

Richard Kearney

Strangers and Others: From Deconstruction to Hermeneutics

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that what is needed to properly engage the human obsession with strangers and enemies is a critical hermeneutic capable of addressing the dialectic of others and aliens, that is, a hermeneutic that can solicit ethical decisions without succumbing to over hasty acts of binary exclusion. It is argued that we need to be able to critically differentiate between different kinds of otherness, while remaining alert to the deconstructive challenge to black-and-white judgements of us-versus-them. We need, at critical moments, to expose the other in the alien and the alien in the other:

KEYWORDS: Strangers, others, deconstruction, hermeneutics, Derrida, Kristeva, Girard, Ricoeur

Ever since early Western thought equated the divine Good with notions of self-identity, the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority or otherness. The demonic was invariably thought of as an outside invader who occupies and estranges the inner unity of the soul. Strangeness possesses our most intimate being until, as Macbeth's

witches put it, 'nothing is but what is not'. Evil is alienation and the evil one is the alien. One of the oldest stories in the book.

Now, while not for a moment denying that evil exists, deconstruction cautions against any moralising rush to judgement. And it reminds us that the logocentric prejudice against otherness that informs the history of Western metaphysics has by no means disappeared in our contemporary world. We find many popular media narratives on our screens promoting paranoia by anathematising what is unfamiliar as 'evil'. Such tales reinforce, once again, the idea that the other is an adversary, the stranger a scapegoat, the dissenter a devil. And it is this proclivity to demonise alterity as a threat to our collective identity that so easily issues in hysterical stories about invading enemies (what Elaine Showalter terms 'hystories'). Any threat to National Security is met with immediate defence-attack mechanisms. This is a recurring phenomenon of recent history. One thinks of Kristalnacht and Auschwitz, the Soviet show trials and gulags, Mao's Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square, McCarthy's blacklists and Reagan's Starwars, the embargo of Cuba and the mining of Managua, the bombing of Cambodia and sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, Satilla and Chabrilla, Sarajevo and Kosovo. The list is interminable.

Most nation-states bent on preserving their body politic from 'alien viruses' seek to pathologise their adversaries. Faced with a threatening outsider the best mode of defence is attack. Again and again the national 'we' is defined over and against the foreign 'them'. Borders are policed to keep nationals in and aliens out. You can of course cross these borders with the right passport and become an alien resident. But to be truly nationalised, you need more. Not always readily available if you happen to be arriving from beneath the Rio Grande or beyond the Gaza Strip. National security draws a *cordon sanitaire* around the nation-state, protecting it from alien trespassers. Like the line drawn in sand at the Alamo. Or other lines separating north and south - in Vietnam, Korea, Lebanon, Ireland.

Most ideas of identity, in short, have been constructed in relation to some notion of alterity. Contemporary thinkers like Levinas and Derrida have made much of the fact that the Western metaphysical heritage, grounded in Greco-Roman thought, has generally discriminated against the other in favour of the Same, variously understood as Logos, Being, Substance, Reason or Ego.

This prejudice is called the 'ontology of Sameness' by Levinas and 'logocentrism' by Derrida. But both share the view - a view canvassed by a wide variety of continental thinkers - that justice demands a redressing of the balance so as to arrive at a more ethical appreciation of alterity and transcendence. Such an appreciation reminds us that the human stranger before us always escapes our egological schemas and defies our efforts to treat him/her as a scapegoated 'alien' or, at best, an alter ego. Openness to the other beyond the same is called justice. For Levinas this relation to otherness establishes an infinite responsibility, while for Derrida it establishes a summons to absolute hospitality.

But since, according to this reading, the other surpasses all our categories of interpretation and representation, we are left with a problem - the problem of discernment. How do we tell the difference between benign and malign others? How do we know when the other is truly an enemy who seeks to destroy us or simply an innocent scapegoat projected by our own phobias? How do we account for the fact that not every other is an angel and not every self is an egoistic emperor? The basic undecidability on this issue bequeathed by Levinas and the deconstructionists requires, I believe, to be supplemented by some kind of critical hermeneutic capable of distinguishing - however tentatively and provisionally - between enabling and disabling forms of alterity. I will begin with Derrida's recent attempts to deal with this question before then moving on to some alternative responses to the enigma of the other, in particular the responses of psychoanalysis, religious anthropology, and phenomenological hermeneutics.

However, first a word on terminology and context. I take the term 'other' here, as frequently invoked by contemporary Continental theory, to refer to an alterity worthy of reverence, esteem or hospitality. I take the term 'alien', by contrast, to refer to that experience of alterity associated with: (a) discrimination (as in certain emigration policies or acts of separating natives from strangers); (b) suspicion (as in UFOs, extra-terrestrials or other unwelcome invaders); and c) scapegoating (as in xenophobic, racist or anti-Semitic practices). I will argue that what is needed to engage properly the human obsession with strangers and enemies, is a critical hermeneutic capable of addressing the dialectic of others and aliens: a hermeneutic that can solicit ethical decisions without succumbing to over hasty acts of binary exclusion.

In short, we need to be able to critically differentiate between different kinds of otherness, while remaining alert to the deconstructive challenge to black-and-white judgements of us-versus-them. We need, at critical moments, to expose the other in the alien and the alien in the other.

I. Between Hostility and Hospitality: Deconstruction and Otherness

It is in the context of world-wide partitioning and polarising that deconstructionists like Derrida, Caputo, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy and others have pursued the question of justice in recent years. Every nation-state is logocentric to the extent that it excludes those who do not conform (non-a) to its identity logic (a is a). This is necessary up to a point, as even the cosmopolitan Kant recognised when he accepted the need to issue conditions for refugee visitors to a state (for example, that their sojourn be temporary, law-abiding, non-divisive).¹ The world belongs to everyone, yes, but within the borders of nation-states it belongs to some more than others. Granted, some form of immigration law is inevitable. That is the law and deconstructionists accept this. But they go on to argue that there is something beyond the law: namely, justice. And justice demands more: namely, unconditional hospitality to the alien.

Hospitality is only truly just, this argument goes, when it resists the temptation to discriminate between good and evil others, that is between the hostile enemy (*hostis*) and the benign host (*hospes*). The Latin roots for both hostility and hospitality is, significantly, the same. And the term 'host' may in fact be used to designate one who welcomes or one who invades.² This paradox is dramatically illustrated, for example, in the *Alien* series where the heroine, Lieutenant Ripley, is at once the mother of the alien-child in her womb and the host of the alien-monster that invaded her - provoking very mixed feelings indeed.

Derrida has much to say about such alien matters in his study *On Hospitality*.³ As we generally understand it, the subject of hospitality is a generous host who decides, as master *chez lui*, whom to invite into his home. But it is precisely because of such sovereign self-possession that the host comes to fear certain others who threaten to invade his house, transforming him from a

host into a hostage. The laws of hospitality thus reserve the right of each host to evaluate, select and choose those he/she wishes to include or exclude - that is, to discriminate. Such discrimination, indispensable to the 'law of hospitality' (*hospitalité en droit*), requires that each visitor identifies him or herself before entering the host's home. And this identification process involves at least some degree of violence. Derrida comments astutely on this paradox:

There can be no sovereignty in the classic sense without the sovereignty of the self in its own home, but since there is no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only operate by filtering, choosing and therefore excluding and doing violence. A certain injustice . . . is present from the outset, at the very threshold of the right to hospitality. This collusion between the violence of power or the force of law (*Gewalt*) on the one hand, and hospitality on the other, seems to be radically integral to the very inscription of hospitality as a right . . .⁴

Derrida goes on to link this inclusive/exclusive law of hospitality with ethics in the more general sense. The paradox of the stranger (*xenos/hostis/gast*) as either invader-alien or welcome-other "extends from the circumscribed field of ethos or ethics, of habitation or visitation as ethos, of *Sittlichkeit*, of objective morality as specifically identified in Hegel's threefold determination of right and the philosophy of right: family, society (civil or bourgeois) and state (or nation-state)."⁵ Derrida sums up the opera of the alien-other thus: "the outsider (hosts) received as host or as enemy. Hospitality, hostility, hospitality."⁶

