

1980

Onomastic Perspectivism of "Don Quijote"

Arsenio Rey-Tejerina
reyteje@yahoo.com

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

Repository Citation

Rey-Tejerina, Arsenio (1980) "Onomastic Perspectivism of "Don Quijote"," *Literary Onomastics Studies*: Vol. 7 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/vol7/iss1/21>

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 digitalcommons@brockport.edu.

ONOMASTIC PERSPECTIVISM OF DON QUIJOTE

Arsenio Rey

State University of New York
College at Geneseo

The onset of the industrial revolution was the era in which the empiricist and other philosophers of the concrete, such as the positivists, stressed the importance of naming things scientifically. The linguistic history of mankind tells us how strong and steady is man's tendency to classify, to distinguish and to put labels to the tangible and the intangible. It is a question of security, an urgent need to establish patterns and principles to which he can relate and feel grounded. While we know that all these labels spring from conventions and private invention, future generations, although they unquestionably would accept what their forefathers had decided upon, could change them. Within this perspective of change, every name and word depend on the relativity of our knowledge; therefore, persons or things can never be named in a fixed, unchangeable way. Miguel de Cervantes was well aware of this and he took a stand against the then-current traditionalistic trend. Departing from such conventionalities he takes hold of other conventions, expanding the possibilities of meaning in multiple perspectives. Cervantes tells us that the word codfish, a very ordinary one, in Castile is called "abadejo", in Andalucía

is known by "bacalao", in some other places of Spain is named "curadillo", and elsewhere is commonly called "truchuela". For Cervantes the name per se is not important; what is most important is the persona or the substance, which could take different names as necessary. The mad Cardenio (Scarlet) which is the personal name, is variously called the Knight of the Wood or the Ragged one of the Sickly Countenance in order to point out the different facets in which he appears to readers. The names are given to him according to particular perspectives of his madness or moods. The first sentence of Don Quijote contains a puzzling reference to onomastics: In a village of La Mancha (the stain) (manxa = dry land in Arabic) "the name of which I have no desire to recall"¹. Readers and scholars until the XX century were in frantic search for the name of this village, when Francisco Rodríguez Marín discovered it was part of a burlesque romance already published in 1596, a few years before Cervantes picked up the line for his book.² His lack of interest in declaring the name, besides being commonplace in medieval stories, had a definite purpose. Boccaccio in Il Decamerone (III, 3) tells the life of a lady "il cui nome, né ancona alcuno altro che alla presente novella appartenga". Marguerite de Navarre used the technique frequently in her Heptameron (XXII) "...un Prieur de Saint-Martin des-Champs, duquel je tairay le nom pour l'amytié que je luy ay portée". Cervantes leaves it up to the reader to choose, if he so desires, the name of any village of that area

which fits his perspective. La Mancha happens to be the geographic center of Spain; therefore, the story of Don Quijote, which is about to begin, could be referred to any Spaniard.

Cervantes tells us he had the purpose of ridiculing in his book the whole machinery built around the novels of chivalry. Names and titles, grandiose pseudo-historic events, marvelous feats had been during the XV century and the greater part of the XVI absorbing the minds of many people (especially women) such that they forsook real life. Their life interest was to follow the peripeties suffered by those knights and their ladies as they were portrayed in the books of chivalry. In Spain this mirage is not broken until the middle of the XVI century by the Lazarillo de Tormes novel, a brutal account of reality taking place amidst the glory of Charles V's empire. Because of his sordid life, Lazarillo never reaches the stature of a respected adult name; he does not even acquire a patronimic and is only known by the hometown river: a child of the river Tormes, which, incidentally, dries up in summer. Cervantes goes beyond the fact of securing a name for his main character. He is not sure of his real name. In that certain village of La Mancha there is an Hidalgo (son of somebody), his name could be Peter, John or James; of his surname Cervantes tells us there is great discrepancy among historians. Some call him Quijada (jawbone), others Quesada (cheese), and some others give three variants of Mr. Complainer: Quejana, Quijano, Quijana. The commentary of Cervantes after referring to

all these name possibilities is: "All this means very little as far as our story is concerned, providing that in the telling of it we do not depart one iota from the truth" (I,1).

