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Book Review

Charles Darwin's Barnacle and David Bowie's Spider: How Scientific Names Celebrate Adventurers, Heroes, and Even a Few Scoundrels. By STEPHEN B. HEARD. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2020. Pp. 254. ISBN-13: 978-0-300-23828-0. $28.00.

Stephen B. Heard is a professor of biology at the University of New Brunswick, Canada, and the President of the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution. As a researcher and educator, one of his primary goals is to help improve relations among the world's scientific and lay communities. Without question, the book under review makes an excellent contribution to achieving this goal. Readers across a multitude of backgrounds will be fascinated by Heard's historical examination of eponymous scientific names. Importantly, as explained in the preface, this system of honorific names does more than offer important insights into the planet's ecology: "in choosing to honor someone with an eponymous Latin name, a scientist can tell a story about the person being honored; but at the same time, that scientist tells a story about him- or herself" (xiii). The use of the word "story" is not incidental here. Heard is truly an exceptional storyteller. Each chapter he provides tells thought-provoking, sometimes troubling, always elucidating stories about how the world's flora and fauna came to be named.

Before launching into the histories behind many of the world's taxonyms, Heard provides essential background information on the mechanics of scientific naming for the uninitiated reader. Thankfully, Heard goes to great pains not to alienate readers by becoming overly technical. His light-hearted tone helps to

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overcome the initial apprehension which many lay readers experience when confronted with scientific texts. As Heard himself acknowledges:

> Everyone knows that science can be dull and fusty, and that the Latin names we give to plants and animals are the dullest and fustiest of all. They're long, they're unmemorable and unpronounceable, and they're at best a necessary evil that biology students memorize as some kind of scientific hazing ritual. Everyone knows this. But everyone is wrong. (3)

For the next 238 pages, Heard does a brilliant job in providing evidence to prove his case. Chapter One, "The Need for Names" (5–13), explains how scientific nomenclature offers a linguistic rubric for ordering the world around us. Of course, scientists are not the only ones who give names to the living and the dead. Every culture has its own traditional system of so-called "common names". So why, one might ask, did scientists go to the trouble of devising their very own system of nomenclature when there are so many out there to borrow from? As Heard explains, there are many reasons why. Aside from the sociopolitical impossibility of selecting one culture's system of nomination over another is the simple fact that common name systems are fatally blighted by contradictions, inaccuracies, and outright falsehoods. As Heard reminds, despite their names, *African violets* aren't actually violets, and *electric eels* do carry a charge but they are not actually eels (9). These are not the only problems with folk systems of nomenclature. Common names are also neither specific nor varied enough to make the kinds of minute delineations required to differentiate species. Moreover, folk systems are geographically restricted. Understandably, the lay peoples living on the North American continent had no need to develop names for plants and animals found in Oceania or Antarctica, and vice versa. And this is to say nothing of gaping lexico-semantic holes in the world's folk etymologies due to the multitude of species that lay people have deemed too useless, too small, and/or too rare to warrant naming. To overcome these and other challenges, scientists needed a system of nomenclature flexible enough that it could be used across different terrains, climes, and times, and robust enough that it could be used to label the tens of thousands of species already identified as well as the universe of life-forms yet to be discovered.

Although many attempted to answer this call, the honor of becoming the world's father of taxonomy went to the Swedish scientist Carl von Linne (1707-1778). Linne, or "Linnaeus" as he preferred to be called, began his university studies at a time when natural scientists were expected to document their discoveries with meticulously detailed, highly ornate illustrations. From the shiny sinews of the human body to the hirsute tendrils of a creeping vine, in Linnaeus's time the most celebrated naturalists were also highly accomplished artists who recorded their discoveries in stunningly detailed paintings. Although Linneaus was a talented observer, he was reportedly an average-to-miserable artist (Charmantier 2011). Undaunted, the young Swede developed a non-visual system of documentation that not only made it possible for scientists to draw attention to the most salient distinguishing features of the life forms they discovered. It also allowed them to place their discoveries into an elaborate hierarchical system of classification.

In Chapter Two, "How Scientific Naming Works" (14-23), Heard details how Linneaus's original system of nomenclature has evolved over the centuries and been refined by the international scientific community. As Heard explains, there are currently five separate systems of nomenclature codes: "One for animals, one for wild plants, algae, and fungi, one for cultivated plants, one for bacteria, and one for viruses". (18). In recent years, thanks to the ongoing pandemic, many people have become familiar with the International Code of Viral Classification and Nomenclature (ICVCN).[1] However, as Heard's book was written before the global SARS-COV2 outbreak, it sadly does not provide detailed information about the names and naming of viruses (Nick 2021). Instead, the reference focuses on the onomastic codes of practice used for animals, wild plants, algae, and fungi. As one might expect, the rules governing the naming of these species are highly complex. However, once again, Heard wisely avoids getting bogged down in the minutiae and restricts himself to answering such fundamental questions as how new names are made public, what morphological and orthographical regulations govern the creation of new declinations, and who decides what to do when two or more names have been accidentally applied to a single species.

