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ONOMASTICS AS A MODERN CRITICAL APPROACH TO LITERATURE*

I. Introduction to Onomastics

The History of the Name 'Madrid' published in 1959, 412 pages long,¹ attests to the fact that within every name there is the potential for a lengthy disquisition, reminding us of what the beloved disciple of Socrates (Antisthenes) said, "The beginning of all instruction is the study of names."² 'Madrid' is not only a toponym, an anthroponym, a popular surname, but also a name in literary works.³ The metonym onomastics (from two Greek words), "serious study of names" was used for the first time in 1600; it was not, however, arrantly analyzed until 1895-1900, in the Dictionnaire général de la langue française, by the team of Arsène Darmesteter and Adolphe Hatzfeld, for the conclave of Antoine Thomas.⁴

The genesis of European scholarship in general and specific onomatological studies dates back to the Seventeenth Century, for even in Spain, a country rarely mentioned in onomatological annals, Friar Martín Sarmiento (1695-1772) made an excellent contribution.⁵ The scientific aspect, such as historical linguistics, lexicography, geographical surveys, etc., was the emphasis given by most scholars. By the beginning of the Twentieth Century the Italian scholars were the most productive.⁶

Albert Dauzat, founder of the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences (Paris, July, 1938) and of Onoma, engendered great interest

* Address, June 10, 1973, at the Banquet of the Conference.

in contemporary onomastic studies. At the Tenth International Congress (Vienna, Sept., 1969), the highlight of my own involvement as a participant was the beginning of my interest in Literary Onomastics, for up to then my research had been limited to Hispanic toponyms and surnames. And now, after four years of exciting research in Spanish literary onomastics, I have the honor of addressing this distinguished group of colleagues in pursuit of "Onomastics as a modern critical approach to literature." With the founding of this annual conference, truly a historical event, we are together laying the corner-stone for a scholarship specializing in the literary genres in all existing languages within the vast field of onomastics.

II. Five Formal Approaches to Literary Onomastics

The numerous sporadic studies of names in literature throughout the ages, beginning with Isidorus Hispalensis⁷ in the Sixth Century, have been produced within an intuitive, subjective, or romantic frame of mind. There are almost no existent authoritative general studies on nominology in literature. The rationale used by authors for charactonyms differs from that universally used by parents. Generally, name-giving in literature is based on the same concept as that of primitive societies: emphasizing the fundamental traits of the personality--T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock," Swift's "Houyhnhnm" and "Yahoo," García Lorca's "Yerma." Many critics have commented on an author's choice of names, often with perspicacity and skill, but frequently have left their remarks so fragmentary that the reader who

cannot integrate them in the corpus of the work is left skeptical. Venturing into guesswork, risking a fall on the tricky road of uncertainty, going beyond the literal to finally end at the hypothetical and fantastic, make us aware of the great challenge: to strive for a concrete, extensive study of the theoretical and actual use of names in literature. In spite of the inundation of critical literary effort on minor aspects lavished on the works of Cervantes, García Lorca, and Shakespeare--masters at naming--these geniuses have yet to be investigated thoroughly in a definitive study of character names. This would elucidate major aspects of their works, serving as a magnifying glass.

In the disillusionment of the post-war period (1919-) following the Treaty of Versailles, there arose in Europe a revolt against accepted cultural standards, expressed in movements such as Futurism, Creationism, Surrealism and Impressionism. In these schools of thought or manifestos applying to all forms of art (plastic, musical, literary, and other), the particular piece of work (poem, drama, composition, painting, sculpture, and so forth) reflects the importance of the subconscious in creative works. For example, nameless characters are included in the play Blood Wedding by García Lorca, merely for the sake of the dramatic action, just as only legitimate use of color is included to support the finished likeness. The lyric poetry in which most of the characters in this play express themselves is vibrantly reminiscent of a surrealist and even impressionistic work of art--and it is common knowledge that Salvador Dalí was the most

potent influence on García Lorca during his early-literary-formative years at the University of Madrid. Since it is permissible to approach the criticism of literature through references to parallel forms or subjective channels in the plastic or musical arts, then it should be legitimate to approach such criticism through the use authors make of the names of persons, places, and things. The systematic study of names (onomastics) bears precisely the same relationship to literary criticism as does that of the arts and music. The history of literary criticism has traditionally followed the basic three approaches explained in detail by O. B. Hardison.⁸

