learned to separate the wheat from the chaff in the statements of medieval and modern witnesses. We have learned to criticize their accounts in a highly selective fashion. But we have not learned in the case of mythology. Past attempts to root myths in reality have been so disappointing that we do not dare follow the scapegoating route in this case. We fear a relapse into the view of a religious age and its naïve assimilation of fanciful language with reality.

Far from reflecting greater methodological sophistication, the contemporary abandonment of reality is almost as naïve as the religious trust in the truth of the mythical message, but it is the reverse naïveté. The historian's handling of the scapegoating vision lies beyond these two opposite kinds of one-sidedness. The commonsense ability to rate certain statements as possibly true (Milomaki's pyre), not in spite of but because of the fact that other statements are obviously false (Milomaki's responsibility for food poisoning), is identical with the popular insight into scapegoating—the insight we automatically turn on when we confront a historical situation and automatically turn off when we interpret a mythical text.

Let me repeat once more that the scapegoat genesis requires an awareness of the nonconscious dimension of scapegoating. The one thing we must not expect from a scapegoat-generated myth is a recognition that the victim is a SCAPEGOAT in the ritual or Frazerian sense, or, in other words, a recognition that the choice of the victim is arbitrary, that the causal link between the victim and whatever disaster is ascribed to him is not real. We expect no such thing from medieval or modern persecutors. We understand that it would be completely absurd. On the contrary, this causal link will be regarded as a fact so well established and so certain that its validity will need no proof, and it will appear in the myth on an equal footing with all other data of the myth, some of which have a good chance of corresponding to real events.

Which mythical data could correspond to real events? First and

foremost, the collective violence, of course, then such disasters as the food poisoning of the Yahuna myth and the plague of the Oedipus myth. These catastrophes may be real not merely because there is nothing impossible and fantastic in them, but because, if real, they would really intensify the (nonconscious) need for scapegoats that the myth as a whole seems to satisfy. Thus they could well have triggered the collective process that generated the Yahuna myth or the Oedipus myth.

It is possible, of course, that none of these plagues really occurred. It does not really matter. None of the clues I have discussed will ever enable us to reconstitute the real events behind the myth but, I repeat, it does not matter. The only thing that these clues permit us to ascertain is that some real violence must have taken place. This is insignificant from a historical viewpoint but of considerable significance in regard to the nature of mythology. The goal of this research is a generative principle, not a historical reconstitution. Anthropologists are right to regard the second goal as unattainable.

When we are asked to describe the type of belief that triggered real persecutions in the Middle Ages, we often call it "mythological," but in a sense judged metaphorical; we never ask ourselves if it might not be literally true. What prevents us from considering that possibility? Part of the answer obviously lies in the differences between myths and the persecution records I mentioned. These differences are fewer than the resemblances, but spectacular, too. They belong primarily to that part of the myths I have not yet mentioned, namely, the conclusions.

The conclusions of myths resemble each other: they are "happy endings." The collective murder or expulsion achieves more than the intended result, the termination of the trouble through the curbing of the troublemaker—so much more, indeed, that we cannot see anything real in those conclusions; we see them as a triumph for the irrational and the imaginary. In the Yahuna myth, a hitherto unknown edible palm grows out of the victim's body and becomes available for the first time. Once expelled from Thebes, Oedipus's body becomes a piece of religious property that is somewhat dangerous, to be sure, but so valuable that its possession is hotly contested among the protagonists of a later tragedy.

The benefits are so out of proportion with their only assignable

cause that we do not really dare ascribe them to the shabby story that precedes. The latter cannot be the cause of the former. And yet it must be; it cannot be otherwise, from the standpoint of these myths: nothing else ever happens; the same sequence reappears in all the myths. Founding ancestors and tutelary divinities never do anything creative or positive. The only action they perform (or their very presence, if they do nothing at all) is so detrimental that it triggers collective violence against them, and that is all. From the collective violence, and from nothing else, a new cult is born, a totemic system is established, a new culture is founded. This sequence very much resembles a scapegoat process that would produce the kind of positive effects sought by the persecutors—the positive effects we always deny that scapegoating should and can produce.

In our world, and even in the medieval world, scapegoating never produces effects so radical as these. We see it as a contemptible process to which honorable men remain impervious. We cannot imagine that it could be responsible for the cultural mystery we call mythology. Even less can we imagine that concrete aspects of culture could be positively affected by it. But we do know that even in our world, scapegoating is not totally without effects. Even if the scapegoat is really an insider, the threat transforms him into an outsider, and the remaining insiders feel united as they never did before. They form a new and tighter inside. The alien threat displaces everything else; internal quarrels are forgotten. A new unity and comradeship prevails among those who, feeling attacked as a group, also feel they must defend themselves as a group.

These results are meager in comparison with the ones claimed by mythical conclusions, but they are not necessarily of a different order. Scapegoating cannot directly produce edible palms or miraculous relics, it cannot cure the plague, but nothing is more important to all aspects of the social enterprise than the social unity to which collective scapegoating still contributes, however faintly, in our contemporary world.

To reconcile our view of the mythical conclusions with our previous observations regarding the first part of the myths, we have only to assume that the generative scapegoating behind these myths is incomparably "stronger" or more intense than anything we can observe around us or even interpret in our historical records. Beyond a certain threshold of intensity—all other circumstances being favorable—the hostile polarization against a victim must empty the group of internal hostility, unifying it so tightly that a cultural rejuvenation can really occur.

You will object that a scapegoat, however intensely rejected, then embraced, cannot cure the plague. He certainly cannot, but he does not have to. To be productive of mythology, a scapegoat phenomenon must coincide with enough objective improvement in the situation, whenever there is an objectively bad situation, to promote the favorable psychosocial effect of intense scapegoating.

The only reality a scapegoat phenomenon can affect is the social climate, and we may assume that mythology is always due to a disturbance of that climate, followed by a scapegoat-induced return to serenity. It does not matter, of course, whether or not the real cause of that disturbance is exterior to the society, whether it is a real epidemic of plague or some bout of internal discord. If the disturbance has an exterior cause, however, we must assume that this cause has already ceased to act by the time the unanimous scapegoating intervened that truly reestablished the social peace and therefore resulted in some mythical and religious foundation.

What did I really mean above by a "stronger" or "more intense" scapegoat belief? One, obviously, that generates a more complete and stable belief. What kind of belief? Belief in the scapegoat means exclusively at first belief in his responsibility as a troublemaker. At the instant the scapegoat is selected, through a nonconscious process of mimetic suggestion, he obviously appears as the all-powerful cause of all trouble in a community that is itself nothing but trouble. The roles are reversed. The victimizers see themselves as the passive victims of their own victim, and they see their victim as supremely active, eminently capable of destroying them. The scapegoat always appears to be a more powerful agent, a more powerful cause than he really is.

The agitation and fear that preceded the selection of the scapegoat and the violence against him are followed, after his death, by a new mood of harmony and peace. To what or, rather, to whom will the change be attributed? Obviously, to the all-powerful cause that dominates the entire community: the scapegoat himself. Thus the scapegoat is credited with the reconciliation and the peace, after

being credited with the earlier disruption. The absorption of all causality by the victim is so complete that he becomes a dynamic symbol of supreme benevolence as well as supreme malevolence, of social order as well as disorder.

This is the mysterious paradox of mythology—so mysterious, indeed, that mythology itself marvels at it and invariably comes up with supernatural intervention as an explanation. The change in the mood of the community, the change from panic to serenity, must be so swift and radical that it does not appear "natural." It must therefore be "supernatural," manipulated from outside; and since the scapegoat has subsumed all active causality unto himself, he cannot fail to be the grand manipulator, must be the sole and all-powerful agent in this affair.

Belief in the scapegoat is so strong that it supersedes even the power of death. The myth-makers sometimes assume that the victim they killed never dies; perhaps he was only wounded or ill, and was cured. In South America, there are myths in which the scapegoat hero only pretends to be dead and then springs back to his feet at the decisive moment. There are also myths that resurrect the scapegoat after his death. In all instances, however, the scapegoat is regarded as the one who planned and manipulated the entire crisis, so as to dispense the gift of a new beginning and be worshiped as the god or founding ancestor of his community.

I think the nature of primitive religions and institutions the world over can help us indirectly verify the universality and efficacy of this process. The three major pillars of human culture are myths, prohibitions, and rituals. We already understand what myths really are from the present perspective of genetic scapegoating. They are the recollection—typically distorted, yet reliable on some crucially specific points—of a scapegoat process so powerful that it turns its victim, in the eyes of the persecutors, who are also the myth-makers, into a transcendental symbol not only of violence and disorder, but of peace and order as well.

Assuming as we must, from the very nature of mythology, that this scapegoating process makes a formidable impression on the community, we can understand why primitive communities would refrain from certain actions in the name of the founding ancestor or

god, and why they would perform certain actions (some of them the same, some different) also in the name of that ancestor or that god. Impressed as they are with their own scapegoating, these communities must inevitably feel that the god or ancestor does not want them to do what he did when he half destroyed them and was correctly punished for it, but that he wants them to do again what he did when they were saved. He is a teacher who must be imitated in the good things he did but not in the bad. The things you must not do are called *prohibitions* and the things you must do are called *rituals*.

The scapegoat genesis makes it possible to understand why divinities are always the guardians, even the founders of the laws they first transgressed; why there is a mysterious overlap between prohibition and ritual; and why the ritual action par excellence is the killing or expulsion of a victim, performed collectively as a rule, in the rites rightly regarded as "most primitive" by early anthropologists. It also makes it possible to understand why so many of these rituals follow a course that seems deliberately planned to provoke a scapegoat transference against the victim, similar to the scapegoating that occurs spontaneously in disturbed communities. The so-called scapegoat rituals of Frazer and others are those patterned so exactly after the spontaneous scapegoating in which the cult originates that modern observers cannot fail to notice the resemblance.

If my paper were not too long already, I would like to perform on rituals and prohibitions the type of analysis I have outlined for a few myths. In the past, such analysis has always led me to conclude that all aspects of primitive religion become intelligible in the light of a scapegoat effect analogous to what we find in medieval and modern scapegoating, but so much more powerful that we have not yet been able to detect it. This detection would become easier if we compared the scapegoat phenomena we are already able to analyze in the modern world with those of the medieval world. As we shift from the modern back to the medieval, we can observe certain modifications in the scapegoating process; for example, there is a greater acceptance of it in medieval times because it generates a more intense and widespread belief amid the populace. As a result, it looks more like an integral part of society and seems to sink into its sub-

structure. This more intense scapegoating becomes more and more invisible, less and less intelligible to those who do, and even to those who do not, practice it.

Thus the phenomena of scapegoating can be arranged on two parallel scales that go in opposite directions. As we shift from modern to medieval times, we move down on the scale of knowledge and up on another scale that measures the coefficient of scapegoating intensity and efficiency. In other words, scapegoating becomes more and more effective as there is less and less knowledge, less awareness of it as a collective delusion.

If we extend these two scales beyond the point where scapegoating is intelligible, either to us or to the societies that practice it, we move back, I believe, into the domain of mythology and ritual. This is the world in which witchcraft is the norm because causality is primarily magical, at least in times of trouble and uncertainty. At such times, the search for a magical cause becomes identical with scapegoating.

The more socially "efficient" scapegoating is, the more capable it is of generating a positive transfiguration of the scapegoat, as well as the negative transfiguration of fear and hostility. The positive transfiguration is still present in the feudal and even the national traditions of military warfare. The enemy is respected as well as intensely disliked. This positive aspect weakens more and more in the modern world, as civil and ideological conflicts tend to predominate. The class enemy of the modern revolutionary never becomes ritualized as a good, even sacred enemy.

As we move back into the past, or to more primitive cultural conditions, we can certainly observe the reverse effect. Even though in the Middle Ages women in general and, more particularly, women accused of witchcraft had a low social status, there was another side to the phenomenon that throws a good deal of light on the primitive *sacer* (Sacred). The same medieval people who burned a woman on a pyre, thinking she was a witch, might almost simultaneously come close to worshiping her, begging her to perform some great miracle for them, still thinking she was a witch, always attributing to her a "power" she could use to help as well as to harm.

The Yahuna myth reflects exactly the same dual belief, and the same dual consequences. So does the Oedipus myth. Do we respect

mythology too much to recognize in it the effects of a familiar phenomenon? Are these effects rendered illegible by the intensification and exaggeration required to produce authentic myths rather than their weakened residue? Both factors, I feel, must contribute to our inability to solve the enigma of mythical genesis.