Fully cognisant of the way this undecidable dialectic confounds our ethical conventions, Derrida affirms the priority of a hospitality of justice - open to the absolute other as another without name. Here we supersede the hospitality of law. What distinguishes the absolute other is that it is without distinction, that is, without name or proper name. And the absolute or unconditional hospitality, which this other deserves, marks a break with everyday conventions of hospitality governed by rights, contracts, duties and pacts. Absolute hospitality, argues Derrida:

Requires that I open my home and that I give not only to the stranger (furnished with a family name and the social status of a stranger, etc.) but to the absolute other, unknown and anonymous; and that I give place

(donne lieu), let come, arrive, let him take his place in the place that I offer him, without demanding that he give his name or enter into some reciprocal pact.⁷

If absolute hospitality requires us to break with the accredited hospitality of right, this does not mean repudiating the latter out of hand; it may even mean, concedes Derrida, preserving it in a state of perpetual progress and mutation. What it does mean, however, is that absolute hospitality is as heterogeneous to conditional hospitality as justice is to the law of right with which it is tied.

But Derrida adds a telling coda to this reading of the 'right of hospitality'. The other is not just the alien stranger, utterly external to home, family, nation or state. For that would be to relegate the other to total exteriority - barbarous, savage, pre-cultural and pre-juridical. No, in order that hospitality be just we must allow some way for the absolute other to enter our home, family, nation, state. And that is why justice can never dispense with the law of right: "The relation to the alien/stranger (*l'étranger*) is regulated by the law of right (*le droit*), by the becoming-right of justice."⁸

The problem with this analysis of hospitality is, I fear, that it somewhat underestimates our need to differentiate not just legally but ethically between good and evil aliens. It downplays our legitimate duty to try to distinguish between benign and malign strangers, between saints and psychopaths (though admittedly most of us fall somewhere between the two). And it does so, in the final instance, by relegating this indispensable requirement of ethical judgement to a matter of legislation invariably compromised by injustice and violence. After all, if hospitality were to be absolutely just, all incoming others without exception would be undecidable - and as such worthy of welcome. Derrida appears to accept as much when he declares that:

For pure hospitality or pure gift to occur there must be absolute surprise . . . an opening without horizon of expectation . . . to the newcomer whoever that may be. The newcomer may be good or evil, but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house, if you want to control this and exclude this terrible possibility in advance, there is no hospitality. [And he adds] The other, like the Messiah, must arrive wherever he or she wants.⁹

For deconstruction, aliens only come in the dark (like thieves in the night); and we are always in the dark when they come. We are never sure who or what they are; we cannot even be sure if we are hallucinating or not. For the absolute other is without name and without face. It is, as Jack Caputo insists, an "impossible, unimaginable, unforeseeable, unbelievable, absolute surprise."¹⁰ The best we can do is try to read between the lines and make a leap of faith, an impossible leap of faith, like Abraham, like Kierkegaard. But why not add - and here is my difficulty with the undecidable - like Jim Jones or David Koresh or other figures of mystical madness who believe they are recipients of messianic messages from some Other they call God? In short, if all reading is reading in the dark how can we discern between holy and unholy spirits; how can we distinguish bringers of peace and justice from bringers of terror and destruction?

In Levinas, one of Derrida's most influential mentors, we already find a tendency to conflate the irrepresentable horrors of the 'there is' (*il y a*) with the equally irrepresentable strangeness of the absolute other (*illéité*). The self finds itself traumatically hostaged and persecuted in both cases. To such an extent indeed that Simon Critchley has suggested that the paranoid language of certain passages in Levinas' later work, *Otherwise than Being*, could feature on a list of horror literature. His point is that Levinas' reduction of selfhood to a subjectivity-as-substitution - a structure of being haunted and hostaged by an alterity that can be neither comprehended nor refused - ultimately makes evil a more valid token of ethical experience than good. Critchley asks:

Does not the trauma occasioned in the subject possessed by evil more adequately describe the ethical subject than possession by the good? Is it not in the excessive experience of evil and horror . . . that the ethical subject first assumes its shape? Does this not begin to explain why the royal road to ethical metaphysics must begin by making Levinas a master of the literature of horror? But if this is the case, why is radical otherness goodness? Why is alterity ethical? Why is it not rather evil or an-ethical or neutral?¹¹

To be absolutely hospitable to the other is, it appears, to suspend all criteria of ethical or juridical discrimination. And in such non-discriminate openness to alterity we find ourselves unable to differentiate between good and evil. A fine lesson in tolerance, to be sure, but not necessarily in moral judgement.

If there is a difference between Jesus and Jim Jones, between Saint Francis and Stalin, between Melena and Mengele, between Siddartha and de Sade - and I think most of us would want to say there is - then some further philosophical reflections are needed to supplement the deconstructive scruple of absolute hospitality. Deconstructive non-judgementalism needs to be supplemented with a hermeneutics of practical wisdom, which might help us better discern between good and evil. For if we need a logic of undecidability to keep us tolerant - preventing us from setting ourselves up as Chief High Executioners - we need an ethics of judgement to commit us, as much as possible, to right action.

But before proceeding to outline such a hermeneutic approach, I wish to briefly explore two other important contributions to our contemporary understanding of otherness, beginning with psychoanalytic critique.

2. Strangers to Ourselves: Psychoanalysis and Otherness

Most Western discourses of identity are predicated upon some unconscious projection of an other who is not 'us'. At the collective level of politics, this assumes the guise of an elect 'nation' or 'people' defining itself over and against an alien adversary. And so we have the old enmities of Greek and Barbarian, Gentile and Jew, Crusader and Infidel, Aryan and non-Aryan, etc. Even many modern and ostensibly 'civilising' nations have not been immune to such stigmatising practices. For example, the English defined themselves as an elect people (*gens*) over and against the Irish who were considered as a 'non-people' (*de-gens*). And this strategy of separating pure from impure was subsequently employed with regard to the subject races of overseas colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas.¹² The English opposed the abstract rights of the French and American revolutions with the "inalienable heritage" of the "rights of the English inherited from (their) ancestors."¹³ Independent America, in spite of its rhetoric, was in turn capable of branding Negro slaves and native Americans - and later again, 'communists' - as new-found scapegoats. Revolutionary France, too, had recourse to us-versus-them thinking as soon as the initial enthusiasm for foreigners (*étrangers*) at the outset of the Revolution turned to a campaign of suspicion and persecution by the time of the Terror. In 1793, the Committee of Public Safety demanded that all "foreigners be obliged to leave French territory"; and within years of the *Declaration*

of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, hundreds of *étrangers* were proclaimed non-citizens and guillotined as “enemy agents” (*agents de l'étranger*).¹⁴ And that was not the worst. Reactionary German nationalists, from the time of Bismarck to Hitler, claimed that only the Germanic *Volk* had, *qua* Master-Race confronted with sub-races, inalienable rights to territorial and cultural dominance: *Deutschland über alles!* Nor did the need to discriminate between ‘us’ and ‘them’ disappear with the rise to world power of multi-ethnic states like the USSR - as the Stalinist campaigns against ‘foreign enemy agents’ remind us. In short, from ancient to modern times, the inalienable Rights of Man were not to be afforded to aliens. For, as nations consolidated themselves into sovereign and homogenous territories, the alien was deemed an “intruder who demolished consensus.”¹⁵

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva relates this recurring xenophobic drive back to a certain unconscious process whereby we externalise what is ‘strange’ and ‘estranging’ within us onto an external ‘stranger’. The result is a denial of the fact that we are strangers to ourselves by means of demonising and scapegoating aliens. To the extent that we exclude the outsider we deceive ourselves into thinking that we have exempted ourselves of alienation - purged that peculiar sense of anxiety which Freud calls the ‘uncanny’ (*das Unheimliche*).

