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**Title:** Among the (Non-) Mythical: Studies in René Girard and Scapegoat Figure Typologies

### Summary

One scholar has concluded that “scapegoating is the administration of death,” insofar as it is a psychosocial, anthropological, and literary phenomenon which has often been dismissed as simply laying the proverbial blame on an innocent, arbitrarily selected victim, without reference to the fact that it may culminate in murder.<sup>1</sup> Following in the footsteps of Frazer, Freud, and Burke, René Girard has proposed a novel hermeneutics of the mechanism of scapegoating which not only gives voice to the victims in the face of unjust persecution, but also unmasks the generative function that belies the frequently lethal conclusions of episodes of scapegoating that can be found in texts of persecution, i.e., those written from the perspective of the persecutors. Paradoxically, ritual scapegoating seeks to assuage tensions and restore peace and order in communities fraught with existential strife. Violence is subsequently sacralized, mythologized, and often reenacted in a ritual context in the hopes of achieving the same stabilization. Moreover, scapegoats cannot be perceived as mere literary motifs or inventions of an author’s fantasy. It remains the reader’s imperative to glean scapegoats from the text where they may serve as a structural principle, even if the author has disguised some gruesome historical reality therein. My thesis examines and interprets the role of these victims on the basis of the four girardian categories of literary scapegoats as delineated by Laura Barge.<sup>2</sup> Girard himself posits two categories of scapegoat, the mythical and non-mythical. They are distinguished by the fact that the latter mechanism reveals *explicite* the violence enacted against the victim as it is written by the persecuted, whereas the former is recounted by the persecutors themselves, thereby providing justification for the destructive actions of the crowd. Nonetheless, it becomes readily apparent

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<sup>1</sup> McKenna, Andrew J. *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction*. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 140.

<sup>2</sup> Barge, Laura. “René Girard’s Categories of Scapegoats and Literature of the South.” *Christianity and Literature*, vol. 50, no. 2, Sage Publications, Ltd., 2001, pp. 247–68.

that many scapegoat figures, both in fiction and non-fiction, fall somewhere in-between Girard's two categories.

Chapter One provides a survey of Girard's major theories of mimetic rivalry, violence, and scapegoating. It also addresses the first archetypal category of non-mythical scapegoat whose Christ-like victimization is portrayed by the author, coupled with the scapegoat's cognizance of that role, as in the case of the preacher-turned-martyr, Jim Casey, in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Chapter Two analyzes Jan Gross's highly controversial account of localized genocide against the Jews of Jedwabne. They are purely mythical scapegoats, persecuted by their "neighbors" not as *sensu stricto* victims, but as "undesirables" against the backdrop of the Nazi occupation. The following chapter is dedicated to a mythical but not pure scapegoat found in Daphne du Maurier's eponymous crime novel, *The Scapegoat*. Therein, despite the victim's latent realization of his intended role, he is powerless to stop the process of scapegoating and instead must admit defeat and accept ignominious exile. Chapter Four concerns the fourth category of non-mythical but not pure scapegoat, one that suffers persecution for a personal, even selfish means to an end as evidenced in two plays by Jean Genet, *The Maids* and *Deathwatch*. The anti-heroes, motivated by feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing, aim to kill in order to satisfy their own metaphysical lack. Chapter Five offers a comparative analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnival and Girard's theory of scapegoating, ritual, and metaphysical desire as each relates to the collapse of social hierarchies, thus necessitating the search for a scapegoat. Yet the antidote to this crisis can be found in the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky and the salvific message of the Gospels.

**Keywords:** *scapegoating, scapegoat mechanism, violence, mimetic theory, mimetic rivalry*