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REVENGE, RESURRECTION AND REDEMPTION: MAPPING THE MYSTIQUES OF MIMESIS IN STIEG LARSSON'S *THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the phenomena of mystique in Stieg Larsson's crime novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. The objectives of the study are twofold: to illustrate how mystique often leads to acts of mimicry, and to map the mimesis inspired by the mystique of the novel's central crime investigation to reflect on religious references based on René Girard's mimetic theory. The analysis is presented in two parts. The first part traces how elements of mystique such as the mystery of an impossible crime and the allure of divine legitimacy create both personal obsession and cultural fanatism displayed through imitative actions of various key characters. The second part applies René Girard's triangle of desire to illustrate how mimetic desire can bring about a sense of rivalry that triggers a chain of violent actions, which entails casualties both intentional and accidental. The analysis also applies Girard's scapegoat mechanism to reveal how the narrative rids itself of violence and resumes its status quo through sacrificing the social ties between the male and female protagonists. The study concludes by projecting that the novel itself is fashioned in imitation of the Christian belief and that the storylines involving the key players in the triangle of desire are marked by the Christian themes of revenge, resurrection and redemption. This suggests that mimesis directs the plot and motivates the players, and that cultural ideologies, such as a major world religion, are indeed too potent and irresistible not to mimic, even for an author who has set out to caution his readers against the risk of mimicking.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* gave rise to the unprecedented global popularity of Scandinavian crime fiction.[1] This sub-genre of iconoclastic writing integrating social criticism with the

[1] Barry Forshaw (2013) acknowledges that Larsson "was comfortably the most commercially successful writer of the first decade of the twenty-first century, albeit posthumously."

presentation of crime investigation had been recognized since the success of Swedish writers Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's Martin Beck series (1965-1975) in the second half of the twentieth century and further propagated by other distinguished Scandinavian crime writers such as Henning Mankell, Karin Fossum, Peter Høeg, and Jo Nesbø. The "quaint aesthetics of the Scandinavian countryside" and the "socialist backdrop" suggesting the decay of a full-size welfare state are, according to MacDougall (2010), "precisely what makes the genre work." It was, nevertheless, not until the epic commercial success of Larsson's debut novel, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, first published in Sweden in 2005 and of the sequels in his *Millennium* trilogy[2] that Scandinavian crime fiction became a worldwide literary phenomenon (Nestingen, 2012) and began to pick up significant momentum on multidisciplinary scholastic platforms, giving wing to the now familiar terms such as 'Scandinavian Noir,' 'Nordic Noir' and 'ScandiCrime' which are also applicable to films and television series of "dark crime and drama portraying complex and strong characters" set in Nordic countries (Sjørslev, 2014).

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo was the first installment of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy. The other two are *The Girl Who Played with Fire* and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* published in 2006 and 2007 respectively. All three novels feature the same protagonists, investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist and sociopathic hacker Lisbeth Salander, and develop on continuing and complex storylines of misogynistic social ills. Each installment in the trilogy, nevertheless, makes use of different sub-genres of crime fiction, predominantly the locked-room mystery in the first book, psychological thriller in the second, and conspiracy and courtroom thriller in the last. The diverse investigative formats give each novel its own distinct feel as well as a fresh take on each new leg of the plot development. The third-person limited omniscient point of view extends from those of the protagonists in the first book to include many of the villains' in the sequels. The novels are unified by a strong thread of narrative, recurrent character traits and subjective morality, yet each book stands out in its own right as a paradigm of crime fiction writing.

Sadly, Stieg Larsson did not live to see the phenomenal success of his three novels. He died suddenly of heart failure in 2004, on the eve of the publication of his first book, a tragic turn of events that did not escape the attention of the media. How much Larsson's untimely death contributed to the sensational sales of his novels is difficult to postulate, but his premature departure at a relatively young age (he was only fifty years old) did give rise to much conjecture concerning conspiracies and murder that are not unlike those in his novels. His sudden death also conjured an air of mysticism about the author who had been a lifelong advocate of left-wing justice and women's rights and had collected countless death threats as a result of his own journalistic work (Forshaw, 2010; McGrath, 2010). That questions concerning the books will never be answered by the author himself has in some ways attracted and fueled the many ongoing discussions and debates about the trilogy. The unavailability of any definite authorial judgment has created an irresistible mystique surrounding both the works and their creator. Larsson's editor at Norstedts, a Swedish publishing house, compares the speculations around the author's deliberations to "the fun-house mirrors in the Tivoli" where "everything gets very complicated" due to the absence of the author (McGrath, 2010). "To make sense of the arguments for and against this acclaim," Forshaw (2013) advises, "the Larsson phenomenon merits sustained inquiry on a level with Blomkvist and Salander's own sleuthing."

Incidentally, mystique is a key motif in Larsson's first novel whose plot pivots around an investigation of a 36-year-old case about the disappearance of a 16-year-old girl. When a young, intelligent and beautiful girl from a very rich family went missing, foul play was suspected. The circumstances surrounding the disappearance were the components typical of a locked-room mystery. In spite of thorough searches, however, her body was never found. Subsequently, the perpetrator was never identified, and the crime never solved. The efforts to unravel the mystery has since become an all-consuming obsession of two old men, the girl's great-uncle and the police inspector in charge of the investigation, and, during the course of the book, quickly take over the days and nights of the book's protagonists.

