

Recent German Publications in Onomastics

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Since the early seventies there has been an increasing spate of publications in the field of name studies, reflecting the never-abating interest in things onomastic. Names not only continue to fascinate scholars and laypersons alike; they have become important foci in the course of attempts to deal with such fundamental questions as selfhood or sense of place. In a society which, under the influence of mass media, mass products and mass psychology, has a strong tendency to de-personalize and de-individualize, identity, it seems, still matters, and the investigation of names as basic expression of that identity, still attracts good minds which, ignoring the lure of instant gratification through concentration on single items, seek systemic solutions through systematic surveys and analyses.

It appears that, in the last dozen years or so, such undertakings have proved particularly attractive to young scholars in the German-speaking world, and the resulting publications are too seminal and too significant to be neglected by name scholars in other countries and cultures. Unfortunately, as we all know, linguistic barriers can be quite detrimental to the sharing of knowledge by a truly universal community of scholars. In the following,¹ I therefore wish to draw attention to some monographs which have appeared in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1973 and which deserve our earnest review. Naturally this is not the total output, and there have also been

¹ This is a revised and enlarged version of a paper first presented on December 27, 1984, in Washington, D.C., as part of the annual meeting of the American Name Society. It does not include any publications of less than monograph length or studies which present and analyze regional place nomenclatures. Unfortunately, one of the relevant books (Siegmar Tyroff, *Namen bei Thomas Mann in den Erzählungen und den Romanen Buddenbrooks, Königliche Hoheit, Der Zauberberg* (Bern-Frankfurt am Main, 1975)) was not available to the author in time for inclusion.

many relevant publications in the German Democratic Republic, Austria, and Switzerland, but the immediate purpose of this review essay makes the chosen restriction necessary. What gives this selection a certain cohesive unity, however, is the not to be belittled observation that almost all of the books to be examined began their lives as dissertations in one university or another, to my mind a very healthy sign with regard to the status of onomastics in German academic institutions.

In many ways typical for the works to be paraded here, and certainly pioneering in the modernity of its approach, is Rainer Wimmer's *Der Eigenname im Deutschen: Ein Beitrag zu seiner linguistischen Beschreibung* (The Proper Name in German: A Contribution to its Linguistic Description).² Earning the author the degree of Ph.D. at the University of Heidelberg in 1970, its published version (which appeared three years later) is somewhat expanded and revised, especially with regard to its numerous and helpful bibliographical references. Wimmer devotes four chapters to potentially new aspects of the synchronic description of proper names, drawing his illustrative examples from German. After presenting the theoretical suppositions of his study and his terminology, especially those which connect with the notion of the proper name as a linguistic sign in Saussure's sense, he discusses the expressive aspects of names, treats their meaning and examines some selected questions concerning their syntactic properties. There is a goodish dose of Hjelmslevian influence in his linguistic terminology and theory; accordingly, he understands, for example, proper names as *pleremes*, i.e. non-segmentable signs, with meaning—a meaning which elsewhere he refers to as “code-specific.” As far as the dichotomy between name and word is concerned, Wimmer takes it to have two major functions within the field of onomastics. On the one hand, it permits the delimitation of onomastics against other disciplines, not because of a unified or uniform onomastic methodology but because of its central object of research—the name; on the other hand, this dichotomy plays an important role in the classification of name types on the basis of the motivation behind the naming process. As one of the consequences of this dichotomy it becomes possible to distinguish between lexical fields

² Rainer Wimmer, *Der Eigenname im Deutschen: Ein Beitrag zu seiner linguistischen Beschreibung*. Linguistische Arbeiten 11 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1973).

and onomastic fields since their distinction stems from the semantic difference between names and appellatives. As a result, Wimmer proposes that, in transformational grammar, proper names be treated as semantic components. Throughout his monograph, he consistently and quite correctly insists on employing purely synchronic criteria in a synchronic description of names as linguistic signs.

