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**“ ‘Let Evil Run its Course’: Rivalry, Scapegoating and Conversion in Toni Morrison’s *Sula*”
-a proposal for a paper at the Colloquium of Violence and Religion Conference
“Transforming Violence: Cult, Culture, and Acculturation”, on June 30th-July 4th , 2010 at the
University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA**

My paper proposal for the COV&R conference of 2010, “Transforming Violence: Cult, Culture, and Acculturation” is concerned with a contemporary classic of American literature, Toni Morrison’s 1973 novel *Sula* and the way this text employs the ‘Girardian’ themes of triangular desire, conflictual mimesis, the wearing out of the surrogate victim mechanism and the ensuing sacrificial crisis, as well as the question of a ‘novelistic conclusion’ as a narrative occasion for coming to terms with and recognizing the rivalry underlying the inter-personal relationships of the story. In the novel, the idyllic childhood friendship of the two main characters Sula and Nel takes on a dimension of a partnership in crime when the girls become unwilling accessories to a freak accident. This tragic event foreshadows their falling-out in adulthood, when Sula has an affair with Nel’s husband Jude. When Sula is turned into a symbolic scapegoat of the black community in the small town of Medallion, Nel is happy to forget her own moral culpability until years after Sula’s death – a death that leaves the community lacking a surrogate victim on whom to project its malaise the real reasons of which are to be found in poverty, racism and sexual hypocrisy.

My reading of Morrison’s novel will emphasize the crucial importance of looking past the seemingly bi-partisan and “empowering” aspects of this canonical “Black Feminist” text and stress instead its shamelessly universal end of unmasking a common core of humanity through novelistic – rather than Romantic - strategies. This said, I will not in any way seek to undermine the author’s insightful and ever-urgent criticism of the racist, capitalist and chauvinist powers that be, but merely to point out that it is indeed possible to recognize these socially, culturally and historically specific tendencies while at the same time trying to transcend their rigidly relativist interpretations.

I am a postgraduate student of Comparative Literature (b.1981) at the University of Helsinki in Finland, from where I received my M.A. degree in 2006, and a member of the European PhD-Network “Literary and Cultural Studies”, a doctoral program based at Justus Liebig University Giessen in Germany. I am at the moment working on a doctoral dissertation “Narrative Selves and Others: A Study of Mimetic Desire in Contemporary English Fiction” in which Girard’s theories play a pivotal role in analyzing the relationships between characters in five Anglophone novels published in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. I have also taught an undergraduate course on Girard at the University of Helsinki in the autumn of 2008. Among my previous conference papers is a presentation at the Colloquium of Violence and Religion in London in July 2009.

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