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CONY-CATCHERS AND CAZADORES DE GATOS:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE LEXIS RELATED TO THIEVES AND SWINDLERS IN ENGLAND AND SPAIN IN THE 16th AND 17th CENTURIES

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Vagabonds "working" as cony-catchers, pilfereres, cazadores de gatos, rateros, etc., have always been with us; but the fact that in England and Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries many writers made them the object of their work, testifies to their importance during that period. The English Rogue Pamphlets and the Spanish picaresque writings are examples of such sources.

This paper examines the vocabulary related to thieves and swindlers in English and Spanish in the 16th and 17th centuries, using primary and secondary sources from the two languages. The lexis of and about these marginal groups, will be compared to determine later on if Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) concept of structural metaphor does operate in the creation of the analysed terms. It will thus be shown that these two underworlds do not lie so far apart as linguistic links can be established between them.

Crime and vagrancy are social phenomena usually considered to be closely tied to poverty. As the number of people lacking adequate means of living increases, the groups of thieves, swindlers, beggars and prostitutes also swell, and when they get organized in hierarchical bands, they are perceived as a social threat. Extant records show that crime and vagrancy became a serious worry in Elizabethan England. Paul Slack, analysing the English Poor Law, states that: "The legislation of 1598 and 1601 was passed at a time when the problem of poverty was unusually severe" (11). Previous years had not been any better and the number of criminals and vagrants was not a low one. In his book *Los Pícaros en la Literatura*, A. Parker tells us that the social and economic situation in the rest of Europe was somewhat similar, and Spain was no exception to this (46-48). But here we are not concerned with the reasons that drew people to a life of crime; our interest is mainly the vocabulary they produced as a result of their way of life, narrowing our scope further to that related to thieves and swindlers.

In English as well as in Spanish during the 16th and 17th centuries we find vocabularies "used" by marginal groups of people who were vagrants, beggars,

thieves, swindlers and prostitutes. The words in these lexical sets differ in the degree to which they were opaque to outsiders depending on the evolution of their use. In English the term applied to that vocabulary is **cant**, from Latin cantare, canting, the singing of beggars when asking for money (*OED*); in Spanish we have the **germanía**, from Latin *germanus*, brother, brotherhood (*DRAE*). The short life of these jargons (at least short life in terms of secrecy) makes it difficult sometimes to state with certainty that a word was included or excluded in any of them. Nevertheless, even the terms adopted by common people, outside these groups, to designate those who were a menace for them are worthy of consideration.

In English, the sources that testify to the existence of this underworld and its vocabulary are the Rogue Pamphlets, a series of treatises written by several authors during the second half of the 16th century and first decades of the 17th century, whose main topic is cant and its speakers, the canting-crew. Awdeley can be considered as the first compiler of this jargon, his The Fraternity of Vagabonds (1575) served as a model for Harman's A Caveat of Common Cursitors (1568) and gave way to other pamphlets like those by Greene, Hutton, Middleton, Dekker or Rid, included in the list of references. The Spanish counterparts to the Rogue Pamphlets are the picaresque and "germanesque" writings whose vocabulary has been studied by J.L. Alonso in El Lenguaje de los Maleantes Españoles de los Siglos XVI y XVII: La Germanía. This author has used literary texts, (picaresque novels, poetry, plays,...) containing germanías as well as other types of marginal lexis. The English texts are less "literary", since writers like John Awdeley or Thomas Harman only offered lists of cant words obtained from the criminals themselves, in an attempt to discover their tricks and prevent innocent citizens from falling into their traps. Though other writers like Robert Greene may use stories to illustrate the vocabulary, they also claim to have used the information provided by people from the underworld, and it is even possible, according to Aydelotte (1913:123) and Salgado (17) that Greene himself was for some time an active participant in that underworld. Apart from the pamphlets, dictionaries of the period as well as those of the present day are also of help in the analysis of these specific English and Spanish vocabularies.

Two great groups, thieves and swindlers, within their marginal worlds in England and Spain will be our main interest here. Their activities will be described briefly to compare their metaphorical implications later on.

Stealing was one of the options that people from the very low classes had as a means of earning a livelihood, sometimes combining it with other "jobs":

begging, cheating, prostitution, etc. The words with which they designated themselves or were designated by others are usually related to how and what they would steal or who they would rob.

