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PART TWO

Mimetic Hermeneutics in History

The Desire to Be You

The Discourse of Praise for the Roman Emperor

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Because Girard's approach is not simply a hermeneutical tool to be applied to certain texts, but has the nature of an anthropological insight with a claim of universal validity, it invites application to textual cultures, such as those of ancient Greece and Rome, which are beyond those that are Girard's own primary focus.[1] For its part, the discipline of classics is based on textual analysis and close reading, but is often rather impermeable to modern literary theories. Conversely, theorists frequently avoid discussing Greek and Latin texts, even though they offer an unexpected interpretive wealth, perhaps especially because of the gap in time that makes these texts appear both exemplary and at the same time surprisingly familiar. This chapter is thus intended to bridge a certain gap by representing the field of ancient literature within a volume devoted to the reception of René Girard's mimetic theory in contemporary literary studies.

A theory of mimetic desire turns out to be a fundamental perspective from which to read and analyze ancient texts for one reason in particular: within the Greek and Latin textual tradition, as is well known, the concept of imitation is absolutely central not only as aesthetic but also as ethical criterion. If it is true that the modern theorists (such as Girard, Adorno, or Ginzburg) who have discussed the concept of imitation cannot be seen as continuing

ancient discussion on mimesis or *imitatio* as "imitation of nature,"[2] it should nonetheless not be forgotten that even in antiquity those terms were flexible and received different treatments. It will be not possible here to sketch the long history of the Greek term "mimesis," as discussed among others by Plato in the *Republic*, Aristotle in his *Poetics*, and the anonymous author of *On the Sublime*,[3] or the Latin terms "*imitatio*" and "*aemulatio*," very much present in texts from early rhehorical treatises such as *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (circa 80 B.C.), through Horace's famous *Ars poetica* (18 B.C.) until late antiquity, when Christian theorists such as Lactantius and Augustine further developed the classical concept of *imitatio* by combining it with the necessities of integrating allegory and biblical hermeneutics.[4] One aspect in particular deserves our attention in this context: mimesis on the one hand was originally meant as *Naturnachahmung*, "imitation of nature" (as it has generally been received within Western culture) and hence the creation of fictional worlds. On the other hand it also meant—especially if we consider the Latin terms "*imitatio*" and "*aemulatio*"—imitation and emulation of other authors. Virgil, for instance, aimed in the *Aeneid* at imitating and emulating, that is, challenging, Homer. The very core of ancient literary aesthetics is based on competition with exemplary models; behind an apparently slavish admiration is concealed a sense of rivalry and a drive to overcome the model.

This sense of imitation as emulation brings us very close to some aspects of Girard's mimetic theory. Although strictly speaking there is no exact ancient equivalent to the (early) modern novel to which Girard mainly directs his attention in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Greek and Roman literature offers a textual type that is often called "the ancient novel" (Petronius, Apuleius, Longus, Achilles Tatius, and others) and in addition to these a broad spectrum of fictional narrative texts. In particular, epic poetry and drama (both tragedy and comedy) are obvious candidates. But there are a number of other genres that also could be explored from a Girardian perspective, among others the Latin love elegy, practiced by authors such as Propertius, Tibullus, and, of course, Ovid, a master in disguising human desire, or epistolography (Cicero, Pliny, Symmachus). Although these last genres are not narrative in their own terms, they manifest many of the aspects emphasized by Girard, namely a constant doubleness of the constellation of the involved personae in the communication (for instance, the lover and the beloved in elegiac poetry, the addresser and addressee within epistolography). Precisely this

constellation turns out to be regulated by the kind of triangulation theorized by Girard, in which desire and competition are tightly connected and interdependent.

The methodological implications that Greek and Roman texts bring with them are especially interesting: they belong to a different literary system, one that from certain perspectives was little affected by the kind of romantic criticism so clearly attacked by Girard. The ubiquitousness of *imitatio* and *aemulatio* in ancient literary discourses allows the use of Girard's theory at its best by systematically applying imitation as the key criterion to analyse these texts. However, precisely because imitation is so ubiquitous, the distinction between "*mensonge romantique*" and "*vérité romanesque*"—that is, the tension between the romantic pretence of originality and genuinity, which Girard marks as "*mensonge*," and the resort to imitation typical of the "*vérité romanesque*"—is weakened if not seriously undermined.

