

THE OLD AND THE NEW:
THE ONOMASTICS OF AN ARGENTINIAN PICARESQUE NOVEL

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The aim of this paper is to show that Gudiño Kieffer, in his novel Manual for Sinners¹ uses names (See Appendix I) as a technique in two ways: first, to situate each character in its particular literary tradition: Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian symbolism, and, secondly, to indicate, through the inverted symbolism of such names, the characters' condition as marginal men, in a literary and in a social sense.

Here, I have made some basic assumptions: first, that the characters are viewed as alienated and isolated people, moving in a hostile environment, similar to that of the pícaro or rogue; secondly, that onomastics are used by the author as a literary technique through which a parody of accepted literary symbols and traditions is performed. I have used the categories formulated by Grace Alvarez-Altman in her paper "Onomastics as a Modern Critical Approach to Literature,"² but I have introduced some modifications; these I shall explain in each case.

Anonymical names

This category groups anonymous characters identified only by common descriptive nouns, as, for example, in Ionesco's The New Tenant, where the protagonist is simply referred to as Monsieur.³ Gudiño Kieffer uses

anonymical names to stress the super-human or the inhuman qualities of people or situations. By emphasizing the super-human or inhuman idiosyncracies, Gudiño Kieffer underlines some of the undesirable characteristics of modern society, that is the schism between reality and marketing techniques, between the omnipotence of one part of society, the business corporation, and the impotence of the individual.

The Magnate: this character, as well as the whole content of this chapter ("Nace una estrella") of Gudiño Kieffer's novel, is a parody of the description of the banquet offered by Trimalchio (The Satyricon, chapters XXVII to LXXIX). The panorama presented by Petronius is a description of the life of a segment of the Roman society of the times, that is, the nouveaux riches, in which plebeians and manumitted slaves (Trimalchio) were included. The Satyricon depicts the lowest aspects of Roman life, and it is a savage satire and a pitiless caricature of Roman times in general and of the decadence of that society in particular. Gudiño Kieffer's Tycoon and the description of his party, is a recreation of the mood of The Satyricon, although the picture has been adapted to fit the contemporary. Thus, the Tycoon is no longer a manumitted slave but the powerful owner of a television station. Nevertheless, like Trimalchio, he is an uneducated nouveaux riche, as is shown by his malapropisms: seletive (sic) instead of selective; hynoti (sic) instead of hypnotic. The word magnate, in Spanish, implies the idea of an important man, of a capitalist. The Magnate, because of his significance

and economic position represents in the novel all the presidents of corporations, all the executives and all those who occupy their positions without fulfilling their moral obligations to society. Thus, the Tycoon promotes an unnecessary pseudo-culture which blankets and suffocates the real needs of an underdeveloped country. People like the Tycoon make use of the available means of communication (in this case, television) to promote the development of multinational enterprises regardless of the need of the society which supports them. Viewed in this way, the Tycoon is a terrifying inhuman, and universal character; terrifying because of the power he has and because of his incapacity or his reluctance to wield such power in a socially responsible manner. The Tycoon is an universal character (not a concept), because his existence is real and verifiable in any of the multinational conglomerates which abound in the underdeveloped countries. Gudiño Fieffer, like Petronius, presents his characters without rancour and without overt criticism. The generic name used both serves to typify the character emphasizing his super-human and inhuman universality and, through this example, points to the make-up of the society in which this character exists.

Attributive or diactinic names are those names which refer to the personal attributes or to the profession of the character, as for example in Ionesco's The Lesson, where the protagonists are the Professor, the Student and the Maid.⁴

Piccolo is the husband chosen for Marta by the Tycoon. The word

piccolo in Italian, meant first the new money, after the lire was devalued. Later its meaning was extended to indicate something small in size or in value, socially, morally or sexually speaking. Piccolo, as a character, is a man diminished; he is morally little (in a bourgeois context) because he accepts the marriage arranged by the Tycoon and allows Marta's sexual relations with the Tycoon to continue after their marriage. However, Piccolo is as interested in women as a Martian might be, which would indicate his sexual diminution. The interpretation, Freudian or not, of this character is totally open, but his name does throw light on to his character. He is morally a small man with a very small appetite for women. Thus, Gudiño Kieffer uses a name to indicate more than a personal or professional trait; in addition, the name serves to underline the behaviour of an alienated character, illustrating the conduct of another sector of society, namely, the people who work for the Tycoons and corporations.