Among those thieves that use hooks to steal, we find in English: HOOKERs, ANGLERs, CURBERs and FILCHERs (FILCHING MORT/ COVE)¹. All are variants of a thief who "with a curb as they term it, or hook, doth pull out of a window any loose linen cloth apparel, or else any household apparel whatsoever" (Greene 1592a:222). It is noticeable that all these terms are derived (through the usual means of the English grammar) from the instrument employed, a curved piece of metal: HOOK, ANGLE, CURB, or FILCH, "a short staff (...) having in the nab, or head of it a ferme, (that is to say a hole) into which (...) when he goes a filching he putteth a hook of iron". (Dekker 1612:380). There are also variants of the modality of theft itself, such is the case of the FIGGING BOY in which a little boy was placed at a window and he performed the part of the hook.

Their Spanish equivalents are the GANCHO, GANZÚA, PESCADOR and GARABERO (Alonso 77). In the first and second no derivation is used, the thief is directly identified with the instrument, whereas GARABERO is formed from GARABO, a hook, and PESCADOR is taken from the relation of this with the fishing rod hook, or PESCADA. According to Alonso these people would use their hooks to open locked doors, and therefore they can be differentiated from their English counterparts in the methods and object of their work, but sometimes definitions are so general ("ladrón que hurta con ganzúa") that they could simply correspond to the English rogues mentioned before. This assertion can also be backed by the fact that in Spanish there are clearer designations for picklocks: LLAVERO DE CERRADURAS and SAN PEDRO. In English we find CHARM applied specifically to this latter type of thief. "House works" were also done by the COMADREJA "ladrón que entra en cualquier casa" (Alonso 79).

A comparable version to the FIGGING BOY is the MALETA (Alonso 80): a man was left in a sack in a house or shop during the day, and at night he would come out to open the door to his partners or to throw the stolen goods through the window.

Among those involved in stealing money we have in English the CUTPURSE and BUNG NIPPER; in Spanish: CORTABOLSAS, CORTA-

¹ MORT probably from Fr. 'mot' = 'word' and used as a ephemism for 'cunt' (Allan & Burridge 1991:95), appears in **cant** as an indicator of female sex, whereas COVE, from Romanic 'kova' = 'thing', 'person' (J. Ayto 1990) implies male sex.

DOR SOBRE PERCHA, BARAHUSTADORES, CAZADORES DE GATOS, and RATEROS. The last two make reference not to the robbing instrument, but to the purse itself made of the skin of a cat, or similar in appearence to a rat (Alonso 82-83). The ARAÑA is another thief of purses; according to Alonso, it was common to call the money MOSCA and that is why the one who went after it was compared to the spider.

Other small-scale pilferers are the FOISTs / GARRAs, their similarity having its origins in the main instrument used, the hand. GARRA (Alonso 79) has to do metaphorically with the animal clutch, and FOIST comes from the Dutch *vuistan*, take in the hand (*OED*). The more general LIFT, still in use, and LEVADOR (Alonso 75) are also curiously connected through the use, in both languages, of verbs which imply moving something by raising it.

Most of the characters mentioned worked in town, but the roads and countryside were not free of theft. In England there were HIGH LAWYERs, PADs or PADDERs: "...such as rob on horseback were called high lawyers, and those who robbed on foot, he called padders" (Rid 415), and in Spain DESVALIJADORes, LOBOs DE VERDON, and SATIROs (Alonso 81), who would rob travellers and also steal cattle in the cases of the last two. Important hauls were also those obtained by the PRIGMAN or PRIGGER OF PRANCERS and the CUATRO MAYOR, both horse stealers.

With regard to the group of tricksters, it must be said that in Spanish they do not form a group as such, while in English we have to distinguish between thieves and swindlers for two reasons, firstly because the pamphleteers do so, and secondly because, though both types have the same goal (to get other people's money), their methods are different. The common thief uses various instruments to open doors, cut purses, steal through windows, etc., whereas the swindler uses his loquacity and intelligence to cheat "simple people" who do not realize they are being robbed until it is too late. To this group belong the CONY-CATCHERS, a term first applied to card players (Greene 1591:158) and later extended to all sorts of swindlers. Alonso does not make reference to this distinction, though he mentions some specially cunning thieves.

The variety of tricks that those who catched innocent conies developed, gave rise to several designations. Very often the whole trick was the work of a group or pair; such is that of the prostitute or TRAFFIC and her "man", the CROSBITTER. According to Grose CROSBITTING is "entrapping a man so as to obtain money, in which the wife, real or supposed, conspires with the husband".

