

Notes

**Dick Boulton's Name in
"The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife"**

According to most authorities, the initial incidents of Ernest Hemingway's "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" parallel actual events which occurred during the summer of 1911. At that time Hemingway's father hired two sawyers from the Ottawa Indian village to cut up some logs which had washed up on the beach near Windemere Cottage (Baker 1969, 13-14). In a letter written soon after the story's first serial publication, Hemingway comments that he used these two characters without even changing their names: "I put in Dick Boulton and Billy Tabeshaw as real people with their real names because it was pretty sure they would never read the Transatlantic Review. I've written a number of stories about the Michigan country - the country is always true - what happens in the stories is fiction" (Baker 1981, 153). In spite of Hemingway's apparent candor, his assertion is not completely accurate. He did change the first name of Boulton from Nick to Dick (Baker 1969, 568), and he probably had reasons more complex than the one stated in his letter for retaining Boulton's surname. In fact, Boulton's name has numerous semantic overtones which help to reinforce important details in this story.

The surname *Boulton* is probably derived from a placename. According to Elsdon C. Smith, this family name served to identify "one who came from Boulton (Bola's homestead), in Derbyshire" (53). In addition, since a very early meaning of the common noun *bolt* was an arrow with a thick, blunt head, the British surname *Bo(u)lt* or *Bo(u)lter* may have originally identified a maker of crossbows (Dolan 80). By using a very similar surname for the half-breed who comes to cut firewood for Nick Adams's father, Hemingway immediately hints at conflict. Such a name choice is fitting because Dick Boulton is an invader from the Indian camp who attacks the Doctor on his own ground and destroys all peace and security in and around the Adams cottage.

A secondary but now very common meaning of *bolt* is probably even more significant in explaining Hemingway's choice of names. In the story Dick Boulton strikes like a bolt of lightning. Instead of splitting logs, he attempts to shatter the Doctor's self-confidence. Hemingway clearly anticipated this aspect of Boulton's name in a conversation between Nick and his father in "Three Shots." In this brief piece which serves as a prologue to "Indian Camp" but which remained unpublished until after Hemingway's death, Nick confesses his great fear of lightning. Attempting to reassure the young boy, Doctor Adams boldly asserts, "There is nothing that can hurt you ... If there is a thunder storm get out into the open. Or get under a beech tree. They're never struck" (15). In "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" these brave words are shown to be hollow. Boulton does confront the Doctor in an open area (the beach), and he attacks by pointing out owners' marks on logs from beech trees. The lightning which Nick feared so much has symbolically struck, and his father's talisman has proved powerless.

Still another meaning of *bolt* enters the story after the Doctor retreats to his cottage. Here he symbolically vents his anger by toying with the bolt of his shotgun. He pushes the magazine full of heavy yellow shells and pumps them out again. Although he leaves the gun loaded, his actions are obviously futile. The bolt of the white man's gun is powerless against the half-breed's primitive attack. Since the first name of the Doctor's foe is apparently Richard (meaning 'powerful ruler'), we are reminded further of the Doctor's impotence. Indeed, the Doctor's wife heaps even more reproach on the displaced ruler when she lectures him about losing his temper and quotes an apt passage from Proverbs: "Remember, that he who ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city" (25).

A final meaning of *bolt* - a sliding bar for locking a door or gate - underscores another significant motif in the early Nick Adams stories about the fall of father figures. Originally the Adams cottage is guarded by a fence and a gate. On entering, Dick Boulton carefully shuts this gate, but when he departs he deliberately leaves it open. The protective fences which have kept Nick secure have been breached, and the locking mechanism is now useless. At the end of the story, the Doctor finds Nick out in the woods rather than within the area once protected by the bolted gate.

In choosing to call his antagonist *Dick Boulton*, then, Hemingway hit upon a very apt name. Since Nick Boulton was an actual person who lived near the Hemingway summer cottage, this name choice may have

been partly serendipitous. Even so, the name is rich in overtones which reinforce several significant points in the story.