V

I move to a third example, a myth from the Ojibway Indians, who live on the northern shore of the Great Lakes. The following summary was written by Lévi-Strauss:

> The five "original" clans are descended from six anthropomorphic supernatural beings who emerged from the ocean to mingle with human beings. One of them had his eyes covered and dared not look at the Indians, though he showed the greatest anxiety to do so. At last he could no longer restrain his curiosity, and on one occasion he partially lifted his veil, and his eyes fell on the form of a human being, who instantly fell dead "as if struck by one of the thunderers." Though the intentions of this dread being were friendly to men, yet the glance of his eye was too strong, and it inflicted certain death. His fellows therefore caused him to return to the bosom of the great water. The five others remained among the Indians, and "became a great blessing to them." From them originate the five great clans or totems: catfish, crane, loon, bear, and marten (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 19).

In this myth, we have not one but six supernatural visitors from some never-never land. One of them kills an Indian merely by looking at him. This unintended murder plays the same role as the plague in the Oedipus myth or the fish poisoning in the Milomaki myth. This time, there is only one victim, but that makes no difference from the standpoint of the community. The threat is the same as in our two previous myths.

If the "dread being" were allowed to stay in the community, more people might be killed. It is imperative, therefore, that he himself be either killed, like Milomaki, or banished, like Oedipus. He is sent back to the bottom of the ocean, we are told. This ocean (or, rather, this lake) is the place where this creature came from in the first place; banishment there, we may feel, is not much of a punishment, but had the creature happened to be a mere human being before he evolved into a supernatural creature, it would have meant some-

thing worse: death by drowning. Whatever the case may be, there is little benevolence, we all know, in the classic invitation to visiting strangers: "Why don't you go back where you came from?"

One more feature in this third myth makes it similar to the first two. The "dread being" committed murder, all right, but out of innocent curiosity. His intentions were friendly. All he did was partially lift the veil that protected the natives from his excessively "strong glance." He hoped he could satisfy his desire to see his hosts without depriving them of the necessary protection. This little story gives the myth its distinctive flavor, its touch of the "uncanny," as Freud would say, but the net result is very much the same as in the other two myths. The personal guilt of the victim is lessened, but his responsibility for the catastrophe remains entire.

In the Oedipus myth, too, we have a hero whose actions were disastrous even though his intentions were good. Oedipus meant no harm to Thebes. He did not commit parricide and incest knowingly. Milomaki's case is a little less clear but seems quite similar. This hero, too, apparently harbored nothing but good intentions toward the community ravaged by his presence. How could the young boy have been aware of his deadly influence on those who ate fish after hearing his beautiful music? Milomaki could not warn the audience at his concerts about something he was unaware of. Oedipus could do nothing about something he did not suspect. Both heroes are personally forgivable therefore, but their very ignorance made the need to curb them even more urgent. Something had to be done, by whatever means.

All three myths have heroes with little or no subjective guilt and a lot of objective responsibility. We cannot blame them for acting the way they did, any more than we can blame those in the community who joined forces against them. No one is really guilty. The victims cannot be condemned for exerting their evil influence: they meant no harm; it was just part of their awesome nature. But the violence that directly or indirectly emanated from the community cannot be condemned, either: there was no other course.

All these stories recall the origin of some cult or of the society itself. I believe that this claim is legitimate, at least in part. Primitive mana, the numinous, *le sacré*, initially reflect very directly their origin in scapegoating. The transcendental power of the divinized

scapegoat is very harmful as well as beneficial. The central figure of the myth is both a criminal and a savior. As time elapses, however, a very natural tendency seems to be at work among the people whose myths these stories became: they want to attribute as little reprehensible behavior to the actors in those myths as seems compatible with a faithful retransmission of the original message.

All these actors end up as sacred ancestors or divinities. Ideally, we may think, they should be blameless. I call this ideal "natural" because it is still operative in us. Despite abundant proof to the contrary, many anthropologists today remain unconvinced that the primitive Sacred, in its original form, is simultaneously "good" and "bad." They find many arguments in primitive religion itself, because as soon as primitive religion becomes a little less primitive than it was originally (originally being understood diachronically rather than historically), it is affected and modified by an attitude that recalls our own.

When this attitude is present, the thought of the hero's abominable crimes causes some shock and disbelief. We feel that all participants in the account of a society's sacred beginning should inspire a minimum of respect, especially the central victim, who generally plays the role not of one supernatural figure among others, but of the sacred ancestor par excellence. Very often, as in the case of Milomaki, he is the only character with a proper name. It is not very nice to discover that the first time our sacred ancestor showed up in the community, it was only to become a vicious killer of his own people.

No one wants that sort of thing. And yet, this is what we have in the Yahuna myth, in the Oedipus myth, in countless other myths. A tendency is at work, therefore, to rehabilitate the hero-victim. There is something, however, that prevents this tendency from fulfilling itself completely, at least at first. The visiting stranger certainly does not receive from the people who turn out to be his people (Oedipus, remember, turns out to be a Theban) the type of hospitality we would expect a sacred ancestor to receive. If the rehabilitation of the victim were too complete, if he turned out to be entirely innocent, then his persecutors would become the guilty ones. We would get rid of one vicious killer, but we would have a whole collection of vicious killers in his stead. And no one wants that, either.

It would be possible, of course, to eliminate the collective murder entirely. But it is the very heart of the story, its dramatic climax. And this story, after all, is the principal, even the sole reason that all these ancestors and mythical beings are remembered. It should be preserved as accurately as possible.

A time finally comes, no doubt, when the cult has completely lost its original vitality and its myths become indifferent stories that can be manipulated at will. Then the collective murder is likely to turn into an individual murder or even disappear entirely, as in the case of much Greek and Roman mythology. I will limit my observations here to an earlier stage of the mythical evolution. It can throw a good deal of light, I believe, on the true nature of mythology.

Let us restate the problem the community has to solve. The main founding ancestor should not be a total scoundrel. If he were totally innocent, however, the truth of the myth would become explicit, revealing the very origin I am trying to uncover, which is far from pretty. The truth is that there never was a righteous community justly mobilized against a dangerous enemy; rather, there was an outbreak of food poisoning, perhaps, or some epidemic, or a panic caused by something else, or by nothing at all, which dissolved the community into a crazy mob. Then, like all mobs, this one turned to violence: the people picked the first available victim, the likeliest scapegoat, the visiting stranger, but they never found out what really caused their violence; they believed in their own story too much.

As sacred ancestors go, the lynchers may be second best to the victim, but they are not insignificant. Even though individually less prominent, they too are sacred ancestors, and a pretty formidable lot. They have proved it. Besides, they are the most direct ancestors of those who regard these myths as *their myths*. They must not be discredited.

This is the problem, and there cannot be a clear-cut solution; there must be a compromise. Each side will have to give a little in order to get a little. The victim must be vindicated, but only to the extent compatible with the good reputation of his victimizers. Thus the myth can neither fully adopt nor fully reject the simplistic vision that mobilizes persecutors against their scapegoats in times of intolerable stress. It cannot face up to the naked truth of the event in which, for some unfathomable reason, the holy is rooted. And yet, being the account of that event, the myth wants to remember it as truthfully as possible, not as it should have been, but as it really was.

The formula of the involuntary murderer is the only solution to the problem at hand, as long as the basic structure of the drama is not seriously distorted. One can still sympathize with the victims, one can view them as heroes, and one can sympathize with their lynchers as well. One must excuse the violence inflicted on the visiting ancestor, and one must excuse the violence he supposedly inflicted on others. This solution lies midway between the nonconscious lie of the persecutors and the truth that no myth has ever uncovered.

All the themes in our three myths and the system they form recur too often to be the result of chance. Everything becomes intelligible if we assume that the scene has evolved from an earlier and rougher version of generative scapegoating. The version we have seeks to blunt the impact of the violence without revealing it for what it is. Our myths become intelligible in every detail if we only assume that latecomers tidied them up somewhat in order to improve their logic and, above all, make everybody in them look good, the victimizers as well as their victim.

We must not conclude from the modifications and attenuations of the original event that the myth-prettifiers see with any clarity what they are doing, repressing deeper down than the myth-makers themselves the truth of the scapegoat phenomenon. On this continued repression, which can assume the most diverse forms in later culture, the survival of the myth and everything that goes with it depends—the religious cult, the culture itself, and even, I believe, the values of nonreligious humanism.

Like the original lynchers, their successors know not what they do. They run away from this knowledge. They would not have to run, however, they would not need excuses for everybody, if they really suspected nothing at all. To modify their myths the way they do, they must feel a sense of malaise. If they had a complete knowledge of what really happened, they would give up their mythology;

if they knew nothing, they would not modify their myths. What makes them uncomfortable, therefore, is the sheer proximity of knowledge.

I see another clue to this malaise in something else that at least two and perhaps all three myths have in common. The violence we have been talking about is not merely "collective": it is spontaneously unanimous. This unanimity is the source of its power to unify the community. The ancient specialists of ritual, in India, for instance, often mention this unanimity as indispensable to the correct performance of sacrifice.

In order to harmonize the entire community, the unanimous violence would have to be the violence of all, without exception. Everybody should be involved, yet none of our three myths shows this universal involvement. Even the two that make the physical violence explicit—the Yahuna myth and, somewhat ambiguously, the Ojibway myth—attribute it not to the entire community but to a smaller group, carefully defined as, we might say, a special-interest group.

In the Yahuna myth, the lynch party includes only the relatives of those who were killed by the combined action of the bad fish and Milomaki. In the Ojibway myth, the posse is limited to the supernatural companions of the troublemaker. If they had not immediately restrained their thoughtless colleague, the other genies of the lake would have become as much of a terror as he was in the eyes of the Indians. Their corporate reputation was at stake, you might say, and they had a special interest in being the first to take punitive action.

We vaguely feel, however, that there may be another reason for the alleged passivity of mere mortals in the Ojibway myth. Overpowering a "dread being" is a delicate task at best, and rather than handle it on their own, if they had the choice, most human beings would prefer to delegate it to other dread beings. The myth describes the safer course, the most reassuring course from the standpoint of the community at large. But let us suppose that a real lynching took place, and that the only being anyone really dreaded was the victim. If no gods were around at the time to substitute for men, it is probable, nevertheless, that a lynching party was formed—most informally, if I may say, with membership unlimited, under the pressure of fear.

The idea of a lynching party limited to other dread beings must be a later development, and it is not completely illogical in view of the action performed, an action made more dreadful still by the dread nature of the victim. The whole affair is raised to the transcendental level. This was a welcome development, no doubt, because it freed the descendants of the lynchers from the fear they must have felt, retrospectively, at the thought of their own direct ancestors, all by themselves, unaided by any supernatural power, summarily dispatching the most sacred of all dread beings to the bottom of the great lake.

In many myths that deal with threats by a single person, similar to the ones described in our three myths, the lynching party extends to the entire community. In the Yahuna and the Ojibway myths, the threat is very much the same, but the lynchers are a smaller group. Thus we have a subgroup of lynchers who are as unanimous as the entire community would be; yet that community remains uninvolved, even though its reasons for being involved are the same as those of the subgroup. The wider community conspicuously abstains from the violence it might feel imperiled enough to commit.

This collective violence restricted to a smaller group is too frequent, all over the world, not to call for some general raison d'être. It can only suggest, I believe, a reluctance on the part of many communities to assume as their own a violence that must have been precisely that—the community's own, the responsibility of the whole community. This is strongly suggested, of course, by those more naïve, perhaps, and more primitive myths that do not restrict the collective violence to a subgroup and must be closer to the original event.

This interpretation is made more likely, I feel, by those religious or literary works that not only do not suppress, minimize, restrict, or otherwise marginalize the central lynching of the mythology from which they are derived, but emphasize it in the extreme. This return to the original emphasis gives them immense evocative power and yet does not unduly scandalize the morally sophisticated audiences of a later age, because the violence is restricted to a small group and can therefore be presented as the unenviable monopoly of a band of reprobates.

I am thinking now primarily of the interpretation Euripides gives

of the Dionysus myth in *The Bacchae*. The subgroup, this time, is limited to women, all the women who have supposedly left their homes and turned *bacchae* to wander in the mountains. They are severely condemned, and the unanimous violence against Pentheus is condemned. They are presented as rebellious against the god even though they are perfectly obedient, and they are opposed to the "good Maenads" from whom nothing concrete distinguishes them.

The genius of Euripides powerfully suggests the dependence of the cult on the lynching scene, revealed as the model of an orgiastic ritual that culminates and concludes with the *diasparagmos*, the tearing apart of a live victim by a veritable mob of worshipers. The presence of that lynching scene in all episodes of the dionysiac mythology confirms its role as the common denominator of the entire cult.

The fact that the collective violence is limited to a subgroup enables Euripides to elude the disturbing consequences of the truth made dramatically manifest in his own play. He maintains the fiction of the lynching scene as a deviation from the true cult, even though it is ordained by the god, and the victim is still treated as guilty in part, rebellious against the god, and in part as a devout worshiper of that god. Left unexploited by the literary critics and the anthropologists alike, these contradictions are enormously suggestive. In this essay, I have tried to show that the lynching scene is really central, and that the interpreters should keep it at the center even in those myths that suggest otherwise—but a little too insistently to be taken at face value. The myth protesteth too much.

