

Dangerous Christenings: the Case of Code Names of French Secret Agents in the Second World War

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I. THEORY

1.0 The concept of *arbitraire du signe* (i.e., independence of sound and meaning) has been one of the basic tenets of modern linguistics ever since it was most clearly enunciated in Ferdinand de Saussure's famous *Cours de Linguistique générale*.¹ This principle suffers but few exceptions. Among these may be listed onomatopoeias. Since such words purport to imitate sounds produced by nature (e.g., in English, animal cries such as *cock-a-doodle-doo*, *bow-wow*, *meow*, etc.)² the

¹ Payot Edition (Paris, 1969), p. 100 and *passim*. The notion that the words of a language are a matter of pure social convention is of course much older: One finds it in Plato's *Cratylus*.

² It is well known that there is no universal agreement on the actual sounds involved. This is not due only to the different phonemic/phonetic inventories of the various languages. The subjectivity of speakers/hearers plays an equally important role. If this were not so, one would be at a loss to explain why different languages possessing many sounds in common in their phonetic inventories still manage to convey quite different sequences in corresponding onomatopoeias: contrast, for instance, French *cocorico* with English *cockadoodledoo*, or the French *meuh* [mø] with English *moo*. In the latter the consonant element is felt to be roughly the same while the vocalic timbre corresponds to a front and a back vowel respectively; such a situation might be labelled an interlingual onomatopoeic minimal pair. A related but non-onomatopoeic phenomenon is provided by a comparison of human cries of pain: these are spelled *ouch*, *aïe* and *au* in English, French, and German respectively; as for Spanish *abi*, it is dissyllabic, and this stands in contrast with the roughly identical phonological sequence in French, [áj], where it is monosyllabic, i.e. a diphthong, etc. Thus while pain may be universally the same when felt, its vocal expression seems very much to be a linguistically conditioned reflex, a cultural channelling of instinct.

arbitrary phonological element of such lexical items is, of necessity, reduced to a minimum in order to maximize the allusive, subjective qualities of the sounds involved in the production of these lexemes.

What is clear is that any linguistic system known today, or reconstructed from the past by accepted techniques of historical linguistics, is characterized by well-nigh complete synchronic phonological *randomness* in the sequential makeup of its lexical items.³ Onomatopoeic items represent an extremely small proportion of the total lexical corpus of a given language, and while they should not be ignored, they provide the proverbial exception that confirms the rule. Whatever else may be said of such marginal linguistic data, they certainly cannot be described as harmful, or at least no more so than the inconsiderate use of *any* lexeme in a given social situation. We may therefore speak of them as cases of harmless reduction of the arbitrary element.

1.1 There are also onomastic instances reminiscent of the situation just described. Anthroponyms and toponyms obviously share the fate of *any* lexical item in a given corpus in that their *phonological sequence* is just as arbitrary with regard to their semantic referents; they share that fate even to the extent that some onomatopoeia-motivated reduction in arbitrariness may affect some of them⁴ though the overwhelming majority will remain immune. It is not, therefore, at that level (the phonological) that the specificity of onomastic, mostly

³ An essential distinction must be made here. There is no absolute randomness, in other words no pure chance, in sequences of phonemes constituting lexical items in any language, though there is a statistical distribution reflecting *in part* the laws of chance in language considered in the mass, i.e., in large samples of discourse (*parole*). While there is a substantial element of choice, i.e., determinism by a speaker or writer, in discourse and style, such freedom of choice, however great it would seem to us intuitively, runs into the stochastic element just mentioned which limits it *ipso facto*. But since, in this paper, we are dealing with individual onomastic items, normal limitations on randomness can be disregarded, and the question envisaged from the point of view of deliberate choice, at least *a priori*. In other words we are only concerned with practical randomness as applicable to individual words, in which de Saussure's principle of *arbitraire du signe* applies well-nigh fully, statistically speaking, with the exceptions noted above at the onomatopoeic level, plus of course those that form the very substance of this paper: cryptonyms. On the broader, and rather vast, general linguistic question of randomness versus determinism, see Gustav Herdan, *The Advanced Theory of Language as Choice and Chance* (Berlin-Heidelberg-New York, 1966).

⁴ Thus some nicknames may well draw their inspiration from the onomatopoeic effect involved, usually with pejorative intent. One may also adduce the example of the South Sudanese group of tribes known as Azande, but also known as Niam-Niam, the latter designation imitating the sound of mastication.

anthroponymic,⁵ instances of reduction of arbitrariness lies. It lies rather in the very semantic function of the onomastic datum within the corpus of a given language. In other words, while the purely linguistic arbitrariness of names can generally be taken for granted, it will be hereinafter seen that such is not necessarily the case with what might properly be called onomastic arbitrariness.

