



The Humble Story of Don Quixote: Reflections on the Birth of the Modern Novel

Cesareo Bandera

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Don Quixote is often called the first modern novel; many would argue it is the greatest novel ever written. But compared with other world masterpieces?from the *Iliad* to *Paradise Lost*, or from *Oedipus the King* to *Hamlet* or *Life is a Dream*, for example?the storyline of *Don Quixote* is remarkably uninspiring and lowly: a middle-aged man becomes mad reading novels and makes a fool of himself by believing he is a hero. The first great modern novel is a warning about the reading and the writing of novels.

In this original study by Cesáreo Bandera, the intimate connection between the simplicity and humility of the story and its greatness is explored. Other comparisons are also made: the story of the picaresque rogue, on the one hand, and the psychological insights of the pastoral novel, on the other. Through these analyses the meaning and significance of Cervantes' novel are developed.

The book takes into critical account Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel, as well as Michel Foucault's views about madness and civilization, in order to bring into relief the modernity of *Don Quixote*. From another angle the contrasting views on human desire of such critics as Unamuno and René Girard become central to a new understanding of Don Quixote's madness, as well as to the development of the main connection between the humility of the story and its greatness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Cesáreo Bandera, professor emeritus of Spanish literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is author of several books and numerous essays in English and Spanish including *The Sacred Game: The Role of the Sacred in the Genesis of Modern Literary Fiction*.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"The originality of Bandera's approach and the novelty of his focus are grounded not only on a solid knowledge of history and literary theory, but also of philosophy, history of religion, anthropology, etc. Bandera's study attracts from its first pages by confronting the reader with concepts which are fundamental to an understanding of the culture and literature of the West in the 17th century."?José María Díez Borque, Madrid, Universidad Complutense

"We are dealing with a book different from all others that have come out on the occasion of the Fourth Centenary. It is full of intuitions, accurate judgments, and, above all [it is] organized and written by an author ready to make tabula rasa of all Cervantine bibliography in order to reexamine ab ovo the state of questions that are still relevant to those who study the best classical novel."?Héctor Briosio, Universidad de Alcalá

"Bandera discusses the historical, social, and spiritual developments that, in the Renaissance, made a revival of the old epic an impossibility and paved the way to the invention of the modern novel. . . . He presents an immensely intelligent, sensitive, innovative, and readable book on this immortal work."?René Girard, Member of the French Academy, Honorary President of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion

"Bandera . . . offers an insightful analysis of Cervantes' techniques, including mimesis, parody, and irony. . . . Highly recommended." ? M.V. Ekstrom, *Choice*

"[The book] contains brilliant insights into the picaresque and the pastoral." ? Julio Baena, *Renaissance Quarterly*

"Professor Bandera enriches our understanding of the literature of the period with acute and instructive insights."?Edwin Williamson, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*

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