

From: *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*, 25.1 (2005 [2006]): 218-24.

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Cesáreo Bandera. *"Monda y desnuda": La humilde historia de Don Quijote. Reflexiones sobre el origen de la novela moderna*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005. 405 pp. ISBN: 84-8589-189-5.

This is a study by a true believer, for Bandera evinces a fervent faith in a trinity of "deities": the God of the Christians, Cervantes, and René Girard. There is nothing surprising about the last one: Bandera hitched his critical wagon to Girard's theory of mimetic desire at least thirty years ago. Combined with the same critic's analysis of the role of the scapegoat in the relationship between violence and the sacred, Bandera continues to find mimetic desire a productive model for interpretation. Such long fidelity to one intellectual mentor, taken with Bandera's conviction that he can read Cervantes' mind and intentions through his work, and his repeated assertion of the "reality" and "truth" of the Christian God, makes this a rather old-fashioned work as well.

It is also a lengthy one, given that Bandera claims that both his argument and Cervantes' are simple: "No pretendo descubrir 'el secreto' del *Quijote*, porque no creo que el *Quijote* guarde ningún secreto" (11). Instead, "Lo profundo está en el primer plano... en esa humíldísima historia de un loco" (394), whose "locuras" serve to entertain the readers at the same time that the story tells them "que es una pena que ese hombre haga esas cosas, y que lo decente y caritativo es desear que ese hombre se cure... y vuelva a ver la realidad sin los anteojos de la ficción." The salvation of the madman, for Bandera, is the "real" story of *Don Quijote* as the first modern novel, and it arises out of "un simple acto de compasión y tolerancia" (19) on the part of Cervantes. Bander-

ra thus sets himself against the kind of reader, typified for him by Unamuno, who sees the mad Quijote as a hero:

Pensaba Unamuno que todo lo que se le podía ocurrir al mediocre Cervantes era un Alonso Quijano bueno, pero no un Alonso Quijano heroicamente loco, es decir, un Alonso Quijano que, sin dejar de ser "el bueno," fuera más allá, pasara a ser bueno en grado heroico, cosa que no puede lograrse...sin aparecer a los ojos de la mediocridad reinante, de todos los Cervantes y cervantitos, como loco de remate. (180)

Implicitly, however, the length of Bandera's book and the breadth of the literary texts he considers imply a recognition that many of the *Quijote's* readers over the years would agree with Unamuno, if not with regard to Cervantes' mediocrity as a writer, then certainly that Don Quijote possesses a grandeur—whether it is called heroism or not, whether Cervantes intended it or not—that Alonso Quijano's sane, Christian death belies. It also implies a complexity of structure, narrative voice, and references that must make it more than a simple, humble story of a man cured of madness.

In order to convince such readers that what matters is sanity and Christianity, and not the nearly one thousand pages of mad adventures and the evocation of imaginary worlds, Bandera analyzes classical literature, the picaresque, the pastoral, the various interpolated stories of the first part of *Don Quijote, Persiles y Sigismunda*, Unamuno's *Abel Sánchez* and *Niebla*, as well as Bakhtin and Kierkegaard, with brief forays into other texts as well. As this list may make one suspect, the overarching argument concerning the "monda y desnuda" story of the madman cured often disappears from the surface of Bandera's study, just as Don Quijote's supposed progress from mad to sane does in the novel. Indeed, some of these individual set-pieces of literary criticism (see below) are more convincing within their generic context than the study's broader thesis, which suffers at times from the author's own intense faith in those three authorities mentioned in the first paragraph of this review.