The RABBIT SUCKER would obtain goods, on credit he would never pay back, and sell them again even to their original owner. His assistants were the TUMBLER and the WARREN, and the person who sold them the merchandise was called FERRET.

The FALCONER pretended to be a writer looking for a Maecenas to whom he had dedicated a pamphlet. In exchange for a nobleman's or any wealthy person's money he would offer immortality with his writings that were never published or even written. The conned person was called TERCEL GENTLE, the false pamphlet LURE, and the money obtained BIRD. The FALCONER also had an assistant, the MONGREL. Another type of comman was the SNAFFLER who introduced himself as a nobleman or ex-soldier, and would get some farmer or innkeeper to lend him money or horses that this PROVENDER would never see again.

The JACK-IN-A-BOX or SHEEP SHEARER used a very complex and clever trick to change money of less or no value for silver, the victim was the poor BLEATER. Similar to this were the Spanish CAMBIADOR and MAREADOR who got "el real y el trueko" (Correas, in Alonso 84-85). Alonso mentions other cunning characters like the ÁGUILA/AGUILUCHO, "ladrones astutos", and the FULLERO, "especializado en hacer trampas a base de hablar mucho, hacer chanzas y decir bromas para despistar al contrario y hacerle perder" (94).

Alonso does not refer to the possible names of the victims, while in English they are also recorded. Most of them took their name from a defenceless animal or from animals that are easily captured and domesticated. Apart from CONY we find in the pamphlets others like: BIRD, BLEATER, FISH, FLOUNDER, GULL and SIMPLER. Nevertheless, we do find in Spanish designations for assistants of the thief, but they do not have specific equivalents in English; some are more general like those related to acting as watchmen (PUNTERO) or helping the thief with the robbed merchandise (e.g.: ALIVIADOR, AZORERO, CESTA), others refer to those that informed the thief about places worthy of their attention (ABISPON, CALETA, HONDEADOR, PILOTO).

The equivalent activities and terms of the English and Spanish underworlds that have been compared so far are summarized in table I.

TABLE I
EOUIVALENT TERMS FOR THIEVES AND SWINDLERS

ENGLISH	SPANISH
HOOKER, ANGLER, CURBER, FILCHING MORT/COVE	GANCHO, GANZÚA, PESCADOR GARABERO
CHARM	LLAVERO DE CERRADURAS, S. PEDRO, COMADREJA
FIGGING BOY	MALETA
CUTPURSE, BUNG NIPPER	CORTABOLSAS, CORTADOR SOBRE PERCHA, BARAHUSTADOR, CAZADOR DE GATOS, RATERO, ARAÑA
FOIST	GARRA
LIFT	LEVADOR
HIGH LAWYER, HIGH PAD/PADDER	LOBO DE GARO, LOBO DE VERDON,
	DESVALIJADOR
PRIGMAN/PRIGGER OF PRANCERS	,
PRIGMAN/PRIGGER OF PRANCERS CONY-CATCHER ²	DESVALIJADOR
	DESVALIJADOR CUATRO MAYOR, SÁTIRO

It is worth noting that correspondences between the two worlds appear not only in the terms that describe the way in which the robbery is committed. The words used to designate the criminal, and even the theft itself, may be different, but there is a deeper equivalence in the way in which they are conceived metaphorically and metonymically. According to Lakoff and Johnson "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor"³. Metaphors are not only a literary resource, they also help us to

understand our daily experiences and to highlight those aspects we consider relevant, leaving aside others not so important, or even those we do not want to show. Within these metaphors we find structural metaphors and metonymies, that are able to structure our actions, our thoughts, and conceptualize the external world, and other "idiosyncratic, unsystematic and isolated" metaphors and metonymies (Lakoff and Johnson 51-55), where the equivalence stated is only between two terms and not between upper concepts from which further "comparisons" can be derived. Our marginal vocabularies, more complex than what they may seem, do not only give evidence of this second type of metaphor. In the lexis dealt with, we find both structural and idiosyncratic metaphors/metonymies. To this latter group belong words like: GANCHO, GANZÚA, GARABERO; LLAVERO DE CERRADURAS, SAN PEDRO; MALETA; CORTABOLSAS, CORTADOR SOBRE PERCHA, BA-RAHUSTADOR; LEVADOR; DESVALIJADOR; CUATRO MAYOR; SÁTIRO; FULLERO; CAMBIADOR, MAREADOR; PUNTERO, ALIVIA-DOR, CESTA, PALANQUÍN, HONDEADOR, PILOTO;

HOOKER, ANGLER, CURBER, FILCHING MORT/COVE; CHARM; FIGGING BOY; CUTPURSE, BUNG NIPPER; LIFT; HIGH LAWYER, HIGH PAD; PRIGGER OF PRANCERS.