Chimerical names: are fantasy names made up in the imagination of the author, but which represent a wish or desire of the society which produces them. Gudino Kieffer makes up chimerical names, but the chimeras he uses are real. The monster slain by Bellerophon has been resuscitated: fantasy is no longer necessary. I propose here that La Unica is the only chimerical name used in Manual for Sinners. That is, Gudiño Kieffer's character is a chimera made up of a man's body with a feminine soul and, as such, is, in fact, a being of ancient and modern society.

La Unica is in love with Manfredi and is the re-incarnation of the spirit of homosexual love as it was understood in Ancient Greece and Rome. However, once again, Gudiño Kieffer cannot resist the use of parody. La Unica is also called rara avis, thus bringing to mind Juvenal's hatred of sexual excesses and Roman perversions (one of them, homosexuality). Furthermore, the rara avis was for Juvenal, the symbol of the faithful wife, more difficult to find than a black swan. From this point of view, the name of Unica implies two contradictory but equally valid concepts. First, Unica is indeed a black swan for his faithfulness to Manfredi, but since Unica is a man, not a woman, the whole idea of Juvenal's rara avis is ridicule. Secondly, the parody goes even further, passing from the realm of literature to that of history. Unica calls herself a "modern Joan of Arc" who works as a stripper in a nightclub called Orleans and who "burns in the flames of her love for Manfredi."⁵ The inversion of concepts is obvious: Joan of Arc was dressed as a man (being a woman), Unica dresses as a woman (being a man); Joan of Arc was guided by Voices, and so is Unica, but they are the melodies played during (his) her strip-tease number. Therefore, the chimerical name is used in its appropriate fashion; the parody appears only in relation to the other names applied to the same character.

Mythological names are those which bring echoes of man's past and tradition. In Manual for Sinners there are several names which belong to this category, but I shall analyze the two which are integral to the

plot of the novel.

Candelaria or Candlemas: this name possesses a long and complicated historico-religious evolution rooted in our Occidental heritage. A quick review of the history of the name and its meaning is necessary to understand better the way in which Gudiño Kieffer uses the name. Candlemas is a religious festivity which has three different historical names: the Purification of the Virgin Mary, the Presentation of Jesus to the Temple and Candlemas. The first two names derive from the Gospel according to St. Luke (ii: 21-25), whereas the name Candlemas was used because on this day the faithful carry lighted candles.⁶ According to Jacobus de Voragine, this custom has its own history. First it was instituted by the Pope Gelasio I (492-496) in his bid to abolish the excesses and superstitions of the Romans who, in honor of the goddess Februa, the mother of Mars, used to light the city with torches and candles during the first days of February. This festival was celebrated every five years and its object was to propitiate the goddess so that her son, Mars, would ensure victory over the enemies of the Romans. Also in the month of February, the Romans honored Pluto and the gods of the Underworld, spending a whole night singing the praises of the god under the light of torches and candles. The poets said that Pluto, so enamoured of Proserpine's beauty, had carried her off and made her his wife, while Ceres and Jupiter, her parents, not knowing what had become of Proserpine, spent innumerable nights looking for her with the help

of torches and candles. In the times of Gelasio I, Roman women still carried on the ritual of the procession in order to procure the favors of Proserpine, who symbolized the vegetation powers of nature.⁷ The manner in which Gelasio I abolished all of these celebrations was simple: on the same day of the pagan festivities he superimposed the Catholic festivity of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. The importance of the double meaning of the name Candlemas and its implications is seen clearly when we consider Candelaria's lover, Fleurety.

