

Leonard Raymond Nelligan Ashley

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Len, as we know him, anchors the American Name Society in sense, sensibility, sensitivity, and, above all, semasiology. Officers of the Society seek his advice, place him on committees, ask him to proofread and edit publications — and often to write them. His articulateness makes him the center of admiring attention at dinner parties and after-meeting decompressings. His ability to tell stories, many of them built around word meanings, keeps an audience of from one to many listening, some might claim totally enthralled, perhaps mesmerized. I hesitate to claim that he has the brightest intelligence and most amazing recall of any member in the American Name Society, but I know of no other who has such a range of knowledge and the skill to communicate it. I have spent many an hour listening to Len talk about and explain subjects that would strain belief of a person who did not know Len's educational background and his all-encompassing intellectual curiosity.

Len was born in Miami, December 5, 1928, the son of Leonard Seville and Sarah Anne Constance (Nelligan) Ashley. From Miami somehow he was beamed to Canada where he obtained his BA with first-class honors (and The Shakespeare Gold Medal, at the head of his class) from McGill University in 1949, followed rather soon by an AM and PhD from Princeton. While at Princeton, he collaborated with Frederick Fu Liu on *A Military History of Modern China*, published in 1956 by Princeton University Press. On the strength of that he was granted the Queen's direct commission in the Royal Canadian Air Force and became after training in Canada and Europe the second assistant to the Air Historian. During this time (1956-1958), he also wrote for North American Air Defense Command *The Air Defense of North America*, a 350-page document, with another 300 pages of charts, graphs, and illustrations, all at that time a very secret report for NORAD.

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He appears back in academia at the University of Rochester for three years. In 1961 he joined the faculty as Instructor of English at Brooklyn College, where he apparently found a home and a great career still continuing. All reports claim that he is an outstanding instructor, but certainly the classroom did not have a monopoly on his time and searching scholarship. One colleague said he is an academic wild man, one who can be found in scholarly jungles no one else would dare enter. A quick glance through his record verifies that Len moved with ease but with rigorous research and publication of results through the prickly thickets of academic (and some not so academic) publications.

His dissertation points to a strange future indeed: *The Management of The Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane under Cibber, Booth & Wilks*. This hardly anticipated his closely-following-in-time poem, "The Ideal Committee," published in *Bulletin of American Association of University Professors*, which exposed another stratum in his mind, the effective leader in academic governance. A list of his committee assignments at Brooklyn College fills pages, including an intriguing assignment as chair for two terms on The Committee of Seven, the College Crisis Committee. Where else would Len be found when crucial decisions have to be made!

And still he has hardly begun. Definitely a Renaissance man in the fragmented culture of the latter part of the twentieth century, he began publishing poems, several in *Western Humanities Review*, as well as in 60+ "little magazines" and several anthologies, and staging his musical skits. He wrote a column a month for several years for *Pageant*, a notable item being "Could you Pass a College Entrance Exam?" He prepared video tapes for classroom use, published articles in National Council of Teachers publications, wrote a book on Colley Cibber for Twayne, produced and narrated a video on early English drama, covering the history of the stage up to Shakespeare's time, published an anthology, *Nineteenth-Century Drama*, served as distinguished visitor and lecturer at Millsaps College, wrote a monograph, *Authorship and Evidence: Attribution in the Elizabethan Drama*, and for Simon & Schuster provided a "brief" *History of the Short Story* and *How to Read a Play*, edited *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and 15 or 20 other classics for Washington Square Press, reviewed a seemingly

countless number of books for *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, completed a two-volume edition of Colley Cibber's *Apology*, and discovered the American Name Society.

Margaret M. Bryant taught much of her career at Brooklyn College. She once told me that probably her best service to the American Name Society was to convince her young colleague to become a member. Len submitted "French Surnames and the English," a four-page article, to the editor of *Names* in 1963. But, as noted before, he was extremely busy in several academic and publishing ventures at the time and did not appear again until 1966 with another note-size article, "Classical Pseudonyms in Europe at the Time of the Reformation." In 1967, he published a major article, "Pomp and its Circumstances." Since then he has been intimately involved in the management of the American Name Society.

This did not mean that he had stopped publishing in other areas and disciplines. Articles, poems, and reviews over the years have appeared in *Word Study*, *Western Humanities Review*, *History of the Theatre*, *Word Ways*, *Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*, *Educational Theatre Journal*, *Directory of British and American Writers*, *McGill News*, *Satire Newsletter*, *Gilbert and Sullivan*, *The Fiction of Doris Lessing*, *Verbatim*, *Etudes Irlandais*, *Human Behavior*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *Flatbush Life*, *Kings Courier*, *Maledicta*, *Comments on Etymology*, *The Count Dracula Fan Club Bi-Annual*, *Logophile*, *Kingsman*, *Classical Outlet*, *Shakespeare Newsletter*, *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art*, *Critical Survey of Short Fiction*, *Communication and the Law*, *Geolinguistic Perspectives* (co-editor), *Language in Contemporary Society* (co-editor), *Tales of Mystery and Melodrama*, *Dramatics (Curtain)*, *Brooklyn College Alumni Association Bulletin*, *West Central Courier*, *Literary Research Newsletter*, *Lettres from Limerick: The International Review of Limericks & Bawdy Verses*, *Christianity and Literature*, *Journal of Gambling Behavior*, *The Gallatin Review*, *Hamlet Studies*, and probably others I have not discovered.

