



5-2014

Bandera, Cesareo, A Refuge of Lies: Reflections on Faith and Fiction. East Lansing, MI: MSU Press, 2013

Andrew J. McKenna

Loyola University Chicago, Amckenn@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/modernlang_facpubs



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#), and the [Modern Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McKenna, Andrew J.. Bandera, Cesareo, A Refuge of Lies: Reflections on Faith and Fiction. East Lansing, MI: MSU Press, 2013. Bulletin of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, 44, : 8-11, 2014. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Modern Languages and Literatures: Faculty Publications and Other Works,

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern Languages and Literatures: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
© The Colloquium on Violence and Religion, 2014.

tending might have required, was far outweighed by the good they had received.

Jeremiah Alberg

REPORTS ON CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Affiliation of Mimetic Theory for Emerging Scholars

In 2012, a group of young scholars of mimetic theory attended the Imitatio Summer School on Mimetic Theory in Leusden, the Netherlands. We had a wonderful, inspirational and educational fortnight together, learning from outstanding teachers who encouraged us to pursue our studies of the theory of René GIRARD—Sandy GOODHART, James ALISON, Paul DU- MOUCHEL and Mark ANSPACH.

At the end of the Summer School, Thérèse ONDERDENWIJNGAARD (our organiser and host) gathered us together to discuss ‘where to from here?’

We had a strong sense that the camaraderie and collegiality we had built should not simply fade away. Particularly, we wanted to be a part of the next generation of Girardian scholars, and to participate in COV&R. We decided to form an ‘emerging scholars’ group, and also to try and mount an online journal for work by such scholars who would appreciate peer feedback as they develop their ideas.

We proposed the formal incorporation of our group to the board of COV&R at the next meeting, at Iowa in 2013. The board were very warm, supportive and enthusiastic about our goal of nurturing the emerging scholars of COV&R, and voted to make us an official group within COV&R. We have taken the name AMES: the Affiliation of Mimetic Theory for Emerging Scholars, and we are working on our forthcoming journal ‘Skandalon’, and there is a great sense of excitement as we plan our activities for the coming years.

What is an ‘emerging scholar’? We consider the definition to be broad and soft-edged, but in essence an emerging scholar is someone in the early years of their career. We are generally doctoral students or recent graduates, mostly young people so far, who are just starting our academic lives and are grateful to have a network of other like-minded people to share our ideas, give us peer feedback on our research, and make friends.

We encourage anyone who identifies as an ‘emerging scholar’ to contact us through the COV&R Facebook page for now—soon we hope to also have a page on the COV&R website—and we will keep COV&R members informed of our forthcoming activities.

Carly Osborne

BOOK REVIEWS

Bandera, Cesareo, *A Refuge of Lies: Reflections on Faith and Fiction*. East Lansing, MI: MSU Press, 2013 (viii, 156 pp.) ISBN: 978-1-60917-378-4. \$19.95.

“What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” TERTULLIAN rhetorically inquired. This controversy has never abated, these days taking the form of a God/no God, science vs faith, fact vs fiction debate, around Darwinism. René GIRARD has expressed no interest in getting involved at this level, remarking blithely in *Evolution and Conversion*, “I do not see why God could not be compatible with science. If one believes in God, one also believes in objectivity. A traditional belief in God makes one a believer in the objectivity of the world.” Still, Cesáreo BANDERA breathes new life into this conundrum when he engages literary and scriptural texts in a way that they elucidate each other. This he does by juxtaposing the faith of Abraham to the sacrificial logic of the Greeks, which he uncovers and spells out vividly in Homeric epic. He traces the confidence we enjoy in the ontological stability of the world to the faith of the biblical narrator voicing that of Abraham, of the prophets, of the Psalmist, who proclaim “The earth, O Lord is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. The sum of your word is truth” (Ps 119:160). As BANDERA notes, the Psalmist “asks God for illumination, he wants to know the truth, he pleads for knowledge. It is not his truth, it is God's truth and he trusts God.” In sum, he trusts in a world suffused the love of its creator.

