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Green Mimesis

Girard, Nature, and the Promise of Christian Animism

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THE SONG OF THE WOOD THRUSH

Today the wood thrush returned to the Crum Woods. I have been waiting for this event for months. I moved to a house in the woods three years ago, and at that time I heard a strange and wonderful bird call in the forest. The song of the wood thrush is a melody unlike anything I had ever heard. Liquid, flute-like, perfectly pitched—the thrush vocalizes a kind of duet with itself in which it simultaneously produces two independent musical notes that reverberate with one another. I have read that Tibetan monks can also sing two notes at the same time, a baseline and a melody line in contrapuntal balance, so now I think of the wood thrush as the singing monk of the forest.¹

In the spring and summer I wake up, and often go to sleep, to the vocal pleasures of a bird that I cannot see but whose delicate harmonies pleasantly haunt my dreams. Like God's Spirit, I know the thrush is there—I hear its lilting cadence from dawn to dusk—but I've only seen one wood thrush during the time I've lived in the Crum Woods. I creep around the forest floor looking skyward, hoping for a sighting, but it always escapes my gaze.

Instead, I keep my window open at night as a vector for the thrush's call. Bathed in its music, it's hard for me to distinguish between waking and sleeping, between twilight, midnight, and early morning. At dusk, the thrush is in my ear until I fall asleep; I dream of its call throughout the night; and I wake up after dawn gently moving through the deep of its sweet-sounding counterpoint.

The wood thrush lives in the interior of the Crum Woods and consistently refuses the lure of my feeder. Thrushes prefer just the right habitat blend for sustenance and breeding: running water, dense understory cover, and moist healthy soil full of fruiting plants and insects to eat. In the heart of the forest, foraging in the leaf litter among large deciduous trees, the thrush makes its nest out of dead leaves, mud, twigs, and sometimes found manufactured materials like paper and plastic. Like other neo-tropical songbirds, it is threatened by habitat loss through continued development of its home range. It is also endangered by brood parasites, such as brown-headed cowbirds, which lay their own eggs in wood thrush nests, crowding out the host's eggs and hatchlings. The perdurance of the thrush in the face of these obstacles gives me hope in a time of despair about the world's future. Thoreau says "The thrush alone declares the immortal wealth and vigor that is in the forest. . . . Whenever a man hears it he is young, and Nature is in her spring; wherever he hears it, it is a new world and a free country, and the gates of Heaven are not shut against him."² For me, earth and heaven come alive with mystery and wonder when I hear the thrush's ethereal song. In my own particular bioregion, the thrush opens to me the beauty of the Crum Woods as a vital habitat—indeed, as a sacred forest—whenever I am graced by its haunting polyphony.

SACRED FOREST

To call the Crum Woods a sacred forest is an odd phrase if one is using traditional Christian vocabulary. Historically, Christian thinkers avoided ascribing religious value to natural places and living things, and restricted terms such as sacred, holy, and blessed to God alone. In general, classical Christian opinion desacralized nature by divesting it of any religious significance. While the Bible is suffused with images of sacred nature—God formed Adam and Eve from the dust of the ground, called to Moses through a burning bush, spoke through Balaam's donkey, arrested Job's attention as a whirlwind, used a great whale to send Jonah a message, and appeared alternately as a man and a dove in numerous accounts—Christianity

evolved into a sky-God religion in which God was seen as an invisible, heavenly being and not of the same essence as plants, animals, rivers, and mountains. The Welsh St. Denio hymn I sign in my Presbyterian church proclaims, “Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes.” Hidden and imperceptible, God exists in a far-removed place divorced from the ebb and flow of mortal life here on Earth. Moreover, God the creator alone is holy, so goes this line of thinking, and everything else in creation, derivatively made by God, is an extension of God’s blessed and benevolent handiwork, yet not all-good and holy unto itself.