It is well known that, historically, the original attribution of names to people (whether individuals or, later, families) was not semantically arbitrary, but reflected some physical feature, quality, or defect, or else the social status or activity of the recipient within the community, any of which could have provided the obvious motive for the designation.⁶ But arbitrariness progressively set in as the intrinsic meaning of, say, a first name (as opposed to the human referent himself) ceased to be commonly understood due to plain diachronic linguistic change. Thus, a name may be the same onomastically through a given span of time, and applied to a large number of individuals, while nevertheless undergoing changes linguistically as the phonological carrier wave, as it were, of the linguistic system involved changes in its own structure. Comprehension of the intrinsic semantics of the name is bound to be obscured after a while even while the name remains onomastically, that is functionally, fully operational.⁷ By such a time the name has become but a reflex of its etymon—name. We have here, as it were, a process of diachronically increasing intrinsic semantic entropy, on one

⁵There are of course numerous instances in world literature of toponomastic inventions. Some of these exhibit a reduction of onomastic arbitrariness, for instance, when the author tries to have his created place name evoke genuine local flavor even though it is fictitious. Thus Marcel Proust's **Balbec* evokes a seaside resort in Normandy since the morpheme-suffix *-bec* is rather typical of real Norman toponymy (e.g., *Caudebec*). (Attempts by some literary critics to see in this toponym an allusion to the famous Lebanese *Baalbek* are rather farfetched.)

⁶See, *inter alia*, article entitled "Name (in Linguistics)," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1961 Ed., Vol. 16, p. 63 ff.

⁷After a while bestowal of names to the newborn either follows automatically the sociocultural habits of each society (such habits may be negative as well as positive, e.g., Jewish taboos on the choice of first names, which must not be the same as that of a grandparent, for instance; or else the French Civil Code's general prohibition of attribution of first names not officially listed or otherwise approved, cf. *Instruction générale sur l'Etat Civil (Ministère de la Justice)*, 276-282). Otherwise, where completely free choice was, or is, available, it follows euphonic, i.e., esthetic, or fashionable reasons appealing to the parents, sometimes to the offsprings' later displeasure when they become conscious of the social status of their names among the then current fads, or when a name runs counter to the individual's personal acoustic esthetics.

hand, but concurrent conservation of the functional semantics of the name, on the other. Such dual semantics, quite characteristic of names when considered diachronically, involves either an increase of arbitrariness, or the maintaining thereof, but no reduction. Such a reduction would be assimilable to "negative entropy," to borrow Schrödinger's famous phrase from the realm of physics,⁸ applicable metaphorically to the theory of information, and in the case of biosystems more than metaphorically.

In the case of family names such onomastic arbitrariness is culturally hereditary and automatically transmitted in most Western societies⁹ unless sheer coincidence occasionally, and briefly, destroys it,¹⁰ often with comical results. But even these are relatively harmless.

1.2 There are, however, instances of deliberate attempts to increase the onomastic arbitrariness of anthroponyms. This is contrary to their usual historical function since the proper name is supposed to individualize and pinpoint his or her bearers for the sake of easy social identification. The very fact that family names exist and are socio-culturally hereditary in the West, that it takes collective approval in the form of

⁸The phrase is quoted and indeed used in a biological as well as a theory of information context, by Lila L. Gatlin, "Evolutionary indices," in *Proceedings of the Sixth Berkeley Symposium on Mathematical Statistics and Probability*, Vol. V, 1971, p. 277. The author refers to Erwin Schrödinger's *What is Life?* (Cambridge, 1945).

⁹A notable exception exists in Iceland, which follows a pattern similar to that of the ancient Hebrews, resulting in a different "family" name for each generation (actually consisting only of first names with the indication *-son* or *-dottir*). This pattern of naming is only broken artificially in the issuance of passports for foreign travel by Icelanders, as the "family names" of married couples and their children are supposed to be identical for consumption abroad, where the intricacies of the Icelandic pattern are generally unknown.

¹⁰E.g., a man named Smith who really chooses to become a blacksmith by profession (an unlikely but not impossible event) thus unwittingly reviving in modern times the very reason why a distant ancestor of his was given the nickname which started the family name in the first place. The French seem particularly sensitive to such coincidences, the more comical of which are duly listed each week in the satirical Parisian weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* after being culled from the national press, in a feature entitled "Comme son nom l'indique."

court or administrative decisions to change them,¹¹ that such changes, albeit legal, are often the subject of social sarcasm,¹² all point to societal, family, and individual wishes to minimize onomastic arbitrariness nowadays, which is the exact opposite of the original purpose of naming. The sheer commonness, or high frequency of occurrence of a family name (e.g., in various societies Smith, Durand, Gómez, Schultz, Cohen, etc.) increases arbitrariness by sheer dilution or diffusion, since it thereby reduces individuality and the supposedly sought-after precise identification.¹³ Deliberate attempts at increasing onomastic

¹¹E.g., in France, attempts at legally changing even one single letter of one's last name in order to harmonize it with the orthographical habits of the national language, even if this can be done without changing the name's original phonology at the locus of the orthographical change, represent a staggering administrative endeavor. Random unfairness, due to historical graphemic institutionalization quirks, exists: Thus a Pole living in France will experience the difficulties described because Polish uses the Latin alphabet, as does French, but a Russian whose papers show his name in Cyrillic characters will merely require a transliteration or adaptation by French officials who will thus automatically harmonize it with French spelling sequences to the extent possible. The Pole, just because France and Poland share a common alphabet and no change whatsoever can thus be brought administratively to the spelling of his name, will forever (unless he undertakes court action) have to suffer social incomprehension and mockery because of such sequences as *-sz-*, *-ejn-*, etc. If his name is, say, Einstein, the enforced Polonization after the First World War changed this to *Ajnsztejn*, a most un-French graphemic sequence, whose French phonetic counterpart is unpronounceable (cf. the Comtesse de Ségur's pseudo-Polish name for one of her characters, *Cozrgbřlewski*, in the children's novel *Les deux nigauds* (ca. 1865), a manifest exaggeration of Polish graphemic reality well calculated to tickle the funny bones of her young French readers).