Mystique, as shown in this story, inspires mimesis. As René Girard proposes in his mimetic theory (Girard, 1965; 1977), mimetic desire could spark rivalry and collective violence that could be alleviated and/or prevented by the sacrifice of a scapegoat, a process that explains many ancient and present-day social behaviors and religious rituals. It is on this angle of mystique that the present study proposes to focus, with the aims firstly to illustrate how, in the novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, elements of mystique displayed through religious and political fanatism often lead to acts of mimicry, and secondly to map the mimesis inspired by the mystique of the central crime investigation in the novel in order to reflect on the religious references using René Girard's concepts of the 'triangle of desire' and 'scapegoat mechanism' from the mimetic theory.

[2] As of August 2020, with three new installments from David Lagercrantz, *The Girl in the Spider's Web* (2015), *The Girl Who Takes an Eye for an Eye* (2017) and *The Girl Who Lived Twice* (2019), the *Millennium* series has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide, making it one of the best-selling book series in history and "one of the Bookseller's 30 most influential books of the last 30 years" (Amazon, 2020).

2. STIEG LARSSON'S *THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO* AND FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo tells stories of two lives that become intertwined in a crime investigation, and that somehow manage to return to their respective status quos after much ado. At the beginning of the novel, a well-known and formerly well-respected journalist Mikael Blomkvist is found guilty in a libel court case against a powerful financier, Hans-Erik Wennerström. Admitting defeat, the beleaguered Blomkvist bids farewell to his occasional lover and co-founder of the magazine *Millennium*, Erika Berger, and retreats to Hedeby Island to undertake a commission by an old industrialist, Henrik Vanger, to unearth the truth about his great-niece and protégé, Harriet Vanger, who disappeared without a trace thirty-six years earlier. At the suggestion of Vanger's lawyer, Blomkvist hires Lisbeth Salander, a young and asocial investigator freelancing at a security company, as his research assistant. Unbeknownst to neither Blomkvist nor the lawyer, Salander is a ward of the state with a long record of misdemeanors - most of which are the results of unnecessary provocations from various bullies and figures of authority - and a world-class computer hacker with a photographic memory. Having been maltreated by the authority all her life, Salander is a law unto herself. When she is raped by a guardian entrusted by the state to look after her well-being, she returns to give him punishments that are as brutal and shameful as the ones inflicted upon her.

During their investigation on Harriet Vanger's disappearance, Blomkvist and Salander develop a sexual relationship while uncovering a series of hideous crimes against women committed by two misogynists in the Vanger family, father-and-son serial killers, Gottfried and Martin - the former is long dead, and the latter is the present CEO of the Vanger Group. In their final confrontation, Blomkvist is captured and tortured by Martin Vanger in his chamber of horror where countless women have, over many years, been imprisoned, raped and killed. Blomkvist, however, is rescued by Salander who chases Martin Vanger to his death in a car crash. Afterwards, they track down Harriet Vanger, who fled the island at the age of sixteen to escape from the violence of her older brother Martin, and persuade her to return to Hedeby to reunite with her distressed great-uncle. With the mystery of Harriet Vanger considered solved, Blomkvist sets out to redress his account with Hans-Erik Wennerström. Using detailed information supplied by Salander's specialized hacking skill, Blomkvist exposes the financier's corrupted organization, reestablishes his career as a serious investigative journalist and happily returns to his longtime lover at the *Millennium* magazine. Salander steals an obscene amount of money from Wennerström's secret bank accounts and returns to her solitary existence.

Studies on the novel have generally focused on key aspects contributing to the popularity of a new type of protagonist embodied by Lisbeth Salander, namely undiluted violence (Todd, 2010; Stenport and Alm, 2012; Vaage, 2019), gender fluidity (Lorber, 2012; Schippers, 2012), and selective morality (Grodal, 2011). For instance, Todd (2010) mentions that the novel leans on little-known "savage sounding" Christian references "to add a lush esoteric aura to its plot." Stenport and Alm (2012) observes that by juxtaposing national statistics of misogynistic practices with corporate rhetoric such as "Incentive," "Consequence Analyses," "Mergers," "Hostile Takeover" and "Final Audit" in section titles, the novel posits that crimes against women are "consistently intertwined" with the corporate structures that make up the economy of Sweden. Vaage (2019) explains that excessive punishment carried out by Salander is perceived to be not merely tolerable but even enjoyable as the character is clearly fantastic and fictional and the violence is portrayed as vigilante revenge in realistic setting. Lorber (2012) posits that Salander is celebrated by men and women alike thanks to the various sexual fantasies made possible by her gender ambiguity. Grodal (2011) employs Lawrence Kohlberg's functional typology of moral systems to discuss the Swedish television adaptation of Stieg Larsson's first novel and explain how the viewers' emotional needs for fairness lure them to justify Salander's selective morality in the story.

The present study, while acknowledging the weight of Lisbeth Salander's actions and motivations on the course of Larsson's first novel, proposes, moreover, to extend the investigation of the impact of actions to two other key characters, namely Mikael Blomkvist and Harriet Vanger, and to track how their involvement and interaction are spurred on by the impetuous drive to imitate one another and how, in a bigger picture, their respective narratives seem to suggest the secularized versions of the biblical themes of revenge, resurrection and redemption.

3. RENÉ GIRARD'S MIMETIC THEORY: TRIANGLE OF DESIRE AND SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM

René Girard is a French archeological philosopher, historian and literary critic. In his attempts to illustrate the workings of social relations, he proposes mimesis as a determining, yet in no way definite, factor and mimetic desire as a central dimension of human nature. According to Girard, a subject propels a desire towards an object through the mediation of a model who possesses or expresses his desire towards the same

object. In other words, the mediator's desire for an object inspires the subject's desire for that very object. Desire, therefore, is neither autonomous nor extemporaneous (Palaver, 2013); it is, in short, mimetic.

