



René Girard's Mimetic Theory (Studies in Violence, Mimesis, & Culture)

By Wolfgang Palaver

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A systematic introduction into the mimetic theory of the French-American literary theorist and philosophical anthropologist René Girard, this essential text explains its three main pillars (mimetic desire, the scapegoat mechanism, and the Biblical “difference”) with the help of examples from literature and philosophy. This book also offers an overview of René Girard’s life and work, showing how much mimetic theory results from existential and spiritual insights into one’s own mimetic entanglements. Furthermore it examines the broader implications of Girard’s theories, from the mimetic aspect of sovereignty and wars to the relationship between the scapegoat mechanism and the question of capital punishment. Mimetic theory is placed within the context of current cultural and political debates like the relationship between religion and modernity, terrorism, the death penalty, and gender issues. Drawing textual examples from European literature (Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe, Kleist, Stendhal, Storm, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Proust) and philosophy (Plato, Camus, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, Vattimo), Palaver uses mimetic theory to explore the themes they present. A highly accessible book, this text is complemented by bibliographical references to Girard’s widespread work and secondary literature on mimetic theory and its applications, comprising a valuable bibliographical archive that provides the reader with an overview of the development and discussion of mimetic theory until the present day.

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Editorial Review

Review

Palaver's survey of Girard's mimetic theory is the most thorough introduction to Girard's thought and its ramifications that has been written, uniting profound insight, clear explication, and a tremendous breadth of research.

--James Williams, author of *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred* and editor of *The Girard Reader*

A real tour de force, Palaver succeeds in situating mimetic theory in regard to major trends in contemporary thought, to document its relevance and contributions to various disciplines while simultaneously providing the most comprehensive and accessible introduction in any language.

—Paul Dumouchel, Ritsumeikan University

Wolfgang Palaver's exploration of René Girard's mimetic theory is comprehensive, thorough, and penetrating. He takes us into the heart of Girard's anthropology of desire, while also tracing its rich implications for the contemporary study of politics, culture, gender, and religion. This English translation now makes available to a wider audience the definitive "must-read" account of one of the most important theoretical projects of our time.

—Bruce K. Ward, Laurentian University

First published in German in 2003, Wolfgang Palaver's *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* is a crucially important addition to the growing body of English-language studies of Girard's work. Clear, comprehensive, analytically acute, this volume shows Palaver to be a worthy successor to his Austrian colleague, Raymund Schwager, as Girard's interpreter and collaborator. The rich fruit of annual lectures over a period of ten years, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* not only describes that theory, placing it in comparison and contrast with the theories of other major twentieth-century intellectuals concerning religion, mimesis, desire, and violence, it also shows why and how Girard's insights are increasingly relevant today. Braiding together topically related discussions of literary fiction, Biblical texts, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, political science, and theology, Palaver reflects, imitates, and extends Girard's own inter-disciplinarity in a breathtaking, scholarly tour de force.

—Ann W. Astell, University of Notre Dame

About the Author

Wolfgang Palaver is Professor of Catholic Social Thought and Chair of the Institute for Systematic Theology at the University of Innsbruck. He is a member of the advisory board of Imitatio, a nonprofit organization dedicated to René Girard's mimetic theory.

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