

THE ONOMASTIC DEVICES OF CAMILO JOSÉ CELA

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After three years of Civil war, Spain not only had lost almost a million people and suffered the destruction of cities and economy, but had also lost most of her intelligentsia: artists, writers, professors, and other professional people abandoned Spain with the half million Spaniards who went into exile. Unamuno and Valle Inclán had died at the beginning of the conflict; the poet García Lorca was murdered in Granada. Antonio Machado died in exile in 1939. Indeed, Literature itself was another casualty of the war. Of Spain's great writers, only Baroja and Azorín remained in the country, but they were silent. Therefore, when in 1942 the novel The family of Pascual Duarte was published, it was acclaimed as the first positive manifestation that the novel, like the phoenix, was rising again from the ruins. The author was a twenty-six year old Galician, Camilo José Cela, now at sixty-five the towering figure of the Spanish narrative. His career as a novelist, short storyteller, and publisher of a distinguished periodical, Papeles de Son Armadans, led him to membership in the Spanish Academy of the Language.

Artists and their work suffer the fate of everything that is consumed in our modern society; they are packaged, labeled and marketed as any other

product. When the first reaction to The family of Pascual Duarte was amazement and horror, some academic critics came up with the tag of tremendismo to make Cela's work easier to handle. Tremendismo, from the Latin: tremendus, means something dreadful or awful, frightening and terrifying, also something extraordinarily large. At first glance the novel seems to deserve the label. It is the story of a murderer narrated by the man himself. In successive outbursts of violence he stabs a friend in a quarrel, kills his horse, shoots his hunting dog and murders the man who was both the pimp that exploited his sister and his wife's lover, and finally he kills his own mother. These are only the crimes that are concerned in the main action of the novel: there are others less central.

Cela rejects the term tremendismo as stupid and imprecise. "Tremendismo in Spanish Literature is as old as literature itself" -- he says -- "tremendismo exists only due to the fact that life itself is tremendous."¹

Then too, many readers, myself included, consider Cela a great humorist in the Spanish tradition of black humor, following writers Quevedo and Valle Inclan and painters Hieronymous Bosch and Goya. Santiago Vilas quotes Cela's concept of humorism: "Humorism is for me irony and ellipsis and the proclamation of the unreal everyday reality as unreal. It is also an escape, and a weapon of revenge", and he adds, "Skepticism always, and cruelty and charity as the eternal keys or fundamental elements of the humorist writer."²

My intention here is to study The family of Pascual Duarte and his later masterpiece The Hive. I see in Cela's special way of baptizing his

characters a proof that within the horror and depression of their lives there is always an ironical touch that establishes a distance between the text and the reader, which protects one from being overwhelmed by the horror, making one aware of the presence of the implied author in spite of the narrative perspective he has chosen.

Pascual Duarte is a memoir, preceded by a note from the Transcriber, who is obviously the implied author, and a letter from the manuscript's executor, Don Joaquín Barrera López. The use of the "don" points to the importance of the person and the last two family names appear as is traditional in official Spanish documents. Then follows the dedication of the manuscript itself to one of the victims of the fictional narrator.

Let us start with the dedication. It reads: "To the memory of the distinguished patrician Don Jesús González de la Riva, Count of Torremejía, who at the moment when the author of this memoir came to kill him, called him Pascualillo and smiled."³

As Fred C. Robinson has pointed out, good writers always show a special gift for adjusting the names of their fictional characters to their special status.⁴ So does Camilo José Cela. The recipient of the dedication is the only aristocrat mentioned in Pascual's memoirs and in the dedication he receives the full treatment accorded to his high station in life. Present are the "Don" and the incongruous first name, not an uncommon occurrence in Catholic Spanish countries, the rather common patronymic González, "son of Gonzalo," an old name with a Medieval Germanic ring, enhanced by the second last name "de la Riva". The genitive "de," a sign of distinction

equivalent to the German Von, points to landed gentry ancestors, which is confirmed by the title, Count of Torremejía, a toponymic. The contrast of this resonance with Pascualillo (both diminutive and affectionate) points to a class difference heightened by the patronizing air of Don Jesús.

But it is the name of the protagonist wherein lies the greatest irony of all the onomastic ironies that Cela provides in this novel. "Pascual" is a name charged with religious significance. It comes from the Aramaic "Pascal" and this is from the Hebrew word "Pasah" that named the Passover feast commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. Saint John and Saint Paul will refer to Jesús as the "Paschal lamb" since he was crucified at Passover time. On the surface, Pascual Duarte is anything but a sacrificial lamb. Brought up in the violent environment of his family life, he inherited the brutal character of his parents. But also, as these memoirs reveal, he had a tender side of his personality and we can see him as a victim of his circumstances.