There are myths in which collective violence plays its role explicitly and is represented as the violence of the entire community. There are myths in which collective violence plays a marginal role and is represented as the violence of a subgroup. There are myths in which violence becomes the violence of a single villain, but traces of its former collective nature may remain (Girard 1982: 85-145). Finally, there are myths in which violence is not represented at all and seems to play no role. I am convinced that the second, third, and fourth types are not really independent configurations but have evolved from the first type through a process that can be retraced from beginning to end: a process of marginalization, then elimination of the unanimous murder scene.

Many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century anthropologists had a tendency to classify as "more primitive" those myths—and rituals—in which the collective violence is relatively central and uninhibited. This tendency has been criticized, and most researchers today studiously avoid yielding to what they regard as an "ethnocentric" temptation. But this temptation seems inescapable at times. Why is it inescapable? Because it is a part of the same broad, uneducated, but powerful insight that causes us to designate a certain type of collective violence by the name of a ritual, the "scapegoat ritual."

A community that actively seeks and finds scapegoats is usually a community troubled by dissension or by some real or imaginary disaster. Such a community will establish a false causal link between its chosen scapegoat and the real or imaginary cause of its trouble, whatever that may be. The presence in all these myths of some disaster for which the victim is regarded as at least objectively, if not also personally, responsible could certainly result from the community's state of panic and from the systematic projections of all scapegoaters onto their scapegoats.

VI

We have observed some deviations from our pattern, such as the attenuation of the victim's guilt and the reduction of the lynching community to a specialized subgroup. We might observe more deviations. If we analyzed them, they would always lead to the same conclusion: they all result from nonconscious efforts to repress, distort, marginalize, or efface the original pattern itself, the telltale signs of collective scapegoating.

Is this a circular reasoning? Myths that contain exactly what is needed to reflect a pattern of nonconscious persecution I take at face value and regard as suggestive of the true nature of mythology, and myths that contain something else and therefore do not clearly support my case I regard as having been tampered with.

The test of the hypothesis lies in the explanatory value of the analyses required to bridge the gap between any given myth and the pattern of collective violence in its most transparent and pristine mythical form. The Yahuna myth comes close to this transparency,

I would think. That is why I analyzed it first. Is the generative principle that this transparency lets us glimpse something suggestive for one myth only, or at most for a limited number of myths—the dionysiac myths, perhaps—or is it useful for mythology in general? Will it throw light, for instance, on the most striking theme of the Ojibway myth, the theme of the veils? I think it will. In my opinion, this theme is a variation on the loss of one or both eyes. Either loss produces a sense of malaise in the onlookers, especially at the first contact—in other words, when the one-eyed or the blind are strangers.

Mythological heroes are often described as individuals with some infirmity, comparable to some mark or sign that turns them, quite literally, into marked men. They seem to attract the blows of destiny and the anger of the gods. Such, at least, is the language of myth and literary criticism. The truth, I am afraid, is more prosaic: persecutors everywhere are especially attracted to them.

Oedipus not only limps but, at the end of his myth, he is blind. Many heroes are also one-eyed, like the Greek Cyclops. The Roman hero Horatius Cocles is not really one-eyed, but when he frowns and his eyes narrow, he seems to be, and as a result, he can sometimes defeat his enemies just by looking at them. His name signifies "cyclops." The many blind and one-eyed mythical heroes accused of having the "evil eye" remind us, inevitably, of the veils in the Ojibway myth. These cover both eyes of five supernatural beings and one eye of the sixth. All six beings are supposedly endowed with the same excessively "strong glance," which kills at first sight.

In strange surroundings, the situation of the one-eyed man may be worse in some respects than that of the blind. Being completely helpless, the blind are ultimately less frightening. Alone in the midst of many, the one-eyed man cannot defend himself if attacked; he sees those who see him, but he draws no real advantage from this ability and much disadvantage. His one good eye seems more uncanny than the two bad ones of the blind. He returns the distrust of the glances that converge on him, thus inspiring even greater distrust and giving rise to the standard accusation of the evil eye.

Different as it seems from the arrival of a famous blind hero in a strange city, such as the arrival of Oedipus at Colonus, the arrival of the six genies among the Ojibway must be very much like it after

all. In the American myth, the collective fear is not objectively described by a poet; it is subjectively and indirectly suggested by the supposed effectiveness of the evil eye. And as usual, the subject of the myth must be a panicked crowd.

Physical infirmities would not appear so frequently in mythology, either directly and explicitly, as in the Oedipus myth, or indirectly and implicitly, as in the Ojibway myth, if they did not obsess mythmakers everywhere. This obsession fits in with the hypothesis of generative scapegoating. The physically handicapped, we all know, are frequent victims of discrimination and persecution, especially but not exclusively among backward people. The physical and moral abnormalities of mythical victims suggest an obsession that is unlikely to content itself with pure contemplation. Like the other clues, this one would have little value if it were isolated, but it becomes highly significant in the context of all the others.

When we think of this mythical obsession, we must also remember the terrible disasters and strange crimes with which the mythical victims are always charged. We must remember the guilt of the victims, which is always taken for granted without the slightest element of rational evidence. We must remember the collective nature of the punishment normally inflicted on the so-called guilty. Finally, we must remember the curious manner in which so many myths marginalize, attenuate, camouflage, and finally suppress all the telltale signs of scapegoating I have listed, thus betraying an embarrassment that points toward the truth quite indirectly, though no less significantly than more positive clues.

Discussion

RENÉ GIRARD: First, let me say that my research always leads me to emphasize scapegoating as the generative principle of mythology, ritual, primitive religion, even culture as a whole. My paper was an attempt to show how the concrete analysis of religious material can lead back to scapegoating.

The notion of scapegoat ritual in past anthropology, or the role of collective violence in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, makes it very easy to misunderstand what I am trying to do. These notions can only be rigid molds into which it is impossible to fit the diversity of religious forms without distortion. I am not trying to revive this type of enterprise. If I were doing this, my research would be a caricature of the older anthropology, with all its defects rather than its virtues increased. The conception of nonconscious scapegoating to which I resort is not a reductive notion. It is a dynamic principle of genesis and development that can operate as a hermeneutic tool.

This principle can certainly account for those religious institutions that present visible signs of scapegoat transference in the explicit and traditional sense, but that is not the only task for which it is suited. It can also account for those religious and cultural forms that present only the most indirect signs; it can reveal that many mythical themes and many ritual actions left uninterpreted in the past are, in fact, indirect signs of scapegoating.

Many people believe that the adoption of any universal principle in the study of primitive religion is necessarily reductionist. For the sake of hasty generalization, they fear, such a principle will ultimately "reduce" and impoverish the diversity of religious phenomena. I do not think this is the case with "scapegoating" in the sense in which I have used the term. The vocabulary of scapegoating cannot fail to be misleading at first, but I do not see how that can be avoided. Even though many more examples are needed and the preceding remarks are fragmentary, as well as deficient in other respects, I hope they will help prevent possible misunderstandings and make a positive contribution to our debate.

Secondly, I would like to point out that I am not a specialist of ritual. I was not trained as an anthropologist but as a historian, and my first book was one of literary criticism. My interest in Greek tragedy led me to the question of sacrifice. The more I studied sacrifice, the more convinced I became that its enigma can hardly be distinguished from the enigma of religion.

I believe that the immolation of victims is the fundamental ritual action and therefore the most characteristic form of religious behavior. In all this, I feel very close to Walter Burkert. And I feel very close to Walter as well in the belief that our investigation of these problems cannot fail to be interdisciplinary. I do not feel we have to justify this attitude methodologically. The reverse attitude is the one that needs justifying. I must admit, however, that my work has been interdisciplinary to a degree that may be regarded as excessive because it can become unmanageable.

I believe that most cultural data are pertinent to the study of sacrifice, even data in a society such as ours, which does not practice sacrificial immolation. The first example that comes to my mind is our own questioning of sacrifice at this very moment. There must be a relationship between this questioning and the fact that blood sacrifice is abhorrent not merely to a small elite but to our entire society, which is rapidly becoming worldwide.

In spite of this abhorrence, many of our customs and practices and much of our thinking may still be related to sacrifice in a manner we do not suspect. I believe that many phenomena in our history are too obviously pertinent to be excluded from an investigation of the subject. This is the case, for instance, with our attitude vis-à-vis certain forms of collective persecution, with our understanding and condemnation of collective prejudice, and of all forms of exclusionary practices. I also believe in the pertinence of many literary documents, such as Greek tragedy or the theater of Shakespeare. I also believe that the Jewish Bible and, above all, the New Testament are instrumental in all the progress that we have already

made, and will make in the future, toward an understanding of sacrifice.

I have been led more and more to develop a global theory of religion centered on sacrifice or, rather, on a hypothesis concerning the origin of sacrifice. When I first turned to the subject, I had no such intention. I am fully aware that global theories are viewed with great suspicion at the present time, and I would still share that suspicion myself if my own research had not taken an irresistible turn toward the sort of enterprise I was taught to distrust. I have reacted strongly against many aspects of structuralism, but in some respects I remain influenced by it. I think it is possible to recover the genetic dimension without losing the positive aspect of structuralism.

Many anthropologists now regard the elaboration of a global theory of religion as a meaningless activity. The search for origins is condemned as mythical, regardless of the form it takes. Most influential anthropologists of the recent past and the present share that attitude, as far as I am aware. Evans-Pritchard, for instance, wrote a book on theories of religion in order to demonstrate that not one of them in the past has ever made any sense, and that none in the future will ever make any sense. It is true, indeed, that all past theories are more or less forgotten nowadays, and deservedly so if you evaluate them from the standpoint of their highest ambitions. I believe, however, that quite a few of them contain extremely valuable insights, and that they deserve to be studied carefully.

In the face of repeated failure, over a long period of time, researchers can adopt two attitudes. They can remain hopeful. They can continue to believe that the right answer must exist and has eluded earlier efforts, perhaps because the right approach has not been devised. Research should go on. This is the attitude of Walter Burkert, I feel, and it is mine as well. I think it is a minority attitude.

The second attitude does not believe there can be a right answer because it does not believe in the question itself. Words are slippery and no one can say for sure that the word religion means anything definite. The search for a global understanding is a waste of time. Research should shift to other subjects. This is an attitude most popular at this time, especially among researchers influenced by the latest trends in critical theory and philosophy, the most important of which are "poststructuralism" and analytical philosophy.

In all instances, it is argued that our usage of such words as ritual, sacrifice, and scapegoat is so influenced by our Western way of thinking that they have little or no value from the standpoint of the cultures we are studying. In this view, the renunciation of globalism is not a defeat for the discipline of anthropology but a positive move, a progress in the awareness of the ethnocentrism that determines not only the answers we give, but the questions we ask. The radical view of ethnocentrism is leading more and more anthropologists and other social scientists to limit enormously the type of questions they ask. All questions about human cultures that have broad philosophical and spiritual implications have fallen under some kind of *a priori* suspicion.

I certainly agree that sacrifice, in a society that practices it, is not questioned at all or is questioned in a sense different from our own questioning. As I suggested before, our questioning is unique, and its uniqueness reflects our society's uniqueness in regard to sacrifice. In my opinion, it is not merely probable but certain that this uniqueness determines both the kind of questions we can ask and the kind of answers we can give.

I am not reluctant to acknowledge that the modern sense of scapegoat (the psychosocial scapegoat of my introduction) is a post-medieval understanding of victimage that originates in the Christian West. On the contrary, I strongly emphasize this "ethnocentrism." It may cause distortions in our outlook that we do not perceive or that we perceive only belatedly, but in respect to the detection of unperceived victimage, it must be regarded as a unique strength. We are the only society, I feel, in which it becomes possible to perceive a relationship between the question of sacrifice and the question of arbitrary victimage.

Our standpoint is probably the only one, culturally and historically, from which sacrifice can become the problem that it is for us. I see nothing in this that necessarily condemns our research or that should deflect us from the task that lies ahead. Why did practically all societies before ours regard some form of sacrificial immolation as a normal part of culture? Why is sacrifice so abhorrent to us? Where does it come from? What is the origin and the raison d'être of sacrifice?

The concern with ethnocentrism was not invented by the coun-

terculture of the sixties. It is an essential feature of the Western intellectual tradition, and it remained exclusively Western until the entire world became Westernized. It was already voiced in the Renaissance in almost exactly the same terms as today, not only by exceptional thinkers such as Montaigne, but in a routine way by many travelers to foreign lands, by the early anthropologists. This concern for ethnocentrism is typical of Western culture in the last four or five centuries, and it is not found anywhere else.