Albert E. Wilhelm

Tennessee Technological University

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Portia, Nerissa, and Jessica - Their Names

Murray M. Levith, in *What's in Shakespeare's Names*, endeavors to present the most complete account of the subject to date. Nevertheless, as he indicates in his Preface, a fair percentage of his observations are far from definitive. This is particularly evident in his treatment of the names of the three women in *The Merchant of Venice*.

For Portia we are offered:

After Antonio's ships are described "with portly sail" (I, i, 9), and Bassanio thinks that "[b]y something showing a more swelling port" (I, i, 124) than his means allow he might win her, Portia is introduced: "Her name is Portia, nothing undervalu'd/To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia" (I, i, 165-66). With the casket scene in mind, Ruskin connects the name with *portion*, finding in the character "fortune's lady." Florio agrees: "portione - a portion, a share, a parcell, a part, a rate, a quantitie, a measure or peece, a partage" (81).

Is Levith implying that Portia in the first scene of the play is connected with *portly* and *port*, as used in the above context? If so, without offering any proof he is relating her name to a stately bearing or, perhaps, to a large group of attendants. And yet, what is there to distinguish Portia's bearing from that presumed normal for ladies of high rank? Connecting her name with *portione* requires some linguistic or literary evidence. Quoting Ruskin so briefly is hardly convincing, unless it is assumed that every Lady who marries a Lord she loves is "fortune's lady." And Florio, who is presented as merely asserting relationships, cannot be made to agree with anyone living centuries later.

There appear to be at least three revealing associations between the name and the character. Shakespeare has presented her as worthy as Cato's daughter. But the name *Portia* also refers to *port* meaning 'harbor' and to *porcus* 'pig.' Helen Swan, without recognizing that she has a diamond in the rough, points out the meaning of *Portia*:

Portia certainly is derived from the Latin word *porcus*, signifying a pig, though in their anxiety to find a more attractive origin for the loved name, some have endeavored to trace it back to *porta*, signifying a harbor. (442)

Charlotte M. Yonge finds the same derivation, *porcus*, for the name (cxii and 323). The Latin spelling, *Porcia*, for the name would further substantiate the derivation. If Shakespeare knew of this derivation, the choice of the name would be witty, for Shylock, who scorns the eating of pork, is given his comeuppance in court at the hands of a judge whose name means pig.

But, despite Ms. Swan's disclaimer, there should be little doubt that in the play the name also signifies a harbor. Metaphorically, she is a harbor for Bassanio and even for Gratiano. More convincing is that Shakespeare uses only one name, *Belmont*, from the highly probable source of much of the plot, *Il Pecorone*. The lady that Giannetto will win is not named except as the lady of Belmont: "if he possesses her he can take her for his wife and become lord of the port and all that country" (I, 465). Apparently Shakespeare made the successful lord of the port, whom he named *Bassanio*, the lord of *Portia*. While Shakespeare possibly thought that *Portia* was derived from *porta*, certainly his poet's ear would have noted the similarity in sound of *Portia* and *port*.

Note, too, that Portia says to Antonio, "... three of your argosies/Are richly come to harbor suddenly" (V, i, 276-77). No one has ever explained how she knows that the letter for Antonio contains this news. But

Antonio replies, "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living ... " (V, i, 286). Portia is a harbor for most of the characters in the play as they swarm to Belmont for the news and the receipt of their financial well-being.

An additional proof that the name means 'port' or 'harbor' involves a discussion of the meaning of *Nerissa*. Books on names usually do not include this invention of Shakespeare (nor do they include two of the three other names invented for this play, *Shylock* and *Bassanio* - though *Bassano* can be found). For *Nerissa* Levith offers little help:

Otherwise, or in addition, *Nerissa* is simply a designation for a brunette. Florio defends *nericcio*, *negriccio* as 'blackish, blacke, sootie, sable, darke, obscure, dun, swart' (79-80).