In his landmark essay on “The Uncanny,” Freud explores the paradox that the “*Unheimliche* is the name for everything that ought to have remained hidden and secret and has become visible.”¹⁶ While the term refers ostensibly to what is unfamiliar and unknown, it also carries the very opposite sense of what is intimately interior and familiar. Freud goes on to note that the *Unheimliche* is that phenomenon of strangeness which curiously re-evokes what is ‘known of old and long familiar’; a phenomenon already intimated by the etymological links between the terms, *Geheim* (secret), *heimisch* (native) and *heimlich* (homely). In short, what we witness here, in both the term and the phenomenon it describes, is a slippage or reversal between two ostensibly contrary meanings - the homely and the unhomely. And this double meaning basically signals how certain things can become so discreet as to become secret and secretive - “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others.”¹⁷ In other words, *das Unheimliche* is the obverse face of *das Heimlich*, arising when the latter becomes so privy, surreptitious and hidden that it disappears from consciousness altogether,

slipping beneath the bar of the unconscious. The intimate becomes so intimate that it becomes strange. The 'uncanny' comes to mean, then, something 'secret or untrustworthy', finding its equivalents in the Latin *occultus* or *mysticus*.

Freudian hermeneutics decrypts the signs of the unconscious to disclose this process of estrangement-alienation. The 'alien' is revealed accordingly as that most occluded part of ourselves, considered so unspeakable and 'sinful', that we externalise it onto others outside of ourselves - the farther the better. The more foreign someone or something is, in other words, the more eligible it is to carry the shadow cast by our unconscious. Strangers become perfect projection material since we can act-out on them the fear, shame and hostility we feel towards our own strangers within. Or as Freud puts it, the *heimlich* becomes so hidden from others and from ourselves that it "comes to have the meaning actually ascribed to *unheimlich* . . . Thus, *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*."¹⁸

Relating this reversible dyad *heimlich/unheimlich* to the split between the conscious and unconscious, Freud suggests that in the realm of the imaginary (which blurs the distinction) we find creatures of our own repressed unconscious returning to haunt us as phantom 'doubles', as *frères ennemis*. The divided self seeks to protect itself against its own inner division by projecting its 'other self' onto someone other than itself. But the foreigner thus scapegoated is, of course, nothing other than our own estranged self coming back to ghost us. Freud thus proposes an 'archaeological hermeneutic' (to borrow Ricoeur's term in *Freud and Philosophy*) to account for the genesis of this doubling phenomenon. When all is said and done, writes Freud:

The quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted - a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The double has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.¹⁹

Indeed, this perhaps explains why so many horror movies from *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to *Dead Ringers* and *Face Off* play on this phenomenon of estranged doubles or twins.

The demonising of 'aliens' and 'strangers' by individuals or nations may thus be interpreted as a harking back to past repressed materials which recur in the present - often with obsessive compulsion - in the guise of something threatening and terrifying. But, ironically, what we most fear in the demonised other is our own mirror-image: our estranged self. "The Uncanny," concludes Freud, "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and of old established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."²⁰

The prefix *un* in *unheimlich* is, in short, to be understood less as a logical or ontological opposition than as a dialectical repression-in-return. The adversaries we so love to hate, or rarely cease to imitate, are in fact ourselves in disguise. Dreaded aliens are most dreaded not because they are other than us but because they are more like us than we are ourselves. There is nothing really alien about the alien.

Kristeva develops this psychoanalytic reading of the uncanny in a number of interesting ways. In the second part of *Strangers to Ourselves*, she endeavours to tease out its specifically ethical and socio-political implications. On the back of Freud, she writes: "disquieting strangeness (*l'étrangeté*) enters into the quietude of reason itself . . . Henceforth we realise that we are strangers to ourselves, and it is on this very basis that we can try to exist with others."²¹ Kristeva promotes the Kantian idea of a cosmopolitan Universal Republic where aliens (*étrangers*) would be respected as others, acknowledging their right to difference. This cosmopolitan federation of states would fully honour the diversity of cultures, languages, confessions and peoples who inhabit the globe and, at the same time, safeguard the right of hospitality to 'strangers' on the basis that the world is round, belongs to everyone, and that "originally no one (people) has more right than another to its territory."²² From this consideration of practical reason and nature, Kant had deduced the following definition of hospitality towards others, also noted by Derrida: "Hospitality means therefore the right of each foreigner (*étranger*) not to be treated as an enemy in the land in which he arrives."²³ A tolerant moral cosmopolitanism thus becomes, for our time, the secular equivalent of the old religious vision - originating in the biblical celebration of the 'stranger', so vigorously promoted by the Prophets and Saint Paul, of a community of peoples and tongues.

With the psychoanalytic disclosure of the uncanny as that otherness within our psyche, we are provided with a hermeneutic capable of depathologising the alien. A primordial space of 'alterity' is now located within the presumed unity and homogeneity of human consciousness, the alien at long last admitted as an integral inhabitant of the 'same'. Heretofore, argues Kristeva, "the stranger is neither a race nor a nation . . . we are our own strangers - we are divided selves."²⁴ This whole discovery may well, Kristeva suggests, have something to do with Freud's own biography as an insider-outsider - the nomadic Jew wandering through various parts of Europe from Galicia and Venice to Paris, New York, Rome and London. But more fundamentally it expresses the universal experience of a deep unconscious malaise with 'others' arising from our repressed rapport with the internally housed 'primal scene' that informs our discourse and desires. "My malaise in living with the other," explains Kristeva, "my strangeness, his/her strangeness, rests upon a vexed logic which governs the strange cluster of drive and language, of nature and symbol, which is the unconscious always already informed by the other."²⁵ Kristeva proffers this therapeutic response to the conundrum of the self-other relation:

It is the unravelling of the transfer - the great dynamic of alterity, of our love/hate for the other, of the otherness constitutive of our very psyche - which enables me, based on the other, to become reconciled with my own strangeness/alterity, to play with it and live with it. Psychoanalysis thus experiences itself as a journey into the other and into oneself, towards an ethic of respect for the irreconcilable. For how can we tolerate strangers if we do not know that we are strangers to ourselves?²⁶

Finally, in a coupling of Heideggerian and Freudian readings, Kristeva affirms that the ultimate stranger of strangers is the shadow of our own finitude. The phantasmatic double, which returns to haunt us again and again through the mists of troubling strangeness (*l'inquiétante étrangeté*), is ultimately nothing other than our fear of death. This spectre of our own mortality, inscribed within as our *Sein-zum-Tode*, is something we cannot bear. And so unbearable does it become that many of us choose to transfer it onto unsuspecting strangers we call our worst enemies.

Already in "Section 40" of *Being and Time* Heidegger had offered a deft hermeneutic analysis of just how our existential anguish before death is expe-

rienced as radical *Unheimlichkeit*: a sense of deep disorientation and indeterminacy at not-being-at-home in ourselves. "*In der Angst ist einem 'unheimlich'*."²⁷ And it is on the basis of this ontological model that Kristeva, like Lacan, seeks to redefine the Freudian take on the Uncanny.

To truly embrace the other as our stranger is to accept a certain de-centring of the ego which opens the self to the novel, the incongruous and the unexpected. Once our defence mechanisms, protecting us from alterity, are thus loosened or removed we either fall into psychotic breakdown or rise to a poetics of new images and an ethics of new ways of being with others. While such a poetics invites us to sublimate the alien into imaginary fiction and play (thus preventing the acting-out of scapegoating and war), a correlative psychoanalytic ethics would solicit a new politics of cosmopolitanism whose solidarity is founded on the "conscience of the unconscious."²⁸ For if each of us can accept that we are the strangers, then there are no strangers - only others like ourselves.