1) The Humanistic, moral, or neo-humanist approach can be traced back to Plato. The origin of the name "Lazarillo" the picaresque character of the Spanish work Lazarillo de Tormes, may be studied within the limits of this approach. The name "Lazarus" takes us to the Pentateuch (Genesis 15:2 and Exodus 18:4) with further mention in the Hagiographa (I Chronicles 23:15, 17) where Eliezer appears. Lazarus, "God is my help", is a contracted form of the Hebrew Eliezer. Moses was so thankful for his deliverance from the Egyptians that his second son was named Eliezer. This anthroponym dates back to the Sixth Century B.C., and is not to be confused with the Lazarus (beggar), whose lacerations were licked by the dogs (Luke 16:21). The use of the diminutive form Lazarillo used in Lazarillo de Tormes such a famous literary work, contributed to a neologism in the Castilian language, "leader of the blind, one who enlightens by observations, not bitter not caustic but compassionate and merciful."

2) The Sociological approach takes into consideration names which easily reflect some characteristic of a society, for example, Doña Bárbara, one of the three most widely read novels in Latin America, made into a popular movie by both Mexican and Argentine film companies, was written by one of the few democratic presidents of modern Venezuela, Rómulo Gallegos. The name of his protagonist, "Lady Barbarian," is truly germane to the social phenomenon of the starkly realistic struggle perpetuated among the poverty-ridden populace for freedom and progress.

3) The Archetypal approach is at times called anthropological, totemic, or telluric. Tracing names or some theme back to the classical or epic periods are typical of this approach. A greater depth of literary understanding is the reward of such a scholar who probes within this framework.⁹

The detailed explanation of the other two approaches that follow are to be credited to I. A. Richards.¹⁰

4) The Psychological Approach has led scholars to a psychoanalytical interpretation of Don Juan to the extent of labelling him a "sexual deviate." In this approach we may study a name with the application of Richards' canons, that is, purposes not merely denotative. These canons are Singularity, Expansion, Definition, Actuality, Compatibility and Individuality. A perfect example of this approach is the Corbacho, an outstanding Spanish literary-prose work of the Middle Ages. Corbacho, meaning "the severed male organ of the bull, once severed, dried and twisted, used as a lash to

whip the oarsmen of the galleys," is a connotative-dichotomous symbolism of what the author tries to extol in the virtuous women after chastising the majority of the women for their vices, faults and evils.

5) The Aesthetic Approach, with its kaleidoscopic ramifications has been bitterly attacked because it tends to dwell upon and analyze the form rather than the substance. Furthermore it favors the part over the whole. A name originally denotative (Lazarus) can become connotative in later works when it alludes to the characteristics associated with an earlier personality. Besides, the connotation may vary from person to person depending on ethnic background.

This has been a succinct review of the five basic approaches to literary criticism. They are worthwhile but limiting. Many applications uninvestigated have been found by authors making full use of names. Literary Onomastics is analogous to El Tremendismo, not a literary school, but a marked literary manifestation in Spanish literature after World War II, appearing at a time in which the Spanish novel was going to disappear with its baroque and pedantic facet. El Tremendismo had already been manifested in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 14, 15. 19-39). Literary Onomastics as a critical approach to literature has already had some manifestations and we, who yearn to investigate, understand from a scientific point of view and not a romantic or subjective one, how an author's naming practices make up part of his poetic expertise, prose virtuosity and dramatic skill, appear on the scene when literary criticism as

a whole needs a facial up-lift. As a starting point to probing into something concrete (as guidelines) we offer the next section of this discourse.

III. Stimulative Categories of Names in Literature

A. ANONYMICAL NAMES. Nameless characters or those identifiable by common descriptive nouns may be used to create doubt, induce fear and emphasize the cosmic or universal implications, as in Kafka or García Lorca. The fourteen nameless characters in Blood Wedding, by García Lorca, fall under two powerful forces of polarization:

CHASTITY & FURCINDITY*****DEATH & HONOR

The first pole encompasses Mother, Mother-in-law, Wife, Neighbor, Servant and Bride who is willing and pleads to be subjected to the cruel fire-test, after the tragic death of Husband, in order to prove her virginity.