Girard employs two triangular models to demonstrate his propositions and gives examples from the relationships of characters in literary works. Each triangle - known as the triangle of desire - comprises three key players: the subject, the mediator and the object of desire. The first triangular type is termed the 'external' model and characterized by the distance between the mediator and the subject which is large enough for the two to stay hierarchically apart and for the subject to remain reverent to the mediator. Referring to Don Quixote's chivalric imitation of Amadis of Gaul, Girard states that Amadis (the mediator) determines the desire to embrace chivalric existence (the object) for Don Quixote (the subject). In other words, Don Quixote's object of desire is chosen - mediated - by Amadis. When the mediator's influence is felt, the subject's fundamental prerogative is surrendered, the sense of reality lost, and judgment paralyzed. This consequently has a potential to heighten the subject's reverence towards the mediator. The second type of triangular desire, by contrast, is called the 'internal' model and characterized by the reduced distance between the mediator and the subject, which then allows the two to occupy the same social sphere and enables the subject to express rivalry and hostility towards the mediator who appears also to act as an obstacle. Girard gives examples from Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* in which the subject (Julien Sorel) rises to a position similar to that of his mediator (Monsieur de Croisenois), making them thus rivals for their mutual object of desire (the proud Mathilde de la Mole). This type of desire could end up planting 'ressentiment'[3] in the subject by instigating hostile feelings such as envy, jealousy and hatred towards the mediator. Girard emphasizes, however, that the distance between the mediator and the subject is spiritual rather than physical, and that the triangles are, therefore, metaphorical (Girard, 1965).

Girard then applies the concept of mimetic desire to explain violence in human history seeded by the sense of hostility and rivalry in acts of mimicry. He depicts the collective violence provoked by a mob that imitates one another's desire and antagonism and the community's effort to keep the violence at a minimum by designating a victim - a scapegoat - to undergo a sacred ritual or dangerous assignment. This 'scapegoat mechanism' helps resolve the crisis of mob violence by assuming that the victim is, symbolically or hysterically, both the cause and the cure of the conflict. The only path to prevent the catastrophic hysteria and snowballing of imitative desire, according to Girard, is to denounce mimesis, in the same way that Jesus Christ did by not retaliating against His captors. Detrimental outcomes of imitative acts can be intercepted, it can be deduced, through the mental strength not to give in to the human inclination towards mimetic desire (Girard, 1977).

The mimetic theory has been applied to analyze and explain relationships and phenomena in diverse academic disciplines such as theology (Schmidt, 2015; Lamb, 2018; Ayaydin Cebe and Akbaş Arslanoğlu, 2020), medicine and psychiatry (Riordan, 2017; Strand, 2018; Jager and Perron, 2020), literature (Korneeva, 2014; Goswami, 2015; Mäkelä, 2015; Rossouw, 2017; Chukwumah, 2018), and films (Humbert, 2017; Padgate, 2019a and 2019b). For example, Lamb (2018) explores how mimetic desire could be related to Christian discipleship and education and suggests that Christian educators should model the gospel externally and internally to motivate their students to be good citizens. Riordan (2017) draws on Girardian anthropology to hypothesize that the scapegoat mechanism occurred among groups of victims in ancient communities who resorted to schizophrenia as a functional adaptation by designating scapegoat victims in order to increase inclusive fitness, restore order and ward off self-destruction. Goswami (2015) problematizes Charlotte Bronte's biased underrepresentation of Indianness - referred to in the article as 'homogenized Othering' - in *Jane Eyre* by legitimizing the novel as both a quintessential discourse of British selfhood and a mimetic response to British social institutions. Humbert (2017) examines the roots of violence in the narratives of seven films directed by Alfred Hitchcock and discovers that the violence in the films is originated not so much under the Freudian motive of human sexuality as under the Girardian motive of imitation and competition. Padgate (2019b) analyzes the power politics in the narrative of the film *Chloe* based on the triangular desire mirrored in the film and reveals the male hegemony underlying the narrative that subsequently undermines the supposed message of female empowerment. The death of a female protagonist at the end, in addition, turns her into a scapegoat victim to restore the patriarchal dominion in the narrative.

Carrying on the strength of the Girardian applications suggested by these previous studies in fields as diverse as psychology, theology and race and gender politics, the present work offers to employ Girard's concept of triangular desire to map the insuppressible, and human, urge to imitate, to highlight recurring biblical suggestions, and to point out the threats of 'othering' and of violence posed by the abuse of

[3] Girard borrows the term 'ressentiment' from German philosopher Max Scheler to encapsulate the result of internal mediation. To quote Girard, "the word *ressentiment* itself underscores the quality of reaction, of repercussion which characterizes the experience of the subject in this type of mediation. The impassioned admiration and desire to emulate stumble over the unfair obstacle with which the model seems to block the way of his disciple, and then these passions recoil on the disciple in the form of impotent hatred, thus causing the sort of psychological self-poisoning so well described by Scheler" (Girard, 1965).

institutionalized power in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. By so doing, this study hopes to assert that mimesis is a key motif of the novel and that social, political and religious powers are mimicked, fixated on and parodied by every main character, not least by the author himself.

4. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

In order to clarify two key terms employed in this study: mystique and mimesis, this section provides general definitions of the terms as well as specific denotations for the use of these terms in the analysis.

Firstly, 'mystique' has alternately been defined as an aura of heightened value, interest or meaning surrounding something that makes it seem mysterious, attractive or special (Soukhanov, 1992; Longman, 2000; McIntosh, 2013; Cambridge Dictionary, 2020b). The quality of mystique could be manifested through a framework of doctrines, ideas, beliefs or a particular occupation or pursuit rendering an air of power, awe and reverence around something or someone (Collins Dictionary, 2020b; Dictionary.com, 2020b; Merriam-Webster, 2020b).