Some instances can exemplify this type of equivalence:

- GANCHO, GANZÚA and FOIST are metonymies in which the part selected to stand for the whole is the instrument which distinguishes one type of thief from the other.
- SAN PEDRO, LLAVERO DE CERRADURAS, SÁTIRO, the identification is of one to one, through the particular characteristics these individuals share with the designated thieves: St. Peter's keys, or just a key ring, with those of the picklock, and the bucolic settings where satyres appear with the man who steals cattle in the countryside.
- PRIGGER OF PRANCERS and CUATRO MAYOR are more complex forms of metonymy. The first takes the vb. PRIG which meant "ride", and PRANCER, horse (both words have an uncertain origin) to transpose the idea of a simple horseman to a person who steals horses. This metonymy became so deeply-rooted that later Grose in his dictionary would register other terms like "PRIGGER OF CACKLERS, robbers of hens". In the case of CUATRO MAYOR, according to Alonso (273) originally a horse (versus CUATRO MENOR, a donkey), the stolen animal, which is itself named by means of a metonymy taking its four legs, is identified with its thief.

² The English term CONY-CATCHER could designate as a generic the specific activities of the TRAFFIC, CROSBITTER, RABBIT SUCKER, FALCONER, SNAFFLER, their respective assistants, and also the JACK IN A BOX or SHEEP SHEARER.

³ As in Lakoff and Johnson, metonymy here will include the traditional concept of synecdoche, where the part stands for the whole (36).

These are so to speak more "simple" equivalences, in which we find, culturally bound independent metaphors/metonymies as well as some correspondences of images between the two languages; but the structural metaphor is also present. It appears that these marginal groups used systematic metaphors to conceptualize their worlds and at the same time render them impenetrable to others in the societies in which they lived.

If we think about most of the terms mentioned, it can be seen that there is a relation among them; they can be grouped under a main idea or metaphorical concept: STEALING-SWINDLING IS HUNTING. The image of the robber trying to find a victim or a good haul, surrounding it and finally stealing it, can be understood by means of the hunter looking for an important prey, pursuing it and catching it. In Spanish many thieves are named after hunting animals: AGUILUCHO, ARAÑA, COMADREJA, LECHUZA, LOBO,... In English, when talking about swindlers, we usually find a human hunter assisted by an animal, as in falconry or FERRET HUNTING (this was in fact the name the RABBIT SUCKER deceit received), an animal which could be the victim itself: CONY-CATCHER, RABBIT SUCKER/FERRET, FALCONER/TERCEL GENTLE, SHEEP-SHEARER. The idea of representing theft through hunting is very descriptive while at the same time rather concealing, since not knowing exactly what the trick consists of, one is not able to identify the trickster just by the name he is given.

It is interesting to see how the animal hunter is more important in Spanish than in English; in the latter the human hunter is preferred to designate the swindler; only two Spanish terms are similar to the English ones in this respect, the RATERO and CAZADOR DE GATOS. The difference shown by the rest can be justified through the use of dysphemism in Spanish. In this language there is no clear division between stealing and swindling; this lack of distinction implies another way of perceiving the act of stealing. While in Spanish the animal side of the thief is highlighted, in English, at least in what comes to swindlers, what matters is their "human" side, the rationality of the hunter, the form in which he prepares the attack to chase his prey. Therefore, though the main image is the same, each language chooses from among the aspects it offers those that best suit each culture and each experience. This can be illustrated with a pair like FERRET and COMADREJA, they are basically the same image, both animals belong to the species of polecat, but there is an important difference: while the ferret can be half-tamed to drive rabbits from burrows, the comadreja or weasel is a wild animal that hunts for its own survival. In cant the FERRET is the cheated person, the one that brings out the prey to be contained in the PURSE NETS (the bag where the rabbit was