The second pole encompasses the Bridegroom, Young Girls, Father (of Bride), Moon, Woman (beggar), Woodcutters, Young Men, Violins; all forces in a semi-real dramatic world of profound passion, evolving around the God of HONOR.

B. ATTRIBUTIVE NAMES. Personality traits or character's occupation is only one cluster of attributive names. Numerous figurative overtones overshadow at times the attributive quality. Cervantes' interest in names is more than labels for distinguishing one character from another. In his first chapter he takes time to explain how it was that after eight long days of conjecturing and meditation he came to finalize on the immortal name, Don Quijote. After deliberating

for weeks on Dulcinea "sublimely sweet lady" he affirms that names must be musical, poetical and meaningful. Shakespeare chooses his invented names on grounds of propriety for poetic utterance, or of mood, or of national origin. His fascination with the possibilities of attributive names, was partially a return to an older tradition and not to his immediate predecessors--Lyly, Greene, Peele, Marlowe, and Kyd, who showed little interest in nomenclature. Many of his lower social class character fall into this category. In II Henry VI, in which Peter, an armorers apprentice is to fight his master, we witness a very serious event because Peter has accused the armorer of treason. In calling for the bout to begin, the Earl of Salisbury asks the apprentice,

Sals. : Sirrah, what's thy name?
 Peter : Peter, forsooth.
 Sals. : Peter. what more?
 Peter : Thump.
 Sals. : Thump. Then see thou thump thy master well.
 (ii:3)

What is significant here is the origin of Peter's last name, taken from a necessary activity in making armor. Shakespeare underscores this by having Peter refer to his hammer in the speech preceding the above quoted question of Salisbury. Charactonyms, Label names, Emblem names, Praecognomen are some of the expressions used for attributive names due to the fact that the English language is in need of a neologism that will engulf all the aspects of attribution. I would like to suggest the term DIACTINIC NAMES, for they are capable of transmitting intellectual actinic rays of light upon the characters. A generalization is in order here: most lower social

class characters have diactinic names.

C. CHIMERICAL NAMES. Purely invented fantastic names with no precedent, fall into this category. For example, the protagonist of the play Yerma by García Lorca, "Yerma" herself is the embodiment of frustrated maternity. Yermo is from the Latin eremus "desert," first used in El Cid (1098), while the sephardic Spanish word Yemie, "rotten, worm-eaten," is still more descriptive. The Greek connotation for Yermo, "hermitage and hermits," was popularized in the Spanish ballads of the Middle Ages by ecclesiastical writers. This is very apropos in view of the fact that in Act II Yerma actually secludes herself in a Hermitage and is to pursue the life of a hermit, after her assassination of her husband. The infinitive yermar means "to depopulate, lay waste, clear, lay bare." In no other substantive of the Spanish language is the primitive, earthy, telluric, fallow, arid, desert land embodied with such dramatic force as in the feminine gender of Yermo.

Alas for the barren wife!
Alas for her whose breasts are sand. 11

D. MYTHOLOGICAL NAMES. These names fill in an era with echoes of the past, as in Joyce or Milton. Studies have been made tracing character names not only to Greek mythology but to other cosmogonical spheres such as the Sagas of Old Iceland.

E. PARONOMASIC NAMES. Many character names have specific effects, such as humor or dual meaning. There are those names created by play on words that are identical or similar in sound but truly homonymic, such as in numerous limericks like

There was a young woman named Bright,
Whose speed was much faster than light.

While hunting around for the meter,
A decrepit old gas man named Peter, etc.¹²

Puns are numerous and interesting in the study of character names.

These five categories are some of the types of names that can be studied as a starting point in Literary Onomastics. Going a little beyond, we would like to present two naming techniques that open up other avenues of understanding the authors works through concentration on names.