In the context of this study, the term 'mystique' refers to a framework of doctrines, ideas and beliefs constructed around a person, institute or activity that endow an air or attitude of mystery and reverence - specifically the reference to the religious and political zealousness of the various Vanger family members in the novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* - and an aura of mystery or mystical power surrounding a particular pursuit - specifically the investigation concerning the disappearance and, later on, the reappearance of Harriet Vanger.

Secondly, 'mimesis' has been defined as the imitation, representation or reproduction of aspects of nature, events and human actions and behaviors as well as a symptom of hysteria (Soukhanov, 1992; Sinclair, 2001; Cambridge Dictionary, 2020; Collins Dictionary, 2020a; Dictionary.com, 2020a; Merriam-Webster, 2020a).

In this study, the term 'mimesis' refers to the act of imitation either by representing and/or reproducing words of others or by recreating actions and events. Also, 'mimesis' is used in the context of Girard's mimetic theory with reference to the mimetic desire (as illustrated in the triangle of desire) and the scapegoat mechanism.

5. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* in two parts. The first part discusses the elements of mystique in the novel along with imitative pursuits inspired by them. The second part makes use of René Girard's triangle of desire to evince the mimetic development of the book's protagonists and concludes the outcomes of the book's narrative by reflecting on religious references based on Girard's scapegoat mechanism.

Part one: Mystique, fanatism and mimesis of intellectual idiosyncrasies and cultural ideologies

True to the genre of Scandinavian Noir, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* features a complex plot wrought by multiple storylines: that of Mikael Blomkvist's career debacle which prompts him into accepting a sleuthing job he would never otherwise be persuaded to take, that of Lisbeth Salander's conflict with her new guardian which drives her to assume the role of a vigilante to compensate for the state's legal inadequacy, and that of Harriet Vanger's disappearance which foregrounds a history of nationalistic fanatism and misogynistic sadism that constitute motives for the crimes in the novel's 'detective' storyline. In these entanglements, mystique is a key element that inspires the characters to plough ahead while paradoxically luring them time and again back into the past to retrace the steps of their respective forerunners in indulgent and obsessive acts of mimicry.

Industrial tycoon Henrik Vanger stepped down from chairing the board of his vast business empire not long after the unexplained disappearance of his great-niece, Harriet Vanger, apparently to devote himself full-time to solving the locked-room mystery of the case:

> *A certain frustration could be read in the official notes when the search was called off on the third day after the girl's disappearance .... Harriet Vanger seemed to have dissolved into thin air, and Henrik Vanger's years of torment had begun.* (Larsson, 2008: 144)

He hired search teams, worked on all the available clues, took meticulous notes and compiled boxes and boxes of personal journals and police records that led nowhere and revealed nothing. For nearly forty years, he has been consumed by the misery of not knowing what really happened to her. Determined to find out the truth before the clock runs out, he hires Mikael Blomkvist to reinvestigate the disappearance: "I want

you to find out who in the family murdered Harriet, and who since then has spent almost forty years trying to drive me insane" (Larsson, 2008: 85).

Blomkvist accepts the job, initially half-heartedly as an occupational therapy to convalesce from his fall from grace. The impossibility of the supposed crime soon exerts a firm grip on him: "This story has got under my skin too" (Larsson, 2008: 356), and he refuses to back off even when threatened with bullets aimed for his head: "I'm going to find you and I will get you" (Larsson, 2008: 387). Realizing that time is pressing, Blomkvist hires Lisbeth Salander to go through police files to identify old murder cases that match the descriptions of ritual punishments from the Bible's Book of Leviticus written in codes at the back of Harriet's diary.

Salander, in turn, quickly finds herself unable to be emotionally detached from the investigation: "She had no wish to be shut out and would have gladly done the job for free" (Larsson, 2008: 356), and resolves to put her own troubled life on hold while dedicating her time to solving the crime: "I want to stay on the case …. I want to know where this story is going" (Larsson, 2008: 381).

The impossibility and irrationality of Harriet Vanger's disappearance challenge the logical minds of these three professionals - Henrik Vanger, Michael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander - who are usually very proficient in their respective fields of expertise - business, journalism and computer. The mystery creates an aura of incomprehension that frustrates their professional pride and drives them to work incessantly to make sense of it: "And nothing in the investigation seems to follow normal logic. Every question remains unanswered, every clue leads to a dead end" (Larsson, 2008: 217). The mystique of the unsolved case, in other words, generates an obsession that becomes contagious, leading one rational character after another to devote their full attention to a seemingly hopeless case, in spite of themselves.

On a much somber note, and in the tradition of social commentary characteristic of Scandinavian crime fiction, mystique is also used to convey a moral and political message of the novel. In its attempt to demonstrate prejudices that undermine the social democratic structure of Sweden, the novel once again turns to the concept of mimicry. Whereas acts of mimicry are the 'result' of the long and puzzled search for Harriet Vanger's disappearance, mimicry serves as a 'cause' - a reason as well as an excuse - for two serial killers in the Vanger clan to conduct a string of hideous crimes against women. In this case, political and religious authorities are shown to inspire fanatisms that eventually lead to imitative pursuits.