When the protagonist decides to become a knight errant he spends four days deciding on a name for his horse. Finally he favors the name Rocinante (hack before) which involves a perspective of the past, as he explains: "...indicative of what the steed had been when it was but a hack" (I,1). Only then does he take his knightly name: Don Quijote (Sir Cuisse, a piece of leg armour) and in symmetry with Amadís of Gaul, he calls himself of La Mancha: Sir Cuisse of the dirty Spot. This selection of a name with the root syllable "Quij", Cervantes points out, made some historians conclude that the original name must have been Quijada and not Quesada. Four chapters later a fellow-man of his hometown addresses him by Mr. Quijana, and in the last chapter of the novel after Don Quijote has regained his mind he is referred to by the same name, but with a masculine ending "Quijano". On making up his last will he bequeaths his possessions to his niece Antonia Quijana and about himself declares: "I am no longer Sir Cuisse of the dirty Spot but Alonso Quijano the Good".

It is a fact that the family names proposed for Don Quijote were family names of the area of La Mancha and other regions of Spain. Rodríguez Marín, the exhaustive commentator of the novel, has uncovered a certain Martín de Quijano who had worked in the

same governmental department as Cervantes. Other family names such as Carrasco (thicket), Pasamonte (crossing mountains), Gutiérrez (a patronimic) the Morisco Ricote (very rich) used in the novel were common names of the area, and Cervantes gives them to his characters almost invariably with the purpose of making fun of them. That eagerness to find historical evidence for all the names would be understandable in the case of a biography or a historical novel, but in a work of the caliber of Don Quijote, it is irrelevant. The fact that his personages are placed not in the square of a definite person or name but in a polynomial context endows universality to Cervantes' creation. Don Quijote would be the compilation not only of Quijada, but of the Quesadas, the Quijarros or whichever name one might wish to think of. The instability of names functions within the scope of an onomastic perspective. This instability or polynomial practice is most puzzling in making up the name of Sancho Panza's wife. Which one was her real name? Again Cervantes has his purpose in remaining ambiguous. None of the many commentators that Cervantes has had gives, to my knowledge, a complete answer to the problem. The question is that we have an abundance of names which seem superfluous or inexplicable. She is variously called Juana, Mari, Teresa with Teresaina and Teresona as correlatives; her surnames include Cascajo, Panza, Gutiérrez, Sancho. She could have been called with the triple name common in Spain: María Juana Teresa and added the four surnames to indicate the two last names

of her father and mother, but this was not the case. The reiterations of Cervantes, inclining the reader to believe he is the narrator of a history - if he is a faithful one - would explain the multiplicity of names for Sancho's wife. Although not as much as the husband she was a well-known person in her town, and people would give her the name they were more familiar with. To those to whom she was unfamiliar the name Mari would be the equivalent of the English John or Jane Doe. Teresaina and Teresona were circumstantial and appreciative the same way as Panza (belly). The two names left, Juana Teresa, must have been her real name which was double as it frequently is in Spain, especially for women. The surname of Cascajo (gravel) was her father's and normally kept by married women. For those more familiar with the husband she was called Mrs. Panza and Sancho referring to characteristics she probably shared with him. It is surprising that nobody called her Mrs. Zancas (Shanks), which were another of her husband's endowments and names. No critic of Don Quijote, as far as I know, has tackled the incongruity of the name Gutiérre, the only non-burlesque name given to Sancho's family. It is a gothic surname, very common and respectable since ancient times, and it was most probably his father's. Sancho is the only one who applies it to Juana Teresa and rightly so, since one would think he had no intention of ridiculing his own wife (I,7). This conclusion would provide the beleaguered squire of Alonso Quijano with a respectable name to which every human being

is entitled.

Sancho is most frequently the vehicle of Cervantes' onomastic perspectivism. Names spring out of his mouth in a continuous flow, prompted simply by feelings or circumstances of the moment. It is what linguists call popular etymology. The polynomial habit of Sancho gives amplification and twist to things and persons, increasing the humor of the novel. Thus the Mambrino (with no particular significance) of Don Quijote is for him Malino (the bad one) or Martino (popular family name) or Malandrino (rascal moor). Sancho changes Don Quijote's Fierabrás into the Feo Blás (ugly Blaise). When he hears Don Quijote mentioning with all propriety the Arab historian Benengeli - supposedly the author of their novel - he transforms it to a familiar idea and calls the historian Berengena (Mr. Eggplant), just because "the Moors are great lovers of eggplants". Observing the sad face of his master in the hills of Sierra Morena while making penance for Dulcinea (the sweet one), Sancho gives Don Quijote a new name which he will carry for most of the novel: El Caballero de la Triste Figura (The Knight of the Mournful Countenance). This is a case in which the English translator makes Sancho sound more educated than he was; a closer equivalent would have been the Knight of the Sad Face. Obviously the translator's main concern was not onomastics.