¹²E.g., the snide remarks sometimes heard in America, directed at Jews who have names sounding a bit too Anglo-Saxon to the ears of an anti-Semite, such as: "When did you change your name?" Incidentally, the same racist is not likely to react in a similar way when confronted with very Anglo-Saxon, "Old American" names such as Washington or Lincoln if the latter are borne by black people. A kind of double standard applies to this situation: blacks have a right to bear Anglo-Saxon names, Jews do not, in this view. Such onomastic racial discrimination should be studied.

¹³In terms of the theory of information, it might be stated that the high frequency of occurrence reduces informational content in the name on an onomastically functional semantic plane, irrespective of the now cryptic intrinsic meaning (which was plain when the name was bestowed for the first time) or even of a still obvious meaning, such as Smith. Bearers of highly frequent last names would seem to harbor contradictory feelings: On the one hand, it is nice to be very much part of the herd and not stand out; on the other hand, they feel robbed of a degree of individuality, to say nothing of traditional mistrust in hotels when a couple registers as Smith. At any rate, patrilineal onomastic continuity, construed as an assurance of biological purity, is deemed more important than exalting individuality.

arbitrariness would therefore be expected to focus on low-frequency choices so as to highlight individualism (this is indeed often the case with literary or journalistic pseudonyms) while maintaining an aura of mystery or even secrecy, the latter not being felt as essential in normal times in a normal society;¹⁴ paradoxically secrecy could also be achieved by adopting deliberately a very common last name (cf. the proverbial Smith couple registering in a motel in less permissive times and places) if no highlighting of individuality is sought.

II. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

2.0 Deliberate attempts at increasing onomastic arbitrariness would *a fortiori* be expected in an area of endeavor where identification or non-identification of the individuals involved might quite literally become a matter of life or death. Paramount in such a category would be the attribution of code names, or cover names, to secret agents operating in wartime for an intelligence service in the field, behind enemy lines; scarcely less important is the assignment of code or cover names to key figures of espionage or counter-espionage directing the agents from various headquarters, whether the latter be located in a safe or unsafe area. Last, the operations or projects themselves receive code names which it is hoped will give the enemy no inkling as to their nature (e.g., Operation Overlord, the Manhattan Project, etc.)

The Second World War was not unique in this respect, but it provides us with relatively numerous data illustrating that in most, but by no means all, instances agents and their organizations have indeed taken pains to maximize onomastic arbitrariness so as to preclude identification by the enemy (or by untutored and thus dangerous friends, however well-meaning, for that matter).

In addition, the Second World War in Europe provides the onomastician with a sorry but rich record involving an entire ethnic group often forced to resort to false names, and to do so successfully if pos-

¹⁴ Among such French pseudonyms, or *noms de plume*, one may list André Maurois, whose real name was Herzog; Voltaire, an anagram of Arouet le Jeune; and the recent case of the *secret* pseudonym Ajar used by the late writer Romain Gary in an unusual hoax.

sible, just in order to try to save their lives.¹⁵ In this article, however, we shall be concerned only with the former phenomenon, more specifically as regards France.

2.1 Anyone studying the history of French Resistance to Nazi occupation will be struck (if he has an onomastician's bent) by the fact that in a substantial number of instances, too numerous for comfort, the choice of *noms de guerre*, or code names, by French agents or members of the various underground organizations, far from being arrived at on rather obvious grounds of security on a basis of 100% arbitrariness (in other words, cover names bearing no possible connection or allusion, however seemingly remote, to the real names) was, quite to the contrary, made on the basis of personal preferences, based in turn on association of ideas. This would result in code names (for which the designation *cryptonyms*, as opposed to mere pseudonyms, is appropriate)¹⁶ sometimes so revealing, so transparent, as to suggest incredible naiveté concerning French perception of the analytical and deductive powers of their arch-enemy, the *Sicherheitsdienst* (S.D.) of the S.S., the *Abwehr* (Military Intelligence), or other Nazi or Vichy-French security services. Onomastic arbitrariness was unwittingly so reduced as to constitute a very real danger.

This phenomenon was noticed by at least one man in a position to know and do something about it, but his professional opinion seems

¹⁵In 1943, when this writer was 10 years old, he and his family, a total of four persons, managed to escape from Nazi-occupied France to neutral Switzerland, using false identity papers supplied by the French underground. On these papers the real name, too obviously "Jewish" in France, was replaced by the far more common and neutral Blanc. The bogus identity papers and the pseudo-last name survived both Wehrmacht and Vichy police scrutiny at the Annemasse (Savoy) border railroad station. Even more miraculous, the author's entire family of pseudo-Blancs similarly overcame that potentially deadly hurdle. Other factors being considered as equal, it would seem that having increased the *arbitraire du signe* by diffusion saved the day. The most brazen such attempt known to this writer is that of a French Jewish writer who adopted the name Michel Chrestien, which has remained his *nom de plume* since the war. (Private information from conversation with the author of *Cber Monsieur Moi*.) The then false name did not, in fact, prevent arrest and deportation, but Chrestien escaped in transit. Overall, the process was only stochastically successful, as too many other factors were involved.