But perhaps this psychoanalytic approach is too quick in its tendency to reduce alterity to a dialectic of the unconscious psyche. For however subtle and complex such a reading may be, it may only be attending to half of the story. To put it another way, if deconstruction too rapidly subordinates same to other, psychoanalysis too rapidly subordinates other to same. And so doing, it risks subsuming the exteriority of transcendence into the language-games of psychic immanence. If these suspicions were correct, the trick would be to try to steer a path somewhere between the polar extremes of alterity and immanence. We will keep this in mind when we turn to a final model of interpretation - a critical hermeneutics of oneself-as-another.

3. Strangers, Monsters, Myths and Scapegoats: Girard and the Anthropology of Otherness

There remains, however, a further aspect to the hermeneutics of otherness, often neglected by readers of deconstruction and psychoanalysis. This third perspective on the aliens-alienation syndrome is that of a religious anthropology, and is best represented in our view by the later work of René Girard. Girard claims that human societies are founded on myths of sacrifice whose purpose it is to scapegoat certain targeted 'others' as 'aliens'. Holding these

aliens responsible for all the ills and divisions of society, the scapegoaters proceed to isolate or eliminate them. This sacrificial strategy furnishes many communities with a binding identity - that is, with the basic sense of who is included - 'us' - and who is excluded - 'aliens'. But the price to be paid for the construction of the happy tribe is almost invariably the demonising of some innocent outsider: the immolation of the 'other' on the altar of the 'alien'.

Girard extrapolates these arguments in a series of controversial writings - from *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978), to *The Scapegoat* (1982) - the aim of which is to expose the sacrificial scapegoat mechanisms at work in such diverse areas as politics, law, literature, myth and anthropology. It is fair to say, moreover, that Girard's hermeneutic is guided throughout by a determination to interpret the masked operations of our social imaginary in the light of a religious ethics of transcendence.

Girard begins by subjecting ideologies of scapegoating to a critical hermeneutics of suspicion, exposing concealed meanings behind apparent ones. His core hypothesis goes something like this. Most societies are based on the ritual sacrifice of a maligned other. The foundational consensus needed for social co-existence between rival humans is provided by a collective projection wherein some victimised outsider becomes the alleged carrier of all the aggression, guilt and violence that sets one neighbour against another within the tribe. This victimisation of the scapegoat-stranger serves to engender a sense of solidarity amongst 'the people' (*gens, natio*), now reunited in a shared act of persecution. In this manner, harmony is restored to the community, which now conveniently forgets its initial hatred for the alien and may even come to revere it (retrospectively); it was, after all, the alien's ritual oblation, which saved the community from itself in the first place. The sacrificial scapegoat thus becomes the one who - *mirabile dictu* - enabled the internally divided society to turn away from its own internecine rivalry and focus its hatred on someone from outside the tribe.

In this manner, the scapegoated stranger becomes a founding figure for the community. Prometheus, as Ricoeur noted in his hermeneutic analysis of Greek foundation myths in the *Symbolism of Evil*, was repeatedly referred to

as *pharmakos* or scapegoat.²⁹ And we witness a similarly retrospective apotheosis of foundational scapegoats across a variety of cultures - Osiris, Romulus, Christ, Orpheus, Socrates, Cuchulain. Such sacrificial figures, though invariably ostracised or excoriated by their contemporaries, became hallowed over the ages until they were eventually remembered as saviour gods who restored their community from chaos to order. They emerge out of the mists of time as miraculous deities who managed to transmute conflict into law. But this alteration of sacrificed 'aliens' into sacred 'others' is, of course, predicated upon a strategic forgetfulness of their initial stigmatisation - that is, the fact that they were originally victims of ritual blood-letting.

In a chapter of *The Scapegoat* entitled "What is myth?" Girard enumerates four essential characteristics of narratives of collective persecution: (a) a social or cultural crisis ('generalised indifferentiation'); (b) a crime considered to be the cause of this crisis; (c) a culprit accused not because of direct involvement in the crime but because of some association with it (the scapegoat-alien); and finally, (d) a violence frequently assigned a sacred character.³⁰

The basic aim of persecution texts is to attribute responsibility for the social crisis to the culprit and then to restore social order (differentiation) by expelling the alleged culprit-alien from the body politic. Girard treats as myth any narrative that contains these sacrificial characteristics. Every text, which tells of sacrificial violence against a victim while seeking to cover up its own persecution mechanism, qualifies as such. Moreover, Girard goes so far as to declare that sacrificial myths refer not just to unconscious desires to persecute but to real events. We are not dealing here with symbolic or imaginary acts of violence but with narratives rooted in repressed historical facts. As he says, "all myths are rooted in real acts of violence."³¹ Here he strongly resists any suggestion that sacrificial myths are reducible to some 'intertextual' play of linguistic relations, as some post-structuralists or deconstructionists might hold. Nor do they relate to mere 'structures' of mind, as structural anthropologists like Levi-Strauss or Dumézil claim. They refer, insists Girard, to events of historical victimisation.³² They are less matters of fantasy than of flesh and blood.

Girard opens his analysis by concentrating on the "exemplary myth" of Oedipus, which he believes "contains all of the persecution stereotypes."³³

Then moving from this explicit myth of persecution to other less evident ones, Girard proposes to show that all myths are rooted, in the first and last analysis, in actual persecutions of actual scapegoats. He offers the following paradigmatic reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*:

Thebes is ravaged by plague: the first stereotype of persecution, Oedipus, is responsible because he has killed his father and married his mother: the second stereotype of persecution. In order to put an end to the epidemic, the Oracle announces [that] the guilty criminal must be found and hunted out. The persecutionary intent is evident. Parricide and incest serve openly as intermediaries between the individual and the collective; these crimes are so undifferentiated that their influence contaminates the entire society. In the text by Sophocles, one notes that the undifferentiated (i.e. the disordered) is equated with the contaminated. This brings in the third stereotype: the signs or stigmata of victimisation. First, there is infirmity, Oedipus limps. The hero moreover has arrived in Thebes unknown to all, an outsider in fact if not in essence. Finally, he is the king's son and the king himself - the legitimate heir of Laios. Like all other mythic characters, Oedipus manages to accumulate both the marginality of the outside and the inside. Similar to Ulysses at the end of the *Odyssey*, he is sometimes a mendicant stranger, sometimes an omnipotent monarch . . . The infirmity of Oedipus, his wounded childhood, his status of outsider, of stranger, of king, make him a veritable conglomerate of victim-signs.³⁴

Comparing the Oedipus myth to the medieval documents of Guillaume de Machaut on the persecution of Jews, Girard notes that both texts bear traces of "persecution drawn up from the perspective of naive persecutors."³⁵ In the Oedipus myth, as in Guillaume de Machaut or the witch trials of the Inquisition, Girard finds "mythological accusations of parricide, incest and the physical or moral corruption of the community."³⁶ Likewise, he finds in the historical narratives of persecution that the annihilation of the 'guilty one' arises in circumstances of acute social crisis and is carried out by a paranoid mob.

Sacrificial myths of alienation are not confined to ancient times. They continue, as both Girard and Mircea Eliade argue, to operate today even though the mechanisms for demonising the other have become more sophisticated and surreptitious.³⁷ Indeed, Girard goes so far as to claim that no modern

society is entirely free from this scapegoating tendency - informed as every society is with mimetic rivalry for scarce resources, periodically resolved by making common cause against an agreed 'enemy'. Thus, may be explained the recurring phenomena of witch-hunting, xenophobia, racism and anti-semitism, often in the name of 'national security'. Such persecutory strategies operate on the fantasy that it is the evil adversary outside-inside the *Volk* who is poisoning the wells, contaminating the body politic, corrupting the unsuspecting youth, eroding the economy, sabotaging peace and corrupting the moral fabric of society. Moreover, the popular press and media in our own day can play a pivotal role in ostracising some commonly identified 'alien' (individual or minority group).