Nerissa is hardly a little nurse, nor is there evidence that she has a dark complexion. If anything, she is blonde, for Gratiano says, "We have won the fleece" (III, ii, 241).

Consider, however, the relationship of Portia and *Nerissa*. Not only are they lady and waiting woman, but they are always together in the scenes in which they appear. They are wooed simultaneously, they wed at the same time, they go to Venice as judge and clerk, they both give and get back rings from their husbands. *Nerissa* hovers around Portia and is to her mistress as the sea to a port.* For the name *Nerissa* could refer to the sea, and seems to be derived from the Latin *Nereis*, the name of a sea nymph and daughter of Nereus. Shakespeare added Italian endings to all of his female names in the play (except, of course, the mention of Leah) and, using the stems of *porta* and *Nereus*, came up with *Portia* and *Nerissa*.

In sum, the name *Portia* would remind the audience of Brutus' noble wife, it might suggest to the learned the derivation from the Latin word meaning 'pig,' and (if they knew about or had read *Il Pecorone*) they would recognize in the name the suggestion of a harbor or port - aside from the possibility that they would hear the *port* as meaningful in the name. And once Portia is identified with a harbor or port, *Nerissa* would not have presented too great a problem to those steeped in mythology.

About the name *Jessica* various authorities have given interesting, though hardly convincing, suggestions. Levith says, "The name *Jessica* suggests

* Grace Ione Spencer (Vassar '00) made this suggestion as an auditor in my Shakespeare class some years ago.

the *iesses*, or reins attached to a captive falcon" (82). If so, the choice is a poor one for a woman who easily elopes.

Several scholars look for a Hebrew derivation of *Jessica*, and come up with many different meanings. John Russell Brown writes "JESSICA probably from *Genesis*. xi, 29 ...; in some early Bibles the form was *Iesca* [see *Geneva Bible*]. The Hebrew signifies spy or looker-out (so Elze, *Essays*, tr. 1874, p. 282)" (3). H.G. Withycombe presents another word as the source. *Jessica* " ... appears to be the Hebrew *Yiskah* 'He beholds.' In the authorized Version Gen. xi, 29 the name appears as *Iscah*, but in earlier translations it is *Jesca*" (167). The *Soncino Chumash* has a rather different meaning for *Iscah*: "*Iscah*. i.e. Sarah who received this name because she 'saw' (*sachah*) ... Further, the word is connected with *nesichah* 'princess' ... " (55). Linda E. Britton, likewise using a Hebrew derivation, says, "*Jessica* is the English equivalent of the Hebrew *Yisca* 'will be anointed' ..." (108). It is obviously difficult to link *Jessica* with a specific Hebrew word, for there are several words with very different meanings that are close in sound to the name.

There is, however, a more rewarding approach than by means of similar-sounding Hebrew words with rather different meanings. Consider that there are two basic groups of names in *The Merchant of Venice*, those relating to Venetians and those relating to Jews and Biblical characters (*Tubal*, *Chus*, *Abram*, *Leah*, *Hagar*, *Jacob*, *Laban*, *Daniel*, and *Balthazar*). *Jessica* is the lone character who bridges both groups. Should she be given a Hebrew name or a Venetian name? Shakespeare solved this problem by inventing *Jessica*. This has a Hebrew beginning and a Venetian ending, like the character herself. The Hebrew name closest to hers is *Jesse*, and *Jessica* could be a feminizing and a Venetianizing of that masculine name. The "could be" changes to "probably is" when we consider the meaning of *Jesse* and relate that meaning to what happens to *Jessica*.

Helen Swan places *Jessica* within the group of names that have the same meaning as *Joanna* (310). She writes about *Joanna*:

Johannah, Jane, or Jessie are derived from the same root as Hannah or Anna, namely the Hebrew word *Chaanach*, signifying "favour," "mercy," "grace," which, combining with the contraction of Jehovah, *Iah* or *Jah*, give Joanna = grace of the Lord.
(304)

Joseph Weidenhan agrees: "*Jessica*. English variant form of *Joanna*" (288). He further says: "*Joanna*. (H. *God has shown mercy of God*)" (288).