Given these premises, in this essay I will concentrate on one of the central literary genres of Roman imperial literature, panegyric, that is, speech in praise of Roman emperors. Discussing this genre as the archaeology of the discourse of praise leads us to a fundamental aspect: admiration as the fundamental mode of mimetic theory, since it is the vehicle of the discourse of the mediator. In other words, I wish to present this textual genre as the one in which more than in others, "metaphysical desire," as it has described by Girard, manifests itself in all its evidence and power. Much more than other literary genres, panegyric presents the tension between the self and the other in an exemplary way, one that arguably does not even need to be detected with the use of particularly sophisticated interpretive tools: it is the essence of this kind of text, and clearly manifests itself at every step.

The Corpus of the *Panegyrici Latini*

As happened to so many Greek terms imported to Rome, the word *panegyricus* was transformed. In Greek, *panegyrikos logos* means literally "speech in front of an assembly," and this was the title of a famous speech delivered by Isocrates in 380 B.C. In Rome, although it still remains within the field of the epideictic genre (i.e., display texts), panegyric specifically focuses on the public praise of the emperor, and the term *panegyricus* was formalized during

late antiquity. In particular a corpus has been handed down to us with the title *Panegyrici Latini*, which was very probably put together at the end of the fourth century A.D. It contains twelve speeches held in honor of different emperors for various occasions such as birthdays, celebration of the foundation of Rome, or a victory. The first text included is the famous *gratiarum actio* (speech of thanksgiving) for the emperor Trajan held in Rome by Pliny the Younger in A.D. 100, while the last is a speech for Theodosius the Great written in A.D. 389 by a certain Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, who might be also the one who compiled the corpus,[5] although in fact we know very little about the authors of the various speeches or the circumstances of the composition of the collection itself; in any case the arrangement does not follow a chronological criterion.[6]

This corpus also contains a unique aspect that makes it a paradigm of a genre: it shows both the text believed to be the model of the panegyric genre (i.e., Pliny's speech) and a sample of the textual tradition that derives from it (i.e., the eleven other speeches). Yet the majority of classical scholars, driven by the necessity of reconstructing the historical context, tend to read the individual speeches in isolation and in doing so they undermine the sense of interconnections that are implicitly emphasized by the corpus. Not only do the twelve speeches need to be read as a textual cluster so that the recurrence of certain themes can be appreciated, but also, and more importantly, the collection itself, having its own textual voice, manifests certain characteristics that are so different from those presented in the single speeches taken singularly that they actually seem to contradict panegyric in its generic expectations. In other words, the corpus of the *Panegyrici*, if read as a macrotext,[7] arguably contains a potential of rivalry and subversion instead of the eulogy and admiration that, as required by the rules of the genre, is programmatically displayed within the individual textual units, that is, in each of the twelve discourses of praise.

Competition, Reflexivity, and Desire

Since the rise and diffusion of political and ethical values inherited from the French Revolution, modern Western readers are accustomed to conceiving a speech written in order to celebrate established power as an act of submission,

flattery, and adulation and to seeing such a speech as self-serving, lying, hypocritical.[8] New perspectives over the past decades have suggested that such a text can be treated differently, by trying to make this almost inevitable prejudice milder, if not to attempt to eliminate it entirely. Indeed, ancient panegyric is now mainly treated as a source for historical reconstructions of the political and social context on the one hand,[9] and of ancient rhetoric and ethics on the other.[10] More recently, by combining literary analysis and historical expertise, many scholars have also tried to reestablish some positive political values the panegyrical texts may have had, almost as if their supposed engagement could somehow make up for aesthetical defects.[11] Thus the intrinsic protreptic function of encouraging and instructing has received attention: the panegyrist not only praises the emperor but also offers him a concrete "programme of behaviour."[12] Also, it has been argued that "flattery is a kind of aggression," since he who believes in the truth of flattery easily succumbs to mockery.[13] In an important study, which surprisingly does not consider panegyric, Frederick Ahl thoroughly discusses ancient literary manifestations of "safe criticism," recurring in particular to the analysis of the rhetorical concept of figured speech, which allows the speakers to implicitly express a criticism instead of presenting it as such.[14]

This essay focuses on another type of question, more precisely having to do with the kind of communication established between the two actors of what we might call the "panegyric constellation," namely the orator and the *princeps*, that is, the one who praises and the one who is praised. Latin panegyric, when observed from a Girardian perspective, becomes a very engaging genre indeed: the reader can fully appreciate the kind of obsession with the admired model that is so relevant for the mimetic desire. The panegyrist is "obsessed" with the figure of the emperor, who thus becomes his model-obstacle. Panegyric, moreover, contains an exemplary kind of mimetic desire in which the Girardian triangulation involves the orator, the emperor, and the textual dimension itself. The desire of the panegyrist is directed to the emperor but also to the text itself, which produces competition with the preceding textual tradition.

