# Projection in Topographic Names

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TOPOGRAPHICAL NAMES MAY BE DERIVED from a physical peculiarity of the feature to be named, such as its color, shape, size, location (Blue Ridge, Long Island, Grand Canyon, Lake Superior), or else the name may have no such base whatever but may serve to perpetuate the memory of an individual, an event, or an idea – be it arbitrarily or because of a historic connection (Mt. Washington, Lake Erie, Hudson River). In South Dakota, for instance,

> when it comes to classification of peak names, the largest group, 17 out of 48, is composed of those named for individuals . . . The second largest group represents those names which are descriptive of the peaks they identify, six in number, such as Twin and Baldy Peaks.[1]

It is the latter type of name that interests us here.

If we examine the "descriptive" names, we find that the nature of the mental processes which entered into the act of "describing" may differ greatly. At the one extreme, we have the purely *descriptive* names, i.e. those that consist simply in naming the characteristic quality of an object: To call a body of water "Blue Lake" or a chain of peaks "Rocky Mountains" is merely to state a factual observation in the simplest and most direct terms: the lake is blue, the mountains are rocky.

Other names imply a comparison. "Fallen Leaf Lake" (because the lake is shaped like a leaf) states a physical quality but not simply descriptively. These names might be called *descriptive-projective* or *comparational.* At the other extreme we have the descriptive element forced into a secondary place in favor of a more imaginative and less obvious comparison – in names like "the Rabbit Ears" or "Bridal Falls": the *projective* names.

[1] South Dakota Writers Project, *South Dakota Place Names,* Vermillion, S. D.: Univ. of S. D., 1941, p. 405.

The word "projective," as used here, is borrowed from psychology (rather than from psychiatry, where it carries a different meaning). The present use of the term was established by Frank[2] a decade ago. Projection has been said to consist in giving meaning to "a stimulus situation which has no inherent compelling organization;"[3] or to be the "externalized expression of one's private inner world through selective perception and organization of the surrounding world."[4]

Psychology has had occasion to study both spontaneous and solicited projection. The former, also known as pareidolia,[5] is the one that most people have experienced. The essence of the phenomenon is that an impression is endowed by the imaginative viewer with a meaningful structure which it does not in itself possess. A person may see figures, faces, animals, etc., in clouds, smoke, flames, mottled walls.

Hamlet taunting Polonius with the different animals that a cloud may be said to look like[6] is the most famous example of projection in literature. Leonardo's notes on what he could see in the spots and cracks of walls[7] is a celebrated instance in the history of art. Man's proclivity to engage in spontaneous projection is the formative principle that accounts for descriptive-projective and projective names of topographic features.

Solicited projection, in which the individual is asked to project onto an unstructured impression has long been used in various types of magic and divination, such as molybdomancy[8] and lekanomancy.[9] These are not widely known, but the crystal ball that shows vague reflexions from which the future is told, has become proverbial.

[2] Lawrence K. Frank, *Projective Methods*, Springfield, Ill.: C. C. Thomas, 1948.

[3] M. Jahoda, M. Deutsch, and S. W. Cook, *Research Methods in Social Relations*, New York: Dryden, 1951.

[4] R. Schafer, *Psychoanalytic Interpretation in Rorschach Testing*, New York; Grune & Stratton, 1954.

[5] K. Jaspers, *Allgemeine Psychopathologie*, Berlin: J. Springer, 1913; and following him, Siegfried Fischer, *Principles of General Psychopathology*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1950.

[6] Act III, scene II.

[7] Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, Princeton: P. Univ. Press, 1956.

[8] Interpretation of the forms which molten lead assumes when poured into water; cf. R. Plank, *Spontaneous Projection of Meaningful Forms*, J. of Projective Techniques, 21, 2 (1957).

At least one commercial game has been based on solicited projection.[10] A German poet, Justinus Kerner, studied the art of projecting onto ink blots, had some of his projections sold at charitable bazaars, and seems to have arrived at the opinion that ghosts manifested themselves in his blots.[11] The Swiss psychiatrist Rorschach, possibly stimulated by Kerner's book, developed the ink blot test into an instrument of diagnosing personality features from the individual's distinctive way of projecting onto standardized blots. This – now known as *Rorschach Test* the world over – with many other projective tests which were developed later, forms an essential part of the armamentarium of scientific psychology.

There would be no solicited projection, hence no projective tests, if there were not a virtually universal readiness to respond to such solicitation. Psychology is therefore interested in spontaneaous projection, and a study that can help towards understanding it – which the study of topographic names can – becomes a contribution to psychology. This science in turn can provide us with instruments for the study of names. The assistance is mutual.

