The Turn, the Cauldron, and the Scapegoat: A Study of the Second Branch of the Mabinogi Through the Mythological Theories of René Girard and J. R. R. Tolkien

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**The Turn, the Cauldron, and the Scapegoat: A Study of the Second Branch of the Mabinogi Through the Mythological Theories of René Girard and J. R. R. Tolkien**

**Rebecca Fox**

Andrew W. Mellon Program and Department of English Literature, Hope College

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**Girard's Mimetic Theory**

The basic concept of the theory is that all human desire is imitative, or copied from a model. In other words, a man unknowingly rates the desirability of an object on its perceived value to others. Desire therefore leads to rivalry and violence, since these are usually finite resources.

Let us say that there is an object, a model desire. A subject sees the model's desire and imitates it. Now the subject wishes to take over in rivalry for the object. The rivalry escalates when the two subjects begin to model each other in an ever-intensifying process. This is called “doubling” because the two are mirroring each other until all differentiation between them breaks down. The rivalry then escalates until the community is drawn into it. Finally, the object disappears, meaning that the participants in the conflict stop caring about the object itself and are only focused on their antagonism. Eventually, this enacts a “mimetic crisis,” where, Girard says, the only “effective form of reconciliation—that would stop this crisis and save the community from total self-destruction—is the convergence of all collective anger and rage toward a random victim, a scapegoat...unanimously adopted as such” (see fig. 1 and 2).

**Tolkien's Fairy-Story Theory**

In his essay On Fairy-Stories, Tolkien lays out the two kinds of supernatural power found in Fairy-Stories, which are guided by two kinds of desire. The first comes from a desire for power that is like Girard’s concept of desire—brave, romantic, and violent, which seeks to, as Tolkien puts it, "produce, or pretend to produce, an illusion in the Primary World." This Tolkien calls “Magic.”

The second type of desire is a yearning “to hold communion with other living things” and to have “the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder” made corporeal through sub-creation. Sub-creation refers to the desire of man to imitate their creator by making their own worlds. When this is achieved through supernatural means, Tolkien calls it “Enchantment.”

Girard and Tolkien’s theories are marked by radically different interpretations of the Second Branch. Girard’s views are able to give an explanation for the incomprehensible violence of this myth. They also reveal Eyfysien’s possible innocence and offer redemption and understanding to this baffling villain. However, Tolkien’s views highlight the community of Enchantment, the caravanserai nature of the story and its supernatural aspects are left without explanation. However, Tolkien fails to offer a suitable interpretation for Eyfysien’s bizarre crimes and, in fact, does not give any explanation for the violence of the story whatsoever. The Second Branch of the Mabinogi contradicts Girard’s theories by holding that the world is not in a state of waste or evil. Tolkien’s theories of Fairy-Stories offer hints and reflections of greater Truth, and therefore questions of factuality are irrelevant, or even detrimental, to understanding myth.

**References**


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**Conclusion**

Girard and Tolkien’s views are able to be reconciled in this exploration of the Second Branch. Girard’s views are able to give an explanation for the incomprehensible violence of this myth. They also reveal Eyfysien’s possible innocence and offer redemption and understanding to this baffling villain. However, Tolkien’s views highlight the community of Enchantment, the caravanserai nature of the story and its supernatural aspects are left without explanation. However, Tolkien fails to offer a suitable interpretation for Eyfysien’s bizarre crimes and, in fact, does not give any explanation for the violence of the story whatsoever. The Second Branch of the Mabinogi contradicts Girard’s theories by holding that the world is not in a state of waste or evil. Tolkien’s theories of Fairy-Stories offer hints and reflections of greater Truth, and therefore questions of factuality are irrelevant, or even detrimental, to understanding myth.

**Consolation in the Second Branch**

The Enchantment of the Noble Head and its Assembly are the Consolation of the story. It “a sudden and miraculous grace” which “does not deny the existence” of the “sorrow and failure” of Brain’s death and the carnage of war, but instead “denies...universal final defeat...giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, joy beyond the walls of the world, poignantly in grief.”