Should we conclude that our enduring obsession with our own ethnocentric fallacies is only our own specific modality of the ethnocentric fallacy and should be rejected as such? I do not think so. The struggle against ethnocentrism is at the heart of the culture that invented the discipline of anthropology. It should not become a leitmotif of self-disparagement; it must not be a logical trap and an excuse for nihilistic inertia.

The effort to rid oneself of ethnocentric prejudices is essential to the scientific spirit, and it should be ardently pursued. We should always be on the lookout for our ethnocentric fallacies, including those that consist in one-sided and excessive reactions to previous fallacies. Moving away from a perceived error offers no guarantee that the opposite stance is more truthful, and can be made still more truthful by being pushed to the extreme.

The self-questioning mood of many social scientists today is potentially more positive than the self-satisfaction of the past, unless it degenerates into a kind of allergy to all broadly based speculation. To a discipline that has never achieved any consensus regarding any theoretical framework, this type of speculation is necessary, especially now that fieldwork is practically at an end in the field of religion, and the need for it cannot be invoked as an excuse for rejecting "armchair anthropology." In regard to extinct cultures, either we will have "armchair anthropology" or we will have no anthropology at all.

In the present situation, we may feel that the less ambitious we are, the greater our chances to achieve solid results. This may be an illusion. Whatever we do, we cannot avoid taking risks, and, at bottom, minimalism may be no safer than the most ambitious theorizing. We should never lose sight of the limitations inherent in our position as researchers, but we should also be proud of the intellectual ideals and practices we have inherited. Outside of a certain philosophical and even spiritual context, which was certainly "ethnocentric," at least in the sense that it was specifically Western, the enterprise of the modern natural sciences would never have been launched. The great initiators in that respect knew little or nothing of Eastern mysticism, or Polynesian ritual, or countless other cultural forms. If they had been influenced by these cultural forms rather than by their own Renaissance humanism, it is probable that their scientific enterprise would never have gotten off the ground. If the theoretical views that made many scientific discoveries possible contained "ethnocentric" aspects, the discoveries themselves did not, and for better or for worse, they must be responsible for the worldwide unification of human culture that is the foremost reality of the present world.

This is the greatness of our scientific tradition: that it never ceases to question its own premises in an effort to achieve greater objectivity. Even if this effort never proves entirely successful, it cannot be declared a failure, even in the social sciences. I think that anthropology should enjoy the same freedom to follow potentially productive intuitions as the natural sciences have always enjoyed. Anthropologists should disregard the puritanical nihilism of our time and feel uninhibited about global interpretations, even if they are framed, as they cannot fail to be, in a context that reflects our own intellectual and spiritual tradition.

I just said a word about the *a priori* arguments against a hypothesis such as mine. Now I will say something about the type of misunderstanding that keeps cropping up again and again because of the peculiar nature of this hypothesis. Too often, unanimous victimage is understood as a theme, ritual, or pararitual, rather than as a structuring device. This tendency manifests itself most spectacularly in the objection that is heard most often: the hypothesis is accused of being "reductionist."

The implication is that I am trying to force the extreme diversity of rituals and myths into a single mold, which would be the "scapegoat" theme or motif effectively present only in some myths and some rituals. The misunderstanding is difficult to disentangle because, out of the whole ritual corpus, Frazer and others have carved a special category, a dubious one at best, that they called "scapegoat

rituals." Many people feel I must be talking about "something like that." I have tried to dispel the confusion, but I have had little success so far, and that is the reason I started my paper with a discussion of the various meanings of the word scapegoat. My fundamental meaning is the modern and vulgar usage, which should enable us to perceive the nonconscious dimension of the operation that interests me.

A text structured by some kind of collective victimage will reflect the view of the victimizers and therefore will not advertise itself for what it is. This text will present the victim as guilty, in the sense of Milomaki being guilty for the poison fish, even though no evidence whatever is provided. The only evidence we have is that the people who died ate fish, and to us, at least, this evidence suggests something different from what both the people who burn Milomaki and the myth itself obviously believe. If the people who died had eaten some bad fish, that could go a long way toward explaining their death. We modern men, with our uniquely ethnocentric view of food poisoning as a medical problem, feel no need to assume the additional explanation of some evil magical power that might emanate from the presence of some stranger in the community. Food poisoning sounds more objective to us as an explanation.

Is the Oedipus myth really more sophisticated in its choice of evidence against the hero than the story of Milomaki? It only seems so, probably because of the enormous cultural fuss around Oedipus in the twentieth century. The victimage that lies behind the myth can be deduced from lots of indirect clues, including the lameness of Oedipus or his position as a self-made man, which resembles the great popularity of Milomaki. Some modern critics vaguely present Oedipus as some kind of pharmakos, but they cannot point to an explicit pharmakos or scapegoat motif anywhere in the Oedipus myth. This goes for Milomaki as well. The only interpretation that makes sense is the one that postulates the real process of scapegoating as the generative and organizing force behind all themes. Would you expect a prosecutor to present as a "scapegoat" the man whose guilt he endeavors to demonstrate? A text is either generated by a real scapegoating process and contains no scapegoat theme, or it contains a scapegoat theme and is not generated by a scapegoating process. You cannot have it both ways.

In *Le Bouc émissaire*, to illustrate the crucial distinction between the scapegoating process, on the one hand, and the theme or motif of the scapegoat on the other, I resorted to medieval texts that can be regarded as near-myths, and that, to us at least, in the modern era, are quite obviously rooted in victimage. In one of his works, the fourteenth-century French poet and musician Guillaume de Machaut speaks about the Jews being responsible for many deaths in the preceding year. These Jews were justly punished. The author does not say where and when all this happened, but all historians agree he must be referring to the persecution of Jews during the Black Death. Since the injustice of the deed escapes him, no historian expects him to write that the Jews were being used as "scapegoats." And yet, all historians agree that they were. We do not have to be trained historians spontaneously to perform on Machaut's text the type of "scapegoat analysis" that I recommend for mythology proper.

If you compare this medieval text with Milomaki or Oedipus, you will see that there is no essential difference in the themes of their organization. Of course, we have a lot of information on the middle of the fourteenth century in France and almost nothing on the world that created the myth of Milomaki. We can see, however, that this historical information plays no essential role in our interpretation of the Machaut text as a reflection of scapegoating. The main cause is a conjunction of themes that we recognize as characteristic of this type of persecution, and this is the same conjunction we have in the myth of Milomaki and the myth of Oedipus.

Every theme of Machaut is determined by the reality of a "scapegoating" in which the author of the text participates as he reproduces uncritically the viewpoint of the actual persecutors. The text resembles the two myths we are discussing precisely because it projects the responsibility for an epidemic of plague upon an obviously innocent victim or victims. And in their desire to convince themselves that their substitute victim or victims are guilty, the medieval persecutors, like the authors of the Oedipus myth, tend to make up additional accusations that relate to family relations and sexuality, such as parricide, incest, infanticide, and bestiality. But the modern historian explicitly views the Jews as scapegoats, using this very word or words to the same effect. He makes the truth manifest and

denounces the cruel illusion of Machaut. He writes a text with a scapegoat *theme* in it, and as a result, that text is no longer structured by a real process of scapegoating.

The text of Machaut is the very reverse. Being structured by a scapegoat process, it says nothing about it, and even though it relates *real events*, it systematically distorts them, but it distorts them in a manner so characteristic of this type of persecution everywhere that we find it relatively easy to see through the distortions and grasp the truth of what really happened, at least in a general way. Being fully visible to the historian and made visible in his text in the form of a theme or motif, the collective victimage has no more power to structure the vision that is communicated to us. The scapegoat structure cannot survive under the sharp scrutiny of unprejudiced observation. It cannot stand visibility.

Historical "texts of persecution," such as Machaut, or stories of the lynching of blacks in the American South, or the arguments of terrorists in the French Revolution, are often called "mythical" by those who refuse to be fooled, and they are so close, indeed, to mythology that we should find it natural to bring all these texts together and ask ourselves if bona fide myths are not simply more texts of persecution that have not yet revealed their secret and continue to fool us all for a number of reasons, but primarily because it has never entered our minds that we could deal with them in the same manner as I have just dealt with the text of Machaut.

Sensational and bizarre as it seems at first, the "theory" of mythology and ritual that I propose is not really a theory at all. It is a correction of persecutory distortions—a correction we have been practicing for three or four centuries on another category of texts—and it has become so acceptable and banal to us that we resort to it almost automatically, but only in the case of texts originating in our own historical world. My personal contribution consists only in saying that the time has come to extend that type of interpretation to the hard core of primitive religion.

It is true, of course, that deluded and mythical as they are, the historical "texts of persecution" never come up to the level of transfiguration that characterizes mythology proper. Even the most mystified persecutors of Jews or lepers in the Middle Ages did not metamorphose their victims (scapegoats) into divinities and sacred

ancestors. But they did often endow them with a quasi-supernatural power to cure the diseases they simultaneously accused them of spreading.

We are discovering only analogies, but analogies so striking, perfect, and complete that they cannot be fortuitous. The power that transfigures a persecuted victim into a mythological being is still active in our world, but always greatly weakened, even when at its strongest, during the Middle Ages for instance.

During the past centuries, the growing capacity of the West, and then of the entire world, to decipher the enigma of scapegoat transfiguration that lies behind the arguments of deluded communities must correspond to more and more advanced phases in that weakening process. The present effort to extend this critique to mythology proper must represent one further advance in that gradual enlightenment, and we can see the day when the persecutory significance of mythology in the entire world will be just as obvious as it is in Machaut and all similar texts.

Mythology proper is more difficult to penetrate, because the coefficient of distortion and transfiguration is higher. The weakening of the force that generates mythology is one and the same as the strengthening of our power of elucidation in regard to that same mythology. Can we identify the antimythological force at work in the modern world? I am convinced that we can, and this is the most controversial aspect of my views even though, in many respects, it is the most obvious.

When we do our "scapegoat analysis" of Machaut and rectify much of the information he provides, without doubting the reality of the victims behind his text, we do something very similar to what the Bible does in the psalms, in Job, in the writings of the prophets, and in all of its best-loved stories. These stories superficially resemble myths because many themes are the same, but more important, they rehabilitate the victims and overturn the scapegoating on which mythology is founded.

You can see this immediately if you compare the Joseph story to the Oedipus myth. Oedipus is expelled from Thebes twice, and each time for a reason that the myth regards as valid. From the beginning, he constitutes a real danger to his family and to the entire city. The second time, he has really killed his father, he has slept with his

mother, and he is responsible for the epidemic of plague. Joseph, too, is expelled twice, first as a child by his own family, and then as an adult by the entire Egyptian community, which regards him as guilty of sleeping with the wife of his protector. The crime is equivalent to the incest of Oedipus, but unlike the Egyptians and the Greeks, who believe that sort of accusation without proof, the Bible regards it as a lie.

Each time, Joseph is wrongly accused and unjustly punished. Unlike the Oedipus myth or the Milomaki myth, which regard their respective heroes as responsible for some dreadful social disaster, the Bible says that, far from being responsible for the destructive drought that occurred during his administration of the Egyptian economy, Joseph took wise measures and saved not only his own starving family, but the whole country. Instead of practicing vengeance, he saved his own persecutors.

The Joseph story, and the other biblical texts, systematically take a stand radically opposed to the standard mythological view. Even when biblical inspiration operates within a narrative framework similar to that of the Oedipus myth, it runs systematically contrary to mythology, since it overturns the illusion of some previous victimage. It keeps reinterpreting mythical themes from the standpoint of the rehabilitated victim.

The similarities and differences between mythology and these biblical stories are the same as those between the Machaut text and the modern historian's account of what happened to the Jews during the Black Death. The main difference is that instead of speaking in his own name, the biblical author chooses as his hero the principal victim, whose viewpoint prevails in an account that does not suppress the persecutors' version but regards it as deceptive. After they get rid of Joseph, for instance, the twelve brothers give their father a false account of his disappearance that may be tentatively identified as an allusion to some primitive myth demystified by the biblical story.

In the nineteenth century, students of comparative religion greatly emphasized the dramatic similarities between the Bible and the myths of the entire world. They hastily concluded that the Bible was a collection of myths similar to any other. Being Positivists, and seeing the more or less similar data everywhere, they perceived no

real difference between the one and the other. Only one thinker perceived the crucial difference and his name is Friedrich Nietzsche.

In Nietzsche's later thought, the dichotomy between the masters and the slaves should be understood primarily as the opposition between the mythical religions on the one hand, which express the standpoint of the victimizers and regard all victims as expendable, and the Bible and, above all, the Gospels on the other, which "slander" and undermine the religions in the first group—all the other religions really, because the Gospels always denounce the injustice of sacrificing some innocent victim. I think Nietzsche was driven to madness by the folly of deliberately siding with the violence and deceptiveness of mythology against the nonviolence and truthfulness of the biblical attitude.