This aspect emerges when considering two themes in particular: the perception of truth and falsity, and the nature of the relationship between the two parties in panegyric. In the most general terms, my aim is to show that the panegyric mode contains its opposite in itself, that is, it contains a potential

of destabilization of power by establishing a type of communication inspired by competition, reflexivity, and desire. Given these premises, the category of metaphysical desire as theorized by Girard represents the most apt perspective from which to shed light on these particular textual features.

The discourses of truth and the eulogy have been tightly connected since the beginning of Western civilization. In his illuminating book *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (1967),[15] Marcel Detienne rightly places emphasis on this connection, but he also sheds light on another connection, which in the eyes of modern readers seems more dangerous, namely that established between *aletheia* and *pseudes*, truth and lie. Detienne points out the inner duplicity and ambiguity that constantly characterize the discourse of truth in religious and poetic discourse in archaic Greece. This productive ambiguity was eventually dissolved with the rise of philosophy, which provided a new set of concepts suited to distinguishing *aletheia* from *doxa*, truth from appearance and lies. Turning to imperial Rome: since panegyric notoriously tends to mix historical reality with mythology and fictional events, the genre has been traditionally seen as the place for historical distortion in order to please the emperor, the representative figure of established power.[16] Praising his addressee, the panegyrical speaker does not care about historical accuracy in referring to deeds and events, and does not hesitate to confound the level of reality with that of myth. Yet perhaps the most curious thing for the modern reader is that the panegyrists deliberately insist on the truth of what they are telling: they do not want to make fiction but to tell the truth, although this truth is seemingly impossible. This motif clearly emerges in a number of passages from the corpus.

> For neither is it a fable stemming from poetic license nor mere belief based on the assertions of bygone eras, but a manifest and confirmed fact.[17]
>
> Do not fear, most eminent authors, for the veneration of your writings; we who have now seen greater things believe in those deeds. Our leader's greatness wins credence for the ancients' accomplishments, but removes the miraculous element.[18]
>
> To this, to this, you pious bards, devote all the labors of your learned nights; celebrate this in all your writings and in every tongue, nor be anxious as to whether your works shall last. That eternity which you are accustomed to confer on histories shall come from history.[19]

> But let us set aside the fables of the ignorant and speak the truth: your piety, most sacred Emperor, gave you winged course. And since nothing is swifter than the spirit, you, whose fiery and immortal minds scarcely perceive the body's delays, rode to each other on the swiftness of mutual longing.[20]

The texts do not want to escape the problem of historical verisimilitude; instead they aggressively use the comparison between reality and myth as a rhetorical strategy. Thus they do not refer to historical events as the readers might expect in historiography or other genres. They prefer to allude to them, recurring to their symbolical and mythical significance for the audience they wish to reach. Since the emperor is represented as the interpreter of divine will, the panegyrist constructs history using the mythological frame. History remains in the background as something that everybody knows, but which it is not important to cite accurately in the moment; it is, one could say, something not to be taken very seriously. As we will see, it is by challenging history in its truthfulness that the orator also implicitly challenges the figure of the *princeps*, who is constantly presented and depicted precisely as an emanation of Roman history.