Gottfried Vanger, Henrik's late brother, affiliated himself personally and ideologically with Hitler's Nazism. His political belief, therefore, was of rightist extremism and supremacism, which gave him a bloated sense of self-importance and served as a pretext for his domestic, racist and sexist abuses. He submitted his son and daughter - Martin and Harriet - to sexual molestation, distorting a morbid fantasy into a filial duty; a task duly performed by Martin and shunned by Harriet. His political inclination, in addition, gave him a premise for intense racial discrimination. Coupled with the misogynistic fervor in his hermeneutic reading of the Book of Leviticus, the third book of The Old Testament - or the Hebrew Bible - which provides instructions on ritual and moral practices[4], he directed his most violent acts to punishing women with names of Jewish origin such as Rebecka, Mari, Rakel, Magda, Liv, Lena and Sara. Rakel Lunde, a fortune teller, for instance, was murdered in 1957. She was found naked and tied up. The cause of death was "a heavy rock being repeatedly thrown at her". The Leviticus passage accompanying her death, quoted most definitely out of context, was: "A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned with stones, their blood shall be upon them" (Larsson, 2008: 350).

Gottfried also 'initiated' his son, Martin, into the gruesome rite of raping and killing women. After his father's death, Martin carries on with the practice by abducting countless women and detaining, raping and killing them in the basement of his house before disposing of their bodies in the sea. All this because "it's so easy. Women disappear all the time. Nobody misses them. Immigrants. Whores from Russia. Thousands of people pass through Sweden every year" (Larsson, 2008: 417). In his hands, ritual imitation transforms into a sick parody of biblical literalism. Mimicking a biblical animal sacrifice, he kills a neighborhood cat, chars the corpse in the family crypt and puts its mutilated body in front of Blomkvist's cabin hoping to dissuade the amateur detective from pursuing the investigation. A religious text, therefore, is parodied to create a façade of

[4] The Book of Leviticus (Literal Word, 2001, Leviticus 1:1-27:34) records God's commands to the Israelites through Moses with emphasis on holiness, cleanliness, rituals and Jewish priesthood and with instructions to observe rules on issues such as sexual behaviors, family relations, worship and sacrifice. The Book teaches that so long as humans avoid impurity, they can be close to God. Impurity is caused by sins as well as everyday events such as childbirth and menstruation. The rituals performed by priests are essential as the means to restore cleanliness and gain forgiveness from God. The atonement rituals involve a symbolic sacrifice of the victim's life through the pouring or sprinkling of blood to wipe out the sin (Discover Books of the Bible, 2020; Averbeck, 2020). The descriptions of the sacrificial rituals, if taken literally, can be misappropriated and abused, as shown in the persecution of animals and women in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. In this novel, the Book of Leviticus functions as both the author's (Larsson's) literary device to design complex detective clues as well as sadistic, psychopathic murderers and the protagonists' (Blomkvist and Salander's) key documentation leading to the solution of the crimes and the salvation of Harriet Vanger.

mystique for inhuman crimes. Salander is not far off the mark when she propounds an idea that the elusive killer she and Blomkvist are hunting is not "an insane serial killer who read the Bible wrong," but "just a common or garden bastard who hates women" (Larsson, 2008: 356).

Whereas the Book of Leviticus offers a means (rituals to perform and rules to follow) to a virtuous end (harmony with God), it is obvious that its verses are lifted out of context by the criminals in Larsson's novel to justify their venomous anti-Semitic and misogynistic inclinations. Instructions meant to cleanse and harmonize, sadly, are turned into a manual for murder. The killers' social and financial privileges, moreover, enable them to commit and then hide their crimes, thus enjoying their serial killer status, albeit incognito, for decades while endangering the security of every woman they meet. These fictional, and admittedly extreme, instances nonetheless provide a social and political critique of how institutionalized power endowed by the accident of race, class and sex can be abused to glorify some individuals and victimize others. They also help illustrate a moral message of how misguided ideological zealousness breeds an air of mystique which subsequently feeds the ego and narcissism of certain groups of people and, in turn, is kept alive and aggressive by them.

Mystique, it can be concluded, is alluring and addictive. It can create a sense of awe and an aura of power that attract intelligent people like Henrik Vanger, Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander to an unsolved mystery, in spite of the risk of pain and no promise of glory. One after another, these curious characters become obsessed with the challenge of the case that puts their intellectual faculty to the test. On the other hand, mystique can generate an air of equivocation that allows fanatical manipulation and discrimination, as in the cases of the tortures and murders of women and animals conducted by the father-son serial killers, Gottfried and Martin Vanger, in their unsound imitation of misconceived politics. The story may be fictional, but it, as typical of Scandinavian Crime Fiction, must also be regarded as metaphorical of criminal activities that threaten people in the real world and that are enabled, even empowered, by the practice of mimicking and/or parodying certain cultural ideologies.

Part two: Mapping the mystique of mimesis through the triangle of desire and the scapegoat mechanism

Apart from purporting that Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* makes a social critique by showing that elements of mystique are potentially powerful tools to instigate obsessive and imitative practices as evidenced in the actions of various key characters described in the previous section, this study also aims to show that Larsson manifests a grander revelation of mimesis in allegorizing the biblical narrative in the lives of the novel's protagonists through three milestones: revenge, resurrection and redemption. René Girard's mimetic theory is applied to explain this projection.

The relationship between Blomkvist and Salander can be illustrated simply in two triangles of desire; the first is externally mediated by Harriet Vanger, and the second is internally mediated also by Harriet Vanger. In both, the mediation of Harriet Vanger stands for the mystery of her disappearance and the mystique generated by it.