¹⁶Sometimes also referred to in English-speaking secret services as "funny names" (see Miles Copeland, *The real spy world* (London, 1974), p. 301; or "field names" (see M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France* (London, 1966), p. 465). The term *cryptonym* seems current in CIA parlance, according to Don Ethan Miller, *The Book of Jargon* (New York, 1981), p. 217.

to have been generally ignored at the time. This was Colonel Brouillard of the French Army, who has since gained notoriety in France as a popular writer of spy fiction, under the *nom de plume* of Pierre Nord (in itself a revealing pseudonym),¹⁷ but who during the Second World War had been the head of a French intelligence unit. Pierre Nord has voiced his onomastic misgivings on this subject in some of his novels, in which fiction is often interwoven with wartime historical reminiscence. Two such passages will now be quoted, illustrating the colonel's preoccupation with what he felt to be instances of breach of security [translation supplied in footnotes]:

“J’intercale ici une note pour les lecteurs curieux. J’étais encore jeune dans le métier et j’avais commis l’erreur fréquente dans le choix des pseudonymes ou des formules conventionnelles: j’avais obéi à une assimilation d’idées, qu’un Allemand intuitif pouvait reconstruire, ce qui l’aurait conduit à me soupçonner, moi...”¹⁸

“—Le capitaine Lebleu, dit l’officier de liaison, m’a communiqué une curieuse théorie qu’il a construite à partir des faits que vous venez d’apprendre, et d’une observation préliminaire, que voici. Lebleu prétend que les neuf dixièmes des pseudonymes sont parlants, transparents, —qu’ils trahissent non seulement la personnalité, mais les intentions de ceux qui les ont choisis. Je ne le croyais pas. J’ai engagé un pari...Je l’ai perdu. A partir de la liste des pseudonymes que les officiers des F.F.L. du Moyen-Orient ont pris pour éviter des représailles à leurs parents en France, Lebleu, en trois heures, a trouvé huit dixièmes des noms réels....L’association d’idées à partir de votre patro-

¹⁷ Nord (“North”) was born in the far north of France, indeed in the Département du Nord. The pseudonym is thus doubly revealing. But his local patriotism in choosing it did not put him in any danger.

¹⁸ Pierre Nord, *Confession d’un agent double* (Paris, 1958), p. 37. Translation: “At this point I insert a note for curious readers. I was still new at the trade and I had made a common error in the choice of false names or covert phraseology: I had yielded to an association of ideas, one which an intuitive German was liable to reconstruct, which might have led him to suspect *me*...” [Translation mine.] The fictional character is portrayed as a *germaniste*, i.e., a specialist of German language and literature, and the code sentence was, in French of course, “On a lu autre chose avant le festin,” which to a cultured German is an obvious translation of Schiller’s “Vor Tisch, las man anders,” thus providing a valuable clue to the profession of the secret French agent. This example using a code sentence is but another aspect of the same phenomenon displayed by transparent anthroponyms used as cryptonyms. To a lesser degree, this applies to contrived phrases as well.

nyme, ou de vos occupations du moment, est irrésistible.”¹⁹

The fictional captain displaying such insight into the psycho-linguistic phenomenon involved did in fact follow his own advice, but even so did not achieve 100% randomness, and therefore 100% arbitrariness, which alone would have provided maximum security. *Lebleu* can be construed by any native French speaker as an item of military slang, *le bleu* (literally and ostensibly “the blue one”), meaning “the recruit.” Since *Lebleu* was a captain rather than a recruit, any would-be counter-espionage specialist would have been thrown off the scent as far as rank was concerned, but not as far as the fact that the agent was a military man, rather than a civilian, was concerned. Why give even that much away when one is trying to conceal one’s identity? And thus did the author, Colonel Brouillard, *alias* Pierre Nord, not fully manage to solve the problem he made others aware of.

III. ACTUAL HISTORICAL PRACTICE

3.0 Leaving now the domain of fiction for that of historical fact, we shall give examples of such dangerous code names with revealing semantic contents, as actually used by French secret agents during the Second World War.²⁰

After analysis of their structure or origin, the code names involved

¹⁹Pierre Nord, *Chasse couplée au Caire* (Paris, 1962), pp. 15-16. Translation: “—Captain *Lebleu*, said the liaison officer, has conveyed to me a curious theory which he has built up from the facts you have just learned, plus a preliminary observation, which I will now present. *Lebleu* affirms that nine-tenths of all false names are revealing, transparent,—that they betray not only the personality but also the intentions of those who have chosen them. I did not believe this. I made a wager with him...I lost. Starting with the list of false names which officers of the F.F.L. [i.e., *Forces Françaises Libres*, or Free French Forces] of the Middle East have adopted in order to avoid reprisals against their relatives in France, *Lebleu*, within three hours, found eight-tenths of the real names....Association of ideas based on one’s family name or one’s occupation at the moment is something irresistible.” [Translation mine.] (Cf. note 31 and appropriate portion of text, *infra*.)

²⁰The basic source is Henri Noguères *et al.*, *Histoire de la Résistance en France*, in 5 volumes (Vol. I, Paris, 1967). Each volume has a good index and other references to cryptonyms are found *passim*. Vol. IV, the last available to this researcher, was published in 1976.

have been divided into defined classes; each entry includes the cryptonym itself, the corresponding real name of the secret agent for comparison, and an explanation of the latter's vulnerability through the use of the ill-chosen cryptonym.

Fifty-four such cryptonyms have been identified.