According to the Manual for Sinners,⁸ Fleurety is an alien who "barely speaks the language of the country, who does not behave like everybody else and whose job is to unearth human remains from what probably was an Indian cemetery". (p.60). Later on, we learn that he is French and that he produces devastating effects on Candelaria, making her feel "as if wind, rain and fire penetrated her every time he looked at her". (p. 64). After Candelaria gives herself to Fleurety, a horrible physical transformation ensues, as well as a marked change in behaviour. The reason is simple: Fleurety is not a French archeologist but is, in reality, a lieutenant-general of Beelzebuth. This Fleurety, the leader of a demon hord, is said to dwell in Africa and is accredited with "the power to perform any labor during the night and to cause hailstorms in any required place."⁹

The religious syncretism provoked by Candelaria's name is perfect: pagan, Christian, and demonic beliefs now come together. However, the

balance is maintained only until the moment at which her child, born of her union with Fleurety, dies. From this moment, the conciliation between the different creeds and traditions starts to crumble, giving way to the worship of the devil.

If one reads the novel bearing in mind the meaning of the names, it is possible to discover that the theme of demonism runs through the work. Thus, some other details of the novel are clarified if in this light we reconsider some of the names used. For example, the double implication of the name of the nightclub Orleans (where Unica works) and of the references to Joan of Arc is now clear. Joan of Arc was burned at the stake for alleged witchcraft; Orleans was the place where thirteen members of a religious sect were burned at the stake in the year 1023 also for witchcraft and heresy.¹⁰ The idea of burning bodies is the link between Unica and Candelmas and it is important because Candelaria cremates the body of her child in her own room (p.67). Fire and cremation, from the mystic point of view, are symbols of sublimation, that is, "of the destruction of what is base to make way for what is superior; is salvation of and through the spirit."¹¹ After the cremation, Candelaria feels totally possessed by Fleurety and her conduct becomes that typical of the possessed: she traces the protective circle on the floor,¹² speaks ancient French,¹³ and prays inverting the words of Catholic prayers. Now, words and names become all important because they are the magic weapons of all sorcerers.¹⁴ Moreover, inverted prayers

and names with new meanings result in the further alienation of the character. Normally, a name is given as an identification sign, so that when somebody uses the name, communication is established, but if the name is not used with its traditional or accepted meaning, but instead with an obscure and esoteric one, the result is a deeper isolation of the person so named. Therefore, it is possible to assert the Gudiño Kieffer has perceived that the traditional myths are no longer valid for our modern world and that, therefore, it is necessary to create new myths through parody and the inversion of meaning of the old names. Once the key of the code used by the author is found, the names and their new symbolism serve to structure and to clarify the text.

Paronomasic names are those names which are phonetically similar and are spelt the same. This category, in Manual for Sinners, makes of modern man a marginal man: he has the heritage of his tradition and he has the technical advantages of the times, but he cannot harmonize and integrate these benefits. To show this, Gudiño Kieffer once again reverses the traditional meaning of names.

Susannah: this name recalls two historical characters, namely, Susannah, wife of Joachim, who was famous for her beauty and for her chastity. The Apocrypha (Book of Daniel) tells how Susannah rejected the advances of two Elders and was then falsely accused by them and condemned to death. However, her innocence was established by the prophet Daniel. The second character is Saint Susannah Martyr. History

tells us that the Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 264-305) wanted to marry her to his adopted son, Maximilian. This Susannah, a Christian, rejected him because of her vows of perpetual chastity and because of the fact that Maximilian was a pagan. As a result, Diocletian had her decapitated for her impiety towards the gods of the Empire. The history of the two Susannahs points to Gudiño Kieffer's Susannah: the three women are solicited by men whom they do not love and do not want. However, the latter day Susannah allows Martin to prostitute her with his boss. The two historical Susannahs refused the advances of men because of the love of God; on the contrary, the modern Susannah accepts a man for the love of another man. The meaning of the name shows the disharmony between the old values and the new morality of our society. Onomastics here points to a reversal of meaning and a parody of concepts.

Finally, there is one more name to be studied: Lazaro or Lazarus. This character's name has to be considered at at least four different levels, all relevant to the structure of the novel. Two of these levels are well known, namely, the Biblical and the literary name. These have been analyzed by many, and in particular, by Grace Alvarez-Altman.¹⁵ However, here, the name has two more meanings. Lazaro is a landmark of Buenos Aires: it is one of the most important funeral homes of the city. The fact that Gudiño Kieffer is aware of this is obvious in his reference to the place. Thus, Lazarus tells us that, at the end, the Lazaro Funeral Home will take care of us all, without exceptions, that is, all will eventually die.