trapped), but he does not keep anything for himself. In the case of the COMADREJA, the thief that breaks into houses does it with the same ability as the animal and the booty obtained is for the thief alone. Very similar cases are those of the FALCONER and the AZORERO; in English the most important in the whole con is the hunter, the one who holds the falcon and prepares the lure to attract him. In Spanish the AZORERO is a secondary character, the assistant of the thief, the one who "acompaña y lleva lo que hurta el ladrón" (Alonso 91); whereas the ÁGUILA and AGUILUCHO are described as thieves themselves. The only exception is the CAZADOR DE GATOS, which could be understood as a human hunter; the same is possible with RATERO, though it could be simply a cat. It is also relevant that the dimensions and reputation as a hunter of the animal selected for the metaphor increases according to the booty obtained; the ARAÑA, RATERO, CAZADOR DE GATOS, are cutpurses, the COMA-DREJA enters houses, the ÁGUILAS and AGUILUCHOS are birds of prey and are, therefore, terms aptly applied to tricksters, while the LOBO looks for travellers and cattle.

The names given to the victims are also meaningful in the English **hunting metaphor**, the CONY, BIRD, PURSE NET, and the BLEATER (the complaining sheep of the SHEEP-SHEARER), are all related to the preys of a hunt.

In table II are summarized the idiosyncratic metaphors and metonymies, and in table III we can see that there are not only lexically equivalent activities in the two underworlds, but also metaphoric and metonymic equivalences in the way their reality was conceptualized.

TABLE II METAPHORIC EQUIVALENCES ONE TO ONE (IDIOSYNCRATIC) METAPHORS/METONYMIES

- HOOKER,.../ GANZÚA,... > hook --> thief who uses a hook.
- LIFT/LEVADOR > raise, take from a place --> steal.
- FIGGING BOY > pick figs in a tree --> steal from a window.
- MALETA > suitcase --> thief left in a house in a suitcase
- FOIST > hand, take in the hand --> rob, thief.
- GARRA > clutch, to clutch ---> thief
- CUTPURSE,..., CORTABOLSAS,... > cutting the purse --> robbing the purse.
- HIGH PAD > highway --> thief who works there.
- PRIGGER > prig --> ride --> thief who steals horses.
- CUATRO MAYOR, MENOR > four legs of a horse, donkey --> thief of horses or donkeys.
- PILOTO > to guide --> assistant that tells the thief where to rob.
- ALIVIADOR, CESTA > help with the weight, container --> assistant of the thief.
- HONDEADOR > to test depth (hondear) --> assistant that sounds places to be robbed.
- PALANQUÍN > stick used to carry weight --> assistant of the thief.
- PUNTERO > to point out danger --> watchman.

TABLE III STRUCTURAL METAPHOR: stealing & cheating = hunting

Human hunter thieves/swindlers	Animal hunter assistants/providers	Animal hunter thieves/swindlers	Prey
CONY CATCHER	_		CONY
RABBIT SUCKER	FERRET		PURSE NET
SHEEP SHEARER			BLEATER
FALCONER	TERCEL GENTLE		BIRD
CAZADOR DE GATOS			GATO
RATERO			RATA
		ÁGUILA, AGUILUCHO	
		ARAÑA	MOSCA
	MONGREL		
		COMADREJA	
		LECHUZA	· —
		LOBO	
	AZORERO		
	ABISPÓN		

It is important to realize that the structural metaphor STEALING-SWINDLING = HUNTING does not originate from the marginal vocabularies analysed. In the everyday language of the period, and even today, the pamphleteers use metaphors from this concept in other registers: "GENTLE READER: (...)avoid the damage thereof by knowing their mischievous and most subtle practice in getting a prey to spoil the same" (Walker 1552:29). What the **cant** and **germanías** users did was to enlarge the metaphor making use of its possible entailments, being more specific and less general to achieve the secrecy they were looking for; they brought out what Lakoff and Johnson (1980:53) mention as those subspecies which lie "outside the used part of a metaphorical concept that structures our normal conceptual system". A further enlargement of the conceptual metaphor here dealt with, is that registered by Grose (1811): CATCHING HARVEST, a period of fairs, celebration when robberies were more frequent.

The introduced novelties in **germanías** and **cant** protected their speakers from public knowledge of their actions, and when these "novel metaphors" came from their possible victims they were a means of understanding the unknown. It can thus be seen how the English and Spanish underworlds were a distorted reflexion of that upper world that made the rules they were breaking.

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