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The Devil and Humpty Dumpty: A Girardian Reading of *All the King's Men*

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Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* is widely recognized as a masterpiece of American literature. It earned him his first of two Pulitzer Prizes, and it has also been adapted twice for film. In the novel, Willie Stark grows up in poverty in an unnamed southern state. He tries to make a career in politics by doing the right thing, but it is only after he discards conventional morality and embraces amoral pragmatism that he experiences political success, eventually becoming governor. At the apex of his power, Willie is assassinated by Adam Stanton, a highly skilled surgeon of inflexible moral character. At the end of the novel, Jack Burden, the narrator, calls Adam "the man of idea" and Willie "the man of fact." He argues that each killed the other even as each tried "to become the other." Each was the other's ruin "because each was incomplete with the terrible division of their age."[1]

Warren claims *All the King's Men* "was never intended to be a book about politics. Politics merely provided the framework story in which the deeper concerns, whatever their final significance, might work themselves out."[2] Still, several scholars argue that the novel has various political teachings and meanings. John Burt concludes that Willie's story is one "of moral impasse" in which "moral language is corrupt, and moral institutions do nothing but ensure suffering, but departure from either yields only confusion."[3] Stephen Ealy states that while Willie's dubious means compromise his ends, the novel's hopeful epigraph from Dante's *Purgatorio*

captures the reality that "the novel is not merely a rejection of politics."[4] Joseph Lane focuses on Willie and examines the "Stark regime." Lane claims the novel illustrates "a set of political dangers inherent in certain commonly held views about the character of American democracy" and shows "how these dangers are manifested both in the practice of our politics and in the character of our citizens."[5] Using Alexis de Tocqueville as a guide, Eric Sands analyzes Willie and Jack, seeing them as representatives of the political and social spheres, respectively. He writes, "Willie was not born as the man who would become governor. He was molded, shaped, and created by those around him—the 'King's men.'"[6]

These representative pieces of scholarship contain significant insights into the novel, but the essence of the text remains only partially understood. In Warren's words, what are the "deeper concerns" in the novel for which politics is "the framework"? Warren attributes Willie's meteoric rise to "the fact that somehow he could vicariously fulfill some secret needs of the people about him."[7] What are the secret needs? Lane describes how the novel grapples with dangers confronting American democracy, but does the novel have a meaning only or primarily for democracy? Is there another way in which Willie is "created by those around him," one that is more primal than Sands observes? Why does a novel with an epigraph from Dante take its title from a nursery rhyme about Humpty Dumpty? To answer these questions, and thereby to excavate the deeper meaning in *All the King's Men*, this article analyzes the novel through the mimetic theory of René Girard.

Girard wrote about literature, anthropology, myth, religion, and many other topics. All his writings were devoted to constructing, refining, and defending his mimetic theory. A few words about its overarching structure will be helpful to readers unfamiliar with his ideas.[8] Mimetic theory contains three major components: a theory of desire, a theory of collective violence, and a theory of biblical interpretation. First, for Girard, all desire is imitative (mimetic). Mimetic desire is strongly prone to producing conflict at the individual, group, and societal levels. Second, when a mimetic crisis reaches a point when a community could

self-destruct, society often engages in a collective act of violence in which an individual or small group deemed to be the true cause of the conflict is sacrificed. The victim (scapegoat) brings peace and restores order after dying, and the community transfigures its guilty demon into a saving divinity. Religion and culture emerge in the aftermath of the founding murder. Third, Girard locates equivalents to mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism in the Bible, especially in the concept of Satan. He also argues that by revealing the innocence of victims and taking their side, the Bible stands apart from the sacrificial violence of the ancient sacred; it damages the effectiveness, but not necessarily the appeal, of the scapegoat mechanism.[9]

More about mimetic theory is offered later, but here enough has been conveyed about the theory to make clear what is at stake in this article. Jack's description regarding the relationship between Adam and Willie is the most important piece of evidence showing that the state in which the novel takes place is in the throes of a mimetic crisis. The crisis is resolved only when both Adam and Willie are murdered—that is, scapegoated. This is the secret need Willie (and Adam) satisfies. If Girard is right that the scapegoating mechanism is the origin of human culture as well as its historical source of renewal, then Warren is right about the novel not being about politics, at least not in the way many scholars think. Its "deeper concerns" turn out to be the deepest concerns of all.

Interpreted through the lens of Girard's mimetic theory, it becomes clear *All the King's Men* is, at its core, a novel about the power of collective violence to transform social and political chaos into peace and order. Thus, if the novel is in some way about politics, it is not only or primarily about the politics of a particular regime, such as democracy in America. In the Girardian sense, the novel depicts the satanic foundation of politics as such.[10] In addition to illuminating the meaning of *All the King's Men*, this article extends the scholarship on mimetic theory to an important but as yet underdeveloped area, American literature. It also shows scholars of political theory, and especially American political thought, how mimetic theory could be used to gain new insights into existing

problems and topics of interest. Finally, in grounding its interpretation of the novel in Girard's nonsectarian use of the concept of Satan, this article shows that the Bible remains a valuable source of theoretical ideas for understanding literature and politics.

Desire and the Stereotype of Crisis

According to Girard, desires, just like viruses, are highly contagious. As they spread, they can threaten the stability and even existence of an entire community. In such circumstances, the stage is set for persecution. About persecution, Girard explains, "[T]he persecutions in which we are interested generally take place in times of crisis, which weaken normal institutions and favor *mob* formation."[11] Thus he calls the first stereotype of persecution the stereotype of crisis. The types of crises he has in mind include epidemics and plagues such as the "black death," natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, political upheavals such as the French Revolution, and religious conflicts such as the wars of the Reformation. Underneath this wide variety of crises is a recurring theme. Such crises are often described in terms of a breakdown of social differences. As a representative piece of historical evidence, Girard cites a Portuguese monk writing in 1697 about the experience of such a crisis: "[L]aws are no longer obeyed; business comes to a halt; families lose coherence, and the streets their lively atmosphere. Everything is reduced to extreme confusion. Everything goes to ruin."[12] Girard also sees a crisis of undifferentiation in works of imagination such as Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* and Euripides's *Bacchae*. Such a crisis is at the heart of *All the King's Men*.

