
DUELOS Y QUEBRANTOS, ONCE AGAIN

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THE discussion of what the hidalgo who was to become Don Quixote ate for his Saturday dinner is a prime example of scholarly fatuousness. If the country gentleman was driven insane (with lucid intervals) by his readings of books of chivalry, normally lucid scholars have been rendered temporarily insane by minor details in the book about Don Quixote. One expects conscientious editors of the novel, of course, to explain the expression "duelos y quebrantos" (I, 1) to the best of their ability. It is when nationalistic passions run high over whether early translators (specifically Oudin and Franciosi) understood the term better than the native Royal Spanish Academy that scholarly objectivity is fractured. When personal feelings are bruised over whether Alonso Quijano ate bacon and eggs or an omelette made with bits of ham (or even slices of ham!) or beans macaronically called *dolichos unguiculatus*, the nadir of scholarship has been reached. The curious student of scholarly aberration is confidently referred for entertainment as well as enlightenment to the lengthy essays on this question by Francisco Rodríguez Marín¹ and José Navío, S.P.² In them, and their like, he will find, tirelessly repeated, all the ambiguous references to *duelos y quebrantos* that diligence has discovered in other Golden-Age texts (especially by Lope de Vega); their discovery has done nothing to lessen the confusion.

This line of research remained trivial as long as no one asked the necessary question why it is significant that the future Don Quixote ate this particular dish on a day of semiabstinence. In

¹ Apéndice VII "Duelos y quebrantos" to his edition of *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, VII (Madrid: RABM, 1928), 82-110.

² "Duelos y quebrantos, los sábados," *ACer*, 6 (1957), 169-91.

the section of his *Cervantes y los casticismos españoles* entitled "Sentido histórico-literario del jamón y del tocino," Américo Castro raises this very question in an attempt to support his thesis that, because "Cervantes era un cristiano nuevo" (p. 9), "[e]l punto de vista del profético y ambicioso autor se integraba en la textura de la obra" (p. 11).³

Accepting Rodríguez Marín's arguments identifying *duelos y quebrantos* as bacon and eggs, Castro inquires into the reason behind the application of a disparaging term to the homely dish. What, he asks, would a person eating it feel? He concludes that, with New Christians, eating bacon caused them to feel "duelos y quebrantos" in the same way that one may feel physically or morally "dolido y quebrantado"; Old Christians, on the other hand, seeing in bacon a symbol differentiating them from New Christians, tended to call it gratifyingly the "merced de Dios" (p. 16). Cervantes teasingly does not make it clear whether eating bacon was a matter of "grief and affliction" to Don Quixote, to the housekeeper who prepared his meals, or to Cervantes himself. "Lo indudable es que el tema del conflicto tocínil hace oír sus grasos sonidos ya en los primeros compases de esta sinfonía humana" (p. 16).

From the narrow perspective of the earlier investigations of the phrase, the weak point in Castro's reasoning is its premise that what Quijano ate on Saturdays was the flesh of a pig. A considerable school of thought, triumphantly led by Father López Navío, holds that what people ate in order to steer as closely as possible to the church law prohibiting meat on Saturdays was offals. Because they were breaking the spirit of the law, they ate meat scraps with *duelo*, at the same time that "*quebrantaban* la ley del ayuno o abstinencia" (López Navío, p. 190). Castro summarily dismisses this notion without countering it (p. 15, note 6).

What all who have puzzled about this dish have failed to do is to look for *earlier* texts, more proximate to the time of "quien tuvo la ocurrencia de llamarlo así" (Castro, p. 15). I do not claim that it was the fifteenth-century poet Antón de Montoro who invented the wry term; but I suspect it may have been someone

³ *Cervantes y los casticismos españoles* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1966).

of his time and in his existential situation. It is undeniable that Montoro, nicknamed *El Ropero* ("the tailor"), was a New Christian because he repeatedly tells us so in his verse; he was, moreover, a first-generation New Christian. That he was capable of wry self-mockery (as well as of pungent satire of others) is also evident in his epigrammatic poems. One in particular supports Castro's "feeling" theory of the origin of *duelos y quebrantos*:

[COPLA] SOLA
DE
ANTON DE MONTORO

Al corregidor de Córdoua, porque no halló en la carnicería sino tocino, y ouo de comprar d'él.

Uno de los verdaderos
del Señor Rey fuerte muro,
han dado los carniceros
causa de me hazer perjuro:
no hallando, por mis duelos, 5
con qué mi hambre matar,
hanme hecho quebrantar
la jura de mis ahuelos.⁴

The term is merely evoked, in the endings of lines 5 and 7. But the context expresses the feelings—which Castro was only able to imagine—of a former Jew forced to eat bacon: "duelos," because of the necessity of having to "quebrantar" the ancestral faith. One does not have to accept Castro's thesis of a New-Christian Cervantes to find in Montoro's poem corroboration of his suspect premise—and of those arguments of Rodríguez Marín on which it was based.

⁴ Cited, with revised punctuation, from the *Cancionero general de Hernando del Castillo* (Madrid: Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, 1882), II, 268 (No 1010). With minor variants ("del Ropero" for "de Antón de Montoro"; "mercar" for "comprar") the poem also appears in the *Cancionero de obras de burlas provocantes a risa*, ed. Juan Alfredo Bellón Cazabán and Pablo Jauralde Pou (Madrid: Akal, 1974), p. 134 (No. 34).

It should not be supposed, however, that this note is the end of the matter. Someone will yet revive Pellicer's theory (1797) that *quebrantos* refers to steer bones broken into a stew to give it more savor. *Stultorum infinitus est numerus*.

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