CLASS I: *Obvious and easy semantic associations: the most dangerous of cryptonyms*

1. Cryptonym—henceforth abbreviated to C: *Ite*

Real name—henceforth placed in parentheses after cryptonym: (Francis Missa)

Explanation—henceforth abbreviated to E: The Catholic Mass ceremony used to end with the Latin words *Ite, missa est*. Any Nazi or Vichy investigator raised as a Catholic could make the connection between *Ite* and *Missa*.

2. *Lapostole* (Francis Missa). E: *Lapostole* is a thin etymological disguise for *l'Apôtre*, "the Apostle," and quite readily linked with kindred words such as *apostolat*, *apostolique*. For the same resister to have chosen two cover names with such obvious ecclesiastical associations when his real name was Missa (see No. 1 above) is highly imprudent. The fact that he was far from being a practicing Catholic (he was a lay Socialist, cf. Noguères, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 227) might have given him some protection had he chosen some less obvious anthropo-cryptonymic connections even while retaining his fondness for ecclesiastical allusions, whether such fondness was real or ironic.

3. C: *La prune* (Capitaine de Peich). E: Peich is pronounced [pɛʃ] in French, a homonym of *pêche* "peach." *La prune* = *la prune* "the plum," the name of another fruit. Such a potential association should have been avoided.

4. C: *Lavoisier* (Berthelot). E: The cryptonym *Lavoisier* is the name of an illustrious 18th-century French chemist, which thus replaces the name of an equally illustrious 19th-century French chemist. A fortuitous encounter between the cryptonym and the real name would bare the connection to anyone with even a smattering of chemical knowledge, such as was given in every French *lycée*.

5. C: *Joie* (Lieutenant Lheureux). E: Lheureux = *L'heureux*, i.e., "the happy one." Any comment on this name's semantic connection with the cryptonym *Joie* ("joy") is superfluous.

6. C: *Ovide* (Max Juvéval). E: An obvious replacement of the name of one Latin author by another. A rather dangerous association at a time when, unlike today, classical culture was still so widespread in France. (Cf. No. 52 *infra*.)

7. C: *Greffier* (Robert Bloc). E: *Greffier* means "court recorder." *Bloc* contains two unfortunately easy mental associations with that profession: 1) In colloquial French, *bloc* is an ellipsis of *bloc-notes* "note pad," on which the man may be writing; 2) in French slang, *bloc* also means "prison." It would be interesting to know the real occupation of agent *Greffier*, but this is unavailable.

8. C: *Duc* (André Dauphin). E: A rather obvious connection between a duke and the heir to the throne ("dauphin," i.e., Crown Prince) under the French monarchy.

9. C. *Page* (Commandant Folliot). E: Folliot is a homonym of *folio*, which in book publishing parlance is synonymous with “page,” a fact well known to any individual with a modicum of culture.
10. C: *Pair* (Alain Grout de Beaufort). E: *Pair* (“Peer”) evokes the monarchic notion of *Pair de France*, one step away from such an obviously aristocratic real name as Grout de Beaufort.
11. C: *Pigeon* (André Rossignol). E: One kind of bird replaced by another (*rossignol* means “nightingale”).
12. C: *Arquebuse* (Capitaine Dewawrin, alias Colonel Passy). E: *Arquebuse* means an early type of firearm; a needless association with the military nature of the colonel’s work, all the more dangerous since he was the head of the Gaullist resistance establishment in London.
13. C: *Marquis* (Marcel Baron). E: Obvious similarity between “marquess” and “baron,” both titles of nobility. This agent took the opportunity to semantically “promote” himself (cf. note 30).
14. C: *Châteauvieux* (Honoré Estienne d’Orves). E. Cryptonym meaning “old castle,” a suggestive image association with an aristocratic name.
15. C: *Gaspard, Coligny* (Jean Tillier). E: The two *separate* cryptonyms point to the 16th century French Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, a well-known figure of the Wars of Religion. A naval connection, if not a Protestant one, is thus *a priori* suggested. Research reveals that not only was Tillier a former executive of the French Line in New York (Noguères, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 283) but that he was in charge of processing naval information for the Resistance. *Coligny* alone might have provided a clue to his identity and was thus quite dangerous unto itself; *Gaspard* alone was more innocuous, unless an investigator were to determine that they were one and the same person by mental association between the first and last names of the historical admiral. A close connection between two or more separate cryptonyms borne by the same agent is to be avoided (cf. No. 1 and 2 *supra*).
16. C: *Espadon* (Jean Fleuret). E: *Espadon* means both “two-handed sword” and “swordfish.” The old French root *esp-*, later *épée* “sword,” is also fairly obvious. All this is semantically uncomfortably close to the real name, Fleuret, whose meaning is “fencing sword, foil.”
17. C: *Espadon junior* (Marc Fleuret). E: Son of above. Kinship needlessly revealed by the word *junior*, in addition to clues provided by *Espadon*, thus compounding jeopardy for both men.

CLASS II: *Transparent allusion to the area of origin or of operations of the agents, or to their citizenship if not French*

18. C: *Kijakowski* (Bitner). E: A Polish diplomat whose mission was to create agitation among *immigré* Polish workers in northern France. The choice of *Kijakowski* needlessly pinpointed his Polish nationality.
19. C: *Ptak* (Commandant Slowikowski). E: *Ptak* means “bird” in Polish, a needless pinpointing of Polish nationality. In addition, there is the possibility that the man belonged to the Polish Air Force (this is hinted by association, but not specifically stated, in Noguères, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 73) just like his associate *Armand*, in which case the symbolism of “Polish bird” is imprudently transparent. But “bird” may also refer to the man’s rank in the

Army, if such an insignia was used by Polish officers. In any case, self-pointing to a Pole was in and of itself a breach of security.