In a study somewhat on the periphery of modern onomastic research but by no means less significant than investigations of more familiar aspects of name properties, Reinhard Krien attempts to give the notion of *Namenphysiognomik* (Name Physiognomy)³ a testable and reliable underpinning. Following particularly earlier studies by Heinz Werner⁴ and Gerhard Eis⁵ and benefitting from them in both outlook and methodology, and dissatisfied with the one-sided interest of name scholars in etymology and name history, he examines the linguistic expressivity of certain words and personal names, in both its associative and connotative components. For this purpose, he hypothesizes the possibility of "expressive universals" on which each language draws in its own peculiar fashion. In such a view, the "physiognomic" qualities of words and names are understood as collective phenomena whose cognition, evaluation, and affective and associative characteristics are actualized in similar ways by all members of any given speech community, rather than by the psyche of individuals. Krien terms these characteristics the "aura" of a name and, on the basis of a series of impressive experiments involving mostly students of college and high-school age, comes to the conclusion that there appears to be indeed a kind of collective intuition with regard to the emotive reaction to, and associative evaluation of, names within each language community. It is intriguing to note in this respect that, for certain factors, names, meaningless phonemic sequences and unconnected individual sounds generate similar expressive experiences in the speaker, and that semantic and phonetic, as well as graphic

³ Reinhard Krien, *Namenphysiognomik: Untersuchungen zur sprachlichen Expressivität am Beispiel von Personennamen, Appellativen und Phonemen des Deutschen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1973).

⁴ Heinz Werner, "Über die Sprachphysiognomik als einer neuen Methode der vergleichenden Sprachbetrachtung." *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* 109 (1929).

⁵ Gerhard Eis, "Tests über suggestive Personennamen in der modernen Literatur und im Alltag." *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 10 (1959); also later publications.

aspects of a language may be bearers of the same primary connotations, and presumably also the originators of associative chains. For example, the personal name *Josef Bumba* creates the following expressive aura for speakers of German: Strong, stocky, small rather than of medium height, not very attractive appearance yet inspiring confidence, a certain homespun kindheartedness, a round face, careful articulation, a rough voice, a strong Slavonic accent. The perception of a close connection between name and personality is strongly suggested by Krien's tests, supported by extensive statistics, tables and diagrams, and in the final chapter he also links his psycholinguistic findings with the age-old phenomenon of names as the vehicles of magic powers, names as influential factors in career choices, and names as ingredients in the creation of a sense of self. A fascinating coda presents the evidence and results of a so-called "portrait test" in which the test persons had to match a set of photographs and names, or, physiognomically speaking, to give faces their names and names their faces. Krien's conclusions ring true but will obviously have to be put to the test in many other languages under stringent laboratory conditions.

Among the books surveyed, Rainer Frank's *Zur Frage einer schichtenspezifischen Personennamengebung* (On the Question of a stratum specific personal nomenclature)⁶ is the most direct contribution to a socio-onomastic approach to names, although it also has considerable bearing on psycho-onomastic concerns. Its main focus is on the act of naming and on the motivations behind such acts and draws its body of evidence from the given names of persons born between 1940 and 1970 in the Segeberg area of Schleswig-Holstein, augmented by the responses to questionnaires distributed to five schools in the region. Although in sociological literature the distinction between *class* and *stratum* has never been fully clarified, Frank prefers *stratum* (*Schicht*) because of its distributive rather than economic connotations. Some of his conclusions are probably valid beyond the restricted sources and area of his investigation: (1) Linguistic origin and etymology are almost irrelevant as motivations in the giv-

⁶ Rainer Frank, *Zur Frage einer schichtenspezifischen Personennamengebung*. Kieler Beiträge zur deutschen Sprachgeschichte 1 (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz, 1977).

ing of names. (2) Fashions in girls' names are less stable than their male counterparts. (3) It is difficult, in our time, to pinpoint the group which most frequently initiates waves of fashionable names although the academic stratum seems to be more involved than others. (4) Although the direction in which innovative name fashions move has not changed from earlier times, the speed of onomastic diffusion is such that it is not easily discernible. (5) When a name drops out of the list of fashionable names another takes its place, or other fashionable names are used more frequently. (6) Length of name, number of names, and name variety vary from social stratum to social stratum. (7) Naming motivation is stratum specific. (8) It is possible to relate the formation of hypocoristic names to social strata. Frank documents all his arguments carefully and displays all his materials in lists and statistics, but since the specific names involved are relevant primarily to his test area and to German, examples would not be very helpful in the context of this review. What is remarkable about this study, and certainly worthy of imitation, is that it sensitizes us to socio-onomastic concerns and fine-tunes previously employed methods which simply listed and statistically recorded the occurrence of given names in a certain area, time, or document without any reference to their social distribution. Socio- and psycho-onomastic considerations, as this monograph demonstrates, are beginning to demand more and more of the name scholar's attention.