In the novel, the loss of differences manifests in several ways. One of the most glaring is the widespread breakdown of family relationships resulting from sexual indiscretions. Monty Irwin, a respected lawyer and judge from a prestigious old family, cuckolds his best friend and neighbor, breaking up the marriage and fathering a son, Jack Burden. When Jack is six, the "Scholarly Attorney," Jack's nickname for his legal father Ellis Burden, leaves the family. A parade of stepfathers such as "the Tycoon," "the Count," and "the Young Executive" come and go. Jack's nicknames for his many

fathers relegate them all to the equality of insignificance. Jack's brief marriage to a woman named Lois lasts only as long as she can satisfy his desire for physical pleasure without generating an emotional connection. He describes Lois as a "well-dressed animal" and explains, "I had loved Lois the machine, the way you love the filet mignon or the Georgia peach, but I definitely was not in love with Lois the person."[13] Jack is convinced all his mother's marriages failed because the men in her life could not satisfy her in the bedroom. In marrying Lois, Jack unknowingly ended up imitating his mother. Jack's relationship with his mother is not physically incestuous, but it seems, at times, to be in the vicinity of that type of erosion of familial differences.[14]

The general deterioration of political order is another manifestation of crisis. At Willie's insistence, Jack set out on a research project to dig up dirt on Irwin. Jack learned that when Irwin was the state's attorney general, his estate was facing foreclosure. Miraculously, his debts were paid in full. Soon after, Irwin resigned as attorney general and took a much more lucrative job as legal counsel with the power company. After a long investigation, Jack discovered that the power company had bribed Irwin to interpret a legal dispute with the state in the company's favor. The job with the power company was an additional reward for good service. Mortimer Littlepaugh discovered this at the time. Littlepaugh was legal counsel for the power company, but he was fired to make way for Irwin. Indignant at being the victim of such corruption, Littlepaugh appealed for justice directly to the state's governor, Joel Stanton. But Stanton and Irwin were close friends. The governor refused to investigate. In despair, Littlepaugh, the sacrifice for this corrupt bargain, committed suicide. Willie's corruption scandalizes his enemies, but the novel clearly shows that his acts are a continuation of an erosion of the differences between virtue and vice that extend into the past.

Girard maintains that human desire is fundamentally mimetic—that is, it is imitative. Individuals learn what to want by seeing what others desire and appropriate. People become models of desire for others. Imitative desire can manifest in good and bad ways. In

Evolution and Conversion, Girard explains, "There would be no human mind, no education, no transmission of culture without mimesis."[15] In some instances, such as acquiring a first language, imitation is not only good but essential to human survival. This is an example of positive mimesis, and this kind of imitation does not generate conflict. Unfortunately, negative mimesis is much more common and much more likely to produce quarrels. A textbook Girardian example of negative imitation in action is evident when observing children at play. Place identical toys in front of two toddlers, and then watch conflict erupt as one child reaches for the toy picked up by the other instead of grabbing the unchosen identical object sitting in front of him or her. This happens because the first child models desire for the second by bestowing value on the chosen toy. Adults like to think they outgrow conflictual imitation, but that is not true. They might not fight (as much) over toys, but competition for goods such as reputation or prestige—that is, conflict over material nothings—can be lethal. Human beings never outgrow imitation.

In Girard's terms, the likelihood of mimetic conflict also depends on whether a desire is externally or internally mediated. In instances of external mediation, a person becomes a model of desire for another person, but the distance between them is sufficient to prevent the outbreak of conflict. For example, a young girl may deeply admire a professional athlete, but the vast differences in age, skill, social status, and so on guarantee the two will never become real rivals. The professional athlete could be a type of positive model, setting a standard of success the young girl tries to imitate. In contrast, internal mediation is present when a subject and a model are in such proximity that envy and competition are likely. This is because, as Girard explains, "if his model is also his peer, then his model's objects are accessible. Therefore, rivalry will eventually erupt."[16] These relationships between the subject and model become reciprocal. The subject's interest in the object intensifies the model's own attachment to what is already in his or her possession. The subject thus becomes the model for the model and tensions escalate.

The importance or even awareness of the object can disappear as acquisitive mimesis—that is, the desire to possess the object—gives way to what Girard calls "metaphysical desire," which is the desire to *be* the model. He writes, "Imitative desire is always a desire to be Another. There is only one metaphysical desire but the particular desires which instantiate this primordial desire are of infinite variety."[17] As reciprocation between rivals accelerates, "there are no genuine differences left between the two, or, to put it more precisely, between their desires."[18] As the rivals become more and more alike, as they become what Girard calls "doubles," they insist with growing vehemence that they could not be more different. Each comes to hate and wants to destroy the other as each becomes their rival's twin. As Girard states, "The truth of metaphysical desire is death."[19]

In *All the King's Men*, the disappearance of differences strengthens internal mediation, produces growing numbers of mimetic rivalries, generates metaphysical desires, and creates doubles. Adam falls into rivalry with Willie, and they become "model-obstacles" for each other. About Adam's understanding of the world, Jack says Adam believes "there was a time a long time back when everything was run by high-minded, handsome men . . . who sat around a table and candidly debated the good of the public thing."[20] This also describes Willie in his early political career. Like Adam, he wants to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. Willie's later embrace of amoral pragmatism is the opposite of Adam's vision. Listening to one of Willie's speeches, Adam seethes at the governor's use of the word *justice* to describe his leadership.[21] Adam defines himself by what he thinks he is not—Willie. Adam is a virtue snob.

Scandalized as he is, Adam is inevitably drawn to imitate Willie, after a fashion. In the middle of the novel, Willie persuades Adam to become director of his hospital building project by offering him the possibility of doing good on a scale he could not achieve alone. Inexperienced in the pragmatic politics for which Willie has a natural talent, Adam becomes anxious and violent, a failed version of Willie. At the same time, Willie's extreme reluctance to let his

hospital project mix with his conventional corrupt practices resonates with Adam's moral purity. Toward the end of the novel, Willie even tries to recover some of the goodness he (and Adam) has lost. He ends all his adulterous relationships and wants to return to his wife, Lucy. The reciprocal exchanges that develop over the entire novel make clear neither character is only, or mainly, a "man of fact" or a "man of idea." Adam and Willie are doubles.