Charlotte Yonge has a different interpretation. She indicates that *Jessica* may be intended as a feminine for *Jesse*: "Jesse's name had the same prefix, and meant, the Lord is" (114).

For the Christians in the play and for the Christian audience, the Lord indeed is. And Jessica's conversion would be seen as a sign of God's mercy. Note too, Lorenzo says,

If e'er the Jew her father come to Heaven,
It will be for his gentle daughter's sake, ...
(II, iv, 32-33)

God's mercy may be extended because of Jessica. If so, she is surely well named.

Norman Nathan

Florida Atlantic University

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Joyce and Rabelais: Mallow, Marrow, and Molly

Duncan Mallum (102) and I (446) have already established the presence of Urquhart's seventeenth century translation of Rabelais as a valuable literary legacy in Joyce. John Kidd acknowledges quite rightly the translator of Rabelais as having made a "literary contribution to the name of Molly's Mallow Concert" (Kidd 324) in the "Penelope" episode of *Ulysses* (U 748).

The schematic significance of Urquhart's contribution to the name of Molly Bloom's Mallow concert and to the "Penelope" episode as a whole is worthy of greater critical note than when, for instance, Kidd remarks on the onomastic connection between the herb commonly known as *mallow* and Molly in Rabelais's *Third Book* (ch. 50): "... mallow because it mollifieth."

Kidd overlooks, moreover, a stronger allusive link Joyce forges with Rabelais's reference to the herb mallow occurring in *Gargantua* (ch. 13): on the subject of the invention of "a *torchecul* or *wipebreech*." The young giant Gargantua tells Grandgousier, his father, "I wiped me with ... mallow". Imagistically and auditorially both, the mallow Gargantua uses to wipe his rump evokes the "smellow melons" of Molly's "melonous rump" which Bloom kisses in U 374, Bloom, incidentally, exhibiting an anal fixation comparable to the one Gargantua exhibits.

The original Rabelaisian French for the *mallow* with which Gargantua wipes himself is *maulve*, or its other form, *guimauve*: according to the Elizabethan lexicographer Cotgrave; the latter is translatable as 'Moorish mallow,' which is in thematic concert with Moorish Molly as she appears in "Circe," "scolding in Moorish" (U 439). Cotgrave - a contemporary of Sir Urquhart's, by the way - lists a variety of mallow known as "Jew's mallow" among his dictionary's entries for 'maulve,' or 'mallow,' and Molly is most definitely a Jew's "moll".

The words *mallow* and *marrow*, as Kidd implies (325), are nearly homophonous. He overlooks, however, other homophony from Rabelais onomastically pertinent to Molly. In the French of Rabelais, for instance, 'marrow' is *mouelle* or *moelle*, nearly homophonous with *molle* 'soft,' which is in turn nearly homophonous with Molly's name. Joyce's beloved lexicographer, Skeat, gives the Greek etymological origin of *mallow* as *molassein* 'to soften,' (Skeat 316) also the etymon of the French equivalent, *mollir*, another verb close homophonously to the proper name

Molly. Furthermore, in Rabelais's French, the verb *mollir* had sexual connotations of penile softness and impotence, according to Farmer (188): notice Molly's description of "... that thing they have swelling upon you so hard so soft when you touch it" (*U* 776).

Moelle 'marrow,' furthermore, according to Farmer, was synonymous with *semen* in the French of Rabelais, and has other sexual associations such as 'penis' (Farmer 188). Thus Kidd misses the sexual connotations of *marrow* and *marrowbone*, although he correctly cites the words' occurrence in the prologue to *Gargantua*, in which the image of a dog with a marrowbone in its mouth appears. Molly evokes the Gargantuan image of the dog sucking a marrowbone as she fantasizes about fellatio, taking a male organ in her mouth "... to suck it so clean and white" (*U* 776).