In contrast to Rainer Wimmer's attempt at establishing universals regarding the concept of the proper name, Edeltraud Dobnig-Jülch in her *Pragmatik der Eigennamen* (Pragmatics of Proper Names)⁷ tries to build a theoretical framework on a very practical and limited foundation—the naming of animals kept or owned for the purposes of breeding, especially horses and dachshunds. Her restriction in this respect is deliberate insofar as it is one of the aims of her investigation to demonstrate that a consistently pragmatic base will achieve more in the description of name usage than any other position. One of the advantages of concentrating on name usage rather than on name giving—on recognition, therefore, rather than on identification—is that such an approach opens up the possibility of freeing the *onomastic* treatment of names of its pervasive preoccupation

⁷ Edeltraud Dobnig-Jülch, *Pragmatik der Eigennamen: Untersuchungen zur Theorie und Praxis der Kommunikation mit Eigennamen, besonders von Zucht-tieren*. Reihe Germanistische Linguistik 9 (Tübingen: Max Miemeyer, 1977).

with the contrast between name and appellative although, as was evident in Wimmer's treatise, the thorough exploration of this dichotomy can be highly beneficial to the goals of *linguistic* description. Usage-oriented onomastics also points up some of the inadequacies of the grammatical models developed by transformational and especially generative grammarians while at the same time highlighting the notion of onomastic competence as rooted or embedded in social acts of communication. It is this social dimension which also shapes the structure of expectations, often of an institutionalized kind, with regard to the choices and products of the naming process. The most fruitful outcome of the "pragmalinguistic" approach, as applied by Dobnig-Jülch, is the salutary reminder that we neglect the socio-onomastic aspects of the phenomenon name to our peril and, more specifically, that all texts are communication-oriented social acts of their originators.

Taking as her basic corpus of evidence the names of bloodstock animals, particularly horses and dachshunds, and the texts in which they occur, Dobnig-Jülch comes to the conclusion that "breeders give pedigree animals names in a different sense than 'normal' namers give names to animals: they act as role bearers...and give names primarily as a sign of distinction which makes a proof of pedigree status unnecessary, and only secondarily as communicative identity markers....It is probable that, in the naming process, they cultivate an image which is, however, different from the one bestowed on them by non-members of the group" (p. 189). The author herself expresses her awareness of her procedures "violating the institutionalized expectations of linguistic research and description" (p. 191), but far from wishing to exclude such "exotic" concerns from linguistics she proposes that linguists should face the risks involved in an expansion of their rather narrow pursuits, to the inclusion of the investigation of corpora like the one examined in her monograph and of the theoretical implications they suggest. May I add, in this context, that there would be no harm in onomastic theorists extending their own enquiries in similar "risky" directions. The naming and names of horses and dogs are certainly refreshing alternatives to the usual, but oh, so repetitive, variations of noun phrases or speculations regarding the definite article.

Hartwig Kalverkämper, too, deals with the *Textlinguistik der Eigennamen*,⁸ i.e. the text linguistic aspects of proper names, but

⁸ Hartwig Kalverkämper, *Textlinguistik der Eigennamen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978).

his orientation is very different, and it is not irrelevant that the dissertation on which this monograph is based originally bore the title *Eigennamen und Kontext* (Proper Names and Context).⁹ *Text* and *context*, though not completely interchangeable or synonymous, obviously approximate each other in this approach; thus text, in an enlarging semantic shift, partially embraces context without losing its own primary meaning. Recognizing the extraordinarily multi-faceted role which names play in human lives, but nevertheless regarding onomastics as a sub-discipline of linguistics, Kalverkämper marvels at the fact "that a small lexical category legitimizes an engaged, quite independent and expansive discipline" (pp. 12-13). At the same time, he points out that this discipline has not yet produced a linguistically valid systematic name theory which describes and defines the status of names in the lexical system. As a possible way out of this dilemma, he therefore attempts an essentially interdisciplinary approach which, with linguistics as its starting point, also makes excursions into neighboring fields such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and law. His chief mentor in this procedure is Roman Jakobson and his "texts" are mainly drawn from predominantly French children's literature, while utilizing German for his contrastive analyses. Even more than for the preceding works, it is impossible in this brief survey to do anything like justice to the great sweep of Kalverkämper's investigation, on the one hand, or to his closely argued individual sections, on the other. It is, therefore, probably a little unfair to single out from the impressive range of his probings a topic on which this reviewer disagrees with the author's conclusions, largely, it seems because the restricted, almost blinkered view of names as *linguistic* signs in *lexical* systems leads to impasses which may be avoided if names are primarily seen as *communicative* signs in an *onomastic* system. Thus, Kalverkämper concludes categorically that in chains such as German *Ludwig* - French *Louis* - English *Lewis* - Dutch *Lowik* - Hungarian *Lajos*, or *Deutschland* - *Allemagne* - *Germany*, it is improper to speak of "translations" from one language into another; he prefers to perceive them instead as substitutions through equivalents in the other language (p. 87). On a purely lexical level this position may well be arguable but when one considers the names in question as items participating in onomastica rather than lexica there is no reason why one