The Judeo-Christian scriptures should be regarded as the first complete revelation of the structuring power of victimage in pagan religions, and the question of their anthropological value can and should be examined as a purely scientific question, in the light of whether or not myths become intelligible when interpreted as more or less distant traces of misunderstood episodes of victimage. I believe that they do.

I conclude that the force of demythification in our world comes from the Bible. This answer is unacceptable to those who feel that anything that would place the Bible in a favorable light cannot be seriously envisioned by scholars because it must be a *religious*—and therefore an irrational—view, with no value whatsoever from the standpoint of anthropology.

This attitude is itself irrational, motivated by religious prejudice. Mythologists and classicists would not hesitate for one second to interpret the Machaut text as modern historians do, and yet it never enters their minds that the same type of interpretation could be appropriate for such myths as Milomaki's or Oedipus's. They are never tempted, it seems, even out of sheer curiosity, to try out in their own field a tool of demystification that has proved immensely successful with texts extremely similar to the ones they have been studying with much less success for a very long time. When I suggest they might go the same route as historians, the suggestion is often regarded, I can tell you, as an almost indecent suggestion, some kind of blasphemous extravagance.

And yet, what should be more natural to scholars than handling similar texts in a similar fashion, just to see what happens? There is an unperceived taboo against this kind of comparative analysis. The most powerful taboos are always invisible.

Like all powerful taboos, this particular one is antireligious, which is the same as religious. At the time of the Renaissance and later, modern intellectuals substituted ancient culture for the Judeo-Christian scriptures. The later humanism of Rousseau and his successors has excessively glorified primitive cultures, and it is also against the Bible.

If the reading I suggest is accepted, our long-standing system of academic values that exalts all nonbiblical cultures at the expense of the Bible will become untenable. It will become clear that genuine "demythification" works with mythology but not with the Bible, because the Bible already does it itself. The Bible really invented it. The Bible was the first to replace the scapegoat structure of mythology with a scapegoat theme that reveals the lie of mythology.

WALTER BURKERT: There are a lot of questions that can be put to this all-embracing thesis. I shall begin with a question of detail that concerns the interpretation of mythology. I venture to take this touching example of Milomaki you deal with in your paper. I must apologize for using a myth from outside my field (my source is Joseph Campbell). We have a story about the boy who sang beautifully and was killed, because whoever ate fish died. Now your interpretation is that this was a real incident of persecution. I have looked up in Campbell the continuation of that story, just a few sentences: after Milomaki died, a kind of palm tree grew out of his ashes, and "the people fashioned huge flutes of the wood of this palm and these gave forth the same wonderfully beautiful tones that formerly had been sung by Milomaki himself. Further, the men blow on such flutes to this day when the fruits are ripe, and they dance while doing so, in memory of Milomaki, who is the creator and giver of all fruits; but the women and children must not see these flutes, for if they did they would die."[1]

What I see in such a myth would be, first, a complex of myth and ritual; there's a clear reference to a festival of fruit gathering, and

[1]Campbell 1959: 221.—ED.

this festival is accompanied by music; and there is a special division between the men and the women and children. This is a wonderful festival with a dark background. I think I somehow understand this pattern because there are Greek myths that are very similar. For example, Orpheus, who sang so wonderfully, was tragically killed by the Thracian women; but still he kept on singing, and his head floated to Lesbos, and now all good poetry comes from Lesbos. (Sappho is from Lesbos.) Or Ikarios, the inventor of wine: people thought he had drugged and poisoned those who first drank wine, so he was killed; but still, as the giver of wine, one remembers him when drinking wine. Ikaria is a village that stands out in the Dionysus cult, and wine is something wonderful. So here again we have a wonderful festival with a dark background. I would try somehow to derive this "joy with a dark background" from the general sacrificial pattern, where joy presupposes something dreadful: a beautiful, "blameless" animal must be killed, or else there would be no feast. So there are disclaimers, attempts at restoration, honors paid the victim, and the festival takes place.

What I find interesting and important is precisely the structure, this kind of peripeteia between tragic background and a joyous festival, that is provided by this kind of myth. If ever somebody were killed in a regrettable way, such an accident would not be what gives life to the complex of myth and ritual. It is not a contingent event but this kind of living cultural pattern at work in society that gives life to the pattern.

GIRARD: Most contemporary anthropologists minimize what you call the "dark event," or they entirely deny its significance. You do not, and I greatly appreciate this aspect of your work. My own emphasis on this "dark event" constitutes the most distinctive aspect of my work, and I had time for nothing else in my paper but, like you, I see a "bright" and positive side to mythology and I want to understand how the "dark" and the "bright" relate to each other. My interpretation of the "dark event" as a trace of unanimous victimage cannot be significant if it does not account for the beneficial aspects of Milomaki's death—the flute playing and the discovery of the edible palm. Your question gives me an opportunity to say something about this.

First, I observe that in your two examples, as well as in the myth

of Milomaki, the "dark event" is a collective murder. The collectively murdered victim is the one who teaches a new art or technique to the community, or is somehow responsible for this innovation. There is something similar in myths that relate to cultural prohibitions. They are said to originate with victims who were killed, not for upholding the prohibitions against trespassers, but, paradoxically, for being trespassers themselves. The collective murder is interpreted as a punishment for the trespassing.

Since these myths say that the law came into existence as a result of all this, and therefore did not yet exist when it happened, they seem to acknowledge, at least indirectly, the arbitrariness of the collective murder. In all these instances, some great good befalls the culture as a result of some unanimous violence against someone viewed as the benefactor as well as the original malefactor. In many instances, it is clear that the victim appears as a malefactor first and is punished as such. He turns into a benefactor as a result of the unanimous victimage. I think this sequence strongly suggests the positive consequences of a killing that cannot fail to be arbitrary but is never perceived as such.

You speak of "joy with a dark background." I see the "dark event" as much more than a background. In all our examples, the "dark event" is at the center, and all positive effects flow from it. In sacrificial rites, the immolation of the victim corresponds to the "dark event" of the myth, and it is really central to primitive religion. The collective murder functions like a triggering mechanism for the various benefits that accrue to the culture.

You want to derive the "dark event" from the killing of innocent animals during the hunt. If the "dark event" must be derived from anything, I agree that it can only derive from the hunt and your hypothesis should be adopted. But I cannot picture the mythical drama as derivative in any such sense. The dark event constitutes the one common denominator of all myths, and not merely of the myths about hunting. In order to respect the general economy of rituals and myths all over the world, the collective murder should not be derived, I feel, from any of the useful activities that it teaches the community. The whole direction of the analysis should be reversed: all useful activities must derive from the murder. But is it really possible? Can it be done without surrendering to some kind of mystique of collective violence?

BURKERT: I agree that there is a basic event. The only difference is that this basic, "dark event," for which I propose the *homo necans* concept, was not somehow a fortuitous accident, which happened once, but a necessary practice that developed in hunting.

GIRARD: I do not conceive my generative victimage as a kind of accident that cannot be repeated. This is a misunderstanding. It may result from a confusion between my hypothesis and the original murder in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. I certainly take a more positive view of *Totem and Taboo* than most people do. I see one priceless insight in that book. Freud surveyed a great many data of primitive religion, and tremendous observer that he was, he detected a single common denominator to all of it: some form of collective murder. The time will come, I hope, when the truth of this insight will be acknowledged. I believe in this insight, but I disagree with Freud on how to interpret it.

The collective murder I am talking about must be regarded as a "normal" occurrence in prehuman and human groups during the whole prehistory of our species and some of its history as well. My idea is that violent forms of so-called scapegoating must put an end to a kind of intraspecific fighting that is normal, too, during the same stages of human development, but so intense and deadly that it would make human culture impossible if there were nothing to interrupt it.

I believe that intraspecific fighting among human beings is held in check by the "scapegoat" murder. I regard unanimous victimage as a self-regulatory device that can stabilize human communities because it provides a model for the whole elaboration of human culture, beginning with ritual sacrifice. To explain this unusual view, I must talk about something called *mimetic desire*, which is the basis for my conception of human conflict and of the unanimous murder itself. My thesis makes little sense unless all aspects are embraced simultaneously. I must summarize a great deal of material and omit all the supporting evidence, which can be found in my books.

The very diversity of cultural patterns suggests that people in groups influence and control one another's desires, negatively, of course, through the prohibitions and taboos that forbid men to desire this or that, but positively as well: many objects and types of behavior seem intrinsically desirable in one particular culture and

completely indifferent or even highly repugnant in another. Such differences of "taste" can only be rooted in reciprocal influence, that is, imitation. I reserve the word desire for what happens to appetites and needs when they become contaminated with imitation or even entirely displaced by it. To me, therefore, desire proper has no specific biological basis and can be studied "phenomenologically."

For modern students of desire, the main question has been: what is the true object of human desire? To Freud, for instance, our "true" object is always our mother. From the mimetic standpoint, this makes no sense. Desire can be defined neither by its object nor by some disposition of the subject. Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind. We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires.

What are the consequences of imitation when, instead of patterning our desires according to the suggestions of some cultural model, we imitate one another in our choice of desirable objects? The model is anyone who suggests an object of desire to anyone else by desiring that object himself. The model and his imitator desire the *same* object, and they necessarily interfere with one another.

Rivalry is too much the rule, especially among the males of our species, to be always ascribable to scarcity or to the fortuitous convergence on the same object of two or more desires that arise independently of one another. The constant crisscrossing of desires must result from the type of imitation that great writers describe, especially in comedies and tragedies.

Take the four mixed-up adolescents in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They are inconstant; the two boys fall in love with different girls at different times, but at any given time they are always in love with the same girl, and therefore they are always rivals. They incriminate destiny, their parents, the fairies. They make up myths, but in reality they copy each other's desires. Shakespeare has a definition for this erotic mimicry: "To choose love by another's eye." This is the tragic and comic predicament par excellence, and I find it more helpful for an understanding of human behavior and the human psyche than all modern theories of desire put together.

As I imitate the desire of my neighbor, I reach for the object he is already reaching for, and we prevent each other from appropriating

this object. His relation to my desire parallels my relation to his, and the more we cross each other, the more stubbornly we imitate each other. My interference intensifies his desire, just as his interference intensifies mine. This process of positive feedback can only lead to physical and other forms of violence. Violence is the continuation of mimetic desire by violent means. Violence does not play a primordial role in my perspective; only mimesis does. This point is often misunderstood. The word violence in the title *Violence and the Sacred* must be partly responsible for the misunderstanding.

Violence is a symmetrical, reciprocal process because it is mimetic. I am convinced that the association between violence and biological twins in many mythologies and rituals stems from a frequent but far from universal confusion between the physical similarity of identical twins and the mirrorlike reciprocity of mimetic conflict. In respect to this and many other themes, anthropologists have a lot to learn from the classical tradition of comedy and tragedy.

Mimetic rivalry is already observable in animal life. Even when food or females are not scarce, when many identical bananas, for instance, are available to a group of monkeys, fighting may erupt. We say that the purpose of these conflicts is dominance, prestige, etcetera. But the postulate of such a complex, purposeful activity is unbelievable. The cause of the fighting is simply that two or more monkeys have set their sight on the same banana, and no one wants to yield to someone else. There is nothing special about the disputed banana, except that the first to choose selected it, and this initial selection, however casual, triggered a chain reaction of mimetic desire that made that one banana seem preferable to all others.

Among animals, these rivalries normally do not result in death, which is why they can play the key role in the establishment of "dominance patterns." The dominant individual is the one who never has to yield because the others always yield first, with or without fighting. The dominance pattern is the consequence rather than the purpose of mimetic rivalry.

In human culture, similar phenomena do occur, especially in marginal areas, but symbolic patterns are the norm. These patterns are possibly but not necessarily hierarchical, and they exist independently of the individuals who temporarily occupy the various posi-

tions. As a result, they can persist unchanged from generation to generation. They are an essential part of the religious and cultural memory of human communities. The various positions are allocated not through actual fighting, as a rule, but according to modalities of inheritance, election, co-optation, etcetera. Why this enormous difference between human and animal societies?

Fixed symbolic patterns tend to prevent mimetic rivalries in the same way that dominance patterns do. Mimetic rivalries can nevertheless occur among men, and when they do, they are more ferocious than among animals and can easily become lethal. Even if one of the antagonists kills the other, a mimetic rivalry is not necessarily over. Some next of kin may take up the cause of the dead man and imitate the killer, doing to him, mimetically, what he had done to his victim: kill him. This diffusion of mimetic violence beyond the boundaries of the initial conflict is called vengeance. And the mimetic process being what it is, there is no reason for vengeance to be limited to a single act. It can transcend all limitations of time and space and turn into the interminable vendetta or blood feud.