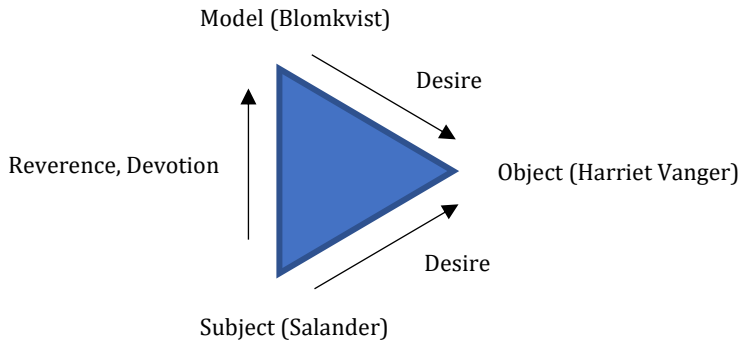

Figure 1: External Mediation

Figure 1 shows the mimetic relation between Blomkvist and Salander in the earliest stage of their acquaintance. When Blomkvist hires Salander as 'his' research assistant, the hierarchical distance between the two characters is formal and professional. At their first encounter, the two protagonists are obviously on different social planes. Blomkvist, despite his recent ignominy, is recognized as a serious journalist with integrity. Salander, in contrast, is a mistreated ward of state often mistaken to be intellectually challenged and morally loose. By accepting to work for Blomkvist, Salander consequently concedes to mimic his desire to unravel the mystery of the Harriet Vanger case. Socially as well as professionally speaking, Blomkvist and Salander are at this stage hierarchically apart. The metaphorical distance is, therefore, externally mediated as

represented in this figure. Blomkvist acts as the revered model whose desire for the object (Harriet Vanger) is imitated by the subject (Salander). Salander's initial interest in the object (Harriet Vanger), it can be deduced, stems from her interest in (devotion to) Blomkvist. Her desire to solve the case is mediated by Blomkvist's desire to solve the case. It is, in other words, mimetic.

Soon, however, their initial social distance is reduced by the mutual respect for each other's professionalism and then completely wiped out by their sexual relationship. Proved to be highly intelligent, Salander takes an increasingly critical role in the investigation. She becomes Blomkvist's indispensable partner and works side by side as his equal. Accordingly, the metaphorical triangle rotates to place the subject (Salander) on the same plane as the model (Blomkvist), as shown in Figure 2.

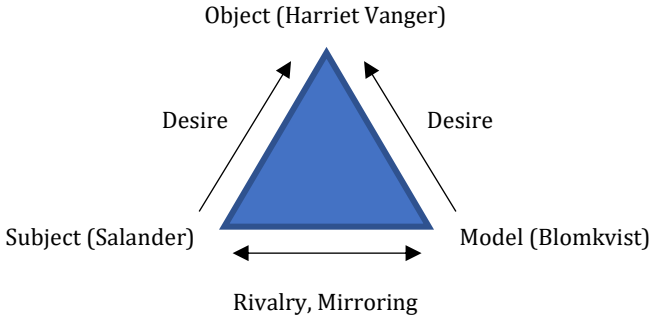

Figure 2: Internal Mediation

Figure 2 illustrates the mirroring mimesis of the subject (Salander) whose desire for the object (Harriet Vanger) is internally mediated by the model's (Blomkvist's) desire for the same object. According to Girard, acts of mimicry between parties occupying a space that has no spiritual distance are likely to result in a sense of 'ressentiment,' which could be displayed through rivalry and even turned into collective violence. Although Salander's relationship with Blomkvist is for the most part amicable, she is competitive by nature. She has no trouble complimenting Blomkvist on his breakthrough that took place before she comes to the scene:

> *Salander said: "It was amazing what you discovered with the pictures."*
> *Blomkvist was surprised. Salander did not seem the type to throw compliments around, and he felt flattered. On the other hand - from a purely journalistic point of view - it was quite an achievement.* (Larsson, 2008: 362)

After she gets on board, however, envy and rivalry can be detected when on a rare occasion Blomkvist is one step ahead of her in their investigation:

> *"There's one more connection," Blomkvist said suddenly. "Maybe you've already thought of it."*
> *"What?"*
> *"Their names."*
> *Salander thought for a moment and shook her head.*
> *"They're all biblical names."*
> *"Not true," she said. "Where is there a Liv or Lena in the Bible?"*
> *"They are there. Liv means to live, in other words Eva. And come on - what's Lena short for?"*
> *Salander grimaced in annoyance. He had been quicker than she was. She did not like that.*
> *"Magdalena," she said.* (Larsson, 2008: 355)

Their actions from this point on mirror each other in key moments. With or without rivalry, Salander comes out as the more impressive of the two. When Blomkvist finally identifies Martin Vanger as the ultimate villain from studying a photograph in Henrik Vanger's collection, Salander comes to the same conclusion separately and almost simultaneously from researching documents in the archive of the Vanger Corporation. In a climactic scene in which Martin Vanger is preparing to kill Blomkvist whom he has tied up on a noose in his secret torture chamber, Blomkvist is saved by Salander who 'follows' him there, cracks Martin Vanger's shoulder blade with a golf club and chases him to his death in a car crash. Later on, when their collective effort finally pries open the mystery of Harriet's disappearance, Blomkvist flies solo to Australia to bring back Harriet Vanger and cash in the reward of five million kronor from her uncle. Soon, Salander flies out to Switzerland on her own to cash in over two billion kronor from the stolen accounts of Hans-Erik Wennerström.

Inevitably, acts of mimesis in the novel bring about various forms of violence that injure, torture and kill both humans and animals. In their search for the solution to the Harriet Vanger case, Blomkvist and Salander encounter incidents of animal sacrifices and murders of women. Blomkvist is shot at and suffers a

wound in his head. He is later on strangled and will always bear the scar cut by the noose on his neck. Salander herself inflicts Martin Vanger with broken bones and can be linked to his death. Even after Martin Vanger's demise, the threat of more damage still looms near as Blomkvist and Salander continue to be in close contact, thus continuing to mirror each other. Wennerström will prove to receive a fatal spin-off from it. His business will be ruined by Blomkvist, but his life will be cut short by Salander.

