

Joshua Hren
2952 N Booth St.
Milwaukee, WI 53212
jmhren@uwm.edu
414.839.6207

Cloaked Kings and Revealed Brothers

Starting from Girard's Oedipus/Biblical Joseph studies discussed in *Oedipus Unbound*, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, and *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, my paper engages questions of violence, cult, and culture related to Joseph's victimization, vindication, and elevation. Within the Genesis story we see a clear movement from minority among his brothers to minority among the Egyptians until, "what was formerly marginal can become symbolically central to the dominant culture's self-definition—a hopeful proof of its 'rags to riches' opportunities" (Call for Conference Papers). While Joseph wrestles with vengeance, he ultimately artfully sublimates his violence, testing his brothers until their conversion is certain. It is his experience as a minority, as scapegoat scathed by violence, coupled with God's hidden movement, that grants him and his brothers reconciliation over revenge.

Girard argues that, while the Oedipus myth condemns the man guilty of incest and parricide, Joseph, innocent, is nearly killed by fratricide and is accused falsely (the story makes the falsity clear) of adultery with a pseudo-mother. These parallels may embody the major similarities and distinctions, but more of the Joseph/Oedipus complexities remain to be revealed. Joseph's exile elicits Judah's, and I argue that the Judah/Tamar episode, which Girard does not discuss, is of prime importance if we are to understand both the Joseph/Oedipus interrelation, and the truth of the Joseph chronicles in and of themselves. In *Oedipus Unbound*, Girard suggests that both Oedipus and Joseph can be categorized as successful immigrants through their skill in interpreting dreams and riddles. Through a close reading of their enacted skills, I will argue that, more than hermeneutic mastery, Oedipus and Joseph each engender political changes that push past thresholds previously unsurpassed by the dominant cultures. If variant truths of these brothers' tales make them literary rivals, the wholeness neither could reveal alone makes them one.