We must envision the possibility of generalized "mimetic crises" that dissolve cultural differentiations into the dreadful reciprocity of chaotic violence. Even though this possibility is unthinkable to the civilized modern observer, at least until recently, it is greatly feared by primitive and traditional societies.

The mimetic conception of desire and violence makes it unnecessary to postulate a specifically human aggressive instinct to account for the murderous intensity of conflicts among human beings. Having a bigger brain, and being the most mimetic animal, as Aristotle was first to point out, man is also the animal with the fiercest mimetic rivalries. The natural tendency for weaker individuals to yield to the stronger does not suffice to counter the mimetic frenzy. The establishment of a society on the animal model becomes impossible.

This whole mimetic view is quite different from the "aggression" of the ethologists. The problem with aggression, I feel, is the implicit one-sidedness of the concept. The whole problematic seems influenced by the situation in modern urban cultures, where one-sided aggression is undoubtedly frequent, but resembles predation rather than an intraspecific conflict. Inside a primitive human community,

unprovoked aggression—or, rather, violence with no antecedent rivalry—is most unlikely. With mimetic desire, the dynamic reciprocity of these conflicts, their tendency to escalate, becomes immediately intelligible. The problem with this type of escalation among men is that is can become infinitely destructive.

Human societies are very different from animal dominance patterns, yet reminiscent of them in some respects, because their rituals, their prohibitions, and their symbolic systems of segmentation replace animal dominance patterns as a means of preventing or moderating—most of the time—the mimetic rivalries that must be held in check.

Since men are unyielding in their rivalries, their symbolic cultures certainly did not originate in the gentlemanly "social contract" cooked up by eighteenth-century theorists. Lévi-Strauss has revived once again this absurd idea, blithely suggesting that one fine day prehuman groupings decided (after some kind of constitutional referendum, no doubt) that cultural differentiations, language, and other cultural institutions would be nice things to have.

The real solution to the problem must lie in the very unyielding intensity of mimetic rivalry. It must lie in the murderous violence itself. To be intellectually satisfying, this solution should involve no factors extraneous to the mimetic crisis as it was defined earlier: it should not depend on dragging some deus ex machina upon our scene of mimetic escalation. It must be purely mimetic, therefore. The "scapegoat" or unanimous-victimage hypothesis satisfies this requirement. When mimetic violence permeates an entire group and reaches a climactic intensity, it generates a form of collective victimage that tends toward unanimity precisely because of the participants' heightened mimetic susceptibility.

We are all vaguely aware of spontaneous and nonconscious scapegoating as a possibility. We know that an enraged mob can almost instantaneously solidify against some individual unanimously perceived as a "culprit," even though no reasonable evidence of guilt is available and the victim was obviously chosen at random. The members of the mob visibly influence, or *imitate*, one another in their selection of the victim. The atomistic dissemination of hostilities during the mimetic free-for-all gives way to a massive polariza-

tion on a single target. A lot of mimetic refocusing occurs on that particular target because it is the nature of the mimetic urge to polarize in this manner.

The entire process must be governed by the same mimetic urge from beginning to end, but it produces different results according to the successive phases of the cycle. First comes mimetic desire, which is divisive and conflictual. Next comes the mimetic rivalry. As it intensifies, it focuses less and less on the disputed object and more and more on the rivals themselves, who become obsessed with one another.

Paradoxically but logically, this intensely conflictual phase, at its most divisive, can become reunitive all of a sudden if it leads not two, not three, not even many, but all the participants without exception to adopt the same enemy through a snowballing of imitation, which the circumstances cannot fail to produce. The more intense the appetite for violence is, the less discriminating it becomes, and the more willing to substitute a widely acceptable target for its original one.

All the participants can satisfy their appetite for violence at the expense of the victim against whom their mimesis has polarized. Thus, in spite of its random and unpredictable aspects, the unanimous expulsion or death of the selected victim can bring an end to this type of disorder on a most regular and normal basis. In the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus observes that "unanimous hatred is the greatest medicine for a human community."

How could such a process lead to a stable religious and cultural system? The examination of the most violent rituals can solve that mystery, I believe. They often begin with reciprocal taunting and quarreling, then so-called simulated fighting breaks out. As the chaos spreads and intensifies, a remarkable shift of attention occurs. Instead of picking on one another, the participants start refocusing on only the one creature—generally an animal, but it can also be a man—that is destined for sacrifice and that is actually or symbolically mobbed by the entire group. Then, peace returns.

The disorderly phase of rituals makes little sense, it seems to me, from the standpoint of the hunting hypothesis. But it makes a good deal of sense if interpreted as the deliberate reenactment of a mimetic crisis climaxing in unanimous victimage. The rationale for the

reenactment is the pacifying effect of the climactic conclusion, which corresponds, of course, to the sacrificial immolation.

If you examine the rules regarding the performance of sacrifice, you will see that, in the most diverse cultures, many of those rules do correspond to actual features of the collective phenomenon they want to reproduce. Many rituals, for instance, emphasize unanimous participation, or at least unanimous attendance; many others seek to introduce an element of randomness in the selection of the victim or of the place and time of the sacrifice. Only an origin in random victimage, shrewdly observed but naïvely misinterpreted as a supernatural intervention, can account for these features.

The purpose of the most brutal and apparently archaic rituals is not merely to relax taboos and have a nice "recreation" in the limited modern sense, but literally to re-create the community by reenacting a process of community disintegration and regeneration, through a unanimous victimage that was obviously experienced as a real starting point for all positive collaboration among the members of the community.

In my opinion, there is no reason to doubt what the participants themselves say about these rituals. They scrupulously reproduce the process from which the ritual originates. They provide us with a good mimetic image of what happens when a religious cult is born, and Durkheim had some inkling of this. This image of religious beginnings can also be regarded as a more confused image of the hominization process itself, when the threshold was first crossed between the dominance patterns of animals and ritualized victimage around which human culture began to crystallize.

Ritual is just as mimetic as its disorderly and violent model, but the mood is entirely different as a result of the sufferings and terror caused by the crisis. It is motivated by the desire to avoid further fighting and renew the benefits of unanimous victimage. To the entire community, the crisis and its resolution become a positive model of imitation and counterimitation.

The mimetic urge has now turned peaceful and culturally productive, because it consists in doing again and again what the victim did or suffered that resulted in a great good for the community (ritual sacrifice). It also consists in negative imitation, in never doing again whatever the victim did that greatly harmed the community

(prohibition). Finally, it consists in remembering the whole process from the viewpoint of the befuddled and grateful victimizers, who project the whole responsibility for what happened onto that mysterious victim. We can now understand why they regard him as a benefactor as well as malefactor (myth). The entire mimetic cycle is projected onto him and interpreted as a supernatural visitation destined to teach the community what to do and not to do in the future.

The paradox of the mimetic cycle is that men can almost never share peacefully an object they all desire, but they can always share an enemy they all hate because they can join together in destroying him, and then no lingering hostilities remain, at least for a while.

Too much mimetic desire will cause an intraspecific free-for-all intense enough to generate the common enemy that is needed for the reconciliation. This collective victimage will trigger not only the cult of the victimized reconciler, but all useful communal enterprises and institutions, from kinship laws to food gathering and rites de passage, because each one of these demands the social harmony that can only be achieved through this process. That is the reason, I believe, why primitive religion associates all useful activities with some form of victimage that brought communal harmony because it was unanimously believed, unanimously *misunderstood*.

Many aspects of collective victimage are somewhat contingent, but the phenomenon can be made continuous with the entire process of human desire and intragroup conflict in such a way that the primitive confidence in the cultural and economic fecundity of what Walter calls "the dark event" begins to make sense. In my last three books, I tried to show, among other things, that the implicit contradictions between the "dos" and the "don'ts" that must emerge from the successfully misunderstood victimage, the inevitable tension between the ritual imperative and the prohibition imperative, can be regarded as the true source of cultural innovation in the nonhistorical phases of human culture.

The strength of the mimetic theory lies, I believe, in its ability to go along with sacrificial religions and reveal the reason behind their unreason to a degree that has never been possible before. Mimetic theory reveals the pertinence of many primitive ideas without surrendering to some kind of neoprimitive mystique. Unanimous victimage and sacrificial substitutions turn the disease of mimetic rivalry into its own medicine. The cure is really the same thing as the disease, and the problem of keeping the "good " sacrificial violence separate from the "bad" is a major religious problem. The mimetic reading enables us to understand better not only primitive ritual, but also the more elaborate reflections that remain dependent on it, such as pre-Socratic philosophy, Greek tragedy, and the *Brahmanas* of India. All these works are enormously useful as confirmations of the relationship between mimetic desire and sacrifice.

In *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, I tried to show that unanimous victimage must play, in the laboratory of human culture (which is this side of the threshold of hominization, represented in the Bible by the murder of Abel), the role formerly played by the surrender of the weaker animal in the establishment of dominance patterns. The victim must be the first object of noninstinctual attention, and he or she provides a good starting point for the creation of sign systems because the ritual imperative consists in a demand for substitute victims, thus introducing the practice of substitution that is the basis of all symbolization.

It seems to me that the mimetic victimage theory avoids the twin pitfalls that threaten the quest for human origins. On the one hand, the ethologists see so much continuity and similarity between animal and human culture that they minimize the difference. On the other hand, the symbolic anthropologists see so much difference and discontinuity that they deny the similarities and end up with no conception whatever of hominization and cultural genesis. The powerful insights of recent ethology are an embarrassment to them. That is the reason for the many efforts to discredit these insights through cheap political accusations.

JONATHAN SMITH: Can I return to the Milomaki myth, because it's an old friend? Walter's quite right; it's a ritual myth. It relates to the only pan-Amazonian religious ceremony there is. People say it's first fruits, but that is being too biblical. It is a spring fruit festival; it consists of blowing on these large wooden flutes. There are literally hundreds of myths that explain where the big wooden flutes come from. These myths are ritual etiologies, if you like. In fact, about fifteen or sixteen of Lévi-Strauss's South American myths are from this group, sometimes a name quite similar, sometimes a name

quite different; but of two to three hundred myths that I know, only five have the motif of killing. What we've got is a very simple problem; it's a problem that deals with transformation. How did something that wasn't come to be?

At times the flute is given birth to, at times the flute is changed: it was once something else, and then it is transformed into being a flute. At times they stole the flute, either from a neighboring tribe or, more frequently, from the women, because they love to tell stories about stealing ritual objects from women. At other times they found it, somebody tripped over it and it made a noise spontaneously, and they got the idea, "Well, if we go on that will make the same noise again." At other times it really is—I hate to use the word—a kind of miracle. They walk by this tree and it starts tooting at them, and they take it and they toot with it.

In other words, there's a vast repertoire of what, I guess, a folklorist would want to call motifs. They're all attempting, it seems to me, in one way or another, to explain how we come to have this object, this cultural, this man-made object in the midst of the fruit ceremony. My question is how one knows to italicize one version as distinct from all the others. Does one understand in some way that the others are really dealing with the same thing but transforming or concealing the motifs? In other words, how do we assign priority?

GIRARD: We do not. I am not selecting one particular motif in the vast repertoire of the folklorists. My thinking is of an entirely different sort. I am talking about a generative process, and if I am right, this process cannot appear directly as a motif in the myth it generates.

I find no scapegoat motif in the myth of Milomaki. In other words, the people who burn Milomaki are not regarded as unjust, as arbitrary persecutors. The myth takes it for granted that Milomaki must be responsible for the death of these people's relatives. The attitude of the myth parallels that of Machaut, who believes the Jews are really responsible for at least some of the casualties in the epidemic of plague.

There is no more a scapegoat motif in Milomaki that in Machaut. The victim or victims are perceived as guilty. But the interpreter should understand in both instances that the entire myth, or quasi-

myth, is determined and organized by the unspoken reality of scapegoating. My entire point is that the Milomaki myth can only result from a generative process similar to the one we never have any trouble detecting in the case of Machaut.

It is essential to my reading that there be no scapegoat motif in any myth. Obviously, you feel that there can be. The reason you do, in the case of Milomaki, is that the process of victimage is more visible behind the motifs of this particular myth than behind most myths. That is the reason I chose it, of course. Even the most skeptical observers find it difficult to deny that in the case of this myth, I have a point.

This makes my demonstration easier, but it can turn into a disadvantage, as I now see. Many observers will think, as you do, that the validity of the victimage reading is limited to the myths that are most transparent in regard to victimage. They will confuse this relative transparency with what we call a motif, or a theme. As a result, they will go on believing that a myth must talk explicitly about victimage in order to have something to do with it. They would never make that confusion in the case of Machaut. To understand my point, you must keep in mind at all times the incompatibility between a text that reflects the victimage it does not mention and a text that mentions the victimage it no longer reflects.