In short, Girard repudiates the view that myths are neutral entities to be revered as antique signifiers of some *pensée sauvage*. Every society, he argues, is based on an empirical act of sacrifice. And the only difference between 'ancient' and 'advanced' cultures is that the function of sacrificial mythology is more obvious in the former. In primitive myths, as Girard notes:

The stereotypes are more complete and conspicuous than in the Guillaume text. How is one to pretend that they are somehow thrown together by accident, or by some gratuitous act of poetic imagination or fantasy, utterly removed from the mentality and reality of persecution? And yet that is precisely what our research experts are asking us to believe, and they consider my arguments extravagant when I claim the contrary.³⁸

Girard makes no apologies and no exceptions. He throws down the gauntlet to the romantic nostalgia of modern ethnologists who think of myths as imaginary tales referring to nothing outside of their own linguistic structures. The "mythicality" of myth, retorts Girard, "is not some kind of vaporous literary perfume but a persecutor's interpretation of persecution."³⁹ If myths are indeed fictional in some respect, it is in their formal capacity to camouflage the genesis of sacrificial signs in historical acts of persecution.

Girard's hermeneutics of the alien is ethical precisely because it is realist. In contrast to the romantic denial of myth's causal reference to reality, Girard insists that the symbolic aspects of myth are no more than representational cover-ups of actual sacrificial events. One of the obsessions of romantic poetics is to construe mythological monsters as pure inventions, thereby occluding

what they really are - combinations of elements borrowed from real forms. The Minotaur, for example, is a mixture of man and bull. Identifying the monstrous as an expression of indifferentiation and chaos, Girard demonstrates how monsters bear signs of persecution stereotypes - especially those of physical and moral deformity (equated in myth) and of the 'stranger' responsible for the crisis in the community. By portraying the Minotaur as a criminal alien of unspeakable bestiality, the persecutors contrive to project the moral culpability for a particular crisis onto an outsider whose physical infirmity suggested an affinity with the monstrous.⁴⁰

The imaginary character of myth makes the so-called 'guilty one' consubstantial with the crime. The monstrous character of the 'criminal' and the direct causal connection between his monstrosity and the collective crisis itself, appears so immediate at the level of narrative fantasy that one scarcely notices the accusatory process behind it. "We assume that we are secure in mythic illusion because we only see it as so much fancy . . . The most effective and definitive alibi remains that abstract disbelief which denies the reality of violence reflected by the myth."⁴¹ This is why Girard is so vigorous in his repudiation of those who persist in construing mythological monsters as fabulous poetic creations. And it is in order to disclose the victimising motivation behind myth that Girard proposes his own hermeneutic of suspicion - the theory of the scapegoat.

But that is, happily, one of reasons scapegoating myths fail. A society can only pretend to believe in the lie because it is that same society which is lying to itself! Hence the ultimately self-defeating nature of ideological persecution: a fact borne out in the need for constant renewal of the sacrificial act. The reliance on an alien-scapegoat never subsides. At least not until such time as we renounce our desire to always covet what the other has and thereby overcome the condition of mimetic strife which gave rise to scapegoating in the first place. A genuinely peaceful community would be one which, Girard contends, exposes its own strategies of sacrificial alienation, and enters the light of 'true fraternity' - a society that lives without need of scapegoats. Such a community would free itself from myths of mimetic rivalry, based on conflicts of desire and fears of strangers, committing itself instead to principles of 'transcendence' beyond time and history. It would take its lead from the exemplary action of Christ who underwent death on the Cross in order to

expose the sacrificial lie for once and for all by revealing the innocence of the victim: the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

In short, peace requires nothing less than the decoupling of the alien and the other, acknowledging that the genuine 'other' is radically Other, divinely Other - an asymmetrical, vertical alterity irreducible to the envious ploys of mimetic desire. Girard, like Levinas, calls this ethical alterity (even if it addresses us through the face of the other) God.

However, Girard's critique of scapegoating as a practice of social purgation and persecution is not without its problems. These problems become particularly evident in his treatment of the monstrous. By describing his own theory of the scapegoat as the 'Ariadne's thread' which guides us through the labyrinth of myth, Girard appears to imply that mythic monsters are themselves some kind of monstrosity, menacing Minotaurs of the mind that need to be expelled. The frequent slippage from the nominal form (mythical monster) to the adjectival (monstrous myth) betrays a tendency in Girard to scapegoat myth itself. On such a reading Girard is treating myth as a textual monster to be expurgated by his own demythologising critique. Mythic narrative comes to function, thus, as a new scapegoat, inherently alienating because an act of imagination contriving to negate reality. So we might ask, if Girard rebukes ethnology for masking the scapegoating function of myth, might he not be himself accused of scapegoating the mythic function itself?

If such were the case, it would no doubt be an unconscious motivation on Girard's part. But this cannot serve as alibi by Girard's own standards. As he clearly states, to seek recourse in the unconscious is to lapse into something "even more mythical than myth itself." Girard is, as we have seen, quite adept in detecting such unconscious motives in Sophocles, Guillaume de Machaut, and other authors of persecution narratives. Indeed, at one point he even suggests that those most practiced in the art of denouncing others' motives are often practitioners of a similar strategy. He approaches here a moment of confessional lucidity:

I have spoken of naive persecutors and I might well have spoken of unconscious ones . . . Being imprisoned in a system permits us to speak of a persecutory unconscious, and the proof of its existence is that even those

most able to discover others' scapegoats in our day - and God knows we've all become past masters in the art - are the last to discover their own.⁴²

Does this not apply to Girard himself? Might the expert inquisitor of scapegoating not also be prone to its obsessions? Might he not be at least partially captive to a new and more sophisticated labyrinth of condemnation? In sum, is not Girard's own critique of alienating ideologies of persecution not itself subject to critique? Does it not, in that sense, deconstruct itself?

Girard concedes as much, I think, in the following passage from *The Scapegoat*, laced as it is with exquisite irony:

In order to fathom the enormity of the mystery [he writes] one must interrogate oneself. Each one of us is obliged to ask where he [sic] stands in relation to scapegoats. Personally I seem unable to recognise it in myself, and I am sure, dear reader, you will respond likewise. We have, you and I, only legitimate enmities. And yet the world is brimming with scapegoats. The lie of persecution is even more rife and duplicitous today than in the days of Guillaume de Machaut.⁴³

Moreover, while agreeing with much of Girard's analysis, I also believe he is too confessionally partisan in his claim that only one religious tradition - Judeo-Christian monotheism - can redeem us from the scourge of scapegoating. I have as much difficulty accepting that theology has the sole remedy to the enigma of otherness as I would accepting similar claims for Freudian analysis, or any other interpretative model. Each has its unique light to shed on the puzzle, but none possesses the absolute answer. The question I would put to Girard, therefore, is whether all non-Judeo-Christian religious myths are necessarily scapegoating? Are there not at least some - Zen Buddhist for example - which might not be based on the need to project false accusations onto innocent victims but express a genuine open impulse to imagine other possibilities of existence that challenge the status quo? Or to put it in terms of Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics: might not some non-monotheistic foundation narratives serve a utopian function of symbolic innovation rather than an ideological function of dissimulation and domination? If this be so, we could suggest that Girard's blanket equation of all myth-making with scapegoating is itself, at times, an exercise in scapegoating - an effort to introject hidden sacrificial motives into the very poetics of myth itself?⁴⁴

It is at this very point that a certain self-critical gesture may usefully supplement an inordinately binary ethics. It is here that moral-religious critique might recall its own dubiousness if pushed to dogmatic or fideistic extremes.

4. Oneself as Another: Hermeneutics and Otherness

While I grant that deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and Girard's anthropological critique offer significant accounts of our ethical awareness of others, I do not believe that any of them provide a sufficient account. There is also need for a critical hermeneutics of action to address an additional need for critically informed ethico-political judgement. It is not enough to be open to the other beyond us, within us, or historically scapegoated by us - though this is crucial too. One must also be careful to discern, in some provisional fashion at least, between different kinds of otherness.