More particularly, the emperor is confronted with history, and he competes with the past as celebrated by the poets. The panegyrist is able to stage a rather paradoxical contest between the past, which ends up becoming a lie, and present reality, which is the only possible truth. History competes with myth, or—better put—myth is replaced by contemporary events. Myth is made present, while history dissolves into the domain of fiction. The *princeps* floats between fiction and reality, between ideal exemplum and real person: "I shall omit the rest and seize above all upon what perhaps will seem astonishing to many, yet which is absolutely true."[21] Here the text again puts emphasis on the contraposition of *mirum* and *verissimum*, practically compelling the audience to mix them up. Another passage from Pacatus's Panegyric for Theodosius shows with exemplarity the vertiginous mixture of reality and fictionality:

> If the favor of the gods is to be measured by the worthiness of the cause, I for one would contend with good reason that your cavalry were carried along, born aloft, by Pegasuses, your infantry on winged feet. Simply

> because divine things disdain to show themselves to mortals, we shall not on that account doubt that things that were not seen were done, since we see things done which we would have doubted could have been done.[22]

As this passage well illustrates, the panegyric genre requires excess, exaggeration, and hyperbole as marks of its own discourse.[23] But the most interesting point for us is that the imitation of literary past and imaginary is deeply marked by a sense of competition. Within this peculiar constellation we find a particular kind of triangulation of desire, which, I would argue, is specifically typical of Latin textuality, which is in its own nature greatly allusive and intertextual (and thus the opposite of the romantic "truth"). The triangulation is constituted by the one who praises, the one who is praised, and the literary tradition—in particular the epic and historiographic genres with which the panegyrist establishes a sort of competition. Precisely this textuality assumes the role of the mediator, as Girard argues in the case of Don Quixote and chivalric romance.[24]

Another key point is that behind the one who is praised is the one who praises, that is, the figure of the author, who by means of his art competes with other authors and other genres. The corpus in its very structure is, after all, a product of competition and subversion. There is competition first with the primary panegyrical model, Pliny's speech, which is presented as the first and to which every other text in the series invites being compared. Second and more subtly, there is competition with the figure of the emperor itself. Every speech is meant, at least theoretically, to be delivered in front of the emperor, but by putting those speeches in writing and making them parts of a series, the corpus produces a very different effect from that of the individual speeches. If praise of the emperor and admiration for the model are the marks of the individual speeches taken in isolation, the series itself, by dissolving the uniqueness of that single moment of delivery—whether real or ideal—dangerously undermines the representation of the emperor precisely by launching him into a web of references that annuls his individual personality. In the end, I would suggest, this is the result of a compulsive mechanism of comparisons with the past and with other emperors that implicitly transforms eulogy into its opposite.

An important set of themes more directly involves the relationship between the panegyric speaker and the person being praised. The figure of

the *princeps*, as we have already seen, is forged by the panegyrist: the latter gives life to the former by representing him through traditional qualities. In praising the emperor, the panegyrist ascribes to his creation the highest level of veracity. And yet his creation, the *laudandus*, is unavoidably represented as a fictional figure. In order to clarify the kind of mechanism working within this particular constellation, I would suggest that the author ascribes to the *princeps* a function similar to that of a mannequin in an artist's studio, which is a model of and model for someone, since it reproduces a previous human figure but its aim is to help the artist in representing another human figure.[25] The comparison between the mannequin and the figure of the emperor as it emerges within panegyric brings us to several points of interest. First, by modeling the qualities of the *princeps* the author deprives his creature of individuality. Second, as has been argued for the mannequin by Claudia Peppel, precisely the act of modelization has the effect of projecting the praised person into a fictional universe.[26] Finally, another point that is the most interesting from a Girardian perspective is this: mannequins within art history have been created not only as a tool for the work of artists in their studios but also in order to represent sacred figures such as Christ or kings, which were then carried in religious and political processions. Transferred from the materiality of the mannequins to the textual dimension of panegyric, this point brings us to the inner connection between royalty and victim that is one of the most famous concepts explored by Girard.[27]

Consider, for example, this passage:

> Whether you knew and followed this example, or did it on your own initiative, in either case it was a very fine accomplishment. For those emulating great deeds deserve no less praise than the authors themselves. Nay more, the enterprise of something untried, however well conceived, is entrusted to Fortune, but the reiteration and repetition of the same stratagem surely redounds to the fame of one's judgement. And for this reason, most sacred Emperor, both of you are now greater than Scipio, for you imitated Africanus, and Diocletian imitated you.[28]

These lines well illustrate the panegyrical constellation in the terms I have suggested. The exemplum and its imitators (*aemuli*) are paramount; only in comparision with a model can the existence of the emperor be assured,

only by reiterating and repeating (*iteratum atque repetitum*) can he achieve glory. In this case, though, the procedure is rendered more complex by the fact that the panegyrist addresses not only one but two emperors, Maximian and Diocletian, so that the reader is vertiginously confronted with a doubled effect of mirroring between exemplary model and imitator.