Building on the insights of Eric AUERBACH's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, BANDERA contrasts the smooth, seamless style of narration we find in the *Iliad*, with its “famous narrative equilibrium in the midst of battle,” to the blunt, roughshod

form of Biblical narrative, with its episodic gaps and discontinuities, and indifference to rhetorical ornament, which is such that “the invisible dimension of historical reality filters in, that a sense of depth and background is conveyed, a profound concern for essential truth beyond the empirical details is communicated at all levels.” Unlike Homeric personae, these biblical characters have a history, no destiny or fate guides them, they are free, they can change, they’re like us.

It is in this verisimilitude, and not in heroic tales, that we find the wellsprings of the modern realist fiction that has known such a fabulous career in the West since CERVANTES set out to test heroic paradigms against quotidian reality. BANDERA returns to *Don Quixote* throughout this book, extending and deepening the analyses he has performed in earlier works (*The Sacred Game, The Humble Story of Don Quixote*; see *COV&R Bulletin*, May 2007) by drawing NIETZSCHE into the orbit of the Don’s madness. Just as romantics among us persist in identifying with the Don’s antic mischief against a humdrum world of everyday reality, postmoderns revere NIETZSCHE’s Will-to-Power perspectivism and his virulent mockery of “a one true world” without considering what is at stake for sanity and even survival. NIETZSCHE admired the Don and could not forgive CERVANTES for his deathbed conversion, where his return to sanity is expressed as a humble acceptance divine mercy, of forgiveness. NIETZSCHE’s aim to “philosophize with a hammer” has a dramatic flair, but since virtually no one responded to his increasingly shrill taunts against the Bible, against WAGNER, it amounts to tilting at windmills. His declared veneration in his *Genealogy of Morals* for what he conceived as the master race of Athenians is a recipe for disaster, alike in this to the Don’s immersion in medieval romance. According to CERVANTES, the Don, and we along with him, is well out of it. The desire of fiction is fueled by fictions of desire that we indulge in to our detriment.

When, upon his arrest, Jesus rebuked his followers to “put up your sword. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword,” he was not offering a tidbit of perennial, axiomatic wisdom for future anthologists; he was summarizing what GIRARD’s mimetic theory tells us about

violent reciprocity; he was repositioning Heraclitean *polemos*, “king and father of all,” as a matter for urgent, practical consideration. For GIRARD, and BANDERA after him, it is Satan’s work to fight violence with violence, to encourage its spread, which is why GIRARD has redefined him as the mimetic principle par excellence. It is because violence will out among those who attempt to use it for their own putative purposes, even to quell it, that culture has depended upon sacrifice to streamline and economize it, directing it away from the community towards its scapegoats. This is the “refuge of lies” that BANDERA deftly scrutinizes; it is a phrase drawn from Isaiah (28:14-19), by which the prophet excoriates his people for perpetuating a “covenant with death,” the murderous fiction of its idolatrous practices: “The idolater sacralizes the violence he wants protection from.” Beneath the shimmering surface of Heroic epic is a world that is rife with fear of what their gods can do to them anywhere, anytime, and sacrifices are regularly performed to propitiate them, keep them at a distance. The people who claim their descendance from Abraham are imbued with a hope of what their God will do for them if they abide by his law, which commands “mercy, not sacrifice,” as many biblical passages proclaim. In this regard, the contrast between Jerusalem and Athens could not be more glaring, since it is reset not as faith and reason but faith and fear.

BANDERA engages fruitfully with Simone WEIL’s famous essay on the *Iliad* as a “poème de la force” in order to uncover its sacrificial organization around the death of Patrocles, which anticipates that of Achilles himself, whose foil is not Hector, his mimetic double, but the grotesque Thersites, “the ugliest man who came beneath Ilion. He was bandy legged ... with shoulders stooped and drawn together over his chest ... his skull with wool grown sparsely upon it” (*Iliad* 2:216ff). Thersites is the “anti-Achilles, or if one prefers, the hidden side of Achilles, the hateful side of the hero-victim destined to die and to carry with him all the sacred pollution that has contaminated the group.” It is in this repulsive figure that BANDERA recognizes the affliction of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh: “despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was

despised, and we esteemed him not" (Is 53.3). By contrast, we read, "If Thersites was an afflicted man, nobody around him saw his affliction least of all Homer. Homer was part of the crowd, he saw what the crowd saw." BANDERA rightly posits "sacrifice as the secret of the *Iliad*," where there could be no sympathy for this kind of loser, though he is of a kind in whom Israel was instructed to expect its redeemer.