Hermeneutic phenomenology suggests that the other is not absolutely transcendent, nor absolutely immanent, nor absolutely scapegoated, but somewhere between all three. It suggests that, for the most part, others be intimately bound up with selves in ways which often constitute ethical relations in their own right. Human discourse itself involves someone saying something to someone about something. It is a matter of one self-communicating to another self, recognising that if there is no perfect symmetry between the two, this does not necessarily mark a total dis-symmetry either. Not all selves are irreparably sundered or shattered.

A minimal quotient of self-esteem is indispensable to ethics, for without it I could not be a moral agent capable of keeping my promises to others. Without some sense of self-identity and self-constancy, as Paul Ricoeur reminds us, I would not be able to recollect myself from my past memories or project myself into a future such that my pledges to the other (made in the past) may be realised (in the future). Narrative identity should not be dismissed as some illusion of mastery; that is just a caricature of its pathological excess. On the contrary, narrative identity, which sustains some notion of selfhood over the passage of time, may well serve as guarantor for one's fidelity to the other. How is one to be faithful to the other, after all, if there is no self to be faithful?

Moreover, one of the best ways to de-alienate the other is to recognise (a) oneself as another and (b) the other as, at least, in part, another self. So that

if ethics rightly requires me to respect the singularity and uniqueness of the other person, it equally requires me to recognise the other as another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities, and capable of recognising me in turn as a self capable of recognition and esteem. To declare, with Levinas and Derrida, that the other is so absolutely other that it defies all narrative acts of remembrance or anticipation is not only to compromise the whole practice of promise-keeping but to threaten the equally ethical practice of testimony. As Ricoeur puts it in answer to Levinas: "With justice may we not hope for the return of memory, beyond the condemnation of the memorable? Otherwise, how could Emmanuel Levinas write the sober exergue: 'To the memory of those who are closest?'"⁴⁵

Narrative memory seeks to preserve some testimony of those others - especially victims of history - who would, if unremembered, be lost to the injustice of non-existence. And this ethical task of narrative remembrance is perfectly in keeping with the Biblical exhortation to 'remember' - *zakhor!* - while refusing any notion that the lost other could be restored as some fantasy 'presence'. Testimony is a voice of record, not a reliquary. The hermeneutic model of memory, explored by thinkers like Ricoeur and Gadamer, thus construes otherness less in opposition to selfhood than as a partner engaged in the very constitution of its most intimate meaning.⁴⁶ Indeed it is the sense of the other as, in part, a stranger in myself, keeping me a stranger to myself, which can serve the crucial function of moral 'conscience' (*Gewissen*). And this, without explaining away moral conscience as Freud and Lacanians sometimes do, as a mere 'effect' of unconscious repression and sublimation.⁴⁷

We might note here the phenomenological experience of deep 'passivity' or 'receptivity' before the call of conscience - disclosing the other within who is calling us to act on behalf of the other without. If one closes off the other's passage in and out of the self, as Levinas does, condemning the subject to a cloistered and autistic ego, then the other becomes so other as to remain utterly alien and alienating - an absolutely separate alterity which torments, persecutes and ultimately paralyses. And the self, in this scenario, can only become ethical against its own nature and its will - finding itself radically assaulted and denuded, stripped of all its interpretations and images in a kind of total exposure to an absolutely superior other: the other who commands and demands expiation.

Resisting this option of self-ruin, a complex phenomenology of the self-other relation prompts us to espouse a hermeneutic pluralism of otherness, a sort of 'polysemy of alterity' - ranging from our experiences of conscience and the body to those of other persons, living or dead (our ancestors), or to a divine Other, living or absent.⁴⁸ There is no otherness so exterior or so unconscious, on this reading, that it cannot be at least minimally interpreted by a self, and interpreted in a variety of different ways - albeit none of them absolute, adequate or exhaustive. The other is not so traumatically estranging as to hold me 'hostage'; nor so miserably abject as to make me imperious. In ethical relation, I am neither master nor slave. I am a self before another self - brother, sister, neighbour, citizen, stranger, widow, orphan - another who seeks to be loved as he/she loves him/herself. Which does not, we insist, mean regression to some Hegelian dialectic of self-doubling; nor to some Husserlian model of 'appresentation' or 'pairing' which reduces the other to an alter-ego (that is, me over there).⁴⁹

For critical hermeneutics, the self-other relation resists the *égoïsme-à-deux* of mutual admiration societies. Instead it reveals a practice of ethical 'conscience' which is the other inscribed within me as an uncontainable call from beyond. And it is precisely this summons of conscience, which breaks the closed circle of the ego-cogito and reminds us of our debts and duties to others. Here the very ipseity of the self expresses itself, paradoxically and marvellously, as openness to otherness: uncompromising hospitality.

By refusing to treat the other as so exterior or unconscious that it becomes the utterly alien self, hermeneutics not only alters the ego into oneself-as-another but guarantees that the other, for its part, retains a certain fluidity and equivocity. The other is neither too close nor too far, neither too familiar nor too foreign, to escape my attention. And thus ensuring that the other does not collapse into sameness or exile itself into some inaccessible alterity, hermeneutics keeps in contact with the other. Indeed I would argue that it is because of this ethical contact, always striving to make the other that little less alien, that we can tender (however provisionally) different interpretations of this or that other. And it is ultimately, I believe, in tune with such discernment that we may offer some tentative judgements about what kinds of others we have before us.

What our four readings - deconstructive, psychoanalytic, religio-anthropological, and hermeneutic - teach us is that moral critique should not be pushed to moralistic extremes. They each remind us that every applied judgement is, *de facto*, informed by an unavoidable conflict of interpretations. We need to acknowledge, in sum, that if ethical critique is an indispensable component in the discernment of others and aliens, it is never above the hermeneutic imperative of a plurality of interpretations - an imperative invoked by thinkers as diverse as Derrida, Kristeva, Girard, and Ricoeur, in the name of vigilance and justice. An ethics of otherness is not a matter of black and white, but of grey and grey. This is not a call for radical indeterminacy or relativism. On the contrary, it is an invitation to judge more judiciously so that we may judge more justly.

* Richard Kearney is Professor of European Philosophy at Boston College, USA, and University College Dublin, Ireland.

Notes

¹ I. Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. T. Humphrey, Hackett, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

² E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. J. Lallot, London, Faber, 1973, pp. 71-82. See, for example, p. 71: "The primitive notion conveyed by *hostis* is that of equality by compensation: a *hostis* is one who repays my gift with a counter-gift. Thus, like its Gothic counterpart, *gasts*, the Latin *hostis* at one period denoted the guest. The classical meaning 'enemy' must have been developed when reciprocal relations between clans were succeeded by the exclusive relations of *civitas* to *civitas* (cf. Gr. *xenos* 'guest' + 'stranger')." I am also grateful to Aidan O'Malley's discussions on this subject.

³ J. Derrida, *De L'hospitalité*, Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1997.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹ J. Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility," in *Questioning Ethics*, ed. R. Kearney and M. Dooley, London, Routledge, 1998, pp. 66-83.