Related to this is another aspect of panegyric communication that needs emphasis and further exploration: the constant duality that underlies the language of these texts and their situation. The readers are confronted with binary oppositions at every level. Reciprocities between the praising and the praised are virtually infinite and represent the very rules of the genre: history versus myth, reality versus fiction, sincerity versus lie, current emperor versus past emperors, *princeps* versus tyrant, praise versus blame, exemplum versus reality, being a model for someone versus being a model of someone, and so on. The whole communication is based on the axis of a double parler and double entendre, as Shadi Bartsch has put it in connection with the Plinian panegyric.[29] But this also implies that every element is at one and the same time its opposite: history becomes myth, exemplum becomes imitation, praise becomes blame, and so on. Furthermore, an extreme kind of communication takes place within panegyric. The *princeps* appears simultaneously as the one who commissions the speech, as dedicatee, and as the praised one; his deeds shall be the only content of the text. But the other protagonist is the orator himself. In fact, one might argue that he actually is the true protagonist, and that in addressing his speech to the *princeps* he praises himself.[30] In countless passages of the corpus this liaison is more or less explicitly present. I cite only a few examples:

> The Emperor who has given me his approbation will provide a supply of material for my speech that is inexhaustible.[31]
>
> I propose for myself a new mode of speaking to show that, although I seem not to speak of all the greatest things, there are nonetheless among your praises other things which are greater.[32]

Another intriguing element in the relationship between orator and *princeps* requires attention. Some scholars have argued that the majority of the speeches contained in the collection were actually never delivered in front of the emperor, and that they remained unspoken words, on paper alone. In this

connection I would point out that the theme of absence and the interrelated theme of presence are figures of desire: writing in general is a medium aimed at catching and representing the absence of the desired object. Interestingly, the concept of the portrait (both in visual arts and in literature) has been also put into relationship with absence and desire. According to Maurizio Bettini, for example, the impulse behind a portrait is *pothos* or *desiderium* for the absent.[33] The affinity between panegyric and portrait is obvious, since the art of verbal eulogy can be easily be compared to the art of a painter or a sculptor while rendering a human figure. Within the corpus, in fact, there are a number of passages that combine the themes of desire, absence, and portraiture.

> But now your injury will make his patience the more commendable: they will long more keenly for him if no picture represents him. The desires of the spirit are more passionate when they have lost the consolation which eyes provide.[34]

Here absence, a portrait, and desire are tightly interrelated. In many other cases a great attention is directed to seeing (*videre*) as the mark of veracity, but this aspect is continously negotiated with the actual absence of the emperor. In one passage we read of the desire of the emperor Constantine to be seen:

> No one may pass judgment upon rulers, for confrontation with an object of veneration repulses the seeker in the entranceway, and any who have approached closer have been blinded and lost faculty of sight, which is what happens to the eyes when they are directed to the sun. But you bring it to pass, greatest of rulers, that things which had previously been shut away are seen to lie open, you who desire as much to be seen in your entirety as the rest were reluctant.[35]

And later in the same speech we read the following:

> There is but one thing by which Rome could be made happier, a very great thing but yet the only one, that it see Constantine its preserver, that it see the blessed Caesars, that it obtain the means of enjoyment in proportion to the measure of its longing, that it receive you joyously and, when reasons

> of state have made you depart, that it send you away with a promise of your return.[36]

In fact, the corpus of the *Panegyrici* is full with passages referring to the *praesentia* of the princeps, and *praesentia* is, after all, a mark of absence and desire.

> We saw you, Caesar, on the very same day taking up vows on behalf of the state and incurring the debt of them being answered. . . . We saw you, Caesar, on the same day both in the most splendid garb of peace and in the magnificent accoutrements of war.[37]

And at the end of the same speech:

> You perceive, O Emperor, how much power there is in the heavenly benefits you have concurred upon us: we still enjoy your presence; we already long for your return.[38]

In the following passage a sort of echoing of the vision of the emperor is put on the stage: first he is seen, then people talk about the fact that they have indeed seen him. The effect is that the direct vision is overcome by hearsay.