But in the Earth-centered arc of the biblical stories, this latter-day devaluation of nature as devoid of sacred worth is entirely absent. Scripturally speaking, God is not an invisible sky-God, but a fully incarnated being who flies through the air, walks and talks in human form, and sprouts leaves and grows roots in the good soil of creation. In the Bible, an astoundingly rich variety of natural phenomena are charged with sacred presence, including the bodies of sacred animals. Many of us—Jews, Christians and other persons of faith—consider ourselves the people of the book; we are used to speaking of the humanity of God, but less comfortable speaking about the animality of God. Let me offer two examples from the panoply of compelling descriptions of God’s animal body in the biblical witness.

Genesis 1 begins with the feathered bird God of creation. In the beginning the Earth was formless and empty and God’s Spirit swept across the dark waters of the great oceans. The Hebrew verb used by the Genesis authors to describe the Spirit’s movement in Genesis 1:1–2 is *merahefet*, alternately translated as to hover over, sweep over, move over, flutter over, or tremble over. This verb describes the activity of a mother bird in the care of her young in the nest. One grammatical clue to the meaning of this dynamic verb can be found in Deuteronomy 32:11 (RSV), where God is said to be a protector of Jacob in a manner akin to how “an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers (*merahefet*) over its young.” Using the same winged imagery deployed by the Deuteronomic author, the writer of Genesis describes the Spirit as a flying, avian being—a bird or something like a bird—to describe her nurturing care over the great expanse—perhaps we should say the great egg?—of creation. Analogous to a mother eagle brooding over her nest, God’s avian Spirit hovering over the face of the watery deep is a divine-animal hybrid that challenges the conventional separation of the divine order and the animal kingdom in much of classical Christian thought.

Presumably, a critic of a theology of divine animality would object to my description of the Genesis Spirit bird as God on the wing. Such a critic would likely suggest that the creation bird is a figure of speech, a birdy metaphor for articulating God's all-pervasive presence in creation, like a hen over her nest, but not a literal description of God's winged body. But when read in the context of the New Testament's similar description of the avian Holy Spirit, what emerges is a biblical pattern of figuring God's Spirit in ornithological terms.

In the story of Jesus's baptism in the four gospels, the Spirit, much like in the Genesis account, comes down from heaven as a bird. As Luke says, "and the Holy Spirit descended upon [Jesus] in bodily form, as a dove" (Luke 3:22). Here the Greek phrase *somatiko eidei* means "in bodily form" or "in bodily essence"—that is, God literally becomes an animated physical body—the phrase *hos peristeran* means "as a dove," "even like a dove," or "just as a dove"—which means that the Spirit's body is thoroughly avian. The preposition *hos* does not operate here metaphorically or analogically—the point is not that the Spirit is "like" a dove—but functions, rather, descriptively to denote the actual living being that the Spirit has become. In the grammar of predication, the Spirit literally "is" a dove. Lovingly alighting on Jesus's person, just like the creation bird hovering over the deep, the Lukan God bird is God enfleshing Godself in carnal form, but now not only in human flesh in the person of Jesus, but also in animal flesh in the person of the Spirit. Wonderfully, God is the *theou zoon*, the divine animal, who alights on Jesus's still glistening body emerging naked and wet from the Jordan River.

The parallelism between the bird God of Genesis and the Gospels is shockingly corporeal. God embodying Godself as a cosmic avian being, in the one case, and as an actual dove with bones, beak, and feathers, in the other, contradicts the anthropocentric chauvinism of traditional Christianity. But some Christians find such latitudinarian attitudes excessive. I recently gave a talk to a nearby church group in which I exegeted these biblical stories of divine avifauna. I used the accounts of God on the wing in Genesis and the Gospels to ask, If God became flesh and feathers in biblical time, could not God become flesh and feathers in our own time as well? Could it be that the gift of the avian God of the Bible means that God could appear again today in the form of a bird, or in principle, any other life-form? At this point, a member of the audience raised her hand and said, "My brother doesn't like doves. He has mourning doves in his yard. He doesn't like their cooing and whistling. In the morning he gets up and shoots them wherever he finds

them.” Speechless, it was clear that my attempt to make a case for God’s full and promiscuous incarnation within the animal world did not make sense according to the deep grammar of faith shared by at least some members of this church community.

