

1981

An Onomastic Study of Cervantes Rinconete and Cortadillo

Catherine Guzman

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los>

Repository Citation

Guzman, Catherine (1981) "An Onomastic Study of Cervantes Rinconete and Cortadillo," *Literary Onomastics Studies*: Vol. 8 , Article 15.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/vol8/iss1/15>

This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Literary Onomastics Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.

AN ONOMASTIC STUDY OF CERVANTES'

RINCONETE AND CORTADILLO

Catherine Guzmán

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Rinconete y Cortadillo, by Miguel de Cervantes, is one of twelve short stories grouped under the title of Novelas Ejemplares published in 1613. It is an excellent example of the creative use of charactonyms by a true master of nominology. In his work, Cervantes always demonstrated thoughtful planning in the choice of names for his characters. Indeed, he makes this quite clear in his most famous work, Don Quijote de la Mancha, where he admits having spent eight days to finally decide on his hero's name, Don Quijote.

It is in this jewel of an exemplary novel, however, where we find that every name is used in the function of identification of the personality, significance, or occupation of the character. Most of the attributive names are diactinic names,¹ as they refer to lower class characters of the picaresque world. In an unparalleled style of wit and humor, Cervantes presents a baroque picture of the underworld of Seville as seen and experienced by his two protagonists, Rinconete and Cortadillo.

This novel has been the subject of differences of opinion among the most notable Spanish critics with regard to its classification as

a picaresque novel. There are three groups: those who deny it is a picaresque novel, Ramón Menéndez y Pelayo, Joaquín Casaldueiro and Ludwig Pfandl; those who claim it categorically so, Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín and Agustín González de Amezúa; and those who, like J. Luis Alborg, claim that it is, because of its ambience and roguish characters. He does make a distinction, however, when he discusses its technique or formal aspect.² I am in favor of Alborg's opinion. As we will see from a brief summary of Rinconete y Cortadillo, the structure of the novel is not that of the picaresque novel, nor do the protagonists share the characteristics of the typical "pícaro" who goes from master to master in order to satisfy his hunger, doing what he must to stay alive. Each episode is a separate vignette.

In contrast with the picaresque novel, we do not have a narrative in the first person. The story begins with a description of the place where the two lads meet and a description of them. Through a dialogue, we discover who they are and then witness their first roguish collaboration. They will then go on to Seville where they will again take part in the light-fingered sport and will be approached by a member of a band of thieves. Throughout, they have been the agents of the action, unlike the antihero of the picaresque novel who is moved by circumstance.

Once they have been singled out and made wise to the ways of the brotherhood of thieves, they are brought to the den of the thieves, where they, as well as the reader, become observers of the underworld and its laws. It is in this segment that we will see all different types of rogues parade before us, with their leader Monipodio beginning

the march.

The last part is a narrative which serves as an epilogue about their reaction to this way of life and the decision to move on away from it. Thus, Cervantes, without moralizing, presents an example of what sort of life is not suitable to youngsters and the dangers of getting caught in it.

The first name that appears in the narrative is that of the inn "Venta del Molinillo" (Grinder's Inn). It is a fitting name for the chance meeting place of two youths whose state of attire appears to indicate they have been put through a grinder: "ambos de buena gracia, pero muy descocidos, rotos y maltratados" ("both were handsome, but very unsewn, torn and mistreated")³

The eldest initiates the dialogue, asking a series of questions. From the answers, we learn about the modest and unhappy home whence the younger boy comes. He's the son of a tailor who denies his parenthood and a step-mother who mistreats him. He has learned to use the scissors to cut "polainas" (leggings). The paronomasia used to describe his skill will announce precedently the surnames of both protagonists and their future relationship:

"y córtolas tan bien, que en verdad que me podría examinar de maestro, sino que la corta suerte me tiene arrinconado" (and I cut them so well, that I could truly pass the test for master, but my short luck has me forsaken).

It is not until the eldest voluntarily bares his identity in order to inspire the former's confidence, that we will find out the young-

ster's name, Diego Cortado. The older boy identifies himself as Pedro del Rincón, son of a pardoner. The money received for the indulgences became a temptation for young Pedro and he was caught and exiled for four years from the court. Subsequently, he led a life of deceit at cards, so that he too, claims mastery of the villainous art and invites the younger one to join him in setting the net "armemos la red" to catch a victim for his game of twenty-one. Thus, the picaresque element in our protagonists manifests itself.

At this point, Diego confesses to being a master at cutting purses, as well as "polainas". He too, was found out by a double agent in Toledo and had to move on before the authorities could apprehend him. Therefore, Cortado and Rincón indicate their marginal position in society. Rincón has been set aside, exiled. Cortado, as a name, not only has the attributive quality of one who cuts (purses or as a tailor) but one who has cut himself off from an unhappy home. His corta suerte-- short luck or luck that has been cut off, finds him "arrinconado", put aside to ultimately be joined in fate to someone of that name who shares his circumstances. Lastly, he comes from a town called Pedroso, linking him even more with Pedro Rincón.

In the selection of the first names, Cervantes appears to have been biblically inspired: St. Peter-Pedro and St. James, the Little-Diego.⁴ Both were disciples of Jesus and were often together. They were sons of fishermen and so it is not unlikely for Pedro to have used the phrase "let's net us a victim". The fact that Diego is the younger of the two also explains to which St. James the author is referring, since there

was James the son of Zebedee who was also a disciple. It will be Pedro who will prove to have a solid character and want to break away from the life of crime, just as St. Peter was tested by adversity and proved to be a source of strength and inspiration to all.