> But when you came closer and closer and people began to recognize you, all the fields were filled not only with men running forth to see but even with flocks of beasts leaving their distant pastures and woods, farmers rushed about among each other, told everyone what they had seen.[39]

Elsewhere, barbarians are defined as "blind" precisely because they could not see the emperor's face: "O truly blind barbarians, who did not see the marks of a ruler on that face!"[40]

Within the same series, particularly revealing is a passage from Pacatus's Panegyric for Theodosius:

> What crowds of admiring people, how great an audience, shall surround me when I say: "I have seen Rome; I have seen Theodosius; and I have seen both together; I have seen the father of the ruler himself, I have seen the avenger of the ruler; I have seen the restorer of the ruler."[41]

Here the fact that the orator has seen the emperor is connected with the admiration of the crowd for the orator himself, and for his part, Theodosius is represented not alone but in the company of his fellows Honorius, Gratian, and Valentinian II.

The Panegyric Pact

In *A Theater of Envy*, Girard discusses Shakespearean dramas as texts where the mimetic dimension emerges with particular clarity. In particular he analyzes the "deeper play" of *Julius Caesar*, in which he detects a mimetic rivalry that leads to the sacrificial quality of the murder of Caesar as representant of supreme power. In a comparable way, I would here like to shed light on the deeper play of Roman panegyric by focusing on the relationship between the two parties in the panegyric "pact" in order to show how panegyric, by contradicting its own generic essence, bears a potential of subversion and destabilization of power. This potential is not necessarily or exclusively to be detected in more or less open mechanisms of critique—consider the rhetorical device of *synkrisis* or *comparatio*, which allows the orator to admonish his *princeps* by recalling the bad deeds of his predecessors, presented to him as tyrants—or in the so-called double speak, that is, hidden allusions to behaviors to avoid. More than this, I would argue, praise itself contains a highly subversive potential, since it deliberately contains a perfect and ideal model, almost unreachable for a human *princeps*. Consider what the Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran affirms regarding the ideal pope described by Joseph De Maistre in *On the Pope* (1819):

> There is only one way to praise: to inspire fear in him whom we extol, to shake him, force him to hide away from the statue that was erected to him, compel him, by generous hyperbole, to measure his mediocrity and to suffer from it. What is a plea that neither torment nor disturb, what is a praise which does not kill? Any apology should be a murder by enthusiasm.[42]

This quotation from Cioran brings us very near to the main thesis of Girard himself, who discusses the figure of the king or of the emperor in their sacrificial dimension: any royal figure is destined to become a victim, a scapegoat

sacrificed by the crowd reproducing the original identification of divinity and political power.[43] Thus, for Girard, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* "is not about Roman history but about collective violence itself,"[44] and, more significantly for our treatment of ancient panegyric, Girard establishes an ontological equivalence between Brutus the murderer and Caesar the victim. The latter turns out to be "the hated rival and the beloved model, the incomparable guide, the unsurpassable teacher." Brutus fully identifies with his victim, and "the more he reveres Caesar, the more he hates him as well."[45] Admiration and the speech genre that most represents it, panegyric, are inevitably and fatally linked with murder.

The suspicion that under eulogy is concealed a sharp criticism is found in many other authors, in particular those who wrote aphorisms such as François de La Rochefoucauld and Fredrich Nietzsche. The latter points out in *Human, All Too Human II*:

> Sharpest criticisms: We criticize a man or a book most sharply when we sketch out their ideal. (157)
>
> The one who is praised: So long as you are praised think only that you are not yet on your own path but on that of another. (340)
>
> Danger in admiration: Through too great admiration for the virtues of others it is possible to lose interest in one's own and from lack of practice finally lose them altogether without acquiring those of others in return. (355)

Apart from these considerations, the potential I wish to illustrate is structural, I would argue, to the very discourse of the genre. Roland Barthes suggests that every literary genre and text contain an inner conflict of opposites; he illustrates this conflict in authors considered rather marginal to the literary system—Sade, Fourier, and Loyola—precisely in order to reveal their high literariness.[46] To illustrate my point about panegyric, I recall the concept of masochism, which overlaps in some ways with the panegyric constellation. Girard devotes an entire chapter of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* to the figure of the masochist, making of him a specific actor of metaphysical desire (176ff). Girard suggests that the masochist will always tend to avoid the

people who manifest love and affection for him or her, and will direct his or her attention to those who overtly show their contempt. He writes: "we are masochists when we no longer choose our mediator because of the admiration which he inspires in us but because of the disgust we seem to inspire in him" (178).