The name of Pascual's sister, Rosario, is another antiphrasis if we consider the life that the girl lives. And although Pascual gives the complete name of his father: Esteban Duarte Diniz, a Portuguese, his mother is the only anonymous character in the novel. Pascual marries twice, first Lola (a nickname for Dolores), and then, after he becomes a widower, Esperanza (Hope). No last name is given for either wife. Besides his mother, his main antagonist is the man whom his first wife took as a lover while he was away for two years; he is Paco López, always called by his nickname: El Estirao (sic). Here we have an Andalusian dialectalism;

the word is estirado, but in colloquial Spanish the "d" between vowels at the end of a word is dropped. The nickname "El Estirao" means literally "stretched," and so in the English translation Anthony Kerrigan calls this character "Stretch," but such a translation does not convey the image of the physical carriage of the character, how he stands and reveals in his every action his contempt for everybody. Estirado is a loose equivalent of "stiff" or "stuck up."

At the end of the novel two characters appear as correspondents of the transcriber: Santiago Luruena, Chaplain, and Cesáreo Martín, Civil Guard, both at the jail where Pascual Duarte was executed. They appear only with the father's last name to indicate their lower station in life.

Although few in number, the names in this novel fulfill their function as signs and signifiers; they name the character, but they also tell us something about the nature of the person so named.

If The family of Pascual Duarte has few characters, Cela compensated for that aspect by going to the other extreme in his 1945 masterpiece, La colmena (The Hive).⁵ It includes 296 fictitious characters and mentions 50 real ones. It has a Census of all of them at the end, although this census has been omitted in the English translation.⁶

The novel, narrated in the third person, has a collective protagonist formed by members of the middle, lower middle, and working class of Madrid in the early forties, when the tide in the Second World War was turning against Hitler.

There is no central plot or conflict. The Hive comprises indeed little more than fragments of lives of interconnected or casually linked people. The novel is centered around a few places which serve as a focus for their meetings. It is a collage of miniature pictures, a kaleidoscope a la John Dos Passos. Paul Elie sustains that in a work with 296 characters, a name is no guarantee that the reader will recognize it.⁷ I do not agree, for I believe that he underrates both the reader and the use of onomastic devices by Camilo José Cela. One man stands out as a leading character while not exactly reaching the stature of a protagonist: Martín Marco, a useless University graduate with literary pretensions whose dignity is eroded bit by bit throughout the novel. Also there are multiple cross references among the characters to create a firm fabric that constitutes the unity of the whole. Cela uses the repetition of a name in a fragment to help the reader to retain it and to make it easy for him to recognize it the next time, for example:

Almost against his will, Don Pablo is always looking at Señorita Elvira out of the corner of his eye. Though it is all over and done with, he cannot forget their time together. All things considered, she was good, docile, and compliant. Outwardly Don Pablo pretends to despise her; he calls her a dirty prostitute; but inwardly it is different. In his moments of soft whispers and tenderness, Don Pablo used to think: "This isn't a matter of sex, no, it's a matter of the heart." Afterwards he forgot this and would have let her die of hunger or of leprosy without a pang. Don Pablo is like that. (My emphasis.)

There is no doubt that to undertake a complete analysis of the Onomastic of Cela in this novel would be beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, besides the technique of name repetition already mentioned above, I will only sketch a few other examples of Cela's onomastic devices. I do not

think that it is by chance that many young women (and others not so young) involved in sexual affairs or related to sexual activities are called by their diminutives. Such a woman is Julita Vázquez (Julie), a 22 year old blonde in the style of Jean Harlow, who bumps into her father when she is leaving a house of assignation. Her father is there to meet his mistress, Victoria (Vicky), a poor girl who is prostituting herself in order to make money to help a tubercular boyfriend.

Of course there are a great many names added only to create the sensation of the crowded humanity vegetating in the gray urban life of Madrid circa 1942. Of the proclivity of the Spanish to name women with abstract nouns, usually religious in nature, we have an excellent example in the progeny of Dr. Francisco Robles and his wife Soledad de Castro. Of their eleven children we have: Amparo (Protection), Socorruto (Little Succor), Asunción (Assumption), Piedad (Piety), Trinidad (Trinity), and María Auxiliadora and María Angustias, both names related to the Virgin Mary in her role as helper in our troubles. Of these girls, three, consistent with their pious names, have entered a nunnery, two have become housewives, Socorruto is living with a painter, and María Angustias has run away with a banker. We must not overlook the irony of the parental names. The surname Robles means Oaks and Soledad de Castro would translate as Solitude of the Fields, ironic in the face of the fact that they have procreated quite a crowd of children. Sometimes we do find a man with an abstract noun for a proper name. Such a man is Don Trinidad (Holy Trinity) García Sobrino, a client at Doña Rosa's cafe. We also have Ventura

(Venture) Aguado Sanz. There is an obvious comic oxymoron between the first name and surname here. Ventura means risk or hazard while Aguado, the past participle of the verb aguar, means watered down. While the effect is pure comedy, Aguado is indeed a real Spanish family name, as is Ventura. It is the juxtaposition we admire. We may not be as sure about other names, such as that of Consortio López, who runs Doña Rosa's cafe, or Cojoncio Alba. Both names seem to be creations of Cela. "Consortium" López yields something like "wolf-pack" perhaps, but Cojoncio Alba is quite something else. He is mentioned in a brief flashback by Doña Jesusa, a Madam of a house of prostitution. Cojoncio was a young seminarist who seduced her when she was a teenager and thus started her on her wayward life. The name Cojoncio derives from cojón (testicle) and Cela, mixing sex and religion, has given him the startling surname Alba. Alba means white, dawn, pure and innocent; it is also the name of the stole worn over the cassock when a priest officiates at mass. It is doubtful that any child would have been baptized with such a preposterous first name.