Bandera begins by proposing that there is a significant disjunction between the classical, pagan world and the Christian, and that it is predicated upon the "desacralization" of mankind's view of the universe. This process involves two simultaneous developments: in one, "el hombre adquiere una mayor responsabilidad frente a lo que sucede en su entorno histórico y social" (12), while in the other, the outside world itself becomes "mucho menos amenazador e impredecible, un mundo que refleja no tanto el desinterés de Dios como su inocencia, el hecho...de que Dios no es caprichoso, no juega o se burla de los seres humanos." This means, by extension, that violence, which once was seen as proceeding from the gods, now originates in the

merely human. It will no longer be possible to propitiate an angry god by designating an individual victim as guilty and responsible, and sacrificing him or her in order to save society. For Bandera, when Christ, an *innocent* victim, is sacrificed, it becomes impossible for collective society to accept without question the culpability of the sacrificial victim.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, however, desacralization also entails the loss of viability of the epic hero, whose being is rooted in a sacralized view of war and violence.

How does this apply to Don Quijote? Bandera establishes a link between the old sacrificial victim and the madman, in the first place, as figures that society was wont to exclude or eliminate. Since no more sacrifices are required after that of Christ, and there can be no more transference of guilt from one person to another, now the excluded or sacrificed must be integrated, saved. Cervantes achieves this in part by reducing the differences between his madman and those that surround him: throughout the novel, Don Quijote encounters individuals whose intellects are disordered by desire, as is his. According to Bandera, Cervantes must nevertheless keep his protagonist sufficiently distinct from the other characters or there would be no novel: "Una cosa es lo que salva al ser humano y otra muy distinta lo que salva la novela del fracaso" (29). Although this may appear reasonable, Bandera's explanation, including a comparison with Sophocles' *Oedipus*, is less than edifying. It involves a contrast between the necessity on Sophocles' part to hide the truth "lo suficiente para permitir el desarrollo de la tragedia y la expulsión sacralizada de Edipo" (29), and on Cervantes' to "revelarla lo suficiente como para llevar a cabo la salvación de don Quijote de manera convincente y cristiana" (29–30). Ultimately, the critic states, for Sophocles, mimetic representation must triumph over the "truth," while for Cervantes, "truth" has to "sobrevivir... más allá de la representación mimética o no existirá diferencia alguna con el modo antiguo, nada auténticamente nuevo se habrá creado" (30, emphasis added).

This is an example of Bandera's mode of argumentation with regard to Cervantes and *Don Quijote* here, and it exemplifies many of the study's weaknesses. The most obvious one is the insistence on the empirical existence of something (never defined) called "truth"; at this postmodern moment, such an assertion calls for a much more nuanced approach. Another

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<sup>1</sup> Bandera later argues that there is also a difference between *how* Christ as innocent victim saves, compared to the classical or primitive scapegoat: "el nuevo Dios no había venido a salvar a la ciudad como tal sino a todos y cada uno de sus habitantes individualmente" (25). This does not quite convince, perhaps because there seems to be a step missing: the member of the *polis* of Antiquity is saved because he is a part of the *polis*. In order for Christ's sacrifice to apply, the individual must take the necessary step of *choosing* to believe in Christ's divinity and the efficacy of his sacrifice.

liability is the imputation of intentionality, which the critic claims to be able to identify, to not only writers and texts, but to history as well. *Don Quijote* certainly makes a claim to do certain literary things *better* (that was the purpose of the Baroque writer's *ingenio* and *agudeza*); there is little explicit evidence that Cervantes meant to do something *new*. Yet another problem is the use of terms of judgement: Cervantes must reveal the truth "sufficiently" to save his protagonist in a manner both "convincing" and "Christian." Sufficient and convincing to whom? What is more Christian about dying not believing in romances of chivalry than dying while believing in them? Despite Bandera's belief, derived from Girard, that Don Quijote replaces the Christian God with Amadís de Gaula, this is not literally the case, since the character is never less than a Christian believer throughout the novel. These tactics amount to a kind of lapse of mind that limits the plausibility of Bandera's interpretation to those who come to it with the critic's own presumptions.