It is especially around this notion of affliction, and Simone WEIL's luminous essay on it, that BANDERA pursues what he calls the "inner logic of Christian revelation." He draws our attention deeply into the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, where he shows that it is not the anticipation of physical suffering alone, or even chiefly, that marks this episode, but the foretaste of utter abandonment, of repudiation by the hostile crowd and by his beloved disciples alike. Jesus prays to the Father to be spared but "also prays that the Father's will be done, not his own." BANDERA refers us to Psalm 55:1-5 to conceive Christ's agony here: "fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me." Here Jesus is "infinitely alone," with all of fallen humanity in its victimizing fervor arrayed against him. BANDERA remarks percipiently that "at no other time is the humanity of Jesus so explicitly highlighted as at this moment":

What we now see is the horrendous price that Christ must pay for rejecting Satan, for resisting the power of the human crowd from the beginning till the end. As he resists the satanic power of the crowd, he reveals the affliction of the victim because he is now in the place of the victim, the foundation of Satan's power. Therefore he is also at an infinite distance from God the Father. Satan's tempting power is now at its peak, because it is in direct proportion to the absence of God.

A desolation that is absolute penetrates to his soul like the point of a nail driven by a universal hammer, a trope evoked by WEIL, though without reference to Christ, in her description of "extreme affliction,"

which means physical pain, distress of soul, and social degradation, all together, is the nail. The point of the nail is applied to the very center of the soul, and its head is the whole of necessity throughout all space and time.

Jesus' cry from the cross ("Eloi, Eloi...") of God's abandonment echoes this absolute dereliction, as WEIL has remarked elsewhere.

Thanks to BANDERA's robust analysis, we begin to see the telling symmetry that he does now bring out, between the faith of Abraham and the agony of Jesus. In Genesis, God tells his servant to take his only son ("whom you love") up to a mountain and kill him, and God rewards Abraham's unquestioning faith with the promise of a glorious posterity that will be a blessing to "all the nations of the earth." In the passion narrative, we find God's only and beloved son ("in whom I am well pleased") accepting an utterly ignominious death, bereft of all ritual trappings designed to disguise a lynching. The Father does not demand a sacrifice here, as the traditional doctrine of atonement avers, but He does wish to be known as the God of victims, as we find in Job, many Psalms, and the prophets; he does wish that his love be known as suffering that is borne for the sake of others ("for our iniquities," Is. 53:5), and to be identified with the victim in the utmost place of shame. Did the Gospel writers have the *akedah* in mind: an angel wards off the sacrifice of Isaac, angels console Jesus? Could they avoid the structural reversal of the pattern, the reversal of the sacrificial perspective, with Jesus now as the embodiment, the incarnation of the God of victims? In any event, his assent, his "fiat voluntas tua," echoes the prayer he taught to his disciples, but also the words of Mary at the Annunciation: "fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum." And both resonate with the "fiat lux" by which creation moves out from the void as an act of love, as the psalmist reminds us: "The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love" (Ps 119:64). BANDERA's summary of this episode specifies what is at the heart of biblical revelation:

The Christian truth in its very essence is not an act of cognition, *it is a person*, or even more specifically, Reason, the Word, the Logos *made flesh*. It is only because the truth is a person, the Word incarnate, that it is also Love.

In Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, then, Creation, Incarnation, and Crucifixion are in total reverberation; ontology and epistemology, those heady words of our philosophical tradition, are realigned, reconciled in mimetic anthropology. Or, as BANDERA states it, "human reason and ultimate Truth are in accord with each other." That is a huge claim, and he makes it stick.