20. C: *Jean l'Albanais* (Jean X, real last name unavailable). E: Really was Albanian. Added to the fact that he used his real first name, this constitutes real vulnerability, especially as Albanians were not numerous in France and a search in the files of the *Préfecture de Police's* Foreigners Section might be expected to yield a rather small and thus readily usable list of suspects.

21. C: *Navarre* (Name of network directed by Loustaunau-Lacau, his real name). E: The real name of the Director is dialectologically Bearnese and can thus easily be associated with former name of province Navarre, now Bearn on the French side of the Pyrenees.

22. C: *Léon des Landes* (Dusarrat, first name not available). E: Operated at Dax, on the southern edge of the Landes region. There is also a village called Léon in that very region of the French Southwest, some 20 miles northwest of Dax. Thus the cryptonym twice points to the area of operations.

CLASS III: *Conservation, whether explicit or implicit, of the real first name in conjunction with cryptonymic last name, thus providing only partial cover names*

23. C: *Defoe* (Daniel Deligant). E: Noguères (*op. cit.*, Vol 1, p. 432) comments naively: "...Daniel Deligant—qui, en raison de son prénom, prendra comme pseudonyme Defoe" ("...who, because of his first name, will adopt Defoe as a cover name..."), apparently unaware that this practice constitutes a potential breach of security. All Frenchmen, all Europeans had read *Robinson Crusoe*. Who would have failed to come up with Daniel as a conditioned reflex when seeing Defoe, and thus been brought that much closer to identifying Daniel Deligant?

24. C: *Jack* (Jacques Mansion). E: A truly minimal modification of the first name. The only saving grace is its anglicization at a time when the British *Special Operations Executive* also operated in France, but this represents little in the way of disguise.

25. C: *Jacques II* (Jacques Lejeune). E: First name in cryptonym identical with the real one. Roman numeral II, suggesting the name of a king, might, just like *junior* (meaning second generation), suggest the semantics and reconstruction of the real last name, Lejeune ("the younger"), although this is more farfetched.

26. C: *Bob* (Robert Vanier). E: To Robert corresponds the common nickname Bob in English-speaking countries. Despite the obviously French real name, such an Anglo-Saxon association was all the more unfortunate since, in addition to the Robert-Bob correspondence, one commonly known on the continent through literature, films and comics, agent Robert Vanier belonged to the Canadian Army, mostly English-speaking, despite the fact that his real name suggests that he was a French-speaking *Québécois*. A shrewd investigator could have established the link between Bob, Robert, and the Canadian Army if he had the necessary elements, and matched those with the real Vanier, whose presumed Quebec accent in French would not have escaped notice, except perhaps in the Saintonge district.

27. C: *Charlotte* (Charlotte Capietta).

28. C: *Robert* (Robert Donzelot).

29. C: *Ivan* (Yvan Dupont). E: All the more reprehensible since this agent was head of an S.O.E. network (*Diplomat*) (Noguères, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 499). The feeble substitution of the letter I for Y in the first name might have been thought to lead an investigator astray by turning his attention from a Breton spelling (Yvan) to a transliterated Russian one (Ivan). This, in turn, might turn attention to Communists, which the S.O.E. network head certainly was not. But it was still a dangerous game, if for no other reason than that names are communicated orally as well as in writing, and Yvan and Ivan are perfect homonyms.

30. C: *Jean* (Major John Hind Farmer). E: Saving grace: Jean, while the French equivalent of John, gives no inkling that an Englishman (an S.O.E. organizer) is involved. But if such a suspicion were aroused, the cryptonymic cover would have been that much thinner.

31. C: *François* (François Fossey).

32. C: *Jean-Louis* (Jean-Louis Fraval).

33. C: *Colonel Charles* (Charles Gaumondie).

34. C: *Ginette* (Ginette Letonturier).

35. C: *Marius* (Marius Guesdin).

36. C: *Marcel* (Marcel Robe).

37. C: *Hervé* (Hervé Vaujour).

CLASS IV: *Full or partial resemblance, phonetically speaking, between cover name and real name*

38. C: *Avricourt* (Henry Aubry). E: First half of cover name, i.e., *Avri-*, is phonetically too close to real name, Aubry.

39. C: *Cam-Ariel* (Marius Camolli). E: Cryptonym rather transparent if viewed in a last name-first name sequence: *Camolli-Marius* = [kamari], with only a suffix *-el* added to allay suspicion by yielding the first name Ariel.

40. C: *Dubourg* (Jacques Debû-Bridel). E: Resemblance between *Dubourg* and *Debû*.

41. C: *Denvers* (Gaston Defferre). E: Resemblance between *Denvers* and *Defferre*.

42. C: *Joly* (Pierre Julitte). E: Resemblance *Joly/Julitte*.

43. C: *Mas-Puck* (A. Massei). E: Resemblance *Massei/Mas-*.

44. C: *Ob* (W. Obremski). E: Resemblance *Ob/Obremski*, the former a mere abbreviation of the latter. Further possible association between Polish/Russian flavor of real name and existence of Russian river *Ob* in Siberia.