Further evocations of the marrowbone image from the prologue to *Gargantua* occur in "Penelope" in Molly's recollection of an obscene song she remembers hearing on the corner of Marrowbone Lane (*U* 776): if marrowbone imagery is phallic, then the lane image is its yonic counterpart.

Kidd points specifically to the symmetry between "mollification of her ... bumgut" in *Gargantua* and Molly's "bumgut" reminiscence in *U* 751: "a child born out of her ear because her bumgut fell out." Kidd concludes that "'Mallow' and 'bumgut' clue us to Urquhart" (Kidd 324), overlooking other such revealing clues - and the greater schematic significance of such verbal clues to Urquhart - as *marrow* and *mollification*, for Molly.

Joanne E. Rea

University of Kentucky

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What do You Call Your Pig? Who is Your Namesake?¹

Naming an animal, house, or boat is a proprietary assertion which follows cultural and linguistic rules as well as the namer's personal interests and requirements. Names of pedigreed animals take a special form for registration and record. The naming of wild chimpanzees under observation by Jane Goodall served for systematic recording of apparent family units, and ethologists' writings frequently refer to animals by names. In zoos, stables, herds, and circuses the names given to individual animals identify them among the keepers, herdsmen, etc.

Domesticated animals and pets are commonly given names by the people and families who are their owners and caretakers. Safire says, "Canine nomenclature is taking a turn toward the human. More and more, we are giving dogs the names we used to reserve for people" (Safire 1985, 8). He classifies dog name types as disposition, regal, appearance, names of people, and interests of dog owners.

The Nuer of the Sudan, discussed by Evans-Pritchard in 1940, designate cattle by age, sex, appearance, and horn shape. They show the importance of cattle to their owners by calling a youth after one of his oxen, in songs and ceremony. In the New Guinea highlands, pigs are most important as property and ceremonial exchange objects; they are also named.

Pigs have been domesticated in Europe and Asia for thousands of years, valued as truffle hunters in Perigord, as retrievers of game in England (Sykes 1985), and as treaders of garden plots in England and New Guinea. For the Simbu people of the Papua New Guinea highlands, pigs are of compelling interest. They are essential to a family's community status, and become food gifts to honor all important relationships and obligations. Simbu pigs are fully domesticated and highly valued household members. Each pig shares food and shelter with the family for years

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before being killed, cooked, and given in ceremonial payment to mark a family life stage, repay a former gift, or celebrate a major group festival. Pigs were taken into the cemetery to be killed to honor the ancestral spirits (Nilles 1977).

Women have the main responsibility for pig care. As household members, pigs are called and taken into a woman's house for food and rest at night and let out in the morning. The pig's history, characteristics, and foibles are well known; identity and individuality may be marked by name as well.

Pigs are bred by the Simbu. Most male piglets are castrated. A boar is kept by an owner in the men's house away from other pigs, and bred with sows by request, for a fee. When the boar is no longer useful or the owner wants to convert it to ceremonial use, it must be castrated before it can be fattened. I witnessed a castration on Feb. 9, 1964, which dramatically illustrated the personal ties of Simbu with their pigs, stimulated my asking about pig names, and eventually led to my writing this note. The owner and several men had roped and suspended the boar on a post to make the operation easier. The operation was done with a razor blade, and the testicles placed on greens, then wrapped in a leaf. An older man, his face blackened with charcoal and grease, wearing a cassowary head-dress, performed a comic dance, ending with "Spot! who cut you? Where are your balls?" The testicles and greens were roasted in the fire and eaten by the performer. The pig's wound was wiped with leaves, and it was hoped that he could be fattened as a hog for ceremonial use.