The circumstances which favor the creation of projective names in topography are different from those that lead to the projections which, documented in autobiographies, poetry, and historical anecdotes, form the bulk of the material on which psychology has been able to study spontaneous projection. The latter type is what we might call private. They depend on a rather unstructured stimulus and on the disposition of the projecting individual. In Hamlet goading Polonius into finding a cloud resembling a camel, a weasel, and a whale, we have the classical combination of a fleeting stimulus which yet has the power of intruding into the field of vision, and of an unusually imaginative individual. When we deal with that projection, however, which leads to the naming of topographic features, both conditions are reversed: The stimulus is permanent and unchanging; and the individual's imaginative power counts for little, since the name can only be established by consensus: that is to say, only a projection which can be repeated by many, if not by the great majority of viewers is capable of developing into a topographic name.

[9] Interpretation of the reflexions of flickering light in bowls of water; cf. H. Silberer, *Lekanomantische Versuche*, Zentralblatt f. Psychoanalyse 2 (1912).

We would therefore expect that in contrast to the typical operation of private projection, topographic features obtain projective names only if they have striking characteristics. This expectation is fulfilled by the observation that mountains and rock formations, and especially those which stand out by themselves and are singled out by a memorable or even bizarre form, acquire projective names, while other features do not.

> The landscape of the Dead Sea wilderness is monotonous, subduing and dreadful. This country is completely impersonal. It is a landscape without physiognomy: no faces of gods or men, no bodies of recumbent animals, are suggested by the shape of the hills. "Nothing but monotheism could possibly come out of this," said one of my companions, who knew Palestine well. "There's no crevice for a nymph anywhere."[12]

Projective names are rare in England;[13] a little more frequent in more mountainous California where we find such designations as Arrowhead, Funeral Mountain, Homer's Nose;[14] fairly common among the higher peaks of the Adirondacks: Out of 46 recorded names for summits of above 4,000 feet, eight are comparational or projective: Haystack, Gothics, Nipple Top, Saddleback, Table Top, Upper Wolf Jaw, Lower Wolf Jaw, Sawteeth.[15]

Not all these are particularly colorful or display unusually felicitous fantasy. Nor is this odd: A striking turn of fantasy is apt to be too individual a matter to achieve that consensus without which, as noted above, a name can not be perpetuated; and the colorful, alas, is all too often of such a nature that it runs afoul of censorship – be it the censorship practiced by authorities who must at least tolerate a name if it is to get into maps and be passed on to succeeding generations, or be it the censorship that everyone carries in his own mind and that tells him that certain names, though in

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[10] S. Rosenzweig, *A Note on Rorschach Prehistory,* Rorschach Research Exchange 8 (1944).

[11] J. Kerner, *Kleksographien,* Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1857.

[12] Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea,* New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955, p. 41.

[13] H. G. Stokes, *English Place-Names,* London: Batsford, 1948.

[14] E. Gudde, *Thousand California Place Names,* Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1947.

[15] *Guide to Adirondack Trails,* Albany: Adirondack Mountain Club, 1950.

private talk they might pass, are not suitable for more general conversation.

Sex organs appear not infrequently in private projections. This observation will not come as a surprise to anybody who has had occasion to familiarize himself with modes of thinking and talking that come to the fore in situations marked by both increased pressure of a dammed-up sex drive, and lowering of the generally socially accepted inhibitions – such as, many situations in armies. One would assume that similar conditions prevailed at the frontiers; but though so many of our geographic names are the product of the frontier, few if any frankly sexual topographic names have survived. Stewart, who notes that they have existed, refrains from giving examples.[16]

A sort of compromise was reached on names which project the female breast. Not as genital as other names might be, they are not quite as taboo. Yet their survival is not secured, and a certain coyness is at work disguising or eliminating them. The *Great Tetons* are respectable because not enough people know enough French to appreciate that they are not. San Francisco's *Pechos de la chola* became Twin Peaks. A peak in the Austrian Alps that was aptly named *Geisstuttenspitze* (goat's tits peak) appears in the maps by a name derived from a town that happens to be the seat of an alpine club which erected a shelter on its slope.

The forces making and unmaking such names might be the same all over the world, so it is not astonishing to find examples as easily in Europe as in America. Another instance can be brought in from South Africa, though here we have the additional pecularity that the name in a sense existed before the mountain.

In *King Solomon's Mines*, an adventure story much read in its day, Sir H. Rider Haggard described a pair of mountains that fulfilled the requirements, except that to all appearances they were entirely fictitious. The needs of the plot – and perhaps the coyness that we have found in other cases – caused him to propose the name first in Portuguese: "*duas montanhas que chamei seio de Sheba* ..." – though the English translation is presently given: "... the two mountains I have named Sheba's Breasts ..."[17] The invention is played for all it is worth:

[16] G. R. Stewart, *Names on the Land*, New York: Random House, 1945.

[17] H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (new ed., New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1926), p. 20.