CHRISTIAN ANIMISM

While Christianity evolved into a sky-God religion often opposed to the world and the flesh, its genuine roots are deeply grounded in the biblical soil of divine enfleshment. In reality, Christianity is closer to the spiritual animism of first peoples than, say, the *contemptus mundi* worldview of Pauline asceticism and Augustinian Neo-Platonism. Could it be, then, that Christianity, in essence, is an animist religion?

The term animism has its origins in the early academic study of the vernacular belief-systems of indigenous peoples worldwide. Sharing resonances with the Latin word *animus* which means soul or spirit, it was advanced by the nineteenth century British anthropologist E. B. Tylor, who used it to analyze how primordial people attributed “life” or “soul” or “spirit” to all things, living and nonliving. Tylor says, quoting another theorist, that in animism “every land, mountain, rock, river, brook, spring, tree, or whatsoever it may be, has a spirit for an inhabitant; the spirits of the trees and stones, of the lakes and brooks, hear with pleasure the wild man’s pious prayers and accepts his offerings.”³ The study of animism emerged out of an evolutionary, occidental mindset that described the unusual pan-spiritist beliefs and practices of first peoples. In spite of its colonial origins, the term today carries a certain analytical clarity by illuminating how indigenous communities then and now envision nonhuman nature as “ensouled” or “inspired” with living, sacred power. As contemporary religion scholar Graham Harvey writes, animism

is typically applied to religions that engage with a wide community of living beings with whom humans share this world or particular locations within it. It might be summed up by the phrase “all that exists lives” and, sometimes, the additional understanding that “all that lives is holy.” As such the term animism is sometimes applied to particular indigenous religions in comparison to Christianity [or Islam], for example.⁴

I want to make two points here. The first glosses Harvey’s animist insight that “all that exists lives.” In this formulation, nature is never dull and

inert but inherently alive with the infusion of Spirit or spirits into all things. Nature is always-already aflame with movement, weight, color, voice, light, texture—and spiritual presence. Nature’s capacity for *relatedness*, its proclivity to encounter us, as we encounter it, in constantly new and ever-changing patterns of self-maintenance and skillful organization is the ground tone of its spiritual, vibrant power. Indigenous peoples celebrated, and continue to celebrate relations with other-than-human communities of beings that are alive with spirit, emotion, desire, and personhood. This ascription of personhood to all things locates humans in a wider fraternity of relationships that includes “bear persons” and “rock persons” along with “human persons.”⁵ In other words, all things are persons, only some of whom are human. As philosopher David Abram argues, nature or matter is not a dead and lesser thing that stands in a lower relationship to animate spirit, but a self-organizing field of living, dynamic relationships.

Yet as soon as we question the assumed distinction between spirit and matter, then this neatly ordered hierarchy begins to tremble and disintegrate. If we allow that matter is *not* inert, but is rather animate (or self-organizing) from the get-go, then the hierarchy collapses, and we are left with a diversely differentiated field of animate beings, each of which has its own gifts relative to the others. And we find ourselves not above, but in the very midst of this living field, our own sentence part and parcel of the sensuous landscape.⁶

My second point focuses on the common assumption inherent within Harvey’s definition of animism that monotheistic traditions such as Christianity should be regarded as distinct from animism. At first glance, historic ascetic Christianity’s emphasis on making room for God by denying the world and the flesh seems at odds with the classical animist belief in the living goodness of all inhabitants of sacred Earth.⁷ In the main, however, Christian faith offers its practitioners a profound vision of God’s this-worldly identity. Harvey’s presumption that Christianity and animism are distinct from one another is at odds with the biblical worldview that all things are bearers of divinity insofar as God signaled God’s love for creation by incarnating Godself in Jesus and giving the Holy Spirit to indwell everything that exists on the planet. The miracle of Jesus as the living enfleshment of God in all things—a miracle that is alongside the gift of the Spirit to the world since time immemorial—signals the ongoing vitality of God’s sustaining presence within the natural order. God is not a sky-God divorced from the material world. Ironically, in the light of its misunderstood history, Christianity is a religion of subsistence, not

transcendence. Now nothing is held back as God overflows Godself into the bounty of the natural world. Now all things are bearers of the sacred; each and every creature is a portrait of God; and everything that is is holy.⁸