Certain characteristics or peculiarities of pigs become the basis of names. Generally, only the household members are familiar with the names of pigs. My information was usually obtained on the spot, asking the name of a pig while the household members were there, and occasionally asking for names of other pigs not present, or a history of family pig names. Some people rarely name their pigs; others usually do. A pig was once named *Mindimamam* after me, but I learned of it only by chance.

While most of the names I collected are in the Kuman language (here italicized), including local placenames (not italicized), some are Melanesian Pidgin English or *tok pisin* (here in quotation marks). There is no standard spelling of these languages, and my rendering is only approximately phonetic.

Pig names can be placed in a number of categories:

1. Sex. A common part of the pig name indicates its sex: for a female, *ambai* 'girl,' *ambu* 'woman,' *mam* 'mother'; for a male, *yagl* 'man,'

kumugl 'young man,' *nim* 'father.' Boars are sometimes distinguished as such: *momgangigl* 'testicles,' or in one case *yagl kulou* 'sterile.'

2. Color or marking: *kama* 'black,' *gogl* 'red,' *kruo* 'white,' *gatne* 'brown.' Sometimes a name of another object or animal describes the pig's marking, for example, *maindimi* has a mark like that of the white bailor shell.

The first two types of name are often combined. These are the commonest kinds of pig designations: *yagl kama* 'man black'; *ambai gogl* 'girl red.' In fact they seem to be descriptive identifications used for family reference rather than names.

3. Circumstances of purchase or acquisition. These include "five pound," "one pound," "moni," "kina" (now the unit of currency), "bis" 'beads,' *baundo* 'red bird of paradise plume,' *ongan mam* 'white gam shell mother,' *minge* 'goldlip shell,' "bebe" when the owner's son was a baby.

4. Placenames: these are either the place of acquisition or the place the pig frequents. Pigs are known as *Kerowagi*, *Bundo*, *Gurema*, *Mingende*, *Kambia*, which indicate where the pig was born or the place where it was acquired. Other pigs have local placenames, such as *Andemoriambo*, a local stream, *Nitnumbum*, a pond, *Bamutnim* 'Bamugl father,' *Anambonim* 'Anambo father,' *Pingamam* 'Pinga mother.' One pig was named *Bomaiyagl*, the same name as a cassowary that was bought in Bomai; the owner planned to kill them together. Places are part of the names of pigs in nearby Mt. Hagen, too (Strathern 1979, 70).

5. Plant names, such as *coffee mongo* 'coffee bean,' and *bondi* 'bean' are often used for pigs, as are flower names: *ambani*, *druagl*, *dri*. Some of these designate a favorite food of the pig.

6. Bird and animal names are often used because of color or marking: thus *gandia* 'possum,' *konokugla* 'owl,' *towtow* (a bird), *kerenga* (a bird), *dua* 'rat,' *namie* (a marsupial), *tina waine* (a white tree kangaroo).

7. An incident or characteristic concerning the pig: *Yandomo*, a leaf packet that was a plaything of the pig; "bag" 'carried in a 'bag'; *agen minna* 'pulls up grass'; *mogo degerito* 'pulls up'; *kina baringe* 'his ear taken off'; *gogongwa* 'nearly died but survived'; "kalabus" 'broke fences and was confined'; *kinambo* 'blind eye'; *pawna bili* 'broken jaw'; *gumangogl* 'red nose'; *nangie kinde* 'bad skin'; *pogo nomani* 'thinking thoughts'; *dogo nongo* 'eats here and there.'

8. Circumstances of birth. "las" was the last one, "wanpish" the only one in a litter, *ambai suara* the only female.

9. Some names are "just names" with no etymology given: *Warita*, *Kondugl*, *Mangogl*.

10. Names may refer to things or ideas, such as *korag* 'belt,' *horse*, a name given to a pig by the owner's son, *pogo poga* 'loosening.'

