Names and Nomenclatures in Science-Fiction

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B<small>EFORE BEGINNING TO DISCUSS</small>, even in a general way, the naming practices of authors of science-fiction, it is necessary to come to some understanding of the extent and nature of this *genre* which has recently achieved both general popularity and literary respectability, especially since the technological advances of the post-World War II years have brought to reality many of the things described by these prescient writers. Serious editors of large science-fiction anthologies have included stories of imaginative content or of non-real places and happenings (e.g., flights to the moon) which were written some centuries ago. One of the attempts to trace s-f (for convenience I employ this widely-used abbreviation) to its origins is August Derleth's *Beyond Space and Time* (New York, 1950, 634 pages with 34 stories). He begins with Plato's *Atlantis*, Lucian's *A True History*, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, goes on to works by Jonathan Swift, Francis Bacon, even Johannes Kepler the astronomer, and one-fourth of the book is used up even before coming to Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, all of whom began prior to this century. Not only must Poe, Verne and Wells be reckoned with in literary history, but also some important authors of today (C. S. Lewis, Stephen Vincent Benet, Philip Wylie, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Nevil Shute, and many others) who have written works which have been included in s-f anthologies or been otherwise considered part of the s-f corpus.

Attempts to delimit, define and rationalize s-f have not been lacking (cf. Kingsley Amis' provocative and perceptive analysis, *New Maps of Hell*, New York, 1960). The Modern Language Association has at least since 1958 held one conference of its annual meetings devoted to s-f in various aspects. However, almost any definition proposed will apply to items not thought of as s-f, or, conversely, will eliminate items generally considered s-f, using such criteria as date of composition, an off-Earth locale, employment of

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scientific marvels not yet perfected or possible, contact with non-human alien races, or even the general impossibility of such events. Since the problem is one of definition, we may say simply that any story which the author calls s-f, or which an editor has included in an s-f collection, may be included for our purposes under the rubric of s-f; in short, a science-fiction work is one because the author or an editor has said it is one. Even such wide latitude does not exclude exceptions. The allied genre labelled "fantasy," and by many editors and writers set cheek-by-jowl with s-f, is often hardly to be distinguished from it. Any attempt to define these fluid and amorphous weird stories is even less susceptible of success.

The topics and aim of s-f writings should perhaps be mentioned as an aid to understanding the genre. In spite of the growing popularity of this style of writing, many people still think of bug-eyed monsters (BEM's to the initiate) abducting scantily-clad beauties from their spaceships as the main theme of s-f literature. It certainly is true that in the early days of the 1920's and 1930's this formed a major component, and such "space opera" is not completely eliminated even today. The s-f literary form allows the author unparalleled opportunity to develop his characters free of earthly conventions, and, in particular (a factor which I find of immense personal interest), through depicting the foibles of a society far in space and time from his own, is thereby enabled artfully to criticize the social mores, politics, technology and general inanities of his own society. C. S. Lewis has said in effect that the best social criticism in America today is disguised as science-fiction. Lastly, we must make the remark, perhaps cutting to the *aficionados*, that not all s-f is quality writing. Much of it is simply of little merit other than as escapist literature or shallow entertainment. However, there are also outstanding works of insight, imagination, beauty and skill, in which the authors sometimes display amazing capacity to project themselves beyond the frames of human and earthly reference and to deal with universal and philosophical questions.

Before proceeding to discuss naming as such, we must first dispose of an area which will disturb those never exposed to this literature. S-f writings make use of a considerable number of conventions, many of which have become so well-established as to remain unnoticed by the fan, but baffling or annoying to the non-initiate. Most of these are technological in nature and have been dealt with

by Amis in his book. Such are the usage of paradoxes or impossibilities, specifically, interstellar travel approaching or even exceeding the speed of light; anti-gravity propulsion; timetravel and allied phenomena; widespread use of "psionic" abilities (i.e., telepathy, teleportation, etc.) and others. We would not need to dwell on these were it not that in nomenclatures some degree of convention also resides, as will be shortly demonstrated.