> ... glittering like silver in the early rays of the morning sun, were Sheba's breasts ...[18]
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> ... These mountains standing thus, like the pillars of a gigantic gateway, are shaped exactly like a woman's breasts. Their bases swelled gently up from the plain, looking, at that distance, perfectly round and smooth; and on the top of each was a vast round hillock covered with snow, exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast.[19]
>
> Behind and over us towered Sheba's snowy breasts ...[20]

Small wonder that the author got enamored with his brain child – so much so that he became convinced of its independent existance:

> Rhodesia has been discovered, which is a land full of gems and gold ... also Queen Sheba's Breasts have been found, or something very like to them, and traces of the great road that I described.[21]

What is more, he seems to have turned out to be right, if we can believe a contemporary journalist:

> The proprietress of a hotel we stopped at took us out on the verandah one evening and nodded toward the Western skyline. "Look," she said, "Queen Sheba's Breasts." And there they were, two pointed peaks, just as Haggard described them, and the trail winding down through the pass between them was obviously the one that Quatermain followed.[22]

That in this instance the name survived so triumphantly undisguised while similar names in other countries had to be domesticated may well be due to its origin in fiction, since novelists are accorded more license and the consensus they have to achieve is different from that required for the more sober business of naming a mountain that already exists.

Brazil has the most celebrated example of a descriptive-projective name in Rio de Janeiro's *Pão de açucar*, the Sugar Loaf. The range behind Rio contains a group of rocks that are very similar

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[18] Op. cit., p. 69.

[19] Op. cit., p. 70.

[20] Op. cit., p. 86.

[21] H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life*, London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1926.

[22] Alan Moorehead, *A Reporter in Africa*, The New Yorker, May 25, 1957, p. 68.

in shape to those that in Austria were named goat's tits peak: pointed pillars of graded height close together. These have a name which, equally appropriate to their shape, is infinitely more proper: *Serra dos Orgãos*, Organ Range. (*Serra*, incidentally, – Spanish, *sierra* – is in itself a comparational name as it means saw; there are also peaks called Sawtooth in the Californian "Sierras").

One peak in the Organ Range deserves – and obtains – special attention. The highway up from Rio turns a corner and the traveler finds himself suddenly in a small valley which contains the town of Terezopolis. Here the road becomes a main street, and beyond the end of the street there looms, totally unexpected, majestic, even faintly sinister, rising abruptly above its neighboring rocks that might well be imagined as the fingers of a hand, a tall, straight, incredible rock. If its sudden appearance were not so overwhelming, it might, simply for its shape, have been called "chimney rock." As it is, it bears the name of *Dedo de Deus*, finger of God.

This is projection at its best. Yet, strikingly fit though the name is, it leaves room to wonder what other projection may have been at work there, perhaps before the Christian god became known in these mountains. One is reminded of Ophelia's flower

> That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
> But our cold maids do dead-men's-fingers call them.[23]

It is possible that Brasilian planters were less liberal than English shepherds.

There is undoubtedly a cultural factor in projection (just as every comparison is seasoned with at least a trace of projection): the English of Shakespeare's day would project differently from the Brasilians of the 19th century because the associative material that their minds had ready was different. Harper's Magazine mentioned an amusing example of this divergence:

> *ocarina* ... [It., dim. of oca, a goose; ... so called from its shape], a small, simple wind instrumend shaped like a sweet potato ...[24]

There is a mountain near the resort town of Zakopane, Poland, called *Gewont* for a legendary knight it is supposed to resemble. When Pilsudski, then the ruler of Poland, died, people discovered

[23] Act IV.

[24] *Webster's New World Dictionary.*

that the outline of the mountain bore a resemblance to the features of the departed, and it became known as Pilsudski's Mountain.

Similar places in Europe and America teem with profiles and other projective features of the peculiar kind that is supposed to appeal to tourists. A genteel and "Victorian" flavor prevails at present; but it is quite possible that in 1984 people will go to a national park for the famous view of *Orlon Falls* from *Hardtop Rock.*

All these are but samples: to illustrate the breadth of the field and the need to see beyond the ephemeral, to discern the great trends. What we have been able to find so far about comparational and projective topographic names is consistent with the theories of modern psychology. Not that these needed confirmation; but to enrich the material on which they are based may always be helpful.

As to the study of names itself, attention to the projective element may be equally rewarding. It has hitherto not been much noted. Yet it represents one of the forces that create names; and perhaps, though a small force, one of the most vital ones. For projection is related to creativity: It is a power by which man breathes life into the lifeless. It is an ability through which man carries on his strange love affair with Nature, reflecting all that in his yearnings which is vulgar or scurrile, and all that is splendid. In constrast to names resulting from more obvious and conscious impulses of naming, projection gives us a chance to descend to deeper sources: both to the changing social aspirations and to the unvarying basic appetites of man.

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