Centuries of strict adherence to these rules have generated a cornucopia of Latinate names with hidden beauty and grace. Take for example the *Magnolia amplissimo flore albo, fructu caeruleo*. On its surface, this name may seem intimidating in its length and hopelessly sterile in its complexity. When translated into English, however, the name reveals itself to be as pleasing as the plant it signifies: "The magnolia with large white flowers and blue fruits" (26). According to Heard, the bloom's first scientific name[2] was devised not only to record its physical appearance but also to commemorate Pierre **Magnol** (1638–1715), an accomplished French Huguenot botanist who repeatedly fell victim to religious bigotry during the reign of King Louis XIV. Although Magnol's tremendous contributions to medicinal botany have since faded away from public memory, the importance of his scholarship is immortalized in the blossom's name: a linguistic time capsule for future generations to open and discover.

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Of course, not every species has the honor of being named after an illustrious scientist. Many species have namesakes whose accomplishments lay far outside of the academy. An excellent example here is Gary Larson, the US American cartoonist and creator of "The Far Side". Even today, decades after his official retirement in 1995, Larson's cartoons "still decorate laboratory doors in universities, museums, and research institutes everywhere" (31). Nicknamed the "national humorist of natural history", Larson has poked fun at nearly every scientific discipline you can think of, from "anthropology, archaeology, biology, botany, entomology, paleontology, and zoology, with occasional ventures into physics and mathematics" (Higdon 1994, 49); you name it, and Larson has drawn it. That being the case, it was just a matter of time before the scientific community returned the favor and named a species after him. In 1990, a graduate student researcher proudly announced the discovery of *Strigiphilus* ***garylarson****i*, a genus of lice that lives in the feathers of small African owls. In his dedication, the Master's student wrote that the name was "in appreciation of the unique light he has shed on the workings of nature" (33). A smaller man might have been perturbed by having his name bestowed upon a louse. However, Larson was delighted. "I considered this an extreme honor", he revealed in an interview. "Besides, I knew no one was going to write and ask to name a new species of swan after me. You have to grab these opportunities when they come along" (33).[3]

As Heard details in Chapter Six (49-56), Larson is not the only pop cultural icon to be inducted into the taxonomic hall of fame. There is the *Heteropoda* ***davidbowie***, a "thin, long-legged, and orange-haired" spider who reminded its namers of David Bowie's lithe alter ego Ziggy Stardust (50); and there is the sleek well-defined ground beetle named *Agra* ***schwarzenegger****i* whose "suitably swollen bicep-leg segments" (52) reminded its name-givers of an Austrian-born body-builder who graduated from being the iconic Terminator to serve as California's latest Republican governor (2003–2011) (California State Library 2019). Representing the other side of the congressional aisle, residing deep within the foliage of the Chattahoochee National Forest in northern Georgia is the *Cryptocerus* ***garcia****i*. This name was inspired by the legendary Grateful Dead founding member Jerry Garcia (1942–1995), who was an ardent advocate for the legalization of marijuana (Kushner 2020). The tiny animal chosen to carry the musician's name is an unassuming species of wood roach—the pun was no doubt intended.

Added to this group of pop culture VIPs is the host of fictional characters whose names have been used for real-life species. Not surprisingly perhaps, one of the most productive sources of characteronym-turned taxonymy is science fiction/fantasy. Examples discussed by Heard include three unassuming weevils called *Macrotyphlus* ***frodo***, *Macrotyphlus* ***bilbo***, and *Macrotyphlus* ***gandalf***, whose names immortalize the beloved protagonists in J. R. R. Tolkien's saga, *The Lord of the Rings*; and the native New Zealand wasp, ***Lusius malfoyi***, named after the platinum-blonde teen antagonist of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels (Lucius Malfoy). According to Tom Saunders, the New Zealand insectologist responsible for the wasp's name, the moniker was inspired not only by the wasp's appearance—its body is light-colored—but also by the perception people have of the insect. As Saunders explained:

> I started to think about how people have a really negative perception of wasps, and it's similar with the Harry Potter series with how everyone knows that Lucius Malfoy is this massive villain and everyone hates him. But at the end of the series he's pardoned for his crimes because he breaks away from Death Eaters and other evil wizards. (Balance 2018, para 21)