To short-circuit the reeling of violence and bring the actions back to their status quo, hence to a sense of some equilibrium and denouement, Blomkvist and Salander must be separated. The separation, however, is a metaphorical sacrifice of Lisbeth Salander. Blomkvist's status quo is affirmed in a world of relative normalcy, Salander's is guaranteed to be in a lonely world of misfits: "She had no faith in herself. Blomkvist lived in a world populated by people with respectable jobs, people with orderly lives and lots of grown-up points. His friends did things, went on T.V., and shaped the headlines" (Larsson, 2008: 553). Being with Blomkvist gives Salander an opportunity for social integration and contentment: "She lay there for a long time, leaning on one hand, watching him. He seemed happy, and she too felt strangely content with life" (Larsson, 2008: 503). Separating them means sacrificing Salander's trust and sense of belonging as well as her chance to live a happy and normal life. To refer to the term coined by René Girard, Salander is a 'scapegoat' in Larsson's plot.

Girard's 'scapegoat mechanism' explains the collective effort of a community to contain a mob's imitation of violence within the arrangement of ritualistic practice. To pacify the mob, a scapegoat is designated as the cause of the catastrophe which must be done away with to return the community to its state of grace, until a new crisis arises, that is. Jesus Christ, as Girard points out, broke away from the devastating finality of mimetic desire by refusing to imitate the collective violence inflicted upon Him. He lived by the code of love and forgiveness to the very end.

Though Christ-like in her physical frailty, Salander's temperament cannot be further away from the Christian model, thus ensuring the continued presence of violence in her life. Misanthrophy and revenge are recurrent themes in Salander's book. Like the Book of Leviticus, Salander fits better in the category of the Old Testament than in the gospels of the New Testament. As an avenger of the wronged females, herself included, Salander's actions that drive her abusive guardian to despair and Martin Vanger to his death are the most exacting forms of revenge. As a savior of Blomkvist, however, she facilitates his revenge against the powerful Hans-Erik Wennerström by supplying him with damaging information hacked directly from the financier's private computer. Using these first-hand data, Blomkvist is able to produce an article with watertight evidence that condemns his nemesis beyond purgatory and restores his reputation as a sharp and courageous investigative journalist. The success of the scoop, which also spawns a best-selling book detailing the mafia activities of the financier, eventually puts his magazine financially back on its feet. Having redressed the debacle, Blomkvist returns to Stockholm and picks up both his job and his lover/co-owner at the *Millennium* magazine. Seeing him with his long-time and glamorous lover, Salander aborts the plan to declare her love for him and retreats to fester in solitude: "'What a pathetic fool you are, Salander,' she said out loud" (Larsson, 2008: 554). The two protagonists will never meet socially again through the rest of Larsson's trilogy. The ties are severed. The sacrifice is complete. Peace is restored, for the time being.

6. REVELATION: REVENGE, RESURRECTION AND REDEMPTION

A reflection on the extent to which the lives of Mikael Blomkvist, Lisbeth Salander and Harriet Vanger are entangled reveals that their different paths are bound not only triangularly but also thematically. The parallel theme concerning the secularization of a biblical allegory weaving through *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* can be chronicled in three parts: the Old-Testament 'Revenge,' the New-Testament 'Resurrection,' and the Judgment-Day 'Redemption,' which are manifested in the storylines involving the three main characters featured in the triangle of desire.

The showdown of the cumulative mimetic acts primes Salander and Blomkvinst for a revenge: one with a sword, the other with a pen. Salander avenges life with life; she makes Martin Vanger and Hans-Erik Wennerström pay for their crimes with their own lives. Blomkvist makes Wennerström pay for a hiccup in his (Blomkvist's) professional life by destroying the financier's business empire in a magazine exposé. *Millennium* magazine - Blomkvist's livelihood - is, subsequently, rescued from the verge of going under, and Blomkvist's journalistic credential is 'resurrected.' By the end of the novel, both his personal life and his professional status return to their status quo. He is redeemed.

Salander's case is more morally dubious. Having exacted retribution from one criminal (Martin Vanger), she turns her attention to punishing another (Hans-Erik Wennerström). Through intricate planning, forged identities and a trip abroad, she steals billions of kronor from Wennerström's off-shore accounts, leaving him in a dire financial strait and in the hands of furious debtors, whom she tips off on his hideout. Wennerström is murdered a few days later. Unlike Blomkvist's 'revenge,' Salander's is not born out of a professional reason,

but a moral one. Her idiosyncratic brand of morality makes her judge that it is suitable to punish immoral individuals using immoral means. As a result of the revenge, however, Salander 'resurrects' as an extremely rich woman, though she can never advertise her wealth. Although she has been made to let go of Blomkvist, hence her only decent chance to acquaint with social respectability, the money now in her possession has redeemed her traumatic childhood filled with poverty and dotted by troubles. It will buy her a new and spotless life, a redemption symbolized in Salander's "dazzlingly clean" apartment:

> *During the holidays Salander tuned out the rest of the world. She did not answer her telephone and she did not turn on her computer. She spent two days washing laundry, scrubbing, and cleaning up her apartment. Year-old pizza boxes and newspapers were bundled up and carried downstairs. She dragged out a total of six black rubbish bags and twenty paper bags full of newspapers. She felt as if she had decided to start a new life. She thought about buying a new apartment - when she found something suitable - but for now her old place would be more dazzlingly clean than she could ever remember* (Larsson, 2008: 553).