There are many instances of what we call elementary empiricism throughout the novel in name-calling or categorization. The woman

who runs a mill is Mrs. Mill and another from a town called Tolosa has it as her name, regardless of whichever personal name they had. The housekeeper of Don Quijote, like Sancho, calls the magician who stole the books from her master's library "Muñatón" and, upon his correction of "Frestón", her explanation is "I can't say as to that, whether he was called Frestón or Fritón, (big fried one) all I know is that his name ended in ton" (tune) (I,7). For her, an old simple-minded housekeeper, the importance of the name lies in the fear-bearing sound of the augmentative; at the same time she is creating a pun by placing the stress of the name in the tone. Incidentally, Cervantes - perhaps intentionally or even ignorantly - does not provide Don Quijote with the true name of the magician, who, according to chivalry books, was named Fristón.

In the second part of his masterpiece Cervantes gives us in several chapters a treatise in onomastics. From the works of Ariosto he takes the burlesque name of Truffaldino, which in Italian emanates from "truffa" (hoax), and creates the Spanish Trifaldín and its regressive form Trifaldi to name two of his most ridiculous characters: Trifaldin of the White Beard is a squire to Countess Trifaldi, also known as Distressed Duenna. Their names respond to the way they are disguised in the duke's palace. Don Quijote is amazed upon seeing them enter accompanied by an impressive cortege of bearded ladies-in-waiting, but Sancho immediately gives his interpretation by calling the Distressed Duenna: Countess Three

skirts or Three Tails? He answers himself: "For in my country skirts and tails, tails and skirts, it is all one and the same thing" (II,37). Cervantes further declares that her real name was Countess Lobuna (Wolf-like) due to the abundance of wolves in her territories. He points out still that if, on the contrary, foxes (zorras) had been abundant, her name would have been Countess Zorruna (Foxy Lady). This is what she actually is since she is putting on a cunning act designed by the duke to dupe his guests Don Quijote and Sancho. The reason she is distressed is that her ward, the Princess Antonomasia (name par excellence) has been gotten into trouble by Don Clavijo (Spike), or more clearly, by Mr. Screw.³ The whole story of Countess Trifaldi taking place in the country house of the duke is a cleverly concealed satire of a prominent Spanish dukedom, the house of Osuna, if we accept the opinion of Rodríguez Marín, the studious investigator of Don Quijote.⁴

Cervantes' use of 50,000 proper names for less than half that many characters in his works serves his well calculated plan of ridiculing a spirit which was an anachronism during his time. The variations or changes of name of one character seem to follow a pattern, marking the facets of its personality or noting some social attitude. Names also indicate specific relationships among characters or between individuals and their world. Cervantes is a true master of the onomastic technique, using it with wit and sharp-

ness: to provide additional perspectives of his characters.

Arsenio Rey

State University of New York
College at Geneseo

NOTES

1. Miguel de Cervantes, The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quijote de la Mancha, a new translation from the Spanish by Samuel Putnam (1949), New York: Random House 1964. I,1. These numbers, as well as those intercalated in the text, refer respectively to the part and chapter of Don Quijote. The reader can use any translation or edition at hand. The quotations that I have used are taken from this translation, which is so far considered the best. The translation of names in parenthesis is my own, except as noted.
2. Miguel de Cervantes, El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha, Edit. Francisco Rodríguez Marín, 10 vols. Madrid: Atlas 1947-1949. Since 1911, when he first edited the work, it has been the most complete edition and commentary of Cervantes.
3. It is a well-known fact that puns are very difficult to translate, and Don Quijote is full of word plays and puns, mostly ignored in translations because of the difficulties.
4. A native of Osuna himself, Marín expressed this opinion in his discourse of induction at the Spanish Royal Academy of Letters (1905). It is included in an appendix to his edition of Don Quijote.