A similar pattern can be observed in the relationship between Jack and Willie. As a journalist covering Willie's first run for governor, Jack is nauseated by the moral pretentiousness of Willie's speeches. When Willie asks Jack why his speeches, filled with important points and facts as they are, never seem to catch on with the audience, Jack explains, "[T]hey don't give a damn about that. . . . Just stir 'em up, it doesn't matter how or why, and they'll love you and come back for more. . . . That's what they come for. Tell 'em anything. But for Sweet Jesus' sake don't try to improve their minds."[22] Jack sets himself up as a model for Willie. Willie ends up taking this advice all the way to the governor's mansion. Later, when Jack tells Willie he does not know why he works for the governor, Willie laughs and says, "[N]o, you don't know why you work for me. But I know."[23] When Jack presses Willie for an answer, the governor explains, "[Y]ou work for me because I'm the way I am and you're the way you are. It is an arrangement founded on the nature of things."[24] Willie is not being clever or cryptic. He knows their relationship has changed. Jack the worldly adviser has been outdone by a man who put such cynical ideas into practice. Willie is the model of action a passive Jack wishes he could imitate. Later, as Willie attempts to recover his moral integrity, Jack also ends his participation in political corruption, saying he is not quitting on Willie but is "quitting certain things."[25] The doubling between these characters is so clear that twice in the novel Jack says, "[T]he story of Willie Stark and the story of Jack Burden are, in one sense, one story."[26]

The early phase of the mimetic crisis in *All the King's Men* aligns closely with Girard's understanding of the concept of Satan. Like Jesus, Satan presents himself as a model for human desires.

Unlike Jesus, he encourages people to transgress taboos and break down prohibitions, promising them liberation from constraints and the achievement of total autonomy. In Genesis 3, the serpent sets himself up as a model for Eve to emulate, telling her that by eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge she will be like a god. As Girard explains, "[T]he road on which Satan starts us is broad and easy; it is the superhighway of mimetic crisis."[27] Indeed, accusation and conflict between Adam and Eve is one of the first effects of the Fall. Girard also places a strong emphasis on the biblical notion of scandal (*skandalon*), which is derived from the Greek verb meaning "to limp."[28] Much like Oedipus limping along as if he is tripping over his shadow, human beings in a state of mimetic rivalry become model-obstacles—that is, stumbling blocks—for each other. In the Gospel of Matthew, when Peter tells Jesus he will not have to face the humiliating death he has just prophesied, Peter presents himself as a model of courage for Jesus to follow. Jesus makes the link between Satan and scandal clear when he responds, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me" (Matthew 16:23). For Girard, it is the exponential growth of such scandals that "produces disorder and instability in society."[29]

As the treatment of the novel so far makes clear, major characters are scandalized and drawn into conflict in a state descending into a moral and political crisis. Such events resonate with Girard's ideas about mimetic rivalry, internal mediation, the emergence of doubles, and the stereotype of crisis. If Satan encourages the explosion of scandals in the early stage of a mimetic crisis, what prevents things from spiraling out of control and shattering the community? In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asks the Pharisees, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" (3:23). In drawing attention to the idea that a demon could bring peace to another person through exorcism, Girard sees Jesus identifying the scapegoating mechanism as the satanic resolution to the mimetic crisis. In *When These Things Begin*, Girard argues, "[W]hat the Gospel adds, and what is unique to it, I think, is that *Satan is order*. The order of this world is not divine, it's sacrificial, it's satanic in a certain sense."[30] To understand this point more clearly, and to see how this notion of satanic order

and renewal is present in *All the King's Men*, a more thorough description of the scapegoating mechanism and the remaining stereotypes of persecution is needed.

Sacrificial Violence and the Stereotypes of Crimes and Selection

In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Girard writes that a community in the midst of a mimetic crisis can survive by satisfying "its rage against an arbitrary victim in the unshakable conviction that it has found the one and only cause of its trouble."[31] He was aware how strange such an interpretation might sound, writing, "[P]eople do not wish to know that the whole of human culture is based on the mythic process of conjuring away man's violence by endlessly projecting it upon new victims. All cultures and all religions are built on this foundation."[32] In many works, Girard draws on a wide range of biological, anthropological, and ethological research to support this claim, suggesting that the scapegoat mechanism is likely the key to human evolution and survival. He writes, "[B]eyond a certain threshold of mimetic power, animal societies become impossible. This threshold corresponds to the appearance of the victimage [*sic*] mechanism and would thus be the threshold of hominization."[33] He also claims not all human communities were able to cross this threshold, and thus "the scapegoat mechanism provided a fundamental contribution to the *fitness* of the group. This is the reason why such a practice is found throughout the world."[34] Such claims led the philosopher Michel Serres, Girard's friend, to describe him as the "new Darwin of the human sciences."[35]

Even though a sacrificial victim appears to be random, this does not mean there are no common characteristics among those selected as scapegoats. In *The Scapegoat*, Girard identifies two additional stereotypes of persecution: the stereotype of crimes and the stereotype of selection. For the stereotype of crimes, accusations of murder, especially parricide or fratricide, are common. So too are allegations of sexual impropriety, frequently in the forms of adultery or incest. Claims of cannibalism, poisoning of wells,

witchcraft, or religious transgressions are also typical. Communities on the brink of committing an act of collective violence tend to believe that their victims are guilty of violating the most important laws of social order.[36]

In a mimetic crisis, even if the victim is guilty of some of these crimes, the person is almost certainly not alone in having done such things. How then is selection *really* conducted? About scapegoats, Girard explains that although "they are accused of crimes that eliminate distinctions[,] . . . in actuality they are identified as victims for persecution because they bear the signs of victims."[37] This is the stereotype of selection. Girard argues, "[E]xtreme characteristics ultimately attract collective destruction at some time or other."[38] Stereotypical victims include women, children, the elderly, ethnic and religious minorities, the poor, people with diseases, people with deformities, the insane, and the unattractive. Victims can also be very healthy, wealthy, beautiful, and powerful. In other words, victims can come from either end of various social, economic, and other spectrums. Some scapegoats exit through the basement and others through the roof.[39]

In *All the King's Men*, Willie and Adam both exhibit several characteristics of victims. Willie has affairs with several women. Sadie Burke, a secretary and early mentor, and Anne Stanton, Adam's sister and Jack's former girlfriend, are the most prominent. Lucy Stark knows about Willie's illicit relationships, but she retires to a country farm, forgoing divorce so as not to harm Willie's political career. About this arrangement, Jack says voters "wanted both Mom's gingerbread and the black-lace negligee and didn't hold it against the Boss for having both. What [they] would have held against the Boss was a divorce."[40] Tom Stark, Willie's son, is a scoundrel. He sleeps with numerous young women, creating a significant political crisis for his father by getting a girl pregnant. He never seems to feel anything like love for others or remorse for his acts. While Willie symbolizes sexual transgression and family decline, Adam's life is almost entirely devoid of interest in sex or family. Adam is not married and has no girlfriend. He seems to have no social life, let alone a romantic life. From opposite ends of

the spectrum, Willie and Adam do not fit with the state's sexual and family norms.