GIRARD'S MONSTROUS COUPLINGS

My recovery of Christianity as an animist religion appears to be a bridge too far in relation to René Girard's repudiation of the monstrous animal gods, and other semi-divine beings, that characterize what he calls "primitive religion." The transgressive hybridity that defines Christian animism—the identity-fusion between God, humans, and animals, including the birdlike Holy Spirit—flies in the face of Girard's indictment of extra-biblical religions as sinkholes of grotesque and immoral boundary violations.

Girard's dismissal of ancient and indigenous religions stems from his theory of mimetic desire. He posits the innate capacity to imitate the needs and desires of others, what he calls acquisitive mimesis, as the clue to understanding human nature. While mimesis is a natural feature of the subject, it inevitably leads to tragic results by blurring distinctions and merging identities whenever the subject becomes successful in obtaining the object of desire. Now the mediator who had modeled a craving and attachment to the object becomes the rival who guards the subject from obtaining the object. Both parties see themselves in the other, imitating each other in a merging of their separate identities and a loss of the distinctions between self and other, model and disciple, that had once defined their relationship.

Historically, the gut-level response to the debilitating threat of unregulated desire is to turn a blind eye to the real cause of the problem—the raw compulsion to acquire the desired object—and impute to an unprotected "other" the cause of the community's dissolution into an undifferentiated and disordered state. The other now becomes the victim, the scapegoat, of the group's disintegration insofar as the other functions to divert collective violence to itself and away from the mimetic crisis. To legitimize the process of victimage, the group notices telltale signs of the other's destructive power, for example, its animal-like resemblances or some physical deformity, as confirmation of its guilty status. The solution to mimetic crises, therefore, is the prophylactic of scapegoating violence. To save itself from the inevitable corrosion of mimetic disorder, the community must periodically plunge itself into a paroxysm of violence toward an abnormal and guilty scapegoat. Girard's final move is to say that while so-

called primitive religion has its origins in sacrificial violence, the religion of Jesus in the Gospels repudiates such violence by uncovering the scapegoat mechanism at the base of culture, and by promoting an ethic of love that allows all persons to expose the lie that scapegoating is inevitable and necessary.⁹

My approach to understanding this schema centers on Girard's analysis of the abnormal victims, often portrayed as deified mortals or sacred animal-like beings, who bear the marks of their victimage. He focuses on "slayers of difference" who are alternately the catalysts, or the result, of violating sacrosanct social norms. His many examples include the godlike and "transvestite" Pentheus in Euripides, ass-headed Bottom in Shakespeare, and the divine dog-woman among Canadian Indians.¹⁰ These bizarre creatures, who erase the differences between gods, humans, and animals, either are symbols of mimetic chaos, or are seen as the perpetrators of chaos themselves. Girard gives many examples of these heteromorphic outcasts in ancient materials, biblical books, Amerindian stories, and medieval persecution texts, to name some, but let me illustrate the tenor of his thinking by noting three of the mythological figures from classical sources he uses to advance his theory.

In antiquity, Girard keys on Euripides's *The Bacchae* to highlight the power of mimetic frenzy to destroy differences and wreak destruction. In this tragedy, the god Dionysus inspires his female followers to become orgiastically insane, leaving their families to hunt and copulate with wild animals and satyrs in the forest outside the city walls. In turn, one of Dionysus's adoring followers, Agave, mistakes her son for a lion, killing him on the spot, and then presents his head to her father as a prize of her sick blood-sport. Girard also gives the example of Leda and the swan. Here Zeus is represented by a swan who seduces or rapes Leda in the woods, perhaps on the same night she sleeps with her human husband, and in some versions Leda then lays two eggs from which some of her children are hatched. Similarly, he notes how Pasiphaë, herself a crossbreed of Helios, the sun god, and a human mother, becomes besotted with the god Poseidon in the form of a bull, makes love with the bull in an open field, and then gives birth to the Minotaur, the monstrous flesh-eating hybrid creature with the head and tail of a bull and the body of a man.