⁹ Hartwig Kalverkämper, *Eigennamen und Kontext*. Ph.D. Dissertation Bielefeld, 1976.

should not regard them as onomastic translations, especially since Kalverkämper, too, consonant with such scholars as Fleischer, Eichler, and Wimmer, emphasizes, for example, the existence of special onomastic morphemes which allow us to speak of onomastic derivation in contrast to lexical derivation (p. 282). Otherwise, his insistence on textual perspectives and the importance of contextual considerations opens many new avenues of thought which allow us to look at some of the established views and scholarly creeds more critically and in accordance with more rigorous standards. This new rigor, for instance, detects several weaknesses in Gardiner's famous definition of a proper name. Kalverkämper's own, textually-oriented attempt at a definition has several advantages in its cautious but by no means vague formulation, always bearing in mind his basic assumptions: "A linguistic sign is a proprium," he says, "i.e. undertakes the communicative function of a proper name, when it is intended as such with certainty (listener perspective)" (p. 386). His observation that names are particularly sensitive to context is also a very helpful contribution to the honing of an onomastic theory.

The remaining four books are even more than Kalverkämper's monograph concerned with literary, especially dramatic and narrative, texts. Henning Thies examines the function of personal names in English, American and German plays;¹⁰ Hendrik Birus investigates the meaning of names in Gottfried Ephraim Lessing's eighteenth-century play "Nathan der Weise;"¹¹ Dieter Lamping devotes a monograph to "The Name in Literary Narratives;"¹² and Gundula Hubrich-Messow reviews names in Schleswig-Holstein folktales.¹³ The current boom in literary onomastics is obviously not limited to this

¹⁰ Henning Thies, *Namen im Kontext von Dramen: Studien zur Funktion von Personennamen im englischen, amerikanischen und deutschen Drama*. Sprache und Literatur-Regensburger Arbeiten zur Anglistik und Amerikanistik 13 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978).

¹¹ Hendrik Birus, *Poetische Namengebung: Zur Bedeutung der Namengebung in Lessings "Nathan der Weise."* Palaestra 270 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

¹² Dieter Lamping, *Der Name in der Erzählung: Zur Poetik des Eigennamens*. Wuppertaler Schriftenreihe Literatur 21 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983).

¹³ Gundula Hubrich-Messow, *Personennamen in schleswig-holsteinischen Volksmärchen (AT 300-AT 960)*. Kieler Beiträge zur deutschen Sprachgeschichte 4 (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz, 1981).

country. What all four works, despite their seemingly incongruous subject matter, have in common is the desire to investigate names, beyond their linguistic function of identification and their social role of individuation, not singly and purely etymologically but as actual nomenclatures in actual texts, and ultimately even to transcend these single texts and reach out for conclusions of more general validity. The world of fiction, expressed through linguistic structures, provides them vicariously with reflections of the world at large in which we live and of its utterances, though the key concept for whose clarification they all strive appears to be that of *Poetische Namengebung*—the creative, imaginative, yet so real naming of places or persons in fictive contexts. They conceive the lack of, as Thies puts it, “a theory of literary onomastics,...a poetics of literary naming,” (p. 1), and proceed to do something about that lack. This is a far cry and a welcome step forward from the many papers entitled “Names in A’s novel X” or in “B’s play Y” or in “C’s biography of Z,” to which we have become so accustomed. It is, however, also good to see that the quest for theory and the demand for systematic overviews never lose sight of the need for such individual studies. Thies, for example, restricts himself to plays written in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and having as their common theme the social role of women, thus enhancing rather than diminishing his search for generalizations regarding the function of personal names in dramatic texts, with special emphasis on the context of dramatic performance. These functions are found to include, in addition to the customary identification, characterization, indication of the relationship between characters, thematic symbolism, allusions, expressiveness, forms of exposition, tension between the identity of the actor and the role of the dramatic character, dramatization of the unconscious, and so on (pps. 356-361). Within the range of allusions there are several which refer to other literary works and Thies’ treatment of these is a first hint at what seems to this reviewer to be a promising new subfield of literary onomastics—onomastic intertextuality.