Adam and Willie are born into opposite ends of the state's social hierarchy, but they live their lives in ways that erode those distinctions. Despite being a highly successful surgeon from an illustrious family, Adam is not interested in status. He lives alone in a "shabby little monastic apartment where the grand piano glittered like a sneer in the midst of the near-squalor."[41] He regularly undercharges or refuses to charge patients because he is not interested in money. In contrast, Willie grows up in poverty. In his first meeting with Willie, Jack describes him as "wearing a seven-fifty seersucker suit" and a "blue-striped tie which you know his wife gave him last Christmas."[42] In his first run for governor, Willie delivers a thundering speech filled with class resentment. He shouts, "[W]hatever a hick wants he's got to do for himself. Nobody in a fine automobile and sweet-talking is going to do it for him. When I come back to run for Governor again, I'm coming out on my own and I'm coming for blood."[43] Once in office, Willie becomes accustomed to the finer things. To keep the "hicks" on his side, Willie retains the dumpy exterior of his childhood home, but he upgrades the inside of the house considerably for his father's comfort.

Willie and Adam are also extraordinarily powerful people. In office, Willie uses blackmail and other illegal means to achieve his political ends. He justifies such acts by arguing that "the law is always too short and too tight for growing humankind. The best you can do is do something and then make up some law to fit."[44] He tells an adoring crowd chanting his name that he will build them a hospital, raise their level of education, increase their wealth and comfort, and do so much more for them because it is their right. He says to them, "You shall not be deprived of hope! . . . Your need is my justice."[45] Willie admits his corruption to his mesmerized audience, claiming, "Sure, I got a bunch of crooks around here, but they're too lily-livered to get very crooked. I got my eye on 'em. And do I deliver the state something? I damned well do."[46] Willie's good ends and evil means make him a kind of political monster.

This polarizes elites but strengthens his bond with his "hick" supporters, sending them into near Dionysian frenzies during his public speeches.

Adam's power as a physician is analogous to Willie's power as a politician. When Tom Stark suffers a major spinal cord injury during a college football game, Adam flies back from out of state in the middle of the night to assess Willie's son. Adam is in full command of the situation, and Willie believes Adam has the power to deliver a miracle. Adam explains to Willie that the extent of the spinal cord damage can be determined only through surgery. The surgery makes clear Tom's spinal cord is crushed and he will be paralyzed for the rest of his life. Willie's vast power cannot change this fact. Earlier in the novel, Adam allows Jack to observe a "prefrontal lobectomy" he is about to perform on a patient who suffers from "catatonic schizophrenia." About the surgery, Adam explains, "[A]fter we are through with [the patient] he will be different. He will be relaxed and cheerful and friendly. . . . He will be perfectly happy." When Jack sarcastically remarks such a path to happiness should be booming business, Adam admonishes him, saying that if the surgery is unsuccessful, then the patient will not be "cheerfully extroverted" but "completely and cheerfully amoral."[47] Adam has power over life and death. He has the power to make monsters and, eventually, to become one.

Adam is not sacrificed until the end of the novel. Willie, in contrast, is put forward as a scapegoat on more than one occasion. Early in his political career, "Cousin Willie" is appointed Mason County treasurer. He is tasked with taking bids to build a new schoolhouse. He selects a builder known to do reliable work at a reasonable cost, but his choice sets off a political crisis. A builder with political connections also submitted a bid. That bid was higher than the one Willie selected. That builder was also known to make poor-quality bricks and to do overall shoddy work. Nevertheless, Willie comes under vigorous attack from county citizens because the bid he selected came from a contractor who uses black laborers. Fiscal responsibility is no match for accusations of stirring up racial tension. Townspeople and local law enforcement accuse

Willie of being "too big fer his britches," of "putten white folks out of work," and of being a "n—ger-lover."[48] Consequently, Lucy is fired from her job teaching at the local elementary school and Willie is voted out of office. The contract is then given to the politically connected builder. A few years later, the schoolhouse fire escape collapses during a fire drill and several children are killed. During one of the funerals, a father of one the dead children grabs Willie's arm and shouts, "Oh, God, I am punished for accepting iniquity and voting against an honest man!"[49] Willie the pariah is transformed into Willie the righteous.

During Willie's first run for governor, he learns he was recruited to run not because of his sterling character but as a ploy by a political machine to defeat a rival outfit. Sadie Burke tells him, "You are the sacrificial goat. You are the ram in the bushes. You are a sap. For you let 'em."[50] This revelation gives Willie a strong urge to get drunk for the first time in his life. Passed out on his hotel bed, Willie, as described by Jack, is lying down with "the hands . . . crossed piously on the bosom like the hands of a *gisant* on a tomb in a cathedral."[51] When Willie wakes up, "Cousin Willie" is dead and "the Boss" is born. After Willie's defeating one political machine and all but doing the same to the other, Jack explains, "And there wasn't any Democratic party. There was just Willie, with his hair in his eyes and his shirt sticking to his stomach with sweat. And he had a meat ax in his hand and was screaming for blood."[52]

The previously mentioned hospital project not only brings Willie and Adam into volatile proximity. The actions they take during this project set off a chain reaction that culminates in their deaths. Sadie, the scorned lover, tells Tiny Duffy, the lieutenant governor, about Willie's affair with Anne. Regularly humiliated by Willie, Tiny becomes dangerously resentful toward Willie after the governor cancels a corruption deal that would have paid Tiny well. Tiny anonymously calls Adam and tells him his appointment as hospital director was a direct result of the illicit relationship between his sister and the governor. Adam flies into a rage. He walks into the capitol and shoots Willie under the rotunda dome.