¹⁰ J. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, p. 73; see also M. Dooley, "The Politics of Exodus: Derrida, Kierkegaard and Levinas on 'Hospitality'," in *Inter-*

- national Kierkegaard Commentary: Works of Love*, ed. R. Perkins, Macon, Mercer University Press, 1999.
- ¹¹ S. Critchley, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 80.
- ¹² L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1797-1837*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992 and "Britishness and Otherness," in *Journal of British Studies*, No. 31, 1992.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.
- ¹⁴ Cited J. Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris, Fayard, 1988 (translated as *Strangers to Ourselves*, London, Harvester, 1991), p. 237 and p. 233. Kristeva notes how in 1793, many 'foreigners' were offered French citizenship - including Jeremy Bentham, George Washington, Thomas Paine, John Hamilton, James Madison and Anacharsis Cloots - amidst a general enthusiasm for a new 'universal Republic' of enlightenment cosmopolitanism, which declared the very word "foreigner" a "barbarian" term! "'L'étranger', expression barbare dont nous commençons à rougir," wrote Cloots, "et dont nous laissons la jouissance à ces hordes féroces . . ." (cited Kristeva, p. 241). On the 14 March, 1794, Cloots was guillotined with other Hebertists who considered it more important to be a "citizen of the world" than a "citizen of France," receiving this xenophobic rebuke from Robespierre: "Oui, les puissances étrangères ont au milieu de nous leurs espions . . . Cloots est prussien!" (cited Kristeva, p. 242). See also Rousseau on the relationship between the Patriot and Stranger: "Tout patriote est dur aux étrangers . . . Ils ne sont rien à ses yeux. L'essentiel est d'être bon avec ceux avec que l'on vit" (cited Kristeva, p. 212). Hegel had an even more fundamental distrust of the 'stranger' as that negative dimension of cultural disunity and antagonism that requires to be in turn negated in the dialectic of mind so as to bring about the ultimate unifying synthesis of absolute consciousness. In contrast to such distrust of what is foreign, alien and different, Kristeva quotes Montesquieu's *Les Pensées* on the virtue of cosmopolitan generosity: "Si je savais quelque chose utile à ma patrie et qui fut préjudiciable à l'Europe, ou bien qui fut utile à l'Europe et préjudiciable au genre humain, je la regarderais comme un crime" (cited Kristeva, p. 213). This quote could serve as exergue for our own ethic of the alien as much as for Kristeva's.
- ¹⁵ Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 219: Kristeva has few illusions about how difficult it was for the 'stranger' to question and challenge the covert codes of the tribe or Volk without being condemned as a saboteur of the domestic national consensus: "Hélas! Elle ne résiste pas toujours aux tentatives dogmatiques de ceux qui - économiquement ou idéologiquement déçus - reconstituent leur 'propre' et leur 'identité' à coups de rejet des autres" (p. 219).
- ¹⁶ S. Freud, "The Uncanny" in *New Literary History*, no. 3, 1976, p. 623. See also the insightful commentary on this essay by Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and its Phantoms" in the same issue of *New Literary History*, pp. 525-548; and our own application of

the Freudian category of the 'uncanny' to a reading of the poetry of Seamus Heaney, "Heaney and Homecoming" in *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture*, Dublin, Wolfhound Press/New York, St. Martins Press, 1988, especially the Appendix "Heaney, Heidegger and Freud - The Paradox of the Homely," pp. 113-122.

- ¹⁷ Freud, "The Uncanny," p. 622.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 624.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 630-31.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 634.
- ²¹ Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, p. 250 (my translation).
- ²² I. Kant, "Essay on Perpetual Peace" (1795), cited and commented by Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, pp. 253-254.
- ²³ Kant, cited Kristeva, *ibid.*, p. 253.
- ²⁴ Kristeva, *ibid.*, p. 268. Kristeva makes the additional point on pp. 194-5 that it is often in societies which give priority to the cosmopolitan "Rights of Man" over the more restricted national "Rights of the Citizen," thereby ostensibly dissolving the notion of category of 'strangers', that the notion of 'strangeness' (*étrangeté*) may find another lease of life in the positive respect for the private, and even the secret, in an overall social world constructed as an alliance of singularities. "*Peut-être s'agit-il, en définitif,*" she asks, "*d'étendre à la notion d'étranger le droit au respect de notre propre étrangeté et, en somme, du 'privé', qui garantit la liberté des démocraties? L'accès des étrangers au droit politique se fera dans la foulée de cette évolution, et nécessairement, avec des garanties juridiques adéquates . . .*" (p. 289).
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 269, (my translation).
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269. Kristeva follows Freud in describing our initial experience of the 'uncanny' as a threat of depersonalisation and annihilation issuing from a feeling of being lost in a murky zone of indistinction between ourselves and the other. "*Face à l'étranger que je refuse et auquel je m'identifie à la fois, je perds mes limites, je n'ai plus de contenant, les souvenirs des expériences où l'on m'avait laissée tomber me submergent, je perds contenance. Je me sens 'perdue', 'vague', 'brumeuse'. Multiples sont les variantes de l'inquiétante étrangeté: toutes réitèrent ma difficulté à me placer par rapport à l'autre, et refont le trajet de l'identification-projection qui git au fondement de mon accession à l'autonomie.*" (p. 276) Freud located the emergence of the 'uncanny' where the limits between the imaginary and the real collapse and certain repressed memories surge up in the guise of doubles, automatons, dead people or the female sex (Freud offers a curiously eclectic list). He also goes on to suggest that one of the best ways to deal with this unsettling experience of the uncanny is to resort to 'fiction' - fairy tales, novels, fantastic stories - where the world of artifice removes the anxiety we feel at no longer being able to distinguish between real and imaginary doubles, thereby allowing the repressed to return without fear or threat. Kristeva

offers a helpful gloss on the Freudian analysis of the 'uncanny' as a dissolution of our conscious defences, constructed on conflicts between self and other (the stranger) whereby the self maintains an ambivalent relation to the stranger as the one with whom one identifies and also fears. "*Le choc de l'autre,*" she writes, "*l'identification du moi avec ce bon ou mauvais autre qui viole les limites fragiles du moi incertain, seraient donc à la source d'une inquiétante étrangeté dont l'aspect excessif, représenté en littérature, ne saurait cacher la permanence dans la dynamique psychique 'normale'*" (p. 278). The aim is not, therefore, to deny or suppress the symptoms provoked by the 'uncanny' but to face them, understand them and where possible appease or sublimate them. Indeed one must be wary of removing the 'uncanny' altogether, for someone without any experience of the strange/alien/other would be a suitable candidate for psychotic acting-out in a sort of megalomania without limits. "*L'étrangeté est pour les 'sujets', le souverain l'ignore*" (p. 281).

²⁷ Commented by Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, pp. 279 ff. Kristeva's proposed solution to the essential 'uncanniness' of our existence, predicated on the split between our conscious and unconscious, seems to involve opting for irony and humour over fear and terror: "*S'inquiéter ou sourire, tel est le choix lorsque l'étrange nous assaille; il dépend de notre familiarité avec nos propres fantômes*" (p. 282).

²⁸ Kristeva, *ibid.*, p. 284. Kristeva poses, finally, the challenging question about the intimate rapport between our own unconscious repressed fears and the age-old hostility towards strangers/aliens outside of ourselves. While admitting that it is rare for the self to experience the same terrifying anguish towards a human stranger that we feel towards our 'returned repressed' (that is, death, evil powers, the female sex and so on), it is still probable that political xenophobia expressed towards others carries some aspect of "*cette transe de jubilation effrayée*" that Freud called *unheimlich* and the Greeks, *xenos*. Kristeva concludes: "*Dans le rejet fasciné que suscite en nous l'étranger, il y a une part d'inquiétante étrangeté au sens de la dépersonnalisation que Freud y a découverte et qui renoue avec nos désirs et nos peurs infantiles de l'autre - l'autre de la mort, l'autre de la femme, l'autre de la pulsion immaîtrisable*" (p. 283). And it is precisely because 'the stranger' is within us in this manner, that when we flee or fight the foreigner, we are in fact fighting with our own unconscious - "*cet 'impropre' de notre 'propre' impossible.*" (p. 283) And perhaps one of the reasons that Freud did not include foreigners and strangers in his own list of 'uncanny' candidates, was to better educate us in the difficult art of locating 'strangeness' within ourselves, rather than hunting for it outside. Kristeva celebrates the Freudian courage "*de nous dire désintégré pour ne pas intégrer les étrangers et encore moins les poursuivre, mais pour les accueillir dans cette inquiétante étrangeté qui est autant la leur que la nôtre*" (p. 284). The aim therefore is to analyse strangeness in analysing ourselves. "*A découvrir notre troublante altérité, car c'est bien elle qui fait irruption face à ce 'démon',*

à cette menace, à cette inquiétude qu'engendre l'apparition projective de l'autre au sein de ce que nous persistons à maintenir comme un 'nous' propre et solide. A reconnaître notre inquiétante étrangeté, nous n'en souffrirons ni n'en jouirons de dehors. L'étranger est en moi, donc nous sommes tous des étrangers. Si je suis étranger, il n'y a pas d'étrangers." (*ibid.*) The ethics of psychoanalysis thus implies a corresponding politics: "il s'agirait d'un cosmopolitisme de type nouveau qui, transversal aux gouvernements, aux économies et aux marchés, oeuvre pour une humanité dont la solidarité est fondée sur la conscience de son inconscient . . ." (*ibid.*) What a psychoanalytic ethic of otherness teaches us is that each self is inhabited by difference and that this difference is the ultimate condition of our being-with-others. Kristeva pursues further political implications of this psychoanalytic ethic of alterity and difference in subsequent works, for example, *Nations Without Nationalism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993 and *Crisis of the European Subject*, New York, Other Press, 2000.