The myth is no more able to detect the scapegoat phenomenon behind the burning of Milomaki than Machaut can behind the burning of the Jews. If we acknowledge a relationship between this myth and scapegoating, the reason lies in our ability to decode the deceptiveness of the Machaut text. We must realize, however, that this same deceptiveness is present in the Milomaki myth, and that whatever scapegoat we find is not provided directly by the myth, but by our own insight, by our own decoding of the myth, which is just as legitimate as in the case of Machaut.

This is precisely what I want us to do, but I want us to be aware that we are doing it ourselves, and that the myth is not doing it for us. We must never confuse these two things: unanimous victimage or scapegoating as the generative force hidden behind a text, and the so-called scapegoat motif that undermines the hidden generative force.

The reading I suggest is contrary to the spirit of the myth, but we

should not worry about it any more than we do in the case of Machaut. This reading alone can provide us with our first real understanding of what the myth is about, just as a realization that the Jews are scapegoats provides us with a real understanding of what the Machaut text is about. If we read the myth as I propose, we realize that Milomaki must have been selected as a culprit for no other reason than his being a stranger in the community. Just as medieval people killed the Jews during the Black Death because they were enraged and panicked by the death of their friends and relatives, the people who killed Milomaki must have been enraged and panicked by the death of relatives who had eaten some bad fish. They picked the visiting stranger for the same (un)reason that moved medieval crowds to pick the Jews.

I do not believe that such a conjunction of themes, in or out of our history, can occur for purely fortuitous or "poetical" reasons, independent of victimage. In all probability, there was a real victim behind the myth of Milomaki, but we cannot say anything about him. This conclusion is prompted by purely textual reasons and has nothing to do with an excessive faith in the historical value of mythology.

The same must be true of countless other myths less transparent than Milomaki's, but transparent enough if you examine them in a comparative light. We are understandably reluctant to consider the possibility that victimage could hide not merely behind a few particularly transparent myths, but behind myths that suggest it less clearly or not at all, at least superficially understood.

To detect the process of victimage behind the Ojibway myth, you must examine it much more carefully than the myth of Milomaki. This is why I included it in my analysis. I wanted to show what can be done with themes that at first seem alien to victimage, like the lifting of the veil. You perceive the relationship to victimage only if you identify it as a form of the "evil eye" that justifies the drowning of a single "culprit." I am aware, of course, that much more is needed to demonstrate the analytical power of the victimage process in regard to mythical texts, but I said enough to show you that the method has nothing to do with a reduction of all motifs to a "scapegoat motif" that really does not exist.

I am aware that many myths—a majority, no doubt—do not lend

themselves to an isolated demonstration of their genesis in unanimous victimage. To become intelligible as products of such a genesis, the analytical process must be broadened; if we want to analyze one particular myth, we must insert it as a link in a chain of related myths. We must begin with the interpretation of those myths that are most transparent in regard to victimage; then go on to less transparent myths, like the Ojibway myth; and finally move to myths that, at first glance, seem to contain no clue whatever in favor of my hypothesis. As we gradually become familiar with the telltale signs of victimage, your "scapegoat analysis" will become more and more skillful and will encompass myths that contain no visible clues to their own scapegoat genesis.

In *Le Bouc émissaire*, I tried to give examples of such analyses linked to one another in the manner of a chain. I was trying to trace the persistence of some less and less obvious telltale clues behind the successive metamorphoses they undergo. I feel there is an enormous potential in this method, but it should be practiced on a much vaster scale.

I am not completely satisfied with the results so far, not because I have doubts about the validity of the method, but because of the difficulties involved in its application. It demands a large amount of minute detail, and the final product is rather lengthy and intricate. It may well try the patience of readers beyond what can be safely expected at the present time. Let me give you an example of a myth that not only has nothing to do with unanimous victimage, but denies so deliberately and pointedly any involvement in it that, for this very reason, we can confidently assert that it, too, has a lot to do with unanimous victimage.

I seem to be joking, but you all know the myth about what happened to Zeus immediately after he was born. The infant god is threatened by his father Cronos, who wants to devour him. What does his mother do? She calls on the Curetes, who are a band of fierce-looking warriors. They form a circle around Zeus and place him at the center. Understandably, the baby is scared, and to prevent Cronos from discovering his hiding place, the Curetes brandish their weapons around the baby and drown his cries in their own ferocious vociferations.

Does not this myth remind you of an even better known mythical

scene, about the infancy of another Greek god, Dionysus? The Titans brandish some kinds of toys to attract into their circle the little Dionysus, whom they immediately proceed to kill and devour.

In both scenes, we have a ferocious band of potential murderers who agitate certain objects and form a threatening circle around an impotent infant. The Curete scene looks very much like the collective murder of Dionysus, but this time there is no murder. There is a potential murderer in the story, but it is the infant's father, Cronos, not the Curetes, who are supposed to play a protective role.

It is a fact, however, that in light of Dionysus and the Titans, as well as in the light of other occurrences of child murder and cannibalism in Greek mythology, the spectacle of the Curetes howling and brandishing their weapons around a tiny baby is simply too suggestive of this dreadful pattern to be regarded as completely independent of it. In *Le Bouc émissaire*, I concluded that this curious scene must be based on an earlier one, quite similar to the episode of the Titans in the life of Dionysus, and that it must constitute a reinterpretation of the whole affair that aims at proving that Zeus was never killed and devoured by anybody, even though a well-remembered scene of his birth story may give the mistaken impression that he was.

The idea of a murderous Cronos must be a part of that reinterpretation. Far from being truly archaic, as the Freudians would have it, the murderous father must be a late invention, required by the metamorphosis of the real murderers, the Curetes, into protectors. The conjunction of the two new themes is destined to dissimulate the more truly archaic and fundamental pattern, which is the collective murder, of course.

I analyzed this scene in order to show how a myth with no collective murder in it, no actual scene of violence, can testify in favor of my thesis no less and even more eloquently than some additional collective murder that might have remained intact somewhere in the corpus of Greek mythology. We have enough of these scenes, and except for Freud, who was ridiculed for it, they have never aroused the curiosity of people interested in mythology.

It does not befit the dignity of Zeus that he would suffer the fate of so many less august deities. The myth of Zeus and the Curetes has obviously undergone a transformation that points negatively to

the importance of unanimous victimage, especially if you place it in the context of other, not necessarily Greek myths. There are other myths no less awkward than the myth of the Curetes, but they do differ from it in their naïve insistence that they have nothing to do with the phenomenon we are talking about.

This is the case, I believe, with the Scandinavian myth of Baldur's death. In that myth, Baldur is bombarded with all sorts of weapons by the assembled gods, and he should not die from this bombardment because he is supposed to be invulnerable to all projectiles. His brothers, the gods, mean no harm; it is all supposed to be good, clean fun on their part, except that in the end, Baldur dies. The gods are innocent except for the villainous Loki, who took advantage of some minor flaw in Baldur's protective system.

It seems to me that in order to have such a scene, you need an earlier one in which Baldur was really killed by the united gods. You also need a community that feels ashamed of this scandalous murder and tries to do away with it, while retaining as many features of a revered text as it possibly can. We are dealing with a mythological revisionism that already resembles Plato's desire, or our own current desire, not to face up to the violence of mythology.

The people who tampered with such myths obviously shared some of our own attitudes, but they certainly did not treat the traces of collective victimage with the same indifference that we do. They did not regard the collective murder as an inconsequential scene, and mythologists might ask themselves, once in a while, if they did not suspect something to which we have become totally insensitive (in spite of Guillaume de Machaut and our obsession with the historical forms of persecution).

The details of my interpretation can certainly be questioned. But the possibility of myths, in systems rather distant from one another, that try to camouflage rather than eliminate the collective murder scene, should help direct the attention of the specialists toward the scene already identified by Freud as fundamental, if anything can. Could we have here something like a mythical analogon of the ritualistic "comedy of innocence" that Walter has emphasized?

SMITH: That there are myths that bear a distant relationship to one another, I have no doubt. What I have a problem with is that of the two or three hundred stories I know about the Milomaki-type fig-

ure, only fifteen or so are "dark"—to use your more neutral term. There are these other things going on here, and they seem also to represent a lot of other things. How do we account for something we once did not have, and we now have (which is a big issue in regard to ritual and ritual implements)? I guess what I want to know is, what can't you account for?

I have no problem with the fact that there are an enormous number of myths that have what you're calling a scapegoating pattern, but there are a great many myths, at least to my eyes, that bear no resemblance to them; and they are often found simultaneously in the same cultures, told about exactly the same object, in exactly the same situation. So what I really want to know is, is this a partial theory? If it is, I can understand it at one level. As you look ahead, will there be five or six other such complexes that will account for other sorts of things, or is there a way of reducing all of these mythic strategies to one? Are there myths and rituals that are non-scapegoating?

GIRARD: I do not know. There are many myths that I feel unable, at this time, to "generate" through the victimage process, but someone else may be able to do it. At some future date, I may or may not see some clue that I do not see now. I do not think that the power of the hypothesis depends on its ability to solve all problems through some kind of theoretical fiat. I believe, though, that the ultimate test for any global theory of mythology lies in the quality and quantity of intelligible relationships it can establish among the most diverse myths and mythical traditions. I feel that victimage, represented or disguised, unrevealed and revealed, in nonbiblical and in biblical religions, is so crucial to the mystery of religion that I am inclined to focus exclusively on the ramifications of this problem, which become more and more extensive, I feel, as I keep exploring more myths.

SMITH: Isn't there a more complex vocabulary? In other words, I would like to find a kind of verb underneath all of it. I propose the verb "to get." For example, this is the story of how we "get" a flute. We kill; that's one way. We give birth to it; that's another way. Find it; that's another way. Steal it; somebody gives it to us; we fall over it. These are all pretty basic translations of the phrase "to get," and

I want to know why you choose group murder as *the* way to "get." Walter has a way of telling me, with a kind of historical argument, why getting it by killing it might be earlier or more primordial or more originary than all these other ways. I have some problem with that; but the problem with you is that you don't present any kind of historical argument, and I don't quite understand what you're saying. You don't have singular origins, and that's a very important point. How then do you know that, of that whole panoply of modes of getting, we should focus on mob, victim, killings, etcetera, when the Amazonians don't do that?

GIRARD: A more complex vocabulary would help us make more refined distinctions between the innumerable motifs and themes in the sense of the folklorist, or the structuralist. To improve the kind of thematic descriptions we already have is certainly a worthy enterprise, but my own interest lies in another direction. It may be an impossible goal, but I would like to know how rituals and myths came about, and why. That is the reason I focus on the genetic possibilities of what I call mimetic violence and "scapegoating." It is another type of complexity that does not necessarily require a large vocabulary.

BURKERT: I shall try to answer Jonathan's question about forms of "to get." I would not try to reduce all forms to one, such as sacrifice. I would rather insist that "to get" is an absolutely basic function of life. The situation is similar to purifying: I see no problem in purifying with water, no problem in purifying with incense, because it makes a sweet smell and seems to make the air cleaner than before. But I see a problem in purifying with blood, because it really makes a stain, it does not make things clean, it makes them dirty. So we have to ask why this paradox is there: is there something beneath the surface, some kind of transposition going on? Similarly, as to "getting," I see no problem in just finding something, or taking it, or stumbling on it, and perhaps not even in giving birth to it. (Why shouldn't some woman give birth to something strange?) But I do see a problem when you must kill somebody to get food, kill "the creator and giver of all fruits." Here again, I find a difference between what is told on the surface and some deeper motif, and there the sacrificial pattern comes in. But I do not say that it is privileged

by percentage, just that it is a phenomenon that I find difficult to understand. Perhaps this is subjective, but it is still some criterion.

GIRARD: I agree with Walter. I am intrigued, too, when I see that to get some food you must kill the creator and giver of all fruits. No, it is not a question of percentages. But it is important that this phenomenon we do not comprehend should be extremely widespread, not only in primitive mythologies, but in mythologies that have made an effort to get rid of it, and that somehow cannot really succeed, like the Greek Olympian mythology. When we feel we understand a large number of connected phenomena, except for one that keeps recurring again and again and does not quite fit the general picture, the chances are that our whole system of interpretation has already failed. In order to discover a better one, we should not shove under the rug the phenomenon that stubbornly resists our efforts—this is what the myths themselves already do. We should actively focus our attention on it. To my mind, the crucial part of a myth is Walter's "dark event." The crucial part of a ritual is the sacrificial equivalent of that same event, the immolation of the victim. I think the real future of our studies lies in the investigation of the "dark event," not in the side issues that may be raised in order to avoid the central issue.