Willie's bodyguard shoots Adam. Adam dies immediately. Willie is taken to hospital. Willie asks Jack why Adam tried to assassinate him, saying, "I never did anything to him. . . . He was all right. The Doc."[53] Willie expresses no anger over being shot, simply bafflement over Adam's behavior. Willie dies.

About the typical scapegoat, Girard argues, "It is important to cultivate the future victim's supposed potential for evil, to transform him into a monster of iniquity—not for esthetic reasons, but to enable him to polarize, to literally draw to himself, all the infectious strains in the community and transform them into sources of peace and fecundity."[54] Willie takes on elements of the monstrous, sometimes almost literally. Jack often uses animal imagery to describe Willie's physical appearance and mannerisms. Willie's political, sexual, and familial corruption draw toward him the sins of the state. He is sacrificed. Once he enters the vortex of mimesis, Adam rapidly deteriorates from moral idealist to murderer. He is the only character capable of committing the assassination, but he is triggered to act by a larger group. The community works through Adam and then immediately disposes of him. The act of collective violence works only if the risk of retribution afterward is nonexistent. Neither Adam nor Willie leaves behind a family or other group capable of seeking revenge. As the novel shows, the deaths of Willie and Adam really do reconstitute order, bringing "peace and fecundity" to those who survive.

Visiting Sadie in a sanitarium, Jack learns the sequence of events that led to Willie's assassination. The brittleness and fury she displayed for most of the novel have disappeared. In the aftermath of the murders, she is serene. Tiny realizes his dreams and becomes governor, doing a poor imitation of Willie. Jack visits Lucy. Tom has died. Although there is some doubt about paternity, Lucy is taking care of what she thinks is Tom's infant son. She names the baby Willie because "Willie was a great man." Jack agrees and tells the reader, "[P]erhaps [Willie] could not tell his greatness from ungreatness and so mixed them together that what was adulterated was lost. But he had it. I must believe that."[55] Jack and Anne are also healed. Decades after their relationship ended in failure, they

get married. Together, they plan to leave Burden's Landing and "go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time."[56]

According to Girard, when a community successfully uses the scapegoat mechanism, "it then finds itself without adversaries, purged of all hostility against those for whom, a second before, it had shown the most extreme rage."[57] Unaware their own violence produced the effect, they attribute the new harmony to the dead victim. Girard explains, "[W]hat is essential is the cadaver as talisman, as the bearer of life and fertility; culture always develops as a *tomb*."[58] Communities want to remember, as best they can, how to maintain their fragile peace and how to reproduce the effects of sacrificial violence if disorder returns. Over time, they develop systems of prohibitions and rituals as well as myths portraying the original crisis and its resolution. In Girard's mind, culture is not made by people debating the rational implementation of ideas about the society in which they wish to live. Religion, "the mother of culture," gives birth to culture.[59] Religion and culture together emerge from the founding murder and serve the practical end of containing human violence, "at least temporarily."[60] In *All the King's Men*, the temporary peace of the state expired. A culture was not founded in the novel, but through an act of collective violence, a culture was renewed.

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard suggests the origins of monarchy can be found in the scapegoat mechanism. He explains, "The king has a genuine function identical to that of any sacrificial victim. He is the catalyst who converts sterile, infectious violence into positive cultural values. The monarchy might be compared to the factories that convert household refuse into fertilizer."[61] In some coronation rituals, the moral pollution accumulated while becoming king makes the monarch worthy of eventual death. It also clears the field for the exercise of vast political power while he is still alive as a type of god-in-waiting.[62] Willie lived beyond laws and morality while doing good things for his state. It is by serving his "hicks," in life and in violent death, that Willie serves the secret need of his state. In his unconscious service to the state, especially

to the elite class, something similar can be said of Adam. In "Humpty Dumpty," the relevant part goes, "all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." The conclusion of the novel, interpreted through Girard's mimetic theory, shows the nursery rhyme is wrong. All the king's men work through Adam to murder Willie. With the deaths of Willie and Adam, the community is put back together again. Willie even receives a vague sort of deification. The idea that he will vicariously live on in his alleged grandson suggests Humpty Dumpty too is restored because, like the king, he never really dies.

In *The Scapegoat*, Girard argues that "the kingdom of Satan is not one among others. The Gospels state explicitly that Satan is the principle of every kingdom. How is that possible? By being the principle of violent expulsion and the deceit it produces."[63] The treatment of *All the King's Men* thus far has shown how the concept of Satan accounts for stirring up scandals and then controlling them through "the principle of violent expulsion." The novel confirms Girard's interpretation that Satan really can cast out Satan. The devil and Humpty Dumpty are the same thing. If Satan is "the principle of every kingdom," then the novel has no unique relationship to questions about democratic leadership, the democratic regime, or the challenges of reconciling means and ends in democratic politics. If Girard is correct, then the novel depicts the first and most important political problem ever to confront human beings since the emergence of politics and culture. This might be difficult for readers to see because the principle of Satan is not merely survival through "violent expulsion." Satan survives through "the deceit it produces," and that deceit is the domain of myth.

Myth and *Méconnaissance*

According to Girard, myths play an essential role in the successful institutionalization of the satanic scapegoating mechanism. Myths do this by allowing communities simultaneously to remember and to misunderstand the origins of their order and the perpetuation of their unity. Myths function only when those who are bound together by them live in a state of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*).

He explains, "[I]n order to have a scapegoat, one must fail to perceive the truth, and therefore one cannot represent the victim as a *scapegoat*, but rather as a righteous victim, which is what mythology does."[64] Misrecognition is present in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. It is also present in such mythic accounts of the founding of civilizations as Livy's tales of the deaths of Romulus and the founding of Rome. In such myths, the killers are always justified in their persecutions. The victims are always truly guilty. The proof of the crowd's justice is the order that results from their violence.