The biblical allegory is, nevertheless, most obvious concerning Harriet Vanger. The fact that she returns to the Vanger family as a successful businesswoman, alive and rich, to step in as the new head of the Vanger Corporation is a sweet revenge on the brother who wanted her dead, failed to bring his business to prosperity and is now, alas, dead. The irony is almost comic in its propensity to baffle virtually all other characters, even one as intelligent as *Millennium*'s editor-in-chief: "Mikael. I want to know what's going on - good grief, I've come back from holiday to total chaos …. Martin Vanger dead. Harriet Vanger alive. What's going on in Hedeby?" (Larsson, 2008: 499).

More importantly, coming back to the family as 'Harriet Vanger' (she fled Sweden using the passport of her cousin Anita whose name she also adopted) allows her to come to terms with her past and let it go:

> *No more lies. I accept that it's all over. In some sense I've been waiting for this day since 1966. For years I was terrified that someone might come up to me and say my name. But you know what? All of a sudden I don't care any more* (Larsson, 2008: 459).

Harriet Vanger is, in other words, 'resurrected.' She marks this by dying her hair back to its original brown before going to see Henrik Vanger for the first time in almost forty years.

In the end, and in the true Christian model, she receives redemption by means of confession. She confesses to the crime she committed in self-defense against her drunk father:

> *I don't have the slightest doubt that he really was trying to kill me, and for the first time that night he managed to complete the rape …. But he was so drunk that I managed to get away …. I was strong enough to shove an old drunk into the water. I used an oar to hold him under until he wasn't struggling any more …. It feels fantastic to tell the truth. So now you know* (Larsson, 2008: 463).

Henrik's forgiveness is all she needs to be redeemed: "Poor, poor Harriet. If only she had come to me" (Larsson, 2008: 466).

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To demonstrate the relevance and contributions of the findings to the reading and studies, past and future, of Larsson's novel, a synthesis of the present study's findings is discussed in this section in relation to those from previous investigations and with implications for further examination. A summary of the study as a whole is provided at the end.

As mentioned earlier, the novel's three main storylines concerning three characters whose lives intersect and diverge are in the end unified by their conformation to the Christian motif. This aspect of the analysis may not be altogether as agreeable as that in Lamb's study (2018), which encourages Christian disciples to model themselves after the gospels using the mediation of mimetic desire. Whereas Lamb focuses, understandably, on the roles of Christian educators modelled after the benevolent suggestions in the New Testament, the characterization of Lisbeth Salander and the motive of the crimes committed by Gottfried and Martin Vanger in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* could never be fully appreciated without the context of the Old Testament. In this, it confirms Todd's premise that the mystique of religious references adds an aura to the fictional plot (Todd, 2010). The present study, moreover, agrees with Humbert's findings (2017) in that much of the violence on fictional platforms, and, presumably in extension, in real life, originates from the Girardian motive of imitation and competition.

In addition, while this study explores the violence inherent in the characterization of the female protagonist and to a large extent excuses her excessive tendency as in studies conducted by Grodal (2011) and Vaage (2019), it adds to the previous investigations on Salander's behavioral and moral tendency by providing

a framework for her motive on the basis of the mimetic theory, which explains her role in the novel's narrative structure as the subject in the triangle of desire and the sacrificial victim in the scapegoat mechanism. It also points to Mikael Blomkvist as a catalyst of violence in his role as the model in the triangle of desire. This finding inevitably shows Salander as a more sympathetic character than she has generally been viewed and Blomkvist as a less innocent character than he has generally been regarded. It, moreover, affirms Girard's thesis that mimesis is a central dimension in human nature and that mimetic desire can activate agitation, unrest and widespread violence.

Furthermore, the social message inherent in the tradition of Scandinavian crime fiction as described by MacDougall (2010) can be detected in abundance in Larsson's novel. While Stenport and Alm (2012) points out Larsson's deliberate use of business jargons in the novel's section titles to suggest the constant intervention of corporate interests in the characters' lives, the present study explores another aspect of deliberation. Through investigating the elements of mystique in the novel, the study finds that while Larsson is making a deliberate criticism of fixation and indoctrination that inspire either guileless or bigoted mimicry, the author himself is drawn to mimicking familiar religious themes. The analysis reveals that Larsson is intentional about employing the Christian motif to demonstrate social problems caused by misappropriation of a religious staple while appropriating religious tropes himself in order to structure his novel.

To conclude, this study investigates the phenomena of mystique in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Aiming to show that mystique often leads to acts of imitation which can then be exploited through various cultural ideologies and by various social institutions, the investigation first traces how elements of mystique such as the mystery of an impossible crime and the allure of divine legitimacy create both personal obsession and cultural fanatism displayed through imitative actions of various key characters both good and evil. Next, in order to argue that acts of mimicry, even in the best of intention, can escalate to violence, René Girard's triangle of desire is applied to illustrate how mimetic desire can bring about a sense of rivalry that triggers a chain of violent actions, as shown in the relationship between Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander which entails casualties both intentional and accidental. The analysis also applies Girard's scapegoat mechanism to reveal how the narrative suddenly rids itself of violence and resumes its status quo through sacrificing Salander's chance for social integration by poignantly, and rather melodramatically, severing the social ties between Salander and her beau. Lastly, the study projects that the novel itself is fashioned in imitation of the Christian belief. By showing that the storylines involving the key players in the triangle of desire - Blomkvist, Salander and Harriet Vanger - are themselves marked by the Christian themes of revenge, resurrection and redemption, the analysis points out that mimesis directs the plot and motivates the players, and that cultural ideologies, such as a major world religion, are indeed too potent and irresistible not to mimic, even for an author who has set out to caution his readers against the risk of mimicking.

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