Hendrik Birus’ study of the meaning of names in Lessing’s famous drama “Nathan der Weise” is intended “to uncover a hidden stratum of this late work which appears to be completely transparent” (p. 194). The tripartite structure of his study allows him to present first a thoroughly competent and illuminating exposition of that ubiquitous problem of “the meaning of proper names,” then to compile “all of Lessing’s theoretical remarks on the problem of names and their etymology” and to give an account of “the finely structured spectrum of

(his) practice of nomenclature," and finally to pursue a detailed investigation of the applied usage of names, especially those of oriental origin, in the drama itself. This is a splendid piece of work which might well serve as a model for all those attempting similar studies, for here we have a felicitous integration of rigorous attention to onomastic detail, penetrating insights into the embedding text and a full understanding of the cultural, historical, philosophical, literary, theological context in which both names and their texts have their being. Admirable!

Dieter Lamping's objective is to attempt an answer to the question: "What is, generally speaking, the achievement of a name in (literary) narrative?" (p. 123). Basing his findings on German, English, and French literature of the last two centuries, he demonstrates that names in narratives are multifunctional and that their potential repertoire of functions includes identification, illusionment, characterization, accentuation, constellation, perspectivation, aestheticization and mythification. *All* stories are capable of displaying *all* these onomastic functions, quite independent of their plots or themes, but do not necessarily do so. Only identification, illusionment, and mythification are essential and automatically implied, and Lamping agrees with Tynjanov that there is no meaningless or insignificant name in an artful literary work. Onomastic multifunction is paralleled by onomastic multivalence, and the various qualities and properties of names are potentially realizable at all times. Lamping's major conclusion is that the artistic value of a name increases according to the number of functions and qualities it is able to integrate into a unit. Using a musical metaphor, he calls the ideal situation the "polyphonic harmony of all its properties."

Since, in contrast, stories in oral tradition provide very different contexts for the embedding of names, it is not surprising that Gundula Hubrich-Messow in her study of *Personennamen in schleswig-holsteinischen Volksmärchen* (Personal Names in Schleswig-Holstein Folktales) is less concerned with linguistic matters than with the name as magic, taboo or power, and consequently with the role that such phenomena as naming, keeping names unspoken, pseudonyms, name deception, and so on, play in Tale Types AT 300-960, i.e. in the so-called "ordinary" folktales. Her statistics are revealing and, in some respects, even astonishing, for in just under a quarter of the types she examined no personal names occur, in the other types only half of all the variants contain names, and more than half the tales do not contain any names at all. Her results should be grist to the mill of

those who find the difference between proper name and appellative, or name and word, to be one of gradation rather than absolute contrast, especially with regard to such functions as identification and individuation.

This report has not covered all the publications which might have been included. It is, however, unlikely that a more comprehensive survey would change our overall impression which is one of vigorous scholarship conducted by good minds and encouraged by name-minded dissertation directors in several universities: Heidelberg (Wimmer), Regensburg (Dobnig-Jülch, Thies), Bielefeld (Kalverkämper), Göttingen (Birus), Wuppertal (Lamping), and Kiel (Frank, Hubrich-Messow). It is also instructive to see that several series published in conjunction with the universities in question have afforded outlets for such innovative and stimulating studies, such as *Linguistische Arbeiten* (Wimmer), *Reihe Germanische Linguistik* (Dobnig-Jülch), *Sprache und Literatur* (Thies), *Palaestra* (Birus), *Wuppertaler Schriftenreihe Literatur* (Lamping), and *Kieler Beiträge zur deutschen Sprachgeschichte* (Frank, Hubrich-Messow). American scholars would probably feel greatly encouraged to produce similar monographs if similar publishing outlets were available. In the meantime, it would be much to the detriment of our discipline on this side of the Atlantic if we were to remain ignorant of these and other significant developments in Europe and of the important contributions studies like the ones reviewed have made to name studies in the last fifteen years or so, particularly in the field of literary onomastics but also in endeavors toward a more theoretical and analytical approach to the study of names. While nobody would argue for blind acceptance of their methods, objectives or conclusions, it would be equally foolish to shrug them off as difficult of access or irrelevant to the North American scene. We must know about publications such as these in order to stay abreast of the best and most recent scholarship in our discipline and to stop ourselves from slithering into parochialism. Those of us who are fortunate enough to have access to another language have a responsibility as mediators in this respect. As a result, we may also find that some of the things which we have cherished as innovative or regard as pioneering have already been done extensively and well elsewhere. At any rate, collegial courtesy within the community of (name) scholars demands that we pay due attention to what others do, interrogate their methods, arguments and findings, and appropriate for our own purposes whatever is useful and catalytic. Otherwise we will miss the boat after having first burned our bridges.