In Girard's understanding, the Bible gradually but irrevocably undermines the sacrificial system's ability to save people from the consequences of their own violence. The Bible accomplishes this by repeatedly insisting that those who are victims of collective violence—that is, the scapegoats—are innocent. God takes the side of victims, not the crowd. In *Job: The Victim of His People*, Girard argues, "The victim has the last word in the Bible; we are influenced by this even though we do not want to pay the Bible the homage it deserves."[65] A representative example of this biblical difference can be seen in the story of Cain and Abel. In Genesis 4, Cain's envy of his brother Abel culminates in the first murder. After this fratricide, Cain's legacy includes developments such as "legal institution, domestication of animals, music, and technology."[66] Like ancient myths, the Cain and Abel story contains a mimetic crisis that is resolved in a murder that gives birth to civilization. Unlike ancient myths, Abel is not deified, and Cain is not justified. Abel's blood cries out to God, and God takes his side.

The innocence of the victim is amplified in the Gospels. In *The Scapegoat*, Girard writes, "[T]he Gospels set in motion the only textual mechanism that can put an end to humanity's imprisonment in the system of mythological representation based on the false transcendence of a victim who is made sacred because of the unanimous verdict of guilt."[67] In the Gospel of John, the logic of the scapegoating mechanism is made transparent when Caiaphas defends the persecution of Jesus on the grounds that "it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the

whole nation should perish" (11:50). Earlier, Jesus tells his persecutors, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning[;] . . . he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). According to Girard, these words are not gratuitous insults. They are also not evidence of anti-Semitism. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus makes his universal perspective clear by lamenting the murders of all the prophets, *from Abel to Zachariah*, and the blood that has been shed "from the foundation of the world" (11:47–51). In his earthly ministry, Jesus is drawing attention to the satanic nature of all persecution, not just his persecution.

Even though the power of Satan to cast out Satan continues to diminish because the "Cross has destroyed once and for all the cathartic power of the scapegoat mechanism," this does not mean violence disappears.[68] Mimetic crises continue to emerge, and many human beings still cling to what used to work. Girard argues, "Collective violence must therefore be recognized as a mechanism that is still creating myths in our universe," but the entire process "is functioning less and less well."[69] In *I See Satan Fall like Lightening*, he identifies a representative example of the enduring appeal and weakening power of scapegoating and myth when he describes the "horrible miracle" of a second-century pagan, Apollonius of Tyana. As approvingly recounted by Philostratus, Apollonius eventually persuades a crowd of Ephesians to rid themselves of a plague by stoning a demon (a beggar) to death. But, Girard explains, it takes much more effort to ignite the act of collective violence in the second century A.D. than in the second century B.C.[70]

Friedrich Nietzsche also understood the ordering power of sacrificial violence. Girard believes both he and Nietzsche see the same fundamental difference between Christianity and the archaic sacred. Girard writes, "[Nietzsche] was too honest to dissimulate the disturbing, the ugly sides of the Dionysian . . . [for he] clearly saw that pagan mythology, like pagan ritual, centers on the killing of victims or on their expulsion."[71] In other words, Nietzsche's enthusiasm for Dionysus is disturbing precisely because it is so clear-sighted. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche's madman tells a

crowd that God is not only dead but has been murdered by "all of us." The madman asks aloud about the need to invent "festivals of atonement" and "sacred games" to "wipe this blood off us."[72] Nietzsche is no romantic. He knows people die when Dionysus appears, but the virile aristocratic pagan culture he admires as an alternative to Christian weakness and mediocrity cannot be produced by means other than the sacrificial. The difference between Girard and Nietzsche is not that they see a categorical difference between Christianity and paganism. The difference is that Girard sides with victims and Nietzsche, in the irony of ironies, stands with the persecuting crowd.

In *All the King's Men*, Jack is aware of the relationship between knowledge and violence. Early in the novel he explains, "[T]he end of man is knowledge, but there is one thing he can't know. He can't know whether knowledge will save him or kill him."[73] He returns to this theme at the end of the novel by wondering aloud if anything worth knowing can avoid being "paid for by blood."[74] Echoing Adam's description of the results of a successful lobectomy, Jack seems to understand the importance of misrecognition for social peace and survival, explaining, "If the human race didn't remember anything it would be perfectly happy."[75] Throughout the novel, he works tirelessly to assign meaning to events by interpreting them through comprehensive visions of how reality holds together. He creates myths.

Jack's myths reflect the simultaneous desire to know and not know the root causes of, in his case, the eroding differences between human beings and between virtue and vice. When Sadie tells Jack about the affair between Willie and Anne, Jack enters a severe depression out of which he emerges only after constructing a vision of the world, a myth, he calls the Great Twitch. Having previously put Anne on a pedestal of purity untainted by the world and its corruption, he reduces her to another version of his ex-wife Lois, the sex machine. Referencing William Blake, Jack explains:

> The mad poet was quite wrong, for anybody can change Kate into Nan . . . because Kate and Nan were exactly alike

> to begin with and were, in fact, the same with only the illusory difference of name, which meant nothing, for names meant nothing and all the words we speak meant nothing, and there was only the pulse in the blood and the twitch of the nerve, like a dead frog's leg in the experiment when the electric current goes through.[76]

By turning the deterioration of differences experienced by the novel's main characters into a belief in the natural lack of differences as such, Jack creates a myth of materialist determinism he describes as "the dream of our age."[77] If all people are indistinguishable—that is, radically equal in their lack of free will—then everything that happens cannot be otherwise. Thus, no one is to blame for the results of acts they are powerless to resist. As the "Last Man on that Last Coast," Jack experiences the myth of the Great Twitch as "the secret source of all strength and all endurance."[78]

Later, Jack creates a myth about Willie's use of corrupt means for good ends he calls "the theory of the moral neutrality of history." Jack explains that "process as process is neither morally good nor morally bad. We may judge results but not process."[79] In this view, the human capacity to understand the difference between good and evil is limited. Good people can produce disastrous results, even when using good means to obtain a good end. Bad people can use dubious means and achieve more good than individuals of high virtue. It is not a coincidence that shortly before announcing this theory, Jack makes a reference to Niccolò Machiavelli as "the cold-faced Florentine, who is the founding father of our modern world."[80] In *The Prince*, Machiavelli looks to history to learn what works and does not work when it comes to obtaining and maintaining political power. He is clear about the need to engage in lying and even murder when the situation demands it, because a rigid set of morals brings a leader "to ruin among the great number who are not good."[81] Like science, history hinders as well as helps people see the truth about existence. Even though the details of Jack's myths change, the deceptive satanic

inspiration behind them is the same. His myths invite violence by misattributing it to forces beyond human control.

