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### A Truck Load of Literary Treasure

The detainees at the Mexicali Penal Institution for Women are determined to discover why young, American-born, Libertad is one of their numbers. In fact, her cellmate tells her, “Don’t worry, it will come out. We’ll make it come out.”(4). Libertad has trouble talking about the events that put her there until she organizes the Library Club and begins to “read” to her fellow prisoners. Emulating Scheherazade, of *Arabian Nights* fame, she slowly reveals her life story. Throughout the book, we, and the inmates, are never quite sure of what may be fact and what maybe fiction. For instance, did Libertad really commit a horrible crime or is she incarcerated by mistake? Is her father a political fugitive from the Mexican authorities, or is it all in his mind? Most important of all, is Libertad sharing her life story or is she just entertaining herself and the rest of inhabitants of the prison?

*Gonzales & Daughter Trucking Co.: a Road Novel with Literary License*, by bilingual author, Maria Amparo Escandon, is such an entertaining read that it is easy to overlook the depth of this novel. The literary license that Escandon refers to is a clue that there are many treasures in these pages. It would be a crime not to search for those riches. She freely borrows characters and titles from other literary works. Appreciating the significance of her selections is half the fun

Escandon has great fun with names. The inmates at the prison have descriptive nicknames. Maciza, which means masonite, is Libertad’s first friend. Masonite is sturdy

building material and Maciza is the person who supports Libertad and shows her the ropes of prison life. Another resident, Matriarca, “a rich lady who was serving time for burning her father’s factory – with her father in it – to collect the insurance (14), is the leader of the White-Collar Clan.. Some of the other inmates’ names translate as Snake (Culebra), Rat (Rata) and Darn Witch (Pinche Bruja), which reflects their personalities.

Joaquin Gonzalez, Libertad’s father, constantly changes his first name. He escaped the 1968 student massacre in Mexico City and is convinced the Mexican authorities are still searching for him. Many of Joaquin’s choices reflect the fact that he was, at one time, a Professor of Literature at the University of Mexico. For instance, Melquiades is the title character in the film *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, by Guillermo Arriaga. Abundio is borrowed from a Juan Rulfo novel called *Pedro Paramo*. Jose Arcadio and Aureliano are found in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Atticus is the name of the father in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. Not even Shakespeare escapes Escandon’s notice, as both Romeo and Macbeth become aliases. Escandon cannot resist christening Joaquin “Speedy” Gonzalez as well.

Filomena, the name on Libertad’s drivers’ license when she is arrested, is the key allusion of this novel. In Greek mythology, Philomena is raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, who then cut out her tongue to prevent her from revealing his crime. Philomena manages to tell of the event by weaving a tapestry depicting her rape and send it to her sister. In order to escape the vengeful Tereus, Philomena is changed into a swallow by the Gods. Libertad weaving stories for her sister inmates is very clever allusion to

Philomena's resourcefulness. Philomena is changed into a swallow by the Gods to escape a vengeful Tereus (Ray 133). Of course Libertad is not the heroine's real name either. She chooses Libertad (Liberty) herself to avoid being called Gorrión (Sparrow) by the rest of the inmates. The choice of Liberty as a prison nickname is beautiful irony. Additionally, the use of Sparrow is a foreshadowing of the Philomena myth.

Another clever device that Escandon effectively employs is the use of book titles to set the mood or comment on events. The first book Libertad "reads" to the Library Club is *The Three Musketeers*, by Alexandre Dumas. When Libertad shelves the book, after one of the club sessions, she puts it right next to *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. A synopsis of *The Three Musketeers* reads, "Here he falls in with Athos, Porthos and Aramis, and the four friends soon find themselves caught up in court politics and intrigue." ([barnsandnoble.com](http://barnsandnoble.com)). Once Libertad starts the readings; she becomes caught up in the politics and intrigue of the prison life. *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, by Manuel Puig is the book she is "reading from" when Libertad tells how her father met her mother. This time it is the romantic sound of the title more than the plot that sets the mood. Joaquin believes he dropped his copy of *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote next to the dying Police captain the night of the massacre.

In a reverse of titles commenting on the action of *Gonzalez & Daughter*, the books tossed out the truck windows by Libertad, comment on the novel in question. "Sand dunes on the way to Palm Springs, right where the windmills catch the air from the desert and turn it into electricity, are digesting the deluxe edition of *Don Quixote*" (8). Don Quixote is famous for tilting at windmills.

Escandon's use of Greek mythology, as well as literary characters and titles may not be apparent if one is simply reading as light fare. There is nothing wrong in doing so. *Gonzalez & Daughter Trucking Co.* will serve that purpose admirably. However, for those who enjoy savoring every nuance of a novel and enjoy the extra thought and effort required to discover all the implications contained in the author's choice of language and literary device, *Gonzalez & Daughter* will surely delight.

Works Cited

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