As Heard explains, the penchant of some scientists to derive taxonyms from the personal names of fanciful characters, be they real or imagined, has been sharply criticized for trivializing the lofty endeavor of identifying, classifying, and cataloging the world's ecosystem. However, as Heard rightly points out, at a time when so much of the planet's biodiversity is under threat of imminent extinction, "it's hard to criticize any effort to being the science of taxonomy into the public eye" (54). From a purely linguistic point of view, one could also make the argument that there is precious little difference between a grateful grad student naming newly discovered species after the doctoral supervisor or recording artist who helped them make it through the night. The underlying linguistic process is the same. Whether inside or outside of the laboratory, eponymous naming is a common strategy to pay homage to those whose lives have been an inspiration to others.

Of course, as we all know, not all heroes are world famous. In fact, very often, those who inspire us the most come from our everyday private lives: people whose kindness and generosity make life worth living. In recognition of this fact, Heard devotes the entirety of Chapter Fourteen, "Love in a Latin Name" (129-139), to beautiful love stories that have inspired scientific names. In 1839, *Sericulus* ***anais***, a species of mynah bird, for example, was named by French ornithologist René Lesson (1794–1849) in honor of his beloved daughter, Anais, who died at the age of eleven. As Lesson later wrote, the name was to serve as an eternal reminder of "a father's deepest sorrow" (131). Another, more famous example of a love-inspired name-giver is the French physician and botanist Raymond-Hamet (1890–1972). According to Heard, during Hamet's lifetime, the scientist documented more than 60 different species of the tropical flower *Kalanchoe*. Three of these discoveries Hamet named after his intimate friend, Alice Le Blanc: (1) *Kalanchoe* ***leblanc****ae*; (2) *Sedum* ***celiae*** (an anagram of "Alice"); and (3) *Kalanchoe* ***mitejea*** (an anagram of "je t'aime"). Although little is

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known of Hamet's onomastic muse, the affection he carried for Miss LeBlanc has been immortalized in these phytonyms. Not all of Hamet's eponymous creations have stood the test of time, however. The eccentric scientist also used species of the East African plant to honor the fascist former Prime Minister of Portugal, António de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970). Although the dictator's name has long since been expunged from most public spaces in Portugal, thanks to Hamet it still remains enshrined in the world of botany (Figueiredo & Smith 2010, 85).

Sadly, as Heard describes in Chapter Eight, "The Name of Evil" (64–72), these are not the only examples of flora and fauna with ill-gotten names. Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Caligula, as well as a basket of other historical deplorables, have all had the honor of having a species named after them. In the defense of some of the scientists responsible for such onomastic disasters, the crimes perpetrated or condoned by political leaders may not have been known to them at the time that they named a new species after them. It is this "potential for regret about naming" that is the reason why modern scientists try "to avoid naming species for celebrities" (68). "After all," Heard continues, "it's not unusual for an athlete, an actor, or a musician to be famous for professional accomplishment but to have questionable virtue" (68). What Heard neglects to mention, however, is the fact that the same can be said of researchers. History is filled with examples of scientists whose professional accomplishments were matched only by their moral failings.

Heard is by no means ignorant of this fact, however. In Chapter Twelve, "Less Than a Tribute: The Temptation of Insult Naming" (104–114), he provides many examples of scientists who have used their naming privileges to wage very public wars against a bevy of private enemies. In the 18th century, none other than Carl Linnaeus himself introduced the name ***Sigesbeck****ia orientalis* to his growing list of botanical discoveries. For taxonomic insiders, the announcement was a scandal. According to Heard, the name was given in retaliation for a scathing review that fellow botanist Johann Georg Siegebeck (1686–1755) had written about one of Linneaus's publications. The onomastic insult lies in the fact that *Sigesbeckia orientalis* happens to be a "small, unpleasantly sticky and rather unattractive weed" (105) with remarkably small reproductive organs. Over the centuries, such insult naming, though officially discouraged, has remained an offensive weapon amongst taxonomists. Despite the stubborn endurance of this naming practice, a more common source of inspiration for taxonyms is scientific accomplishment. As described in Chapter Ten, "Names from the Ego" (85-94), more than a few researchers have used this onomastic tradition to call attention to their own achievements. However, the majority of researchers have resisted this temptation and have chosen to name their discoveries after researchers whose work they admire. The legendary Dr. Charles Darwin (1809–1882), for example, has had 389 species named after him. Chapter Thirteen, "Charles Darwin's Tangled Bank" (115–128), examines this complex onomastic legacy and concludes that "Darwin's eponymous species" are "a celebration of his importance to science" (127). At the same time, as Heard is also careful to point out, the historical preoccupation with a few has meant the continued marginalization of a great many others. Heard brings home this point in Chapter Seven, "*Spurlingia*: A Snail for the Otherwise Forgotten" (57-63). Heard cautions:

> For every Darwin or Bates, Wallace or Gould, there were likely dozens of [. . .] unheralded, likely uneducated, and largely unremembered. Some considered themselves scientists, others were hobbyists, and some played supporting roles---as guides, crew members, even cooks and craftsmen without whom the expeditions wouldn't have been possible. (63)

The striking preponderance of scientific names that celebrate the accomplishments of wealthy White men can to a certain extent be explained by historical prevalence of this demographic in the natural sciences. This is only part of the explanation, however. As Heard rightly asserts, another equally important factor has been the canon's insistence upon systematically denying, denigrating, ignoring, and/or belittling the accomplishments of minority researchers.

Importantly, Heard not only talks the talk but walks the walk. Of the fifteen chapters that make up his publication, almost half are devoted to marginalized people in scientific naming. In Chapters Eleven (95–103), Seventeen (162–171), and Nineteen (182–192), for example, Heard describes how female pioneers like the US American primatologist Dian Fossey (1932–1985), the South African naturalist Marjorie Courtenay Latimer (1907–2004), and the entomologist Mabel Alexander (1894–1979) became a part of the small but growing circle of women who have had species named after them in recognition of their scientific achievements as opposed to their feminine accoutrements.[4] Sadly, of the tens of thousands of taxonyms that exist today, only a tiny fraction honor the work of female scientists; and fewer still celebrate the contributions of non-White researchers, whatever their gender. The paucity of such eponymous taxonomy is a reflection of the degree to which racist and sexist ideologies still permeate scientific thought and practice.[5] Evidence for this assertion can be seen not only in the glaring terminological absences but also in the shocking preservation of phytonyms and zoonyms that feature highly offensive terms such as *hottentot*, kaffir*, gypsy*, squaw*,* and *nigger**.[6] The fight to have these and other hurtful epithets replaced by culturally

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respectful and scientifically useful terminology has faced a surprising amount of resistance within the academy. This continuing resistance is in marked difference to the advances that have been made in eradicating pejorative official place names and trade names (e.g., *Washington Redskins* → *Washington Commanders*; *Aunt Jemima* Syrup → *Pearl Milling Company Syrup*; *Mount McKinley National Forest* → *Denali National Forest*).[7]

By comparison, more progress has been made in ensuring that new taxonymic naming practices adhere to the principles of diversity, equality, and inclusivity (DEI). For example, as Heard details, in recent years, there has been a growing movement to devise new taxonyms by incorporating the names Indigenous peoples have traditionally used for the flora and fauna of their communities. For example, *Anhinga anhinga*, the scientific name for a Brazilian bird native to the Amazon rainforest, was derived from Tupi, a Brazilian Indigenous language (Driver and Bond 2021, 1493). Chapter Fifteen (140–151) is entirely devoted to discussing other cases of species naming that reflect the growing number of pro-DEI initiatives in taxonymy. A recent example of eponymous naming used to recognize the shared values of Western and Indigenous Sciences occurred when the body of a female whale washed ashore on the western coast of Aotearoa New Zealand. Initially, scientists in Wellington ruled that the mammal was True's beaked whale. This classification was, however, called into question by the Mātauranga Māori whale expert Ramari Stewart. Subsequent genetic testing determined that Stewart's assessment had been correct and the cadaver belonged to a hitherto unknown whale species (Carroll, et al. 2021). In commemoration of Stewart's work, the species was given the common name *Ramari's beaked whale* and the scientific name *Mesoplodon eueu*. The term "eu'eu" means 'big fish' in Khwedam, the language of the Khoisan people of South Africa, which is the geographic home of the migratory mammal. As Stewart commented in reaction to the eponymous honor, "It's wonderful that Western science is starting to recognize that Mātauranga Māori is as equally great as Western science and the two can work together" (Olsen 2021, para. 12). Although the two systems are different and independent, as this example shows, "they can profit from mutual comparison, and each should be respected and valued for its distinctive role" (McGlone, Heenan, Wilton and Anderson, 2021, 1).