The names given to people fall into most of these types also. Very common personal names are the names of plants and animals, especially trees for men, flowers for women, marsupials for men, and birds for men and women. Rarely, the same name may be used for men and for women. Personal names are occasionally colors or places, sometimes distinguished by sex (-*ambai*, -*nim*). Object-words, for example *Tambage*, the bamboo jew's harp, *Nerembare* 'flute,' *Yere* 'arrow,' are fairly common, and the name or nickname of a person may be taken from a place where he/she lived. This is why I was called *Mindimamam*. In 1984 when a child was given the name *Paula Brown*, the relationship of *dina* was well defined, as explained below.

While a pig is named idiosyncratically, usually when adult, human infants are given names of living persons in the group who have been especially important to the parents. The practice confirms a relationship with a *dina*, often the father, mother, or sibling of a parent, and commonly a leading person in the local group. The decision is made by the parents, in consultation, a father usually choosing his son's name and the mother her daughter's name. At a family celebration some time later, the *dina* will be honored.²

In any local group there may be many men and boys with the same name, all namesakes of a leading elder. The next generation includes children who are *dina* of these men, children of brothers and friends. Conducting a census or taking a genealogy is certainly difficult and confusing. The use of nicknames is not much developed, but today most people also have Christian baptismal names that are used together with the local ones (for example *Bomaiambu Clara*), which is less confusing.

¹The field research on which this paper is based was supported from 1958 to 1965 by fellowships at the Australian National University. Later research was supported by the State University of New York, Stony Brook in 1971 and 1976, Wenner-Gren Foundation grant #4484 in 1984, and the American Council of Learned Societies in 1985. General publications on the Simbu are Brown 1972, 1978, and forthcoming.

²As an example of the practice of *dina* selection, *Yaglkruo* means 'man=light-skinned.' It is a name in one group where hereditary albinism is common. However, the name is given to a namesake without regard to the color of the child. The terms *Yagl Kruo* and *Ambu Kruo* are used also to refer to white men and women. Note, incidentally, that the word *dina* may refer either to the original holder of the name or to the namesake.

It is this difference in the naming process between people and their pigs that calls for cultural analysis. Although the same types are often found, personal names acknowledge social ties of parents and namesakes. Parents are referred to by the child's namesake as *dina nim* or *dina mam*, and the same designation is a jocular greeting or invitation among friends who have not named a child after the person. Namesakes have continued responsibilities for financial help, gifts, nurturance when needed, similar to those of godparents in many European societies.

Simbu personal naming practices proclaim and affirm social ties. In contrast, pig names are varied and idiosyncratic. They are chosen by the household to distinguish the characteristics or source of the individual pig. A pig's individuality is clearly designated. The names of people, while similar in that they are the names of plants, animals, things and places, commemorate the interpersonal relations of the family.

Paula Brown

State University of New York at Stony Brook

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Notes

Ethnic Personal Names - AGAIN?

Professor L.R.N. Ashley's "A Note or Two," *ANS Bulletin* no. 78, refers to "strange names" given by occupants of "the ring or ... other occupations that make stars of people of all origins and classes," and refers to the "somewhat unusual" (perhaps "illiterate") names that boxers of note give to their children. It would require a strange adherence to a newly obligatory colorblindness not to remark that the two boxers in question, Muhammed Ali a.k.a. Cassius Clay, and Joe Frazier, are both black. It may require a particularly closed mind not to consider the possibility that ethnicity, not "lower class" or "illiterate" status, may be the operant factor in this and other naming patterns.

It is of course well known that Joe Frazier was from the Sea Islands, an area generally known since Turner (1949) - and known to wide-ranging investigators well before that - as an area characterized by special cultural practices, including language and naming patterns. Muhammed Ali, on the other hand, was and is well known for his ardent support of ethnic causes. The Puerto Rican boxer-writer Joe Torres, who is very perceptive though not committed to any kind of academic controversy, wrote (n.d., 56):

Ali goes to the roots of his people, their culture, their customs, their sufferings, their superstition. It is a profound knowledge of many things that have to do with blacks.