More importantly for my purposes in this essay, Girard focuses on the fact that a masochist, precisely like any other victim of metaphysical desire, beyond the facade of suffering seeks actually to reach the power and divinity of the mediator. Thus the panegyrist, while praising the emperor and humiliating himself in front of him, actually renders the object of his eulogy an instrument of a strategy devoted to reach the level of his addressee, and possibly to overcome him by means of words. A masochist, as Girard points out, desires "autonomy and a god-like self-control, his own self-esteem and the esteem of others; but by an intuition of metaphysical desire . . . he no longer hopes to find these inestimable treasures except at the side of a master whose humble slave he will be."[47]

In a famous essay on masochism, Gilles Deleuze provides another useful consideration in order to better understand the phenomenon of masochism.

He first introduces important conceptual divergences between masochism and sadism: while sadism practices an "institutionalized possession," masochism thinks in terms of a "contracted alliance."[48] While the obession of the sadist is possession, that of the masochist is the pact. The masochist, after all, enters into an agreement with his or her partner: "You will cause me pain—but only up to a certain point." The sadist, on the other hand, ideally is not interested in what his or her partner wants (hence Deleuze keeps quite distinct the two categories, and thus does not speak of "sadomasochism"). In particular, in the novels of Sacher-Masoch a "dialectical reversal" takes place: while the masochist seems to be educated by his dominatrix, he is in fact the one who forms and educates her. It is he who gives her the words to use with him. As Deleuze points out:

> It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself. Dialectic does not simply mean the free interchange of discourse, but implies transpositions or displacements of this kind, resulting in a scene being enacted simultaneously on several levels with reversals and reduplications in the allocation of roles and discourse.[49]

Furthermore, the masochist needs to create an impossible model for his or her fantasies, and it is necessary that this ideal model be more valid than reality, in order to avoid any possible disappointments deriving from an imperfect reality.

Girard and Deleuze provide an insightful instrument, one well suited for illustrating the panegyrical constellation in the terms we have seen. On the one hand, the panegyrist renders the historical emperor a literary figure, placing his subject within the realm of fiction and myth, which turns out being a kind of "novelistic truth." Thereby his relationship to the model is made present at every step; to use Girardian terminology, the mediator is in this case the Latin literary tradition itself. By means of this mediator, the panegyrist establishes a relation of competition, and at the same time he tends to destabilize historical truth, which turns out to be nothing but "romantic lie." The one who desires—says Girard—wants to transform himself into the mediator. Within the panegyric constellation, the Roman emperor becomes a fictional figure like Emma Bovary. His principal trait is an absolute lack of originality, since all his deeds, all his battles, all his gestures have been already told and retold a myriad of times within previous texts.

On the other hand, the panegyrist reveals himself as a masochistic stage director of his own desire. The masochist and the panegyrist set up a direct confrontation with power. Both create their own image of power; both are marked by desire for the other and for the self; and both enter into a pact or agreement between the parties involved. In both discourses, a eulogy of the desired object—whether the beloved or the *princeps*—turns out to be a eulogy of the self.

Notes

1. Although Girard extensively treated some figures and narratives from classical myth (e.g. Oedipus and Dionysos in *Violence and the Sacred*, and in *Oedipus Unbound*), ancient texts per se are not at the center of his system. Conversely, Girard's theory has only very rarely had an impact within the study of ancient literatures; one exception is Cesareo Bandera's *The Sacred Game: The Role of the Sacred in the Genesis of Modern Literary Fiction* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994) approaching Virgil among other premodern authors from a Girardian perspective.

2. See L. Costa Lima, "Mimesis," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, ed. K. Barck et al., vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002): 84–120.

3. For a treatment of mimesis in ancient Greek thought and its reception see S. Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

4. For an overview of mimesis and imitatio see the entry "Mimesis" in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. G. Ueding (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001).