IV. Techniques in Nominology

A. SYNECDOCHIC TECHNIQUE. The trope called synecdoche in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for the part, such as fifty sails for fifty ships is highly exploited by many outstanding authors. Cervantes, for example, was a master in this art of naming. In English Quixote means a "greave" or armor for the leg from knee to ankle," part of the medieval suit of armor. Thus quixote is synecdochic not only of armor but of knight-errantry as a whole, as well as of Quixote's madness. The two whole volumes of this great classic, abounding in over 600 characters, with numerous synecdochic names are yet to be explored. We could go through the works of Dickens, the brilliant Molière, Galdós, (the direct successor of Cervantes who averaged a novel a year for each of his seventy seven years of life), of Joseph Conrad, of Hemingway, of almost any such writer, and make a pretty lucid study of the relation of character names to artistic merit.

B. POLYANTHROPONYMICAL TECHNIQUE. In this case the personality of a character is given more than one name. For example, in the play aforementioned, Yerma by García Lorca the four human facets of the personality of the protagonist (Yerma) as explained by the erudite and philosopher Unamuno, the existentialist, are given distinct names, what she would like to be (María); what she thinks she is (Dolores-Pains); what people think she is (Yerma) and what she really is (Honor). All four characters form one entity, with Victor and Juan (her husband) as the two facets of the symbolic honor of Yerma, to whom he is sacrificed mercilessly.

V. A Typology for Literary Onomastics

In 1959 J. B. Ručnykyj pioneered in the rationale of the "redende Namen" theory, the topological schema which he explained in detail of relevance to content: that is relevance to quality of literary characters, relevance to place of action and relevance to time of action, suggesting also a relevance to form.¹³

His idea of relevance to form was enlarged upon and extended by I. G. Tarnawecy for the poetic genre in Polish literature. This entails relevance to rhyme: alliteration, consonance, assonance, anaphora, refrain. Then relevance to rhythm was expounded: shift of accent, onomastic elliptization, etc.¹⁴

I have barely scratched the surface of the relevance to Ontology, the third typology I have suggested. Eugenio Montale, the Italian poet, propagated the idea that there is in a certain type of alienation in poets, dramatists or novelists, the guarantee of relevance in

our troubled times; that is what he called the necessary "solitude of the artist" a distance making for perspective.¹⁵

García Lorca, international poet and dramatist, whom I have studied within an onomastic framework, reflects onomastic concepts in his dramas relevant to the philosophy or metaphysical lore still inherent in the people of Granada. His Arabic, Hindu-Oriental, Judeo-Roman, Tartan heritage was a glorious continuum in the intellectual life of Spain, giving her the uniqueness of being the only European country without Renaissance, since she was the link in Europe between the Dark Ages and Modern Times. García Lorca follows in his three plays, Yerma, Blood Wedding and House of Bernarda Alba the Buddhist "apoha" doctrine or negativism, which stresses the concept that things cannot be named, for they cannot be perceived.

The intellect is dialectical, i.e., it is always negative. Its affirmation is never direct, never pure. It is affirmation of its own meaning necessarily through a repudiation of some other meaning. Names are constructed by the force of productive imagination and are essentially negative, relative and dialectical.¹⁶

Hinduism conceived of proper names which though denotative of individuals had "universals" as their connotation. For example, the word "cow" is used to refer to individual cows because there is the universal "cowhood." It should be valid to permit the objectivity of a universal "motherhood" for the character "Mother" in Bitter Oleander by García Lorca. Islamism was a dominant force in Spanish thought. Ibn Arabi, the first Spanish Sufi, author of Futuhat lived and died in Andalusia in 1240. His ideas were propagated to the entire Islamic

world by a refugee from Granada. Ibn Arabi, combined astrological symbols with the science of names, thus producing a muslimized world. An esoteric doctrine formulated by him is that of the universal man (al-insanal-kamen), which is so dominant in the Sufi perspective that it has been called the "privileged myth of Sufism." In the Walt Whitman sense every man potentially is the Universal Man but within the "Kalimali" only prophets and saints merit any august title or name. Leonardo (the only character of the fifteen in García Lorca's Blood Wedding with a name) was far from deserving any name within this concept. However the author associated him with an astrological phenomenon, "shooting star," which is one of the meanings of Leonardo. The Arabic sensualism, pathos and contrition were part of García Lorca's personality, reflected in his onomastic concepts.¹⁷

Much is yet to be done in this typology of relevance to Ontology. I have only suggested here, tonight, an infinitesimal beginning, which will bring greater elucidation to understanding the great works of all literatures. Thank you for your kind attention. Discussion is now in order.

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