

Sacrificial and unsacrificial epics

The sacrificial origin of society is reproduced almost transparently in most epic poems. Foundational texts, these poems describe the chain of violent events which give birth to a community and promote fictions that interpret these events. Epic poetry observes mimetic violence and its sacrificial transformations, and discusses the possible negative effects of a mimetic violence not completely contained by sacrifice.

This paper will consider a text that apparently deviates from the epic norm, the Castilian Poem of el Cid. In its first part, the text describes the containment of mimetic violence and its displacement towards appropriate substitutes; however, the second half of the poem deconstructs this fiction, and presents reciprocal violence and its displacements as essentially destructive. The only possible solution for this contradiction is renunciation to revenge and the absorption of mimetic violence by a judiciary system organized around a depersonalized royalty. I will point out the coincidences between this text and a number of Medieval social projects – Tregua Dei, Pax Dei, the crusading movement and the reintroduction of Roman law – that aim to the eradication of reciprocal violence. Within this frame, the poem reveals itself as a strong proposal against the values that uphold both epic poetry and pre-modern societies.

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