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Abstract: Mimetic Principles During the English Restoration

When the great French philosopher Voltaire went to England for three years (1726-29) to learn the language and its literary works, he came upon something else that surprised and enlightened him. What separated these Englishmen from his brethren in France was freedom to be skeptical while retaining a belief in God. Will Durant tells us that:

What surprised him was the freedom in which Bolingbroke, Pope, Addison, and Swift wrote whatever they pleased: here was a people that had opinions of their own; a people that had remade its religion, hanged its king, imported another, and built a parliament stronger than any ruler in Europe. There was no Bastille here, and no *letters de cachet*. Here were thirty religions, and not one priest. Here was the boldest sect of all, the Quakers who astonished all of Christendom by behaving like Christians. Voltaire never to the end of his life ceased to wonder at them.... (158)

What occurred in seventeenth-century England can be described as a culmination of mimetic forces that were developing and conflicting before and after the English civil war which primed the society for a new way—the *middle way*, of neoclassicism, or, “The Augustan Age.”

This treatise examines the impact of the workings of mimetic forces before, during, and after the Restoration. While based on research for a thesis on John Dryden, this work will focus more on Girard’s theories of mimetic desire, rivalry, and scapegoat

mechanisms as they applied to the cultural and societal changes in the period, as related to literacy, religious tolerance, and societal-identification. The mimetic rivalries that formed during the civil war period and beyond, as well as the impact of the fear of new violence, led to the “Glorious revolution” of 1688 and the condition of secular humanism that we still observe to this day.