All of these examples make the same point in Girard's theory. Nature is the place where "monstrous couplings between men, gods and beasts are in close correspondence with the phenomenon of reciprocal violence and its method of working itself out."¹¹ Thus, mimetic helter-skelter is symbolized

by a chaotic world in which the lines of division between the gods and humankind have collapsed; where gods, humans, and animals all fuse into one “muddy mass” of undifferentiated horror; where sexual norms give way to libidinal license; and where mortal and godlike women, Agave, Leda, and Pasiphaë, respectively, travel outside the confines of civilization into untrammelled nature where they violate sacred taboos, or are violated themselves, and thereby descend into bestiality and madness. Consistently in Girard’s writing, the natural world is the site of violence and chaos—the site where Agave performs infanticide and where Leda and Pasiphaë make love with grotesque animal gods—the site that stands over and against the normal order of structured and differentiated civilized societies. This binary opposition in Girard—the opposition between mimetic frenzy and social norms, between wild nature and cultural order, and between grotesque identity confusion and the ordered differences that separate divinity, humanity, and animality—is one of the primary structural features that unlocks the meaning of his work.¹²

But Girard’s relegation of uncivilized nature, monstrous hybridity, and primitive religion to the world of violence and chaos, and elevation of civil society, social order, and Christianity to the world of safety and equilibrium falsely separates what biblical religion carefully blends and mixes together. Far from being an undifferentiated mass of confusion and violence, the natural world, and its many divine, human, and animal denizens, is the primary locale of the biblical God’s revelation of peace and fecundity. Above all else, nature is God’s preferred habitat in the Bible. In Genesis, God partners with the sacred ground to make human beings out of the fertile soil. In Job, God answers Job’s theodicean cry with a plea for Job to look to nature for answers—and especially to the Behemoth, the great hippopotamus, the first of all of God’s works. In the Gospels, Jesus is born in a stable, uses agriculture as the basis of his many parables, and grounds his most sacred teachings about baptism and eucharist in the primal elements and foodstuffs of water, wine, and bread. And in the Gospels, it is here where God incarnates Godself in the animal body of a dove, conjoining what Girard seeks to separate as essential to nonsacrificial biblical religion.

In the Bible, it is earthen wild places—it is the natural world in all of its glory and wonder—that is the interspecies body of God’s revelatory activity. It is here where Moses encounters a burning bush—God as a sacred plant—where God speaks of God’s perfect identity and instructs Moses on his divine mission. It is here where two Solomonic lovers sing a rapturous poem of erotic delight: Your rounded thighs are precious jewels,

your breasts are palm clusters that I want to climb, your kisses are the best wine that glides over lips and teeth. And it is here where the Markan Jesus, symbolized by the lion, is ministered to in the wilderness by wild beasts and angels at the threshold of his public ministry; where the Johannine Jesus makes mud pies as poultices to heal the man born blind from birth; where the Lukan Jesus goes to pray great drops of blood in Gethsemane on the night of his arrest; and where Jesus's body, in Matthew's account, is laid to rest in a garden tomb after a life spent in compassion and struggle. In the Bible, contrary to Girard, the natural world, and its wealth of flora and fauna, is not a dangerous hodgepodge of demigods and monsters, but the privileged site of God's beauty and habitation.