Torres uses this interpretation to explain why Ali was able to "psych out" black opponents, but might it not just as well apply to why Ali changed his own name from *Cassius Clay* to *Cassius X* to *Muhammed Ali* and named his children *Maryum*, *Jamillh*, and *Reeshemah*? Would Joe Frazier's somewhat different involvement in black culture not also "explain" his choice of *Mavis* for one son and *Jo-Netta*, *Weatta*, *Natasha*, and *Jacqueline* for his daughters? Since Frazier has always been much less involved in political causes than Ali, it seems consistent that *Jacqueline* (and, I should say, *Natasha*) are not "bizarre" from the viewpoint of mainstream America.

Professor Ashley appears, in fact, to be using his own "bizarreness reaction" as a kind of discovery procedure, precisely what I tried to do in a book on black ethnicity in names (Dillard 1976). Puckett (1937) had already established the existence of "bizarre" names like *Snowrilla* in black ethnic culture as well as dealing exhaustively with such unbizarre

phenomena as the predominance of the name *Johnson* among the chosen family names of ex-slaves.

There is a considerable tradition of dealing with slave names in the United States and North America, a backlog of investigation which should not be sacrificed to political considerations such as ignoring the prominence of slavery in black history simply because we wish it had never happened. Inscoe (1983) studied the relationship of slave-naming patterns to acculturation. One of his major types, the day name, is subject to the criticism that such "African" patterns were evident only among the Ashanti and there is no apparent evidence of domination by that tribe. On the other hand, such names as *Cuffee*, *Quaco*, and *Quasheba* frequently proved, in the West Indies, to have attributive functions (*Cuffee* as 'stupid') rather than the strict day-name function (DeCamp 1967). Given the swing away from ethnic considerations in recent years, it has not been feasible to pursue such obvious problems as whether the non-Ashanti uses of the names are traceable to Africa or to semantic transfers made in the New World.

Although acculturation has obviously gone far, the study of the complex of naming patterns around "day names" is not purely historical in interest. Deborah Nathan informs me (personal communication) that there are seventy-two names like *Coffee* and *Coffey* in the Chicago telephone book, in "ghetto" areas heavily populated by blacks. Informed investigation of the telephone book of almost any big city will reveal something of the same pattern, and it seems likely *a priori* that the unacculturated are less likely even to have telephones than those adapted to the mainstream. (Compare the ghetto church names collected by Fairclough (1960) and Noreen (1965) to the rather more sedate list which is to be found in telephone books.) The church names are, of course, hardly "African"; African survivals, in the Herskovitsian sense, are not necessarily the most important part of the story. Inscoe (1983:554) may be onomastically sentimental when he writes

Their [the slaves'] own original and creative input not only supplemented but even overshadowed what was given by their owners.

There is no reason whatsoever to say that the names given to the children of Joe Frazier and Muhammed Ali are "African" - and no one who knows anything about Muhammed Ali would dare say he was giving "slave" names. On the other hand, a quite distinct ethnic group with many distinct cultural features may well have not only started but continued its onomastic patterns apart from and productively different from the mainstream. Impressionistic terms like "imaginative" and even

"exuberant" frequently occur in descriptions of naming patterns in West Africa and the West Indies - again, probably denoting through the observers' bizarreness reaction that there is a different pattern or tradition involved. My own files from Northwest Louisiana contain examples like *She-Ress* and *RaHonda* which are impressionistically very like *Jo-Netta*.

Facing the facts of ethnic differences - even if they remind us of slavery, segregation, and continuing prejudice - seems essential to our utilizing the best that onomastics has to offer in the interpretation of American culture. Concentration on placenames has been the recourse of those who do not want to see ethnic factors, but there are always real places like Cudjo's Cave and imaginary ones like Diddy Wa Diddy to be dealt with. It seems time to face the ethnic facts.

J. L. Dillard

Northwestern (Louisiana) State University

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