This is perhaps why the most convincing parts of the study are those that have to do with the narrative genres that contribute to *Don Quijote's* composition—the picaresque and the pastoral—and the text that resulted from Cervantes' own, Avellaneda's false continuation. Bandera's consideration of Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* emphasizes, first, that the *pícaro* protagonist "es en última instancia responsable de su destino" (64); he is not the victim of an unjust socioeconomic system, as some have argued. Bandera also discerns that *Guzmán* fails in its attempt to write a picaresque novel from a Christian perspective: the picaresque is antithetical to the fundamental nature of Christianity because it is "una forma concebida como el espectáculo público de un delincuente, una víctima, que exhibe sus delincuencias y es zandadeada de un sitio a otro y maltratada para entretenimiento y lección de todos" (68). Thus the long debate over whether Guzmán's conversion is "real" or not is, for Bandera, mistaken. The conversion is real, but the picaresque provides the wrong form for it, since the *pícaro* addresses his confession not to God but to the readers, that is, to the society that judges him. As such, the protagonist-narrator does not present himself as the reformed sinner he has become, but as the enthusiastic sinner that he was.

Similarly, in the *Buscón*, Bandera finds something almost pre-Christian, even anti-Christian: "Pablos es una especie de vacío humano viviente que se mueve a lo largo de una trayectoria predecible, predeterminada; una trayectoria, además, terriblemente violenta, es decir, lanzada por una intención claramente victimaria" (90). Quevedo's intent, in this reading, is to undermine Alemán's attempt to Christianize the picaresque and to make it a genre of moral purpose. In the process, the *Buscón* unmaskes a version of the carnivalesque that is far from the "carnaval color de rosa, ... una jocosa suspensión de inhibiciones y barreras sociales" (91), one that instead reveals structural

similarities to a public execution. From this perspective, Bandera sees Pablos punished for his envy, the logical result of which would be the elimination of distinctions between classes. It is precisely this aspect of Quevedo's novel that explains its enormous popularity at the time: Pablos does not speak in the voice of the poor, but rather "se apropi[a], ha[ce] suya, la voz del verdugo o, más exactamente, la voz de la turba que lo señala con el dedo y lo expulsa" (107). Less convincingly, or perhaps, less necessarily for his interpretation of *Don Quijote*, the question of envy leads Bandera to an eighty-page discussion of various questions having to do with Unamuno's *Abel Sánchez*.

Bandera's interrogation of the pastoral novel's psychological implications, like the picaresque's sociological ones, is also of interest to those who study the period. In the pastoral, he argues, desire becomes a desire for the rival's desire, in essence, a need not for the erstwhile object of desire, but for an obstacle to the fulfillment of desire. A lover pursues his or her beloved as long as the beloved keeps running away; at the moment when the beloved turns to the lover with open arms, the lover loses interest. At that point, the beloved becomes the pursuer and the whole mechanism begins again. Bandera relates this cycle of flight from satisfaction to the motivation to read novels: "La novela responde de una forma u otra a ese placer y por consiguiente, responde al deseo del que la lee" (285), so that "la dinámica interna del deseo 'de leer novelas' es la misma que conduce al personaje de la novela a la frustración o a la locura" (286).

While these insights may seem unexceptionable, and they certainly do explain the endless cycling of the pastoral, as well as what leads us to read such literature, they become less persuasive in the context of Bandera's penchant for large (and largely undefined) concepts such as "truth" and "reality." Reducing their plausibility even further is the critic's tendency to confuse literary characters with real people. Don Quijote, for example, is compared unfavorably with the madman of Córdoba mentioned in the prologue to the second part, because the latter "aprendió algo en cabeza propia" (294), while the former is so obsessed with being a hero to rival Amadís that he cannot "learn" from his failures. When Cardenio flees from Luscinda's house rather than defy Fernando, Bandera assigns motives to him which the novel does not: "debió de ver algo terrible, su propia culpa, su complicidad en esa traición que lo destruía. Debió de ver algo lo suficientemente angustioso como para volverse loco, para huir desesperadamente de sí mismo, para no ver lo que vio" (317, emphasis added). In a similar way, Bandera presumes to know what Cervantes himself was thinking: "no puede caber duda de que Cervantes siente una profunda, sobria y seria satisfacción al conectar su novela con hechos históricos" (357). These strategies create the impression that the critic is uncertain of his interpretation and, therefore, "oversells" it. Fictional characters only learn what their authors want them to learn, and when. Don