Several books also were published: *British Short Stories: Classics and Criticism* (Prentice-Hall), *A Study of Attribution and the Renaissance Drama Illustrated by the Case of George Peele*

(Libraire Droz), *Other People's Lives* (Houghton Mifflin), *Mirror for Man: 26 Plays of the World Drama*, *Great Writers of the English Language: Novelists*, *Great Writers of the English Language: Dramatists*, *Superstition, Prophecy, and Luck*, *The Wonderful World of Witchcraft*, *Elizabethan Popular Culture*, as well as many introductions to books whose subjects move like geographical features about the intellectual landscape, including Irish and Persian literature, Shakespeare, and the papers of the Society for Psychical Research.

Because we see Len at so many American Name Society functions, we assume that he has no other responsibilities, somewhat the way college teachers assume that students take only their courses and nothing else, but a search reveals that he was President of the Graduate Society of McGill University, New York branch (meaning that he had also been an officer at various levels), President of the American Society for Geolinguistics (after serving in several capacities), Secretary of The International Linguistic Association, secretary of numerous sections of North East Modern Language Association, a member of committees of The Modern Language Association, and on the editorial boards and managerial boards of several publications and organizations. I have simply neglected to enumerate and list the subjects of his probably 250 papers read before different groups. He has organized two international conferences for the American Society of Geolinguistics (of which he has been president for several terms) and published extensively in *Geolinguistics*.

After surveying the enormous sweep of his work outside the American Name Society, I find it, well, a bit overwhelming to mention his contributions to all aspects of the Society and to the publications in onomastics, all relating in some way to the furtherance and promotion of the study of names. Articles of his appear in *Connecticut Onomastic Review*, *Literary Onomastic Studies*, *American Name Society Bulletin*, two volumes of *The Collected Papers of the Names Institute*, *Papers of the North Central Names Institute*, *Names*, *Onomastica*, *Namenkundliche Informationen*, *450 ans de noms de lieux Francais en Amerique du Nord*, *Geolinguistics*, *Actes du XVI Congres International des Sciences Onomastic*, and *Omni Gazetteer of the United States*.

What else has he done for the American Name Society? He has served as president twice, each time when its fortunes (mostly misfortunes) needed attention and leadership. He has been a member of the Board of Managers (many times) and of the Editorial Board (where he read and evaluated probably more than one hundred articles). His many services include being Guest Editor of the Shakespeare issue of *Names*, writing issues of the *Bulletin*, being a member of the Nominating Committee (several times), writing at least a thousand recruiting letters to obtain members for the Society, being interviewed by the media (radio, television, newspaper and magazine reporters) more than 600 times, serving as reader and advisor for several publications by members of the Society (for which he did not often receive credit), and being available for advice on the multitude of problems that beset small organizations always seeming adrift. When something went wrong, or when wrong was anticipated, I always called Len.

He once told me that everything he knows and everything I would want to know about names would appear in *What's in a Name?* (1989). Well, he was in jest exaggerating, but the book was hailed by reviewers as "an avalanche of fascinating material about names," "a textbook on onomastics," "no book on names [is] so authoritative and so wide in scope," and "absolutely monumental." And these are not exaggerations. Still, the study maybe is Leonard R. N. Ashley! The style pops and crackles and moves rapidly, the way he talks, and it reflects the encyclopedic mind and phenomenal memory he has. For an introduction to onomastics, no other book compares with it for coverage and the copious examples, several thousand names analyzed and categorized, a god's plenty. The original chapter on onomastics and necromancy has no counterpart in the literature of the study of names. Here, Ashley, the least superstitious of humans, explains the several very technical systems of numerology, and shows how the gullible who dabble in such occult activity can be affected. As arresting as is his commentary on all the *-mancy* activities in names, the text moves beyond a singling out of a section and becomes a sweeping overview of names and naming.

He has spoken on "political correctness" at the Modern Language Association in a talk hailed in 1993 as the best paper

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at the whole MLA convention and has added to his editing of books by Charlotte Brooke (*The Reliques of Irish Poetry*) and Charlotte Clarke (*A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Clarke*), articles in the field of women's studies in anthologies such as *Modern American Drama: The Female Canon*, and reference books (such as *British Women Writers*), and continues to review many books each year relating to Elizabethan England in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, in which he has written much about Elizabeth I, Lady Mary Worth, and Mary, Queen of Scots, as well as other women (and men) of the period.

Indeed, hardly any new trend in literary history or criticism or of importance in the fields of language and literature or any of his other interests has escaped his pen. He has written articles on nearly forgotten dramatists such as Elkanah Settle, Edward Fitzball, and Alfred Sutro, and of more recent but not nearly forgotten ones such as Coward, Kaufman, Hart, Albee, Barry, Behrman and Pinter. He has written about curriculum wars and the canon, the development of the short story, Scandinavian folklore, German immigration, lesbian in-group language, politics, English history, American slang, Mexican placenames, and air strategy.

He continues, with articles to be published in two anthologies devoted to novels by Stephen King, several articles for *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, several for *Encyclopedia USA*, and five long articles for *Encyclopedia of British Humorists*, and more. He is also working on a huge dictionary of slang and a giant encyclopedia of onomastics which he jokingly refers to as *The Big Book of Names*. As with everything else he writes, it will benefit from his catholic tastes, broad knowledge, and interdisciplinary approach.

Many an academic has been promoted to professor with hardly 1/1000th of Len's scholarly productivity, but the accumulation of honors, books, articles, reviews, governance work, and leadership positions can never define the man whose life has been devoted to educating (in all good senses) youth, to leading and guiding others, and to living the ideals of friendship and good deeds. We each define him and salute him as he has served us.

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