5. For an edition of the corpus with introduction, English translation, and commentary see C. E. Nixon and B. Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

6. For a discussion of the particular contexts of the various speeches contained in the corpus see M. Mause, *Die Darstellung des Kaisers in der lateinischen Panegyrik* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994); and R. Rees, *Layers of Loyalty in Latin Panegyric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

7. For a definition of "macrotext" see M. Corti, *Introduction to Literary Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); and C. Segre, *Introduction to the Analysis of the Literary Text* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

8. See I. Cogitore and F. Goyet, eds., *Devenir roi: Essais sur la littérature adressée au Prince* (Grenoble: Ellug, 2001); *Eloge du Prince: De l'antiquité au temps de Lumières* (Grenoble: Ellug, 2003).

9. Exponents of this tendency are, among others: A. Giardina and M. Silvestrini, "Il principe e il testo," in *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica*, ed. G. Cavallo et al., vol. 2 (Rome: Salerno, 1989): 579–613; M.-C. L'Hullier, *L'empire des mots: Orateurs gaulois et empereurs romains* (Paris: Diffusé par Les Belles Lettres, 1992); Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*; M. Whitby, ed., *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

10. See in particular L. Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'eloge dans le monde gréco-romain* (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1993; D. A. Russell, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004); Russell, "The Panegyrists and Their Teachers," in Whitby, *The Propaganda of Power*, 17–50.

11. In an important article, Sabbah sought to find positive value in the activity of a panegyrist by affirming that those were "true orators, whose word, active in the real and the present, was also action" (363); G. Sabbah, "De la rhétorique à la communication politique: Les Panegyriques latins," *Bulletin de l'association Guillaume Budé* 4 (1984): 362–85.

12. S. Morton Braund, "Praise and Protreptic in Early Roman Imperial Panegyric: Cicero, Seneca, Pliny," in Whitby, *The Propaganda of Power*, 66.

13. F. Ahl, "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome," *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984): 199.

14. The article by Ahl is relevant and would require a longer discussion, especially because many of his assumptions, being characteristic of the way in which classical scholars read ancient texts, would need to be revised. I mention here only one point in particular: Ahl analyzes only the kind of criticism that ascribes intention to the authors, firmly believing that we must read the text according to it. This chapter takes a different approach by showing how the text itself, independently of any intentionality, produces a discourse of rebellion and subversion.

15. Marcel Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque* (Paris: Maspero, 1967).

16. See, for instance, Mause, *Die Darstellung des Kaisers*.

17. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 10.1.3, p. 53. All English translations of the *Panegyrici Latini* are from Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*.

18. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 4.15.6, p. 360.
19. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 2.44.4–5, p. 511.
20. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 11.8.4–5, p. 94.
21. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 10.3.1, p. 57.
22. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 2.39.5, p. 507.
23. See Rees, *Layers of Loyalty*.
24. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 1ff.
25. See B. Mahr, "Modellieren. Beobachtungen und Gedanken zur Geschichte des Modellbegriffs," in *Bild—Schrift—Zahl*, ed. S. Krämer and H. Bredekamp (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2003), 59–86.
26. C. Peppel, *Der Manichino*. *Von der Gliederpuppe zum technisierten Kultobjekt*. *Körperimaginationen im Werk Giorgio de Chiricos* (Bonn: VG Bild-Kunst, 2008), 123.
27. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, research undertaken in collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort, trans. Stephen Nann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 59–66.
28. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 10.8.3–6, p. 65–66.
29. S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 174.
30. Though from a completely different perspective a recent article reads the panegyric of Pliny as an act of "self-fashioning"; C. Noreña, "Sef-fashioning in the Panegyricus," in *Pliny's Praise: The "Panegyricus" in the Roman World*, ed. P. Roche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 29–44.
31. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 6.23.3, p. 253.
32. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 11.5.5, p. 89–90.
33. M. Bettini, *The Portrait of the Lover* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
34. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 10.12.5, p. 73.
35. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 4.5.1–2, p. 348.
36. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 4.38.6, p. 385.
37. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 10.6.3, p. 63.
38. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 10.14.5, p. 75.
39. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 11.10.5, p. 96.
40. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 4.18.4, p. 364.
41. Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, 2.47.5, p. 515.
42. E. Cioran, *Excercises d'admiration* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986): 17.
43. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 51ff.
44. René Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 223.

45. Girard, *A Theater of Envy*, 189.
46. Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980).
47. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* 184.
48. Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil, published with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 20–21.
49. Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, 22.