Since we wish to study naming practices in a body of written material labelled s-f, it must be presumed that we will have little interest in stories laid in a modern milieu in which the names differ but little from those found in any current novel. Of greater interest will be tales of the future or alien cultures in which a regularity of naming or some systematical nomenclature is envisaged by the author as a detail in the story to add versimilitude. Most often, perhaps, names seem to be chosen for their supposed non-Earthly sounds, or, conversely, can only be presumed to be from random euphonious combinations invented by the author. Possibly the vast bulk of s-f stories fall into this category; and of the more than one thousand items read for this survey,[1] only a small percentage contain sufficient data on nomenclatures or names of interest to warrant inclusion or discussion here.

There is one previous study in this general area, namely, Dr. Robert Plank's article in *Names* (9, 151–159, 1961), "Names and Roles of Characters in Science Fiction," in which the author studies the assignation of Anglo-Saxon and foreign names to heroes and villains in science-fiction stories, and is interested in trends and tendencies towards certain types of names in the characters. In the present article, however, I am chiefly concerned with describing the types of naming systems evolved by various writers.

The first general category, as stated, contains stories in which the milieu and names differ but slightly if at all from the contemporary scene, or in which a future society merely continues names current

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[1] The present article is subsidiary to a much longer completed study of language and communication in science-fiction, surveying the means by which authors employ natural and artificial languages, mechanical translators, telepathy, etc., to resolve the practical needs of communication with alien extraterrestial cultures. A total of around two hundred volumes (both hardback and paperback) of novels and collections was read and briefly abstracted. Individual stories from anthologies number over one thousand, and vary in length from one to a hundred pages.

in the North American culture. It is the exception rather than the rule to find a remark which explains any feature of the nomenclature. George Orwell's popular and well-known novel, *1984*, depicting life in a highly regimented society of the immediate future, has a scene in which the all-seeing television monitor admonishes the prisoners, as "6079 Smith W.! and 2713 Bumstead J.!"; whether this implies a regular numerical addition to traditional naming, or is merely indicative of the prison, is not stated, but left to conjecture. A variation on this is seen in Robert Heinlein's *Beyond this Horizon*[2], a tale of a society 300 years in the future, in which genetic control is responsible for both advances and defects. Here characters occur last-name first, as Hamilton Felix, Smith John Darlington, Hartnett Marion, Monroe-Alpha Clifford (the suffix is not explained, but by convention I assume it indicates a robotic status or origin), Longcourt Phyllis, and others. However, the practice of that society is not otherwise explained.

The next general category builds on the preceding to some extent, and contains implicitly the information that the future society is one completely fused, merged or integrated with respect to races and cultures. For instance, in Robert Sheckley's story, "Holdout" (in his collection *Notions Unlimited*), dealing with the problems faced by a Georgia mountain boy in an interracial spaceship crew, we find this dialogue: "The medical officer is an Israeli. The navigator is a Venusian. The engineer is Chinese. There are Russians, New Yorkers, Melanasians, Africans and everything else in this crew. Men of all races, creeds and colors ..." The next step is a blend of names which indicate an actual multinational or multiracial origin, as in C. M. Kornbluth's story, "The Marching Morons" (from his collection of the same name). This tale of a slick promoter of the late 1900's, who is revived from his suspended animation to

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[2] The majority of books surveyed for this article appeared in pocket-sized paperback editions. To avoid complicated bibliographical citations of these sources, which is really unnecessary for our purposes, I choose here to give only author and story-title, and omit details of publisher, date, place, pages, etc. This is because many of these novels and stories first appeared in the "pulp" magazines, were reprinted in hard-cover anthologies, reprinted in paperback, sometimes under new titles, and sometimes revised and expanded, and also in more than one collection. The s-f enthusiasts themselves have published some checklists and bibliographies in which it is possible to trace a given story for those who require further reference to it. The fuller data is also in my files.

a society overpopulated with low-grade masses and run by a secret elite, contains this exchange:

> 'My name's Ryan-Ngana.' He put out his hand.
> ... 'Ryan what?'
> 'Ngana.'
> 'That sounds like an African name.'
> 'It is. My mother's father was a Watusi.'