For all its brevity, this book is a *Summa* of sorts, chiefly the one directed "contra Gentiles,"

if we understand by that word what Saint Paul referred to as “the powers and principalities” relying on the sacrificial logic of the crowd and relict in their contagious addiction to violence. BANDERA’s close readings and perspicuous argumentation build up to this resounding conclusion:

... so does mimetic theory require a reality that is both beyond the fictionalizing power of desire and yet fully desirable in itself, an object of desire whose desirable existence is not a projection of the intersubjective maneuverings of human desire, and can be, because of that, also fully rational. Yet the rationality, as well as the desirability, of such a transcendent object is rather special. It is, in fact, unique, and cannot be fully completely comprehended by human reason, precisely because there is nothing else to compare it with—there is nothing else that is inherently desirable. Thus we are led to posit an object of desire and of reason that transcends the limits of both. In other words, God.

This book does not provide anything like an ontological proof of God’s existence, but an anthropological foundation for it. It is a profession of faith, but in no way a “sacrificium intellectus,” since it exercises a faith in logical argument as much as in anything else. Still less is it a recourse to any version of “credo quia absurdum” (which TERTULLIAN, to his credit, never said), the only form of the absurd it evokes being the mindless because mimetic clash of iron on its path to human flesh. BANDERA addresses our critical intelligence at every step of his reasoning; he prods us to trust our best hopes as expressed in what the great texts of our religious and literary tradition have revealed to us about ourselves.

Andrew McKenna

Breitenfellner, Kirstin: *Wir Opfer.*

***Warum der Sündenbock unsere Kultur bestimmt.* München: Diederichs-Verlag; 2013; 286 pp. 16, 99 €; ISBN: 978-3-424-35085-2**

The author of this book is a journalist and writer and lives in Vienna. Through her book she wants to acquaint a larger audience with R. GIRARD’s mimetic theory, and she wants to show how this theory can help to gain a better understanding and judgment of current processes in society. The book focuses on Germany and Austria but, because of its cultural leadership role, it also considers the U.S. Special interest is placed on the media—press, radio, TV, internet—and the peculiarity of their conduct.

In the beginning BREITENFELLNER emphasizes the importance of the topic: again and again the term *Opfer* occurs in public debates, and its meaning is extremely vague, which is only partly due to the fact that the German *Opfer* can translate as *sacrifice* or as *victim*, it is also due to equivocalities in the reality itself. For that reason the German word *Opfer* will often remain untranslated in this review.

In two introductory chapters, the readers are familiarized with GIRARD’s theory of victimization and sacrifice—the foundation of culture in the scapegoat mechanism. An overview of the function of sacrifice for the world religions follows. In the Biblical tradition—in Judaism and Christianity—the criticism of violence becomes ever more pronounced. This, the author states, is a permanent civilizing achievement of Christianity despite its many relapses into scapegoat thinking. The meaning and forms of sacrifice in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam are sketched briefly. These religions too substitute bloody human or animal sacrifice with the gift of objects, food, or flowers (p. 54). In the end the symbolic, i.e. inner sacrifice, ensues (p. 54). But every religion also experienced relapses to bloody violence.

The following six chapters explain the essential thesis of the book: *Opfer* has become a central category of public discourse in the past decades. Political debates are suffused with it as much as the self-conception of the individual. It is a key concept for the interpretation of current social processes and political activity. Yet, there are negative developments and abuses as well, which are described extensively. Despite this criticism, it may not be overlooked that the author in principle appreciates attention to victims and solidarity with them.

This attention to victims was initiated by a reflection of the holocaust. Because of its concentration on the present, the book especially focuses on the problems of this development. It relates Peter NOVICK’s and Norman G. FINKELSTEIN’s criticism that a “holocaust industry” takes advantage of the victims’ suffering and abuses them for its own political or financial purposes, so as to draw dividends from the role of victim, so to speak. The thesis of the uniqueness of the holocaust is rejected because through it the victims of the holocaust become in a sense privileged. Other atrocious crimes of