Close to the end of the novel, amid the squalor and sordid mediocrity of these lives, there is a moment of tenderness, sex, even true love, in which the antiphrasis of the girl's name, Purita (pure, immaculate, spotless) in the diminutive, provokes a poetic association for her lover Martín Marco. He has spent the night at the brothel of Doña Jesusa, who has asked Purita to oblige this loner, who by now is a man on the run from the police. They have a mutual discovery of love, and the next morning they talk about the uniqueness of their shared experience as it contrasts with their situation.

Carried away by his emotions, Martin recited to the young prostitute a poem by Juan Ramón Jiménez, a sonnet, that starts, "Lofty and tender image of consolation":

Lofty and tender image of consolation,
Dawn breaks over all my sorrow's sea,
Lily of peace whose scent is purity,
Divine reward for my long tribulation!

Martin is aware that the girl is able to transcend and overcome her low everyday reality and live up to the name, whose echo we perceive in the third line of the quoted poem. To call a young prostitute "Purity" shows the same duality and ambiguity found before in "Pascual" Duarte, as a name for a multiple murderer and parricide.

There is a phonetic appeal, sometimes a musicality, to the names that Cela chooses that is entirely lost in translations of his works, which is almost impossible to convey. It is precisely in these names that the humor of Camilo José Cela comes to the fore, no matter how gruesome or grim is the content of his narration. The names break us up with laughter and we overcome the horror or the disgust.

My research on Cela's ideas on onomastics has produced two items to be found in a collection of columns published in Informaciones, a newspaper; in the first article "Considerations on the Santoral," in discussing the controversial usage of Josemaría as one word instead of two, he says, in passing: ". . . I found the name neither in the Novísimo Diccionario Santoral by Dr. D. V.J.B. (sic), Barcelona, 1894, nor in the Martirologio romano, by Father Valentín M. Sánchez Ruíz, Madrid, 1953, for these are the two books that I always use to baptize my characters." The second article "Contri-

butions to indigenous onomastics" is more intriguing. Cela tells us that a lawyer from a province of the hinterlands (of which Cela comments: "not Palencia, perhaps the Spanish area with the most peculiar onomastics") has sent him a list of proper names that do not appear in the two books "that I usually handle to baptize my cautious -- or prudent, as the wind blows -- literary puppets," and then reiterates his source of names. Furthermore, Cela proceeds to invent fictional characters, giving them minibiographies, for fifteen of the names (first names only) sent him by his lawyer friend who, according to Cela, has obtained them through his law firm work. I have translated two fragments of these:

1. Don Abodio, a Provincial Office Recorder, has a son named Taurino, in memory of the saintly Bishop of Evreux, and a daughter named Marujita in memory of her saintly mother. Young Taurino is a Deputy Justice and Marujita practices the art of love in Tarragona under the protection of a gentleman who respects her as she deserves--and even more than that--for he is somewhat soft in the head and keeps her like a queen, and I mean it, like a real queen.

5. Doña Arodafnusa, a Chipriot word that means rosebay, has buried three husbands, owns an eatery in the outskirts of the capital. She wears a shoe an inch higher on her right foot. She has something of a moustache and is somewhat bitchy.

Cela continues in the same vein, with names such as Don Arquipofontino, Don Caralampio, Don Cebsurio, Don Conjonciano, Doffa Concisa, etc. . . . What credibility should we lend to such preposterous names? Cela claims that his friend is a man of character and even-tempered and so he is not inclined to doubt the authenticity of the names he has supplied. If we too accept their authenticity, the miniature portraits serve as an excellent

example of the Cela method of basing characters on names. It is in Cela's The Hive where we find this method stylistically dominant, for the novel is an expanded version of these miniatures, with characters interlocked and recurring throughout the work. It is as if Cela had wanted us to have a peek into his workshop.

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NOTES

- 1 Camilo José Cela, La familia de Pascual Duarte. Cela is quoted from La rueda de los ocios, in the Introduction by Harold L. Boudreau and John Kronik. (My translation.)
- 2 Santiago Vilas, El humor y la novela española contemporánea, Vila quotes from his correspondence with Cela, pp. 180-181. (My translation.)
- 3 Camilo José Cela, The family of Pascual Duarte, translated and with an Afterword by Anthony Kerrigan, 1972, p. 13.
- 4 Fred C. Robinson, "Appropriate Naming in English Literature," Names, 20, #2 (June 1972), 132.
- 5 Camilo José Cela, La colmena, Editorial Noguer, sixth edition, 1965.
- 6 Camilo José Cela, The Hive, translated by J. M. Cohen in consultation with Arturo Barea, who also wrote an Introduction, 1953.
- 7 Paul Elie, La novelística de Camilo José Cela, 1963, p. 123.