This is the only remark to cast light on this aspect of the society, the rest being assumed by convention and implication. Other names in the story bear out the assumption: Gomez-Laplace, Garvey-Seabright, Tinny-Peete, Hull-Mendoza, Black-Kupperman, Rogge-Smith, Swenson-Swenson, Tsutsugimushi-Duncan, Kalb-French.

Now that the s-f fan has become accustomed to this idea, it is possible to utilize it as a convention, and introduce compound names of diverse origin with no explanation at all of the societal processes underlying their adoption, as in Edward Jesbey's story, "Sea Wrack" (in Wollheim and Carr's collection, *World's Best Science-Fiction: 1965*). This is a story of a future world in conflict between undersea men and island dwellers. Characters occurring are named Greta Hijukawa-Rosen, Hadji Abuwolowo Smyth, Carl Hauptmann-Everetsky and Gunnar Bjørnstrom-Cousteau. Another example, which implies only a world unity and not a racial fusion, occurs in William Tenn's story, "Down among the Dead Men" (in his collection, *Of all Possible Worlds*), a bitter satire on a future world where the bodily elements of slain soldiers are scientifically reconstituted into humans again for further fighting. The hero, a commander, gets a team of these surrogate fighters, and finds that they are modeled on famous recent military heroes whose names are Roger Gray, Wang Hsi, Yussuf Lamehd and Stanley Weinstein. The mere juxtaposition, in one story, of names of diverse earthly origin has become a convention implying world government, loss of prejudice, and so on.

Occasionally stories have characters restricted to members of one ethnic group. Such is Murray Leinster's episode, "Sand Doom" in his collection *The Planet Explorer* (earlier titled *Colonial Survey*). This describes adventures on distant hot worlds in which colonization is carried out by Amerinds and Africans who withstand heat well. Names of characters in this story are Abeokuta, Sutata,

T'chka, Lewanika and Dr. Chuka for the African component,[3] and for the American Indian crowd, Northwind, Tall Grass, Spotted Horse, Johnny Cornstalk, Bob Running Antelope, Sally White-horse, Aletha Redfeather and Mike Thundercloud. Sometimes stories contain names solely representative of particular Earthly cultures or ethnic groups, e.g., Irish, Scandinavian, etc., and pre-suppose by convention the future settlement of other worlds entire-ly by representatives of that group. An example is G. McDonald Wallis' *Legend of Lost Earth*, which draws its names from Gaelic and Celtic legends.

Another major category of naming in s-f stories involves the use of number, either as wholly numerical, or, more often, combinations of syllables or names with numbers. This is found both on Earth and on alien soil in these stories. In Charles Eric Maine's novel, *Time-liner*, a story of the future lives of a scientist successively and un-willingly reincarnated in a vast future cycle, we find, in one distant era about 10,000 years in the future, characters named Kane 447, Thoa 802 and Sketh 202, but no further explanation of the nomen-clature. Another brief instance is in Wallace G. West's story, "The Last Man" (in the *Pocket Book of Science Fiction*, ed. by Donald Wollheim), in which the last surviving man in a future matriarchal society with artificial birth is just M-1. His keeper is "old WA 10 NA 56, whom in defiance of the rules he always called Wana," and when he meets and escapes with the last girl, she said, "My name is Eve ... I gave it to myself. I have forgotten my number." In Roger Lee Vernon's story, "The Deathseekers" (in his collection *The Space Frontiers*), the author describes a future civilization of re-juvenated geniuses who are stifled by the robots of their own crea-tion. The hero is Ibn 7-64B-3, or "Ibn-Seven, as he was called even from the beginning." Other *dramatis personae* are Len-Two, Wil-Eight, Sal-Four, Wen-Eight and Jas-Six, and not until the end of the story do we find reference to "Jeremy Tellus, a man who was so old that he actually outdated the nomenclature classification and went by a name instead of a syllable and a number." (Note too the symbolism of *Tellus*, a mediaeval name for Earth.)

