

Reviews

Jamaican Place Names. By B. W. HIGMAN and B. J. HUDSON. Pp. xii + 319. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press. 2009. \$25.00. ISBN: 978-976-640-217-4

For its size (somewhat smaller than Connecticut) and population (some three million) the island nation of Jamaica seems to have more than its share of unusual geographic names, names like *Dinner Time*, *Half-a-Bottle*, *Slippery Gut*, *District of Look Behind*, *Me No Sen You No Come*, *Too Good Gully*, *Show Meself Corner*, *Rest and be Thankful*, and *Wait a Bit*. In their interesting and innovative book on Jamaican place names, B.W. Higman, a historian who has written extensively on Jamaican history and economy, and B.J. Hudson, a geographer who specializes in urban and regional planning, discuss these in their historical and geographical context, along with a significant share of all the known names to appear on Jamaican maps. Higman and Hudson, who both taught at the University of the West Indies, are thoroughly familiar with toponymic nomenclature as used in Britain and in North America, as well as in Jamaica, and are thus able to make informed and informative observations of both the British tradition of place-name usage and the modifications and adaptations that give Jamaican place names their special character.

This is an unusual place-name book in that it is organized thematically rather than alphabetically. The two introductory chapters, “Place Names and History” and “Names and Name-Givers,” are followed by chapters on “Common Names,” “Topographical Names,” “Hydrological Names,” “Coastal Names,” “Enterprise Names,” “Settlement Names,” and “Route Names.” The authors create their onomastic databases from maps of Jamaica drawn about 1680, 1760, 1800, 1880, and 1950, augmented by the Kingston street map of 2000. These allow the authors to observe changes in names and naming practices not only over space but also over a time span of nearly three hundred years. The text is supplemented by more than fifty maps, twenty pages of citations, and an extensive bibliography showing a wide familiarity with toponymic literature.

The name *Jamaica* was first recorded by Columbus on his second voyage when he was given the name by Cuban Taino natives who reported that the land to the west was the home of another group of Taino, the Yamaye. The Taino are now extinct, as are all but a few of their place names, which were replaced first by Spanish names and then by English names. Spanish names are common (e.g., most are stream names identified by *rio*) but the majority of Jamaican names are British, beginning with the British takeover of the island in 1655, especially transfer names applied to administrative units (*Cornwall*, *Middlesex*, *Surrey*, *Westmoreland*) and general transfers from England (with *Richmond*, *Windsor*, and *Kensington* most common). Other names are transfers from Europe (*Chantilly*, *Brussels*), North America (*Bunker Hill*, *Niagara*), Central and South America (*Lima*, *Peru*), other Caribbean areas (*St Kitts*, *Martinique*), Africa (*Oran*, *Timbuctoo*), Asia (*Bengal*, *Java*), and the Middle East (*Jerusalem*, *Jericho*). One surviving Spanish name has a less glamorous origin than its status as a tourist attraction suggests. For all its exotic allure, *Montego Bay* derives from Spanish *manteca* “lard, hog fat.”

Even with such an extensive history of European colonization (Jamaica not achieving formal independence from Britain until 1962) the authors note, “[T]he truly common place names of Jamaica, the ones that are scattered far and wide and happily duplicated, and that give the Jamaican settlement pattern a particular character [...] are not] derived from personal names or transferred from other places [...] but] are associated with sentiment” (61). Thus we find, especially in rural areas, such traditional and widely distributed names as *Content*, *Friendship*, *Fellowship*, *Prospect*, *Retreat*, and *Retirement*. In more recent naming, the emphasis has

changed somewhat, and new highways and schools tend to be named for national heroes and relevant political personages. In 1975 Charles Square in Montego Bay was renamed *Sam Sharpe Square*, for the leader of a slave uprising in the 1830s who had been publicly hanged at the site. Other recent commemorative naming is for Marcus Garvey, Jose Marti, and Nelson Mandela.

Due to the nature of its settlement and the intermingling of the several streams of its population, especially the significant number of enslaved Africans (slavery remaining legal in Jamaica until 1838), pidginization and creolization were characteristic of an evolving Jamaican English, and many English words took on secondary meanings or were used in characteristic Jamaican senses. A Jamaican *bump* can be the crest of a hill (*Hand Dog Bump*); a *pass* may be a path or roadway; a *gully* may be a small stream; a *mountain* may be a small farm or any cultivated area; and a *walk* may be a grove of cultivated trees (*Plantain Walk*). Several uniquely Jamaican topographic terms which appear as both generic and specific have evolved. A *pen*, from the earlier appellative for “enclosure,” is a large rural property, often one which supplies cattle for market; a pen may also be the residence of a wealthy merchant or successful professional. A *crawl(e)*, cognate with Spanish *corral* and Dutch/Afrikaans *kraal*, is an area where food crops are grown or where animals are kept until sale. The Jamaicanism *cockpit*, derived from the bowl which created an arena for fighting cocks, is a depression among steep hills; an area of northwest Jamaica is known as “cockpit country.”

Jamaican Place Names is a notable book in all respects, well researched, well organized, and well written. It is a worthy addition to the world place-name library.