At the end of the novel, Jack discards myths such as the moral neutrality of history and the Great Twitch because, he says, "he had seen too many people live and die." His final myth, the one about Adam and Willie being "doomed to destroy each other . . . because each was incomplete with the terrible division of their age," is supposed to be different.[82] To emphasize this perceived difference, Jack cites Hugh Miller, the attorney general who resigned because of Willie's corrupt practices, as saying "history is blind, but man is not."[83] Jack also refers to the theological ideas of Ellis Burden, who explains, "[T]he creation of evil is therefore the index of God's glory and His power. That had to be so that the creation of good might be the index of man's glory and power. But by God's help."[84] Some scholars see in these concluding scenes a faint theological transformation in Jack's and possibly the novel's perspective.[85] But the difference between Jack's last myth and all those that precede it is only apparent. What Jack categorizes as "the terrible division of their age" is another instance of mythic misrecognition, one that flows from a successful resolution to a mimetic crisis achieved through an act of scapegoating.

In *All the King's Men*, there is no solidarity with the victim analogous to that which Girard claims is found in the Bible. In the novel, there is little protest against the injustice of the murders. No one hears the blood of the slain crying out. There is not much mourning, but there is tremendous gratitude for the effects of the killings. Hugh Miller seems to have it wrong; history *and* human beings are blind, at least partially. Somewhat aware of the temporary nature of the peace that results from Willie's and Adam's deaths, Jack sees a potential return to politics in his future, but only if the rumors that Hugh will return to politics are true. A new model who can draw others into the churn of desire and politics is always available. Jack explains, "[I]f anything is certain it is that no story is ever over, for the story which we think is over is only a chapter in a story which will not be over."[86] A stage is perhaps being set for another, likely less violent, round of satanic scandal and restoration. Despite what Jack thinks, he has not had an epiphany

at the novel's end. He has only offered his latest effort to use the power of mythic narrative to explain away the violent foundation of order and renewal.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this article has been to use Girard's mimetic theory to offer a new and provocative interpretation of *All the King's Men*. That goal has been achieved. Some ways in which this Girardian reading calls into question different scholarly interpretations of the novel have also been made clear. As noted in the introduction, a secondary goal of this article has been to demonstrate how future research in political theory and American literature might profitably draw on Girard. A great deal of American literature, perhaps the primary strain of American literature, deals in different ways with the "deeper concerns" about American history and American identity Warren explores. Although some scholars have used Girard to analyze such issues as they are raised in works of American literature, much more can and should be done in this area.[87] Girard was not a political theorist, but in his writings he makes clear his indebtedness to such thinkers as Alexis de Tocqueville, Thomas Hobbes, and, especially, St. Augustine.[88] At the same time, Girard was cagey about political theorizing, and that reticence is also present in the scholarship. But the more overtly political components of *All the King's Men* treated in this article hint at ways in which Girard's notions of desire, myth, and the foundations of order could be used to break new ground on such topics as American constitutionalism, American democracy, partisanship, populism, violence, and peace.

No matter how high the pile of corpses, human beings have been reluctant to let go of scapegoating. For Girard, this is in large part because there is no easy alternative when it comes to human hopes for a society, or a world, transformed. Individuals might participate in positive mimesis, taking a figure such as Jesus as a model, but such an approach will never be socially authoritative. At its best, conventional politics can slow down deterioration and manage violence, but it cannot generate real and lasting social or political renewal.[89] In contrast, *All the King's Men* suggests the

secret needs of politics, democratic or otherwise, can still be served through the power of myth and scapegoating. The novel imagines a world in which the satanic principles of order and rejuvenation are much stronger than Girard claims.

Does Girard or Warren have more of the truth? Only a whisper of an answer can be given here. In *Democracy and Poetry*, Warren writes, "What poetry most significantly celebrates is the capacity of man to face the deep, dark inwardness of his nature and his fate."[90] If Girard's mimetic theory is correct about human desire, collective violence, the origins of religion and culture, the nature of myth, and the interpretive power of the Bible, then *All the King's Men* does confront "the deep, dark inwardness" of existence, but intentionally or not, it does so from the perspective of the persecutors and thus is at home in the *méconnaissance* of the satanic sacred. The novel stands against the biblical vision of solidarity with the victims of collective violence that Girard sees as the only alternative to the complete and utter destruction of humanity.

Notes

1. Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*, 2nd Harvest ed. (1946; repr., New York: Harcourt, 1996), 657.
2. Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction to the Modern Library Edition of *All the King's Men*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "All the King's Men": A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 97.
3. John Burt, *Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1988), 152.
4. Stephen D. Ealy, "Willie Stark as Political Leader," *Perspectives on Politics* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 96.
5. Joseph H. Lane Jr., "The Stark Regime and American Democracy: A Political Interpretation of Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," *American Political Science Reviewer* 95, no. 4 (December 2001): 811.
6. Eric C. Sands, "Democracy's Burden: A Tocquevillian Reading of *All the King's Men*," *Perspectives on Politics* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 166.
7. Warren, "Introduction," 93.
8. Several systematic introductions to René Girard and his mimetic theory are available. James Williams and Cynthia Haven have edited books of collected primary source writings. See René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed.

James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996); and René Girard, *All Desire Is a Desire for Being*, ed. Cynthia L. Haven (London: Penguin Books, 2023).

Chris Fleming, Scott Cowdell, and Wolfgang Palaver offer works deeply engaged with Girard's writings. Cowdell also addresses how mimetic theory intersects with questions about modern secularity, democratic capitalism, war, and terrorism. Palaver puts Girard's ideas into extensive conversation with numerous philosophers, literary authors, theologians, and political theorists. See Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004); Scott Cowdell, *René Girard and Secular Modernity: Christ, Culture, and Crisis* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2013); and Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2013).