²⁹ See also the illuminating analyses by Paul Ricoeur and Northrop Frye of the *pharmakos* (sacrificial victim) in the Greek myth of Prometheus as discussed in *The Wake of Imagination*, London, Hutchinson, 1988 (reprinted Routledge), pp. 82-84.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, This argument is an emended version of part of a paper entitled "Le mythe come bouc émissaire chez Girard," delivered at the René Girard conference at Cerisy, Normandy, in 1984, and subsequently published in *Violence et Vérité*, ed. P. Dumouchel and J.-P. Dupuy, Paris, Grasset, 1985 and as "Myth and Sacrificial Scapegoats: On René Girard" in our *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1995, pp. 136-147.

³¹ Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, London, Athlone Press, 1987, p. 38.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 114-139.

³³ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, London, Fontana, 1968; and our own analysis of the contemporary relevance of ancient 'sacrificial' myths in *Myth and Motherland*, Derry, Field Day Publications, 1984, republished in Ireland's Field Day, London, Hutchinson, 1985 and, in somewhat expanded fashion, in our *Postnationalist Ireland*, pp. 108-121, and in "Myth and Martyrdom I-II" in our *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture*, Dublin, Wolfhound Press, 1988, pp. 224-248. See finally our study of the relevance of the Girard thesis to the contemporary invocation of sacrificial myths by the IRA in Northern Ireland, "Terrorisme et Sacrifice: Le cas de l'Irlande du Nord," *Esprit*, April 1979.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57. The New Age guru, Joseph Campbell, for one, has much to say about messianic monsters in *The Power of Myth*, a best selling book and enormously influential television series. The following passage, it seems to me, serves as cautionary reminder of the need for some kind of ethical decision: "By monster I mean some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all your standards for harmony, order and ethical conduct . . . That's God in the role of destroyer. Such experiences go past ethical judgements. Ethics is wiped out . . . God is horrific," *The Power of Myth*, New York, Doubleday, 1988, p. 222. See our discussion of this passage in our chapter, "Evil, Monstrosity and the Sublime" below. There we note how we do not need to go to the extremes of gnostic New Ageism to identify a moral confusion on this issue, since it is prevalent in several post-structuralist and post-modern apostles of the Sublime.

⁴² Girard, *The Scapegoat*, p. 62.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See *The Scapegoat*. However, Girard the inquisitor of myths may be said to redeem himself somewhat, I believe, to the extent that he turns the mirror back on himself.

⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Autrement: Lecture d'Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence d'Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, p. 9. See Ricoeur's further challenge to Levinas' rejection of narrative memory and history in this later work, pp. 12-14, 38-39. In the following passage (pp. 24-25), Ricoeur is especially trenchant in his critique of Levinas' anti-theological emphasis on the "traumatism of persecution" in *Autrement qu'être*: "Bref, il faut que ce soit par sa 'méchanceté même' (p. 175) que la "haine persecutrice" (*ibid.*) signifie le "subir par autrui" de l'injonction a l'enseigne du Bien. Je ne sais si les lecteurs ont mesure l'enormite du paradoxe consistant a faire dire par la méchanceté le degre d'extreme passivite de la condition ethique. C'est a l'outrage", comble de l'injustice, qu'il est demande de signifier l'appel a la bienveillance: "C'est de par la condition d'outrage qu'il peut y avoir dans le monde pitie, compassion, pardon et proximité" (p. 186). Ce n'est pas tout; il faut encore que le "traumatisme de la persecution" (p. 178) signifie l'irremissibilité de l'accusation" (*ibid.*), bref, la culpabilité sans bornes . . . Il y a la comme un crescendo: persecution, outrage, expiation, "accusation absolue, anterieure a la liberte" (p. 187). N'est-ce pas l'aveu que l'ethique deconnectee de l'ontologie est sans lanagage direct, propre, approprié? . . . La detresse du discours est encore aggravee par le deni et le rejet de toute solution 'théologique', apaisante ou consolante" (p. 184). Le texte de Levinas est a cet egard violemment antithéologique . . ."

⁴⁶ See Thomas Brockelman's lucid commentary on critiques of the self offered by such neo-Lacanian as Richard Boothby and Slavoj Žižek, *The Frame and the Mirror: On Collage and the Postmodern*, Northwestern University Press, 2001, pp. 129-144.

⁴⁷ See Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, L'Histoire, L'Oubli*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 2000; Jean Greisch, *L'Age herméneutique de la raison*, Ed. du Cerf, Paris, 1985 and *Le Cogito herméneutique*, Vrin, 2000; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Seabury Press, 1975.

⁴⁸ See P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992, p. 355. Here Ricoeur, *pace* Levinas, advocates a certain equivocalness of the status of the other as source of moral conscience. The philosopher cannot say, concludes Ricoeur, "whether this Other, source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God - living God, absent God - or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end." In his commentary of Ricoeur's notion of the moral self, Guy de Petitdemange sees conscience as the most pivotal example of passivity before otherness, alongside the body and intersubjective relations: "il y a pour Ricoeur une passivité 'hors pair', la plus intérieure à soi, s'énonçant du plus loin et à la verticale, la voix de la conscience", "La Notion du Sujet" in Paul Ricoeur: *Morale, Histoire, Religion*, no. 390 of *Magazine Littéraire*, September; 2000, p. 61. He develops his commentary of the Ricoeur-Levinas debate as follows, p. 61: "A propos d'autrui, Ricoeur engage une discussion longue et souvent vive avec Levinas et il faut lui savoir gré de cette distinction. Chez celui-ci, il refuse l'hyperbole, l'excès, un paroxysme 'encore jamais atteint' ('Chaque visage est un Sinaï qui interdit le meurtre'), qui arrive à son comble avec la notion de substitution, coeur de son maître-ouvrage, Autrement q'être. L'excès tient à deux choses liées: l'autre a l'initiative exclusive de l'assignation du soi à la responsabilité; or, l'auto-assignation est 'le thème central de nos trois études'; et il résulte de cela l'hypothèse scandaleuse d'un autre devenu 'maître de justice' et même 'offenseur' appelant à l'acte moral ultime, l'expiation. Ricoeur ne nie pas d'évidentes proximités avec Levinas, mais il met en cause l'hyperbole de la séparation du côté du même, donc du moi, bien moins situation de guerre avec autrui que presque autisme. L'amitié, la capacité d'accueil, le dialogue, sa spontanéité bienveillante, la réciprocité dans la reconnaissance et le fait même qu'autrui compte sur moi contesterait la thèse initiale de Levinas d'un moi totalement enfermé en lui, clos, clôturé, dans une asymétrie insurmontable, que l'autre, en l'arrachant à sa suffisance, pulvérise et n'en fait plus qu'un soi ayant en charge le monde et l'histoire qui l'accusent et l'écrasent, paralysent."

⁴⁹ See E. Husserl's Fifth meditation in *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1967; and also Derrida's debt to this same meditation as admitted in "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility," *Questioning Ethics*, pp. 71-72.