The first name in our gallery of rogues will be the bridge between the two worlds of the protagonists, their picaresque world and the underworld. He puts his hook into them and fishes them out to bring to his master. He also hooks up the two worlds. His name is Ganchuelo - Hook.

Monipodio is the head of the brotherhood of thieves. He is the principle figure of the second part of the novel. The first part of the name in christian art - "mono" symbolizes sin, evil, astuteness and lechery.⁵ "Podio" from the latin "podium" signifies pedestal; therefore, we have evil on a pedestal. His position before his henchmen is one of being before an audience as if he were at the podium. From there, he reads off the various assignments he has for each one. "Monipodio" is also a form for "monopolio" which means to enter into an illicit or deceitful contract.

Monipodio renames our two protagonists Rinconete and Cortadillo, because he considers these names more in consonance with their age. The suffixes ete and illo are diminutives often attached to the noun youngster or lad - "mozalbete" or "mozalbillo". When Monipodio is informed that someone has stolen a deacon's purse and has not reported it, he becomes infuriated. To avoid trouble, Cortado, who had stolen it, turns it over to Monipodio. He is then renamed, "Cortadillo el bueno"

(the good). In this manner, Cervantès absolves Cortado from the crime.

The audience of thieves begins to take on character as two women come in to the patio and fall in the arms of two rogues; Maniferro, who is so named because he has an iron hand replacing one cut off by the authorities, and Chiquiznaque, (Chiquichaque) whose name uses onomatopoeia for the sound of something scratching or cutting, as his art is that of slashing people for pay. Both are executioners. The women who enter are prostitutes. They are joined by still another one and their names, as well as their description, point to their profession: "Gananciosa" from the verb ganar or gannen in Frisian, meaning to solicit with avid looks; "Escalanta" from "escala" (stairs) one who goes up and down the streets, stairs or bodies, and "Juliana la Cariharta". "Cariharta" is composed of two words cari from the latin caries meaning literally rottenness and putrefaction, figuratively - corruption, and "harta" which means full. Therefore, she was full of corruption or rotten through and through.

Cariharta seeks justice from Monipodio for a beating she received at the hands of her boyfriend and pimp "Repolido" for not giving him the money he demanded from her. In his name, we have the prefix "re" which can mean again or is an augmentative. "Polido" stems from "paulilla" in Mozarabic signifying moth or other such parasite. Repolido - big parasite. After the wrongs are righted by Monipodio according to his system, there is a small celebration. This gives occasion to another group of characters to make a brief appearance.

"Pipota", an old woman, is Monipodio's mother. Like the "pipa" or

wine barrel, she not only can fill herself like one with wine but her skirts give her a rounded appearance too. She is in charge of prayers for the brotherhood and the lighting of candles so they will all go to heaven.

Some of the other charactonyms mentioned are: "Silbatillo" - the whistler, who is a look out and signals if the authorities are coming. "Renegado" renegade or wicked person and "Centopies", "Cento" in latin means patched cloth or quilt and "pies" feet. It is pure speculation on my part but there is nothing in the work that indicates this could be anything but a chimerical name, "Lobillo" a card sharp who is as astute and cunning as a wolf. "Tordillo" a small thrush and "Cernicalo" windhover or hawk both refer to birds. They represent two neutral constables that come by Monipodio's "aduana" or customs and cause quite a stir of its occupants. The object of using birds' names for the constables is to emphasize their ability to be quick-sighted, taking in the situation at a glance. "Tagarote" is the name for the falcon. His position as sentinel of Monipodio's house demands having sharp eyes.

Finally two of his executioners are: "Desmochado" - the mutilated one who goes out to mutilate others; and "Nariguete" one having a small nose, who will pierce with horns one of Monipodio's victims for being a cuckold, who will also have his house smeared with excrement and so, the humor of having an executioner with a small nose.

The representation of every aspect of the underworld of Seville makes this work a picture of the low-life in that society.

The tremendous effort of having all these names apply to the

traits, professions, or relationships between characters in the context of the novel, is in itself a work of art. Cervantes' use of charactonyms adds to the judgment pronounced by J.L. Alborg when he states, "even if Cervantes had not written Don Quijote, he would have a place of honor in Spanish literature simply as the author of Rinconete and Cortadillo".⁶

Catherine Guzmán
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

NOTES

- ¹Alvarez Altman, Grace, "Onomastics as a Modern Critical Approach to Literature," Literary Onomastics Studies, I (May 1974), p. 110.
- ²Predmore, Richard L., "Rinconete y Cortadillo: Realismo, carácter picaresco," Insula, 254 (1968), pp. 17-18.
- ³The translations into English are mine.
- ⁴Alexander, George Moyer, The Handbook of Biblical Personalities (Seabury Press, 1962), p. 128, p. 225.
- ⁵Pérez-Rioja, J.A., Diccionario de Símbolos y Mitos (Madrid: Tecnos, 1971), p. 307.
- ⁶Alborg, Juan Luis, Historia de la literatura española, II, (Madrid: Gredos, 1967), p. 103.