GREEN MIMESIS

But today, this privileged site is threatened by apocalyptic changes that challenge the very existence of everything we hold dear in creation, whether we are animists or not. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they neither toil nor spin, yet Solomon in all of his glory was not clothed as beautifully as these lilies" (Matt. 6:28). Jesus saw everyday flowers as signs of God's beauty in wild nature—a more satisfying aesthetic feast for the eyes and heart than any built structure imaginable in ancient times. But global warming—what we should call global dying—is creating cascading waves of extinction for wildflowers along with all other plants and animals across the planet. One wonders, could we still see and appreciate today the field lilies Jesus prized when more than two-thirds of the world's uncultivated plant populations are crashing due to introduced species, habitat loss, and agricultural pesticides?

Global warming—the trapping in Earth's atmosphere of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane from car and power plant emissions—is propelling air and water temperatures to rise catastrophically, as much as three to ten degrees Fahrenheit this century, resulting in the melting of Arctic ice and a rise in sea levels by two feet or more. Today, rising temperatures are also causing: an increase in large wildfires, such as the deadly June 2013 Yarnell Hill Fire in Arizona that killed 19 elite firefighters, a product of early snowpack melts, raging summer temperatures, and a mega-drought in the American Southwest; continued sea level rises, already more than eight inches since the end of the industrial age, resulting in terrible flooding in low-level areas from Bangladesh to the Eastern seaboard of the United States, as with Hurricane Sandy; the world's oceans becoming

more acidic and thereby lethal to coral reefs and fish stocks, so that at this time 90 percent of all large fish are gone from the oceans; and in general, a global die-off of species similar to the last mass extinction event over 65 million years ago when the great dinosaurs were wiped out. This sixth Great Extinction is a biocidal runaway train, with biologists conservatively estimating that 30,000 plant and animal species are now driven to extinction every year—including, perhaps, the beautiful field lilies that Jesus lifted up as floral icons of God's benevolent care for all of us.¹³

We will not save what we don't love. The only hope for our collective commitment to saving Earth from our exploitative habits is to fall in love again with the myriads of creatures and landscapes that populate the living places that we all inhabit.¹⁴ Our only hope for blunting the impacts of climate change is to feel our way back into an emotional relationship with our biotic and abiotic kinsfolk. John Milton says that "millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep."¹⁵ This is the ethical promise of Christian animism: a new vision of a world filled with spiritual beings—the beasts of the field, birds of the air, fish of the sea, and trees of the forest—all of whom are saturated with God's presence, and thereby deserving of our protection, even better, our love. We will save what we love. The first naiveté of primordial animism is lost to most of us, but now a second naiveté of biblical animism is available as a critical-but-innocent affective disposition sufficient for rekindling our spiritual bonds with our plant and animal relations.

Here Girard's mimetic theory is crucially important for understanding the attitudinal gesture necessary for reforging primal bonds with our natural cousins. Girard's vision of nature as a muddle of identity confusion may be too one-sided, but his notion of mimesis is a productive resource for cultivating the right emotional framework for healing our deformed relationship with our planetary habitat. Girard maintains that there are actually two modes of mimetic expression that define the human condition: acquisitive mimesis that leads to rivalrous chaos, as we have seen, but also nonacquisitive mimesis that imitates the healthy desires of others and does not descend into a whirlpool of violence and retribution. He writes, "On one side are the prisoners of violent imitation, which always leads to a dead end, and on the other are the adherents of nonviolent imitation, who will meet with no obstacle." At another point he flatly declares, "Mimetic desire is intrinsically good."¹⁶ His point is that while mimesis can easily degenerate into rivalry and aggression, mimesis can also lead to positive identity-formation as the subject learns to appropriate the other's desires while still

maintaining thoughtful boundaries between self and other. The goodness of mimesis, as Girard puts it, inheres in the subject's capacity to grow and develop through nonrivalrous imitation of the other without the need to acquire or dominate the other in the process.