Quijote keeps getting bashed on the head and falling off his horse for just as long as Cervantes thinks it will be interesting and/or funny; he stops when Cervantes decides to have him do something else. Cardenio is only thinking what Cervantes tells us he is, or nothing at all. There is nothing that he “must have been” thinking. All that we know about the historical events of the Captive’s Tale is that Cervantes included them. Why he did, or what he felt upon doing so, must remain a mystery in the absence of any text that would resolve such a question.

In a way, all of these problems stem from one central confusion in Bandera’s interpretation: he believes that *Don Quijote* is somehow less “fictional” than the other fictions to which he refers. Thus, his reference (cited above) to Cervantes’ “satisfaction” upon including historical events in the novel explains Cervantes’ feeling by saying that such elements “eran de verdad, reales, y no entes de ficción” (357). Although many critics have observed that Don Quijote’s mode of reading is dangerous, and others such as Ife have described the controversy during Cervantes’s time about the truthfulness of fictional literature, few have taken, as Bandera does here, such a negative view of the notion of “fiction.” For him, Don Quijote goes mad not because of *how* he reads (to the exclusion of all other activities, including sleep and exercise), but because of *what* he reads: fiction. All of the other deluded characters in the novel behave as they do because they are aping fiction; they are cured when they return to “reality.”

The problem, of which Bandera seems unaware, is that *even their reality is fiction*. The Don Quijote who swears off romances of chivalry on his deathbed is just as fictional as the one who tilts at windmills. Don Diego de Miranda, Bandera’s touchstone for the “reality” of the noble gentleman of Don Quijote’s time, is as fictional as Altisidora. Even the Captive’s Tale, although it has a historically recognizable setting, is fictional: beginning with the folkloric opening of the three brothers who take different paths to fortune to the intervention (which even Bandera refers to as “providencial,” which is to say, logically inexplicable) of Zoraida to the unlikelihood of her escape from rape at the hands of the French pirates<sup>2</sup> to the extraordinary coincidences of the brothers’ paths intersecting immediately upon the Captive’s return, everything points to the “literary” nature of this interpolated story. Indeed, Cervantes employs many of the same motifs in the exemplary tale “El amante liberal.” Thus, Bandera’s insistence that the other love stories involve the “fictionalization” of the characters’ lives, while the Captive “cree en la verdad

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<sup>2</sup> Leyla Rouhi, in a paper presented at the 2005 MLA Convention, proposed that Zoraida was in fact raped, and that the captive used his unprecedented lack of concern for his honor in the situation to construct a new form of Spanish masculine identity.

de lo que dice, porque tiene fe y profunda confianza en la existencia de la verdad y cree que lo que dice está de acuerdo con la verdad" (361), reveals once again the critic's confusion of his own faith with that of the characters, as well as his tendency to treat characters as if they were real people.

Ultimately, Bandera's thesis for this study, that *Don Quijote's* greatness arises not from the literary elements of form, structure or character, but from the "simplicidad compasiva de Cervantes," undermines many of his valid literary analyses. It is perfectly true, as he argues, that Don Quijote in Avellaneda's continuation "está concebido poco menos que como una marioneta que se mueve según le tiran de las cuerdas" (34) in order to "exhibir públicamente al loco en su locura para divertimento de todos" (31). It is less clear that Cervantes' supposed compassion "le confiere a su personaje de ficción su característica independencia" (380) or that "la compasión cervantina no puede ser otra cosa que un acto de arrepentimiento" (381) "como hombre, como ser humano, responsable ante Dios" (382). By conferring upon Cervantes his own negative attitude toward fiction, Bandera turns the novel, and its protagonist's fate in it, into Cervantes' act of contrition for having written the novel, for having deliberately created a great fiction that continues to attract readers after four hundred years: a peculiar conclusion indeed about a compulsive writer of fiction.

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