However, the name Lazarus also belongs to a German philosopher and sociologist, the founder of the so-called "psychology of the nations".¹⁶ According to Mauricius Lazarus,¹⁷ the individual who lives in a society finds in it not only the natural beauty of such organization, but also an intelligent system of representations which, in turn, exerts great pressure on him. This system imposes itself on the individual, shaping his mentality. The importance of this system lies in the fact that a nation is a group of human beings and it is the spiritual work of the components of the group that which exerts the pressure. Thus, there is a collective consciousness which is the sum of the individual ones, but which, nevertheless, modifies the individual because, in this case, the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

This onomastic observation is most pertinent to the name in particular and to our interpretation of the novel. Lazarus, as an individual, generates change within the system, which, in turn, alters the spiritual state of the group. In other words, the national conscience integrates and extends individual consciousness so that the spirit of the nation is derived from, yet influences, the consensus of the individuals who make up the nation. Thus, if Lazarus and others like him believe that false mendicity is an acceptable way of earning one's living, then, society as a whole agrees with this type of activity. In this way, Lazarus becomes the symbol of the Argentinean national conscience, or rather, and more importantly, the symbol of the modern lack

of conscience, since through the meaning of his name and through his rogue-like behaviour he represents the true state of the society of the time.

Although I have used Lazarus as an example of a paranomasic name, I should like to make an interpolation here to introduce another category, namely the diachronic name. That is, a name which accumulates layers of meaning through temporal progression. Gudiño Kieffer's Lazarus can only be understood if we see him in terms of an image which combines the Biblical Lazarus, the Lazaro of the traditional picaresque and the Argentinean synchronic circumstances. The same applies to Candelaria (pagan-Christian and modern demonic) and to Susannah (Judeo-Christian and modern).

In conclusion: it is possible to affirm that Gudiño Kieffer uses the names of his characters to reaffirm the idea that literary creation is, in the modern world, the re-creation of the old and the conquest of the new. The names in this novel fulfill a very important role: they relate Argentina to its historical past (through parody of meaning) and, at the same time, they reaffirm Argentina's literary and cultural independence from that historical past.

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NOTES

¹Eduardo Gudiño Kieffer, Gufa de pecadores (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1972). The translations used in this paper are mine, since the book has not yet been translated.

²Grace Alvarez-Altman, "Onomastics as a Modern Critical Approach to Literature," Literary Onomastics Studies, I (1974), pp. 103-117.

³There are many other examples in Latin American Literature. In Carlos Solórzano's Los Fantoques, two of the characters are called the Woman and the Youngster.

⁴For example in the play by Egon Wolff, Los invasores, two of the characters are called China, which means maid, in Chile, and Toletole, which means gossip (also in Chile).

⁵This is found in the chapter called "Rara avis in Terris."

⁶Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., translated by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger), pp. 149-154.

⁷Wade Baskin, Dictionary of Satanism (New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1972), p. 257.

⁸In the chapter called "Por muchas cosas, por tantas cosas."

⁹Arthur Edward Waite, "Concerning the Descending Hierarchy," The Book of Ceremonial Magic (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 184-194.

¹⁰G.G. Coulton, From St. Francis to Dante: a translation of the Chronicle of Salimberre (London: 1908).

¹¹J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 63.

¹²William Woods, A History of the Devil (New York: Berkeley Publishing Corporation, 1974), pp. 11-22.

¹³Montague Summers, Witchcraft and Black Magic (New York: Causeway Books, 1974), p. 174.

¹⁴Hans Holzer, Witchcraft and Demonology (London: Phoebus Publishing Co., 1974), p. 196.

¹⁵Cf. Grace Alvarez-Altman, p. 106.

¹⁶Personal communications with the author.

¹⁷Enciclopedia universal ilustrada europeo-americana (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1905-1930), XXIX, pp. 1221-1223.