Nurturing healthy mimetic relations with others begins with me in the natural world. In the summer I spend hours sitting in a big chair perched at the edge of the Crum forest longing to hear the wood thrush sing its intoxicating polyphony. I can't literally imitate its song, but I can gently rock in my chair to its supernal rhythms, I can take a break from my mad quest for profit and productivity in everything I do, and I can emotionally drift into a never-ending sequence of notes that stills my spirit, calms my body, and fills my heart with joy and wonder at the beauty of creation. This is mimesis at its best. This exercise in contemplative listening to the wood thrush is a sort of green mimesis, an *imitatio naturae*, where I learn to imitate the thrush's singleness of purpose and the living of its life as a kind of art-form—goals I seek to embody in my own life. At another point in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Consider [or as Girard might say, imitate] the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them" (Matt. 6:26). Especially when I am distraught and feeling hopeless about so many things—my family, my finances, Earth's future, and much more—I take refuge in one particular bird whom God feeds, the wood thrush, to remind myself that God seeks to care for all of us, avian and human alike, and that this is the ground of our hope in a world on fire. Mimetically, I take refuge in the thrush, as Wendell Berry, the Kentucky farmer-philosopher, does among his own feathered friends in this poem with which I will conclude:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water
and I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. And for a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.¹⁷

NOTES

1. Using audiospectrography, see an early study of overlapping, simultaneous notes singing by wood thrushes in Ohio in Donald J. Borror and Carl R. Reese, "Vocal Gymnastics in Wood Thrush Songs" *The Ohio Journal of Science* 56 (1956): 177–82.
2. Henry David Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, ed. Odell Shepard (New York: Dover, 1961), 92.
3. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (New York: Gordon, 1871, 1974), 2:170–71.
4. Graham Harvey, "Animism—A Contemporary Perspective," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron R. Taylor et al. (New York: Continuum, 2005), 1:81.
5. See "new animism" studies of human-nature intersubjectivity in Patrick Curry, "Grizzly Man and the Spiritual Life," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 4 (2010): 206–19; Priscilla Stuckey, "Being Known by a Birch Tree: Animist Reconfigurations of Western Epistemology," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 4 (2010): 182–205; and David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Vintage, 2010).
6. Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 47.
7. See this extra-canonical exhortation to Christian asceticism from late antiquity, urging its readers to cleanse themselves of worldly pollution by overcoming fleshly temptations: "Blessed are those who have not polluted their flesh by craving for this world, but are dead to the world that they may live for God!" ("Pseudo-Titus," in Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 239).
8. Here I am reminded of Job's animism of sorts, when he says, "But ask the animals and they will teach you; the birds of the air and they will tell you; speak to the Earth and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you" (Job 12:7–8). I also think about Karl Barth's statement that approaches a kind of animism, "God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog. We do well to listen to him if he really does" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1:1, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936, 1975], 55).
9. For an overview of Girard's theory of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism see Mark I. Wallace and Theophus H. Smith, "The Editors' Introduction," in *Curing Violence*, ed. Wallace and Smith (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1994), xvii–xxvi; and Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, "Religion and the Thought of René Girard: An Introduction," in *Curing Violence*, ed. Wallace and Smith, 3–24.
10. See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 39–67, 119–68, and *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 44–75.
11. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 220.
12. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 220.

13. See Elisabeth Rosenthal and Andrew C. Revkin, "Science Panel Says Global Warming is 'Unequivocal,'" *New York Times*, February 3, 2007, A1, A5. Also see James Gustave Speth, *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); and Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006).
14. On saving what we love, see Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).
15. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book 4, lines 677–78.
16. Girard's discussion of positive mimesis is an underdeveloped aspect of his fundamental anthropology, but see Rebecca Adams, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard," *Religion and Literature* 25 (1993): 9–33, and René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009), 120–35. On the challenges of Girard's appeal to good mimesis in the light of his postmodern thesis that the subject's desires are never innate but intersubjectively constructed by others, see Martha J. Reineke, "After the Scapegoat: René Girard's Apocalyptic Vision and the Legacy of Mimetic Theory," *Philosophy Today* 56 (2012): 63–75, and Stephen L. Gardner, "The Deepening Impasse of Modernity," *Society* 47 (2010): 452–60 [review of Girard's *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*].
17. Wendell Berry, "When Despair for the World Grows in Me," in *Earth Prayers From Around the World*, ed. Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 102.