9. Girard's interpretation of the Bible is arguably the most controversial part of his mimetic theory. Such scholars as Raymund Schwager, James Alison, and Wolfgang Palaver have engaged Girard on different theological points with varying degrees of receptivity to his ideas. More recently, Grant Kaplan has written about Girard as a Christian apologist, placing Girard in conversation with such philosophers as Hans Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, and Charles Taylor. See Grant Kaplan, *René Girard, Unlikely Apologist: Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2016).
10. This article is not the only work of scholarship to use Girard's understanding of Satan to analyze literature. See, e.g., Jessica Hooten Wilson, *Giving the Devil His Due: Demonic Authority in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor and Fyodor Dostoyevsky* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).
11. René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 12.
12. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 13.
13. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 457.
14. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 165–69.
15. René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 56.
16. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 42. There is a link between the modern democratic idea of equality and the intensification and expansion of mimetic conflicts brought on by the transition from external to internal mediation. Cowdell observes both the benefits and the challenges of

modern democratic equality when he writes that "it is the social shift to a more level playing field, but it also increases the mimetic risk of envy, rivalry, and violence." Cowdell, *René Girard and Secular Modernity*, 117. See also Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 61.

17. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1965), 83.
18. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1987), 299.
19. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 282.
20. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 370.
21. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 394.
22. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 108.
23. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 287.
24. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 288.
25. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 536.
26. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 236. Jonathan Baumbach sees the "doubling" tendencies between Willie and Adam and between Willie and Jack. See Jonathan Baumbach, "The Metaphysics of Demagoguery: *All the King's Men*," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Robert Penn Warren's "All the King's Men,"* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 21, 28.
27. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightening*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 33.
28. Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightening*, 16.
29. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 161.
30. René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer*, trans. Trevor Cribben Merrill (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2014), 48. Emphasis in original.
31. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 27.
32. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 164.
33. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 95.
34. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 71.
35. Cowdell, *René Girard and Secular Modernity*, 1–2. And yet, Girard was exasperated by the resistance his mimetic theory encountered because it used the Bible as a serious analytical resource. He explains, "[N]o one studies the facts that I have endeavored to bring to light. People pass from my scientific work to what they consider to be my ideological and religious biases, and they deduce that the latter dictated the former." Nadine Dormoy, *The World of René Girard: Interviews*, trans. William A. Johnsen (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2024), 74.

36. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 17.
37. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 21.
38. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 19.
39. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977), 12.
40. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 493.
41. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 351.
42. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 20.
43. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 140.
44. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 204.
45. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 392–94.
46. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 592.
47. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 476. James Simmons argues both Willie and Jack receive symbolic lobectomies and are "cheerfully amoral" at different times in the novel. See James C. Simmons, "Adam's Lobectomy Operation and the Meaning of *All the King's Men*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "All the King's Men": A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 75, 82.
48. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 80, 85.
49. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 97.
50. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 121.
51. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 124.
52. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 145.
53. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 602.
54. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 107.
55. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 643.
56. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 661.
57. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 27.
58. Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 83.
59. About Girard's argument regarding the origin of culture, Stephen Gardner explains, "[T]his is an event, not so much in history as constitutive of history, where culture erupts in the midst of nature. Girard recovers this event by arguing that human sacrifice (as a social mechanism of ritual scapegoating) is the primeval institution of religion and the generative source of myths, rituals, laws, and language, the moment of transition from nature to culture." Stephen L. Gardner, "Rene Girard's Apocalyptic Critique of Historical Reason: Limiting Politics to Make Way for Faith," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 18 (2011): 5.

60. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 70; Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 8.
61. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 107.
62. About the synthesis of pollution and purity in sacred kingship, see Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 104–16. See also Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis*, 57.
63. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 187.
64. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 62.
65. René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1987), 35.
66. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 53.
67. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 166.
68. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 169.
69. Girard, *Scapegoat*, 50.
70. For Girard's complete account and interpretation of this "horrible miracle" in Ephesus, see *I See Satan Fall like Lightening*, chap. 4.
71. René Girard, "Dionysus Versus the Crucified," *Modern Language Notes* 99, no. 4, French Issue (September 1984): 819. Giuseppe Fornari has done work on Nietzsche incorporating elements of Girard's mimetic theory. See Giuseppe Fornari, *A God Torn to Pieces: The Nietzsche Case*, trans. Keith Buck (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2013).
72. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 181. Girard offers an illuminating reading of Nietzsche's "death of god" aphorism in "The Founding Murder in the Philosophy of Nietzsche," in Girard, *All Desire Is a Desire for Being*, 21–40.
73. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 14.
74. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 647.
75. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 60.
76. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 466.
77. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 467.
78. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 467, 468.
79. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 593.
80. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 592.
81. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1992), 42. For mimetic analyses of Machiavelli's political theory, see Jim Grote, "The Founding Murder in Machiavelli's *The Prince*," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 5 (Spring 1998): 118–34; and Harald Wydra, "Human Nature and Politics: A Mimetic Reading of Crisis and Conflict in the Work of Niccolò Machiavelli," *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 7 (Spring 2000): 36–57.

82. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 657.
83. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 658.
84. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 659.
85. For representative examples of this "tentative conversion" line of interpretation, see Norton R. Girault, "The Narrator's Mind as Symbol: An Analysis of *All the King's Men*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "All the King's Men": A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 35; and James Ruoff, "Humpty Dumpty and *All the King's Men*: A Note on Robert Penn Warren's Teleology," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "All the King's Men": A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 86.
86. Warren, *All the King's Men*, 534. For the more conventional interpretations of the novel's ending as it relates to Hugh Miller and optimism or pessimism for the future of politics, see Ealy, "Willie Stark as Political Leader," 96; Lane, "The Stark Regime and American Democracy," 825–26; and Jerome Meckier, "Burden's Complaint: The Disintegrated Personality as Theme and Style in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "All the King's Men": A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 69.
87. Examples of such research can be found in *Contagion*, which has published articles on American authors, including Nathaniel Hawthorne and Cormac McCarthy, as well as in Carly Osborn's book on the American dream. See Carly Osborn, *Tragic Novels, René Girard and the American Dream: Sacrifice in Suburbia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
88. For descriptions of these and other theoretical influences on Girard, see Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*.
89. In a few places, Girard elaborates an idea he takes from St. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–7 and describes the role the *katéchon*, the "restrainer," plays in politics after the Resurrection. See René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2014), 97–98. See also Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 252–55.
90. Robert Penn Warren, *Democracy and Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975), 31.