Objects of Desire: Mimetic Theory in Middle-earth

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**Objects of Desire: Mimetic Theory in Middle-earth**

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**René Girard’s Mimetic Theory**

René Girard’s mimetic theory states that we desire objects because we see others desiring them. He writes, “[The modern world] wants desire to be strictly individual, unique. In other words, the attachment to the object of desire is, in a way, predetermined. If desire is only mine, I will always desire the same thing.” Desire can only become mobile, something different than mere instinct, Girard continues, when a model is introduced – a figure exhibiting desire for an object, and thus inciting the subject to also desire it.

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**The Internal Model of Desire**

If the model and the subject are on the same social plane, and can actively compete for and deprive each other of the object, the triangle of desires soon turns to one of rivalry and hatred – an internal, or mirrored, model of desire:

**Model**

Desire

Internal Mode of Desire

Subject

Rivalry/Mirroring

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**The External Model of Desire**

If subject and model are not part of the same social sphere, if the model is out of reach of the subject, the joint desire for an object turns the subject’s desire to devotion. If the model and the subject are on the same social plane, and can actively compete for and deprive each other of the object, the triangle of desires soon turns to one of rivalry and hatred – an internal, or mirrored, model of desire:

**Model**

Desire

External Mode of Desire

Subject

Rivalry/Mirroring

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**Mimetic Theory in *The Hobbit***

The **Archetome as Object**

Objects of desire change from that of the Arkenstone itself to peace. In stepping out of the triangle of desire formed between himself, Thorin, and the Arkenstone, Bilbo attempts to use the stone to end the rivalry between the Dwarves and Bard over the rest of the dragon-treasure. Bilbo manages to step out of the triangle of mimics, change his object of desire, and use his original misdeed (stealing the Arkenstone) in an attempt to end the rivalry over the jewel completely.

The **Scapegoating in *The Hobbit***

The **Renunciation of Desire in *The Hobbit***

**Conclusion**

Tolkien's ideas of power tie closely with Girard’s concepts of mimetic desire, rivalry, individuation, and the desire to be another. The *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* is filled with countless other examples of mimeticism being played out, from the characters of Bard, Smaug, and the Master of Laketown to Faramir, Tom Bombadil, Galdor, and many others. Tolkien’s *Légendes armées* contains mandfold theories. Myth and magic, power and corruption, enchantment and ecstasy, fill the pages of his works, leaving their mark over and again in the rich weave of his stories. With such a vast spread of history, Middle-earth provides more than enough ground for any scholar to delve into, and may be looked at through countless different theoretical lenses. René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire uplifts and encircles many of Tolkien’s ideas, making clear aspects that aid readers in reaching a deeper understanding of Tolkien’s work. Focusing on the texts of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, one may examine Tolkien’s understanding and portrayal of power and the ways in which his use of objects such as the One Ring and the Arkenstone align with Girard’s theories. Viewing these works through the lens of mimism in this manner aids in creating an understanding of the power the Ring holds over those who bear it, and the power of the Arkenstone to cause division among the Peoples of Middle-earth. Through an examination of the characters central to these stories, such as Bilbo and Frodo, one uncovers the significance of the renunciation of objects of desire and power. This important turning away from the object of desire impacts Girard’s mimetic theory by integrating the renunciation of mimetic rivalry with heroic qualities, and using these combined ideas bring about a new understanding of Tolkien’s heroes. Tolkien’s portrayal of power in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* and his use of the Arkenstone and the One Ring coincide smoothly with Girard’s theories, leaving scholars and literary theorists with a wealth of discoveries to make.

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**Resources:**


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