45. C: *Bruneau* or *Bruno* (Docteur Aron-Brunetière). E: Resemblance *Bruno/Brunetière*.

46. C: *Laurent* (Antoine Llor). E: Obvious resemblance, all the more since outside of Catalan country the last name would not be pronounced [ljora] but plain [lora], quite close to [lorã].

47. C: *Egréneuse* (Christian Allègre). E: A somewhat curious case. *Egréneuse*, an ellipsis of the expression *égréneuse de chapelet* ("female teller of beads"), evokes an unmistakable ecclesiastical atmosphere *per se*. Add to this the second half of the last name, i.e., *Allègre*, and you have the first half of the cryptonym *Egréneuse*, both phonetically and graphemically. The last name,

Allègre, in turn evokes Church liturgy (the word *allégresse* is often chanted in church), and the first name is *Christian*, with obvious religious connections. As if this were not enough, the agent was dropped in April 1944 in a place in the *département de la Marne* which had its own code name: *Harmonium*, no less! There was more than enough for an astute adversary, aided by chance juxtaposition of some of the above elements, to nab the agent (Noguères, *op. cit.*, Vol IV, p. 582) only thinly disguised by the feminine gender of his code name.

CLASS V: *Anagrammatic substitutions for the phonetics of real names*²¹

48. C: *Larva* (Capitaine Avallart). E: The last two syllables of the real name, when reversed, yield *Larva*.

49. C: *Kleber* (Beucler). E: The real name, pronounced [bøkler], is a good anagram of Kleber, but easily reconstituted if needed. And C. and R.N. rhyme, too: an additional stimulus.

CLASS VI: *Miscellaneous other cases*

50. C: *Dédé* (André Schwiter). E: *Dédé* = common French nickname for André; otherwise, belongs to Class III.

51. C: *Harold* (Commandant Eraud). E: Eraud is homonym of *héraut* "herald," which in turn suggests the first name Harold through English because of near-homonymy in French. The use of an obviously English cryptonym was thus counterindicated, for the train of thought might well work the other way, from Harold to *herald* to *héraut* to Eraud.

52. C: *Grognard* (Louis Mangin). E: Anyone in France knows that *grognard* (literally "griper") meant a soldier of Napoleon's Grand Army. The military association being thus prepared, if one further knows that Mangin was the name of a famous First World War French general, the semantic connection is traceable.

53. C: *Maxence* (Max Juvéinal). E: *Maxence* is a mere derivative of the real Max. As name of Roman emperor, it provides a further clue to Juvéinal, the name of a Latin author (cf. No. 6, *Ovide, supra*). This particular resister was apparently unable to extricate himself from Roman reminiscences.

54. C: *Le petit Mercier* (Capitaine Mercier). E: A rather childish cover name, since the last name is not at all disguised, and the agent apparently counted on the overall semantics of the spoken name only (where no initial capital would be evident), i.e. "le petit mercier" meaning "the little haberdasher," to allay suspicion.

IV. FROM HISTORICAL PRACTICE TO CONCLUSIONS

4.0 Since the cryptonymic situation and its attendant perils should be obvious to anyone, how can one explain that the French allowed such dangerous cover names to be used? There might be at least two

²¹Cf. Kim Philby's statement on Gore, note 29 *infra*, and corresponding text.

explanations:

(1) The individual agent wanted to express a preference in the choice of his or her cover name; the request was granted without regard to potential consequences, and semantic associations thus became possible. When, however, cover names were given under a different scheme (e.g., geometrical terminology such as *Losange*, *Lemniscate*, etc.) the necessary randomness, arbitrariness, and safety were more or less maintained.²² An example of good arbitrariness maintained in the choice of a cryptonym is that of Lieutenant Asher (a man destined to be instrumental in the liberation of a goodly portion of southwestern France in 1944 as head of a huge *maquis* and who became a member of the elite Gaullist order of the *Compagnons de la Libération*) who took on the totally unrelated cover name of Ravel. The latter was the name of an Alpine peak near which he spent his pre-war vacations,²³ a fact which could be known by few people and would hardly cross anyone's mind outside of this small circle; but strictly speaking this was not 100% randomness. And the fact that he kept his real first name, Serge, throughout the war certainly was not helpful (cf. our Class III). Taken in isolation, each factor was not too dangerous; taken together, a perilous picture could have emerged.

(2) The agent would be assigned, and accept, or devise himself, a cover name that was easy to remember, and those with associative overtones would be easiest to remember.

This explanation might seem farfetched, given the extremely tough training undergone by a secret agent, and it might be argued that surely remembering a cover name was a very minor thing compared to the rest of the agent's preparation for his mission. And yet actual cases show that the conditioned reflex of a lifetime's use of one's real name

²²Even so one may suspect that such terms, of which additional examples are *Hypoténuse*, *Segment*, *Circonférence*, etc., gave away the common engineering training of the network members. A shrewd investigator would start, for instance, by checking the list of *Ecole Polytechnique* or *Ecole Centrale* graduates, especially the former since it supplied officer training as well as the scientific kind.