JOHN LAWRENCE: The real purpose of René's theory and the purpose of this conference is to explore some important connections between religious rituals and violence. I think that René is very straightforward in saying he has a maximal theory, which is exposed to a maximum kind of risk, and its power should be explored in relationship to this distance from the data. I'd like to refer to what seems to me to be an important kind of historical data, connecting religion and violence, which seem to me to be alien to his model. I guess we might call them "rituals of Manicheism." It seems to me that many cultures, including our own and extending back into the ancient world, have developed rituals with a highly ideological character, through which they differentiate between themselves as the righteous ones and some other group that is utterly unrighteous and unworthy of existing, and so should be destroyed. There is a typical scenario of innocence, wherein the group that wants to

exterminate the other group proclaims itself as being utterly innocent and utterly righteous, and that is the prelude to some kind of exterminating action, the premise of which is Manichean. It seems to me that as a model of the kind of violence with religious motivation that exists in the world today, this one is much more prevalent than a model related to the scapegoating. So I would join in with Jonathan to a certain extent, on the principle of selectivity, and ask: if our concern is the present shape of the world, why is this model chosen in preference to some other model, which is certainly also prominent in history? I want to let Bob Jewett get in on the tail of my comment because he knows more about this history than I do.

ROBERT JEWETT: Well, just very briefly, the contention that the Bible is always on the opposite side of the knowledge, that it refuses victimage, does not seem to match the evidence in our particular cultural tradition, which has been shaped so decisively by biblical models. My own work on zealous nationalism has led me to a more dialectical approach to biblical materials, because when you look at the Indian massacre rationale from the beginning, and at major figures of zealous nationalism such as John Brown, you'll see that major actors in these patterns of violence model their behavior on the great conquest narratives of the Old Testament, on the pattern of Phineas in Numbers 25, Elijah, and Elisha. Now I concur with you, René, that there are biblical counterweights to that zealous pattern; but in our tradition, that holy war ideology, which has been secularized in popular media, reaches its apotheosis, I think, in the Reagan administration, which carries out exactly the same Manichean policies that we can trace right back to biblical paradigms. I guess the point here is that there is one side of the biblical heritage, which I think we should in all frankness admit, that takes sides in a Manichean direction with the heroes of zealous violence. As was said in the Numbers account of Phineas, when he broke into the marriage tent and speared the Israelite man and the Midianite woman to avert the plague, "His zeal was the zeal of Yahweh" (Num. 25:6-13); he had a short circuit of zeal in which human rage was flatly identified with divine rage, thus relieving him of responsibility, and his action relieved the plague and redeemed the community. The

pattern of redemptive violence that we can trace throughout many of the strands of biblically oriented communities is directly connected with that kind of a paradigm.

GIRARD: It seems to me that everything John Lawrence said militates in favor of the scapegoat genesis. In my view, what you call "rituals of Manicheism" are not entirely specific to cultures influenced by the Bible, but they may be more widespread there, because of a conflict between the growing awareness of scapegoating, as a result of the Judeo-Christian influence, and the difficulty of giving up the practice. You have to make your scapegoating more convincing to yourself by displacing it and also by accusing your victims of being the chief victimizers, in order to justify your own victimization of them. This is what political propaganda is mostly about, I am afraid.

If you look around, you will see how widespread this devious injection of the Christian problematic into our conflicts really is. Even the most banal political discussions illustrate this modern phenomenon—"How do you dare reproach me for the Gulag when all you do is justify and defend the Pinochets of this world?"—etcetera, etcetera. However nauseating this type of argumentation always is, it should be studied carefully because of its unique religious significance. Never before in history have people spent so much time throwing victims at one another's heads as a substitute for other weapons. This can only happen in a world that though far from Christian, to be sure, is totally permeated by the values of the gospel. Nietzsche was correct in saying this. Nietzsche tried to convince himself that this process of mutual recrimination and *ressentiment* expresses the genuine essence of the Gospels, but this view cannot stand a serious examination. The greater a truth, the more perverted it will be in the hands of sinful men. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* This process of corruption is now reaching a level of intensity that would amaze even Nietzsche himself.

The question of the type of world we live in as a result of the Judeo-Christian influence on us is an important one. It is inseparable, of course, from the question of whether or not the Judeo-Christian scriptures reveal the "scapegoat" or victimage infrastructure of all religions. But the question of that revelation must also be considered separately. This is the only question I have discussed so far. I

certainly do not believe that the Bible gives us a political recipe for escaping violence and turning the world into a utopia. Rather, the Bible discloses certain truths about violence, which the readers are free to use as they see fit. So it is possible that the Bible can make many people more violent and, indirectly, help generate the Manichean ideologies you are talking about. Religious truth and social usefulness do not necessarily go hand in hand. This is Dostoyevski's point in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor.

In the Hebrew Bible, there is clearly a dynamic that moves in the direction of the rehabilitation of the victims, but it is not a cut-and-dried thing. Rather, it is a process under way, a text in travail; it is not a chronologically progressive process, but a struggle that advances and retreats. I see the Gospels as the climactic achievement of that trend, and therefore as the essential text in the cultural upheaval of the modern world.

The question I wish to put to modern anthropology concerning the Bible is why the privilege granted the Bible by Western people is to be considered only the result of ethnocentrism. Could there not be good substantive reason for that privilege—reason arising out of the Bible's power to disclose the truth about human society? For instance, Frazer says that a proof of the nonspecial nature of the Bible is that the centrality of the death of Jesus Christ makes the New Testament just like the many other religious sources that have a dying savior at their core. Thus the same anthropologists who do not want to consider murder an important element in the creation of mythology, when they start talking about the Bible, curiously agree that the proof that the Gospels are the same thing as mythology is the Passion. Thus, rather curiously, they express precisely what I contend: that at the center of all myth, at the center of culture, stands the same great event, the event of the scapegoat. This the New Testament discloses.

The Crucifixion is the same event as in the myths, looked at from a point of view other than that of the persecutors. What this point of view is, is difficult to specify. One can get some idea of it by looking at how the persecutors are portrayed. They are all the "powers of the world," as the psalm quoted by Peter at the beginning of Acts says: "All the kings and powers of this world are united against the Lord and against his anointed" (Acts 4:26). You have the ecclesias-

tical authority, you have Pilate (even if he doesn't want it), you have Herod, and finally you have the most important thing of all, to which all powers of this world return: the mob.

Not only those powers but also the disciples are against Jesus. Peter's denial is reported to make this point. In other words, the Gospels tell us there are moments in which there is absolutely no truth in culture; and I do not think any other source tells us that with quite the same conviction. There are some anticipations in Greek culture, in particular the death of Socrates, but in the accounts of the death of Socrates, philosophy always knows the truth, whereas in Christianity, the Christians themselves say "Peter, our leader, was ignorant." In other words, the New Testament says that truth is not a human truth, that truth is outside of culture and has to be introduced into the world against the grain of culture itself; and it's not going to get there without doing a lot of damage, it's not going to get there by suddenly transforming the world into a utopia. It might even give some a new opportunity for evil, a reverse mode.

We go on persecuting, but in our world everybody persecutes in the name of being against persecution; that's what we call propaganda. We have our own scapegoats, but they are always the people who make scapegoats, and we never persecute directly any more. The honesty of the primitive culture is that you do what you do and do not pretend. So the gospel tells us there will be many victims, but they will always be helped by the Paraclete. I long pondered what that could mean, and suddenly I realized it's so simple. Satan means "the accuser," the word of accusation made true. Paraclete means "the lawyer for the defense," the defender of victims—nothing else. The Holy Spirit is the defender of victims.

So history makes sense in that way. Even if the gospel tells the truth, man is free and is going to do anything he wants with it. Therefore the gospel is going to be disguised and is going to create an extremely complex world. But certainly not one in which the people—especially the people who pretend to speak in the name of the gospel—would infallibly have the truth, as the example of Peter shows. The Gospels warn you, "Look what happens." It would be a mistake, therefore, to read them as justifying a Manichean attitude.

JEWETT: The point is, the violent history of the Western world is to a substantial degree oriented to the other side of the biblical heritage, climaxing in the Book of Revelation. It lacks that kind of openness toward the victim, or sympathy toward the victim, that you get in the Gospels.

GIRARD: I agree that there are differences, but we should not judge too hastily. We all feel highly sympathetic to "real" victims, but our "real" victims are not always the same as our neighbor's "real" victims. Do we really know what total sympathy toward all victims would entail? Certain aspects of the Gospels sound very harsh in the light of modern sentimentalism. This does not necessarily mean that our sympathy toward real victims is greater. I personally believe this sympathy can only be an emanation from the Gospels, and very often a caricatural emanation.

BURTON MACK: I want to see if I can rephrase what I think is going on with several questions, in my own way. When I read *Le Bouc émissaire*, I thought, René, that you had moved away a little bit from the type of argument that you used when you went from "mimetic desire" to "violence and the sacred," in the direction of what I thought was a datum of social history. As I understand you now, that might not be true. Nevertheless, you were quite concerned to talk about the reality of these things, and based your point of departure heavily on the actuality of the plague and the persecutions there.

GIRARD: Well, I can clear up that point very quickly. The first part of *Le Bouc émissaire* is a comparative analysis of medieval persecution and a number of myths. I wanted to show that mythology can be read as a reflection of the scapegoaters' viewpoint, independently from the theory of mimetic desire. This does not mean that mimetic desire has lost its importance in my eyes. I see no contradiction. In the present discussion, I have outlined both approaches.

MACK: What is the status of the historical social data for you, that is, what is the status of the realia of the social dynamics as you explain them in other ways?

GIRARD: I don't take a position on these problems.

MACK: Okay, I can handle that, let's leave it at the level of text, and say that there is a reality reference and we're not going to touch that in terms of methodology, in terms of social history, but you are concerned about mythology having an effect.

GIRARD: Mythology primarily. If you can have a genetic theory of mythology simply by seeing the reality of the victim, I don't say I'm reconstituting any historical scheme. I don't say I know anything about the Milomaki text, except for the fact that if it were a historical text I would smell the real victim.

MACK: Okay, the way I want to phrase my question then, is this. The scapegoat mechanism is for you, at least primarily, a matter of nonconsciousness, as you have phrased it. And even though you have worked out a schema to show various ways of adjudicating that and finally talking about a disclosure, the disclosure comes from another text, the Gospels, which then, because of the way you've answered the questions here, especially from John Lawrence and Bob Jewett, also really works at a concealment level. That is, you were quite easily drawn into using this kind of social-historical data as an inverse argument, or seeing it as an inversion of the scapegoat mechanism vis-à-vis the Gospels. You could use that to argue for the scapegoat mechanism, but you didn't say anything about how you could use the same kind of data that are put before us here to talk about the status of the Gospels. In other words, it's almost as if you have reified the gospel text over against the mythological text in the same way. They both work at the level of concealment; nevertheless, the gospel text also somehow discloses.

GIRARD: No, no, I wouldn't say that the text of the gospel conceals. It's all revelation, but we are not able to take it in.

MACK: But what does it mean if it's a revelation that we can't take?

GIRARD: Ah, but we can take it gradually. It's seeping in through history, and it has more and more effect, even though we don't recognize it. I refer you to the words of John's gospel, "I have yet many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).

MACK: Unrecognized revelation?

GIRARD: Unrecognized revelation, which is all the gospel is about—which is, "You don't understand these things now, but someday you will." We understand more and more.

MACK: Okay, I just wanted to hear you say that.

GIRARD: I wouldn't say that we have the right revelation now. I would say our history, in contact with the text of the Gospels,

teaches us a certain significance of that text and a certain action of that text. Therefore there are invisible aspects of that text that have become more perceptible today. That text is alive.

TERRELL BUTLER: What is important to me about this conversation is the distinction that you made in *Le Bouc émissaire* between a text of persecution or a myth on the one hand, and the Bible on the other. In the former, the scapegoat mechanism is left out, while in the latter, it is put in.

GIRARD: The important distinction I make is between the case where the victim appears and his status as victim is justified—"it is right to hate the enemy" and so forth, where that justification is the result of the nonconscious operation of the scapegoat mechanism—and the case where we are told explicitly that the victim is a scapegoat, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." The former is a text that conceals, whereas the latter is a text that reveals.

MACK: But it is double damnation if that revelatory text is used in the way that Bob Jewett and John Lawrence say it is by some contemporaries.

GIRARD: Why? That's what's predicted. The fact is the Christians have never been able precisely to see or to state the point made in the text, "Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish'" (John 11:49-50).

MACK: The Christians have never been able to see that?

GIRARD: Well, it would be wrong to say they've never been able to see it; rather, let me say that they have never been able to formulate it in the language of modern theory, as I do. They have been able to conceive of all sorts of in-between statements, but nothing clear-cut. And that corresponds to the situation: nothing is clear-cut. We are in a place between the full revelation of the scapegoat and the totally mythical. In history, we are always between the gospel and myth.