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Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature. By JOHN MULLAN. Pp. 374. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008. \$22.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-13941-8

Why should an author be moved to keep his or her name off the title page of a work? Let John Mullan count the ways. His chapter-length answers are multifold: mischief, modesty, women wishing to be read as men, men wishing to be read as women, danger, the politics of reviewing, mockery and devilry, and latitude for confession. The range of anonymity is immense, from *Beowulf* (where the work speaks in a mythic sense for an entire culture) to *Primary Colors* (the 1996 novel whose secrecy of authorship implied unrestrained truth about the shading doings of a presidential candidate). Along the way, the history of literature written in English unfolds, and not just in the United Kingdom; Americans such as Sylvia Plath and Joe Klein are prominent participants, making Mullan’s subtitle presumptively Anglo-centric, to say the least. But in all cases anonymity supplies “a special voltage” to the reception of these works (7). That is the one constant among the many motives for such effacement and suggests that influencing how works would be read is the major consequence.

Modesty is the most innocent among Mullan’s categories of motives. Charles Dodgson felt genuine discomfort at being identified in public, especially when associated with writing meant to communicate privately with the young and innocent he doted upon. Hence “Lewis Carroll” provided a cloak for the *Alice in Wonderland* books that let him share a private world with children. Jane Austen’s intent was different. While there was eventually no great secret about her authorship and no timidity either — she met and negotiate with her publisher, for example — she did appreciate the hint of mystery anonymity conveyed. More practically, her examination of the ordinary side of domestic life was such that letting it be associated with her actual family could seem inconsiderate. As for women who wrote under men’s names, speculation as to the author’s actual gender was often a measure of a book’s success, though for Charlotte Brontë the matter was more than this, “a kind of creative principle” that “allowed her to make life into fiction” (93). More practically, Mary Anne Evans was living unconventionally enough that “George Eliot” was a more appropriate identity. Men who let their women characters pose as authors of books at hand include Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson. The former appreciated how a name implies a past, while the latter wanted his novels’ letters to seem as natural as they could.

The plot thickens when Mullan entertains the notion of danger. Sometimes these dangers were simply to careerist aspirations. Jonathan Swift knew that *A Tale of a Tub* could “impede his advancement in the church” (172–73); hence he had it published not only without his own name but absent the name of his printer, Benjamin Tooke, who was commonly associated with him. More creatively, Swift found that anonymity enabled him as a satirist to enact a position he actually despised, as in *Gulliver’s Travels*. Other authors had practical reasons for remaining anonymous: avoiding duels with those they had satirized or arrest by the government — Mullan’s list of punishments handed down in Elizabethan days reads like a catalogue of horrors. Yet anonymity could be a trick recommended by lawyers; everyone knew Byron had written the anonymously published early cantos of *Don Juan*, but, because his name was not on the title page, his presumed authorship was not admissible in court, where a custody battle over his daughter was underway.

More mundane are the advantages and drawbacks of unsigned reviews. Anonymity can remove base motives for flattery and critical lenience, letting the work under review stand or fall on its own merits. It also puts the reviewer in the position of speaking for the magazine rather than personally. On the other hand, signing one’s opinion discourages the perception of a “critical oligarchy” that promotes establishment views, though it also prevents the practice of authors reviewing their own books, several examples of which are hilarious (193).

Mullan is at his best when considering the most consequential motives for anonymity, which are mockery and devilry. In Elizabethan times, it “gives the satirist opportunity to act the devil” (225). For a Romantic like William Blake, it could provide a means for “releasing devilish thoughts,” as in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (237). By publishing *Beppo* without his name, Byron allowed “a suppressed sense of scandal” to surround the work — “or rather, it is evidence of a suppression that is itself mildly scandalous, a suppression of the author’s own biography and involvement” (241). As for the mockery of satire, much of the joy of reading such works involved inserting names where anonymity had left blanks. As for the writer, it allows him or her to let “others’ arguments run away with themselves, madly accumulating evidence for whatever their prejudices might be” (246). Authorship itself thus becomes a merely fictional convention, a matter to be considered when judging Mullan’s ultimate equation of authorship with textuality.

Confession, the last of the nine motives for namelessness, is even less exciting than the politics of anonymity in reviewing. Obviously, keeping one’s name off the work allows no end of self-indulgence with one’s own story. More positively, it creates an atmosphere of truthfulness; why lie when there is no identity to protect, no self to heedlessly esteem? The best literary case for the anonymity of confession is made with Tennyson’s “In Memoriam,” for here the private exercise of grief is able to serve as an emotion for the whole human race. In a similar manner Edmund Gosse would find a liberation from himself when writing *Father and Son*, a work of much greater richness than his signed biography of his father. In both cases what is personal can be made to serve as representative, becoming a larger work of art.

Mullan’s Epilogue adds some random notes to his otherwise orderly analysis: that contemporary authors (such as Edith Pargeter and Harry Patterson) have had success distinguishing their subgeneric works with pseudonyms (“Ellis Peters” and “Jake Higgins”), that Doris Lessing published her atypical novels on aging pseudonymously to avoid critical and readerly preconceptions, and that Eric Blair used the authorial persona of “George Orwell” to evade the need for accuracy in works that were presented as autobiographical. The conclusion is that anonymity provokes a search for the author as if having the author’s identity in hand is needed for understanding the work. While Mullan’s history establishes the first half of this statement, he does absolutely nothing to prove the second half. Indeed, he trivializes the matter with a smirking reference to Roland Barthes that assumes his “death of the author” theory has now been laid to rest (296). No, it has not. Nor has it even been entertained. That readers seek to identify an author does not mean that discovering it is essential to understanding the work, only that the quest is — and the quest is often unfulfilled. Mullan’s swipe at Barthes (and at continental theory in general) is surely meant to be comic; his own study involves no theory whatsoever, just a recounting of historical fact. But it does detract at the end of a very good history.