²³Private information supplied in interview with Mrs. Ida Ravel, wife of the resister. The true name of Asher, one of the biblical tribes of Israel, was far too dangerous to keep. The Resistance name became after the war the legal family name. A somewhat jealous General de Gaulle never wasted an opportunity to call Ravel, who had promoted himself to Colonel during the war, "Lieutenant Asher," forgetting that his own rank of General had been given to him in 1940 in the dying gasps of the Third Republic as a temporary rank only.

is so strong at times as to cause one to repress and forget the cover name, even under very dangerous circumstances. There is the case, fortunately merely comical of the Israeli agent who checked in at a foreign hotel with his false passport bearing his cover name, and who by the next morning had so thoroughly forgotten his cover name that he excited suspicion while trying to retrieve his passport from the desk clerk without giving his "name." It is to be surmised that this cover name was a good one in the sense that it was truly random as compared with the man's real name; otherwise, association of ideas would have quickly reminded him of his somewhat thinner cover. While on the ludicrous side, the danger of forgetting 100% safe cryptonyms is real.

4.1. We have investigated secret agents and resisters in France during the Second World War as regards transparent cryptonyms. But the French have had no monopoly on such practices.

One may cite, for Israel, the case of a Mr. Bader ("bather" in German) who used the "cover" *Schwimmer* ("swimmer") while his sidekick named Abel used the "cover" *Cain*.²⁴ The famous Soviet spy network of the Second World War, the Red Orchestra, used such dangerous cryptonyms as *Arier* ("Aryan") for the aristocratic real German name Rudolf von Scheliha, *Arwid* for Arvid Harnack (cf. our class III), *Dora* for Rado (cf. our class V).²⁵ The disease seems well-nigh universal, but to various extents in the various societies. The British S.O.E. in France has a rather good record in this connection, especially in its names for networks,²⁶ and for most of its agents. But other British services were quite vulnerable on this score: Thus the code name *Armada* was given for spying activities in Spain; it is difficult to know whether Kim Philby,²⁷ who relates this, approved or disapproved when he wrote: "As pseudonym for correspondence with the Chief, he chose Armada—natch!" One suspects that even this master spy did not sense the dangerous connection when he wrote about another operation: "He had been educated at Eton and Oxford; he had entered

²⁴ Stewart Steven, *The Spymasters of Israel* (New York, 1971), p. 253.

²⁵ Heinz Höhne, *Codeword: Direktor* (New York, 1971), p. 253.

²⁶ *SOE in France*, *op. cit.*, see maps in back fold and *passim*.

²⁷ Kim Philby, *My silent war* (London, 1968), p. 39.

the Foreign Service in the middle '30s; he was a classical scholar of distinction to whom the codename Homer would be appropriate; Homer, in its Russian form of Gomer, was a near-anagram of Gore; ..."²⁸ (The real name of the man in question was Gore-Booth.)

It is not known how the CIA fares along these lines, though judging by the meager information supplied by the *Book of Jargon* their cryptonyms seem safe enough. One fact stands out: The locus of the transparent cryptonym phenomenon, nevertheless, remains France.

4.2 Our brief study has been historically relatively remote from our own time, for there are, for obvious reasons, no extensive data available about current practices in the various intelligence agencies. And thus it is not known whether the dangerous practices of the Second World War have been continued to this day. If they have been, to whatever extent,²⁹ it would only show that such agencies are quite conservative in some of their outlook.

Transparent cryptonyms are a potentially great danger, but also an understandable human temptation, prophetically explained by Sigmund Freud: "It is impossible to think of a number, or even of a name, of one's own free will. If one investigates the seeming voluntary forma-

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

²⁹ A spy thriller by Adam Hall, *The 9th Directive* (New York, 1966) suggests that as far as novelists at least are concerned the lesson had not yet been learned: "We had given Pangsupa that cover name [Fishmonger] because of the tank with its blood-red water." (p. 199). As for more recent historical reality, some fleeting, hence tantalizing references may be found in some publications dealing with that more recent, though still relatively old, period. Thus a Soviet English-language source (*West Berlin—The Facts*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962) lists the following cover names for French Intelligence officers which it says were operating in West Berlin in 1962, twenty years after the French resistors of the Second World War: "...Charles Lentz (b. 1918), cover name 'Carlos'...François Markert (b. 1915), cover name 'De Marquet'..." (p. 26, *op. cit.*). The former merely hispanized his first name, but the latter barely changed his real last name, just enough to make it look more authentically French, but also with an aristocratic *particule de* thrown in for good measure. These cover names thus correspond to our Classes III and IV respectively, de Marquet in particular being quite

tion, let us say, of a number of many digits, uttered in unrestrained mirth, it always proves to be strictly...determined.”³⁰

One may then, in conclusion, suggest the creation by intelligence agencies of lists of randomly selected “neutral” names, somewhat analogous to the lists of random numbers used by statisticians, as well as random assignment of these names to agents who might have the privilege of refusing them if the psychological associations should be fortuitously unpleasant; by the same token, a given random name should not be used if it turns out to be fortuitously pleasantly connected with the personality of the agent, and thus revealing to a shrewd potential enemy. The bearing of such randomized, semantically neutral cover names by secret agents might be less romantic but would be far safer.

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transparent. These two 1962 Intelligence officers had not made much progress over their 1942 resister forebears. Pierre Nord’s criticism is again vindicated. It would be most interesting to find out whether their transparent or semi-transparent cover names contributed to the identification by Soviet or East German Intelligence.

³⁰Quoted by Otto Friedrich, *Before the deluge*, (New York, 1972), at the head of Chapter IV, p. 58. And thus it can be seen that what psychologists and statisticians have known for a long time, intelligence organizations, and especially French ones, have not fully mastered.