The book ends with a remarkable name story that brings together many of the onomastic issues examined in chapters previous. In the Epilogue (193–200), Heard explains how one of the greats in the world of natural sciences came to serve as the namesake for one of the planet's smallest—the *Microcebus* ***bertha****e*, a tiny species of mouse lemur native to the island nation of Madagascar. The namesake of this species is Dr. Berthe Rakotosamimanana (1938–2005). Born and raised in a village located deep within the Madagascan rainforests, Rakotosamimanana went on to study biological anthropology at the prestigious Université de Paris. After earning her doctorate in France, she returned to Madagascar, where she devoted her life to protecting its biodiversity through education and research. An ardent conservationist, in 1994 she founded the Groupe d'étude et de recherche sur les primates (Primate Research and Study Group). Although more than two decades have passed since Rakotosamimanana's death, the generations of researchers and activists she trained continue her legacy today. The name *Microcebus* ***bertha****e* is then an onomastic testament to the work and life of an extraordinary female scientist of color.[8]

The last page of the reference provides readers with a wonderful black-and-white illustration of the wide-eyed lemur that carries Madame Berthe's name. This illustration, along with nearly a dozen others that appear in the book, was created by celebrated Canadian nature and science illustrator Emily S. Damstra. A master of her craft, Damstra's artwork has appeared in numerous scientific journals, magazines, and books. What fascinates her about this work is not only her love for nature, but her passion for "telling stories through art" (www.emilydamstra.com). Without doubt, it is Damstra and Heard's shared love of science and storytelling that makes this work such a satisfying read for onomastic scholar and name enthusiast alike. Just as its title promises, *Charles Darwin's Barnacle and David Bowie's Spider* tells the wonderous tale of "how scientific names" have been used throughout history to "celebrate adventurers, heroes, and even a few scoundrels".[9]

Notes

[1] According to its official statutes, the ICVCN is responsible for developing "an internationally agreed taxonomy for viruses" as well as generating globally recognized "names for virus taxa" in accordance with three essential principles of virus nomenclature: (1) stability; (2) accuracy; and (3) necessity (Adams, Lefkowitz, King, & Carstens 2013). With the emergence and global spread of COVID-19, the prudence of adhering to these principles was shown as political leaders coined common names designed to malign and scapegoat members of the global community. For more, see Nick (2020).

[2] The flowering tree is native to the West Indian island of Martinique and is known locally as *Talauma* (Ramyashree and Hemalatha 2020, 39).

[3] This louse is not the only species to have been named after the humorist. There is also *Serratoterga* ***larsoni***, a neo-tropical species of butterfly which also carries the cartoonist's surname.

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[4] In a 2018 landmark study by Lindon, Gardiner, Brady, and Vorontsova, it was determined that fewer than three percent of land plant species had been named by women.

[5] Although there is much to be done, the sustained protests have resulted in some organizations at least acknowledging that there is a problem with racism and sexism in scientific naming. For example, in June 2022, the North American Classification Committee (NACC) of the American Ornithological Society issued the following acknowledgement in its naming guidelines: "The NACC recognizes that some eponyms refer to individuals or cultures who held beliefs or engaged in actions that would be considered offensive or unethical by present-day standards" (2022, Section D, para 1). Despite such acknowledgements, there has been a considerable degree of push-back from those who condemn the removal of injurious scientific names as leftist extremism. However, as Schiffman rightly counters in a 2019 article for *Scientific American*, "Surely saying that genocide and slavery is bad is not political correctness run amok?" (para. 11).

[6] In the past twenty years, some scientific activists have called for the partial or complete replacement of the traditional binomial system of nomenclature with Indigenous naming systems. As Gillman and Wright (2020) criticize, Indigenous names are frequently ignored "despite these often conveying in-depth knowledge relating to form, uses, distribution and ecology" (2). Although the suggestion to completely abandon Linnaeus's system has been largely rejected, the debate has encouraged more attention to and respect for pre-existing naming systems. For more, see Palma & Heath (2021); Driver & Bond (2021); Figueiredo and Smith (2010).

[7] For more on the issue of racism in official place names, see Nick (2017).

[8] In his blog "Scientist Sees Squirrel," Heard gives two more examples of modern species naming that go against this tradition: (1) ***Izzibella abbotta****e*, a red alga named after Isabella Kauakea Aiona Abbott (or *Izzie* to her friends [Park 2022]), "the first indigenous Hawai'ian woman to receive a PhD in science"; and (2) *Tarsius* ***supriatna****i*, a small leaping primate (tarsier) named after the Indonesian primatologist Jatna Supriatna (2022, para 6).

[9] Phrasing taken from the book's sub-title: "How Scientific Names Celebrate Adventurers, Heroes, and Even a Few Scoundrels".

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