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[3] I am in no position to evaluate whether these names actually occur in some African language or in more than one, or how accurately they may reflect the possi-bilities actually found. If they sound "African" to the reader, their purpose is served.

An interesting example of a wholly numerical nomenclature is found in T. S. Stribling's story, "The Green Splotches" (from Wollheim's *Pocket Book of Science Fiction*), a tale of Andean explorers who come on an extraterrestial being collecting specimens for his zoo. The following exchange occurs between them:

> '... I see you desire my name. Well, I have a number. In my country the citizens are numbered. I am sure when your own countries become densely populated you, too, will adopt a numerical nomenclature.'
> 'What is your number ?' asked Standifer ...
> '1753-12,657,109-654-3.'
> 'It sounds like a cross between a combination lock and a football game...'
> 'The name of my country is One, or First,' he smiled. 'Of course that is a very ancient and unscientific name, but notation must begin somewhere...'

Later, after the alien has departed, the Earthlings speculate that Jupiter is his planet of origin by applying a mathematical process to his name which yields the total probable number of units in the nomenclature as 14.5 quadrillions; hence, Jupiter is the only planet large enough to support such a population.

The practice of using names and numbers is also found on our Earth, among the Chinese, Mongols and Monguors (a divergent Tibeto-Mongolian people of Kansu), a fact which I neglected to mention in my earlier "Mongolian Personal Names" (*Names* 10, 81–86, 1962). The last name is taken from the clan, and the first name is the age of the father's mother, if living, if not, of the father's father. This produces many names on the order of "Sixty" or "Sixty-Five", as Kan 75, or Bashiliu (Chinese: eight ten's + six, 86), the name of the Dilowa Gegen's father.

In order to set off his story sharply from Earthly limits, the author may wish to invent names of his own choosing, generally euphonious, and generally without any particular ethnic overtones, although, of course, some of these names no doubt occur coincidentally in some form among the millions of possible Earthly names. A typical example of this is Edmond Hamilton's novel, *Beyond the Moon* (also called *The Star Kings*). This is a fast-moving space opera of a young man from post-war New York catapulted into an intergalactic conflict of the distant future, with superscience, intrigues and love. Personal names occurring in this story are those of the ruler of the galaxy, Arn Abbas and his two sons, Zarth Arn and Jhal Arn, with others: Vel Quen, Hull Burrel, Shorr Kan, Orth

Bodmer, Lianna, Murn, Zu Rizal, Sath Shamar, Thern Eldred,
Thallarna, Dar Carrul, Val Marlann, Tu Shal, Brenn Bir, Zora, etc.
Names of spaceships are the *Markab*, the *Meric*, the *Dendra*, the
Ethne and others. The universal capital of the galaxy is Throon
City. It would be possible to multiply examples from this category
at considerable length. Sometimes, however, names are deliberately
cacophonous or impossible to pronounce, no doubt to reflect better
their alien origin. Witness H. L. Gold's story, "Love in the Dark"
(from F. Pohl's collection, *Beyond the End of Time*), telling us of
"Clrkxsdyl 93J16. I call him Clark for short. And he comes from
Alpha Centauri somewhere."

An extremely interesting category of naming is found in some
stories in which the author creates a society having a systematic
nomenclature indicative of rank, occupation or other characteristic.
For instance, in Fletcher Pratt's old novel, *Alien Planet*, in which
some earthmen encounter a stranded off-worlder (and ultimately
visit his planet), we learn this about the alien's naming system (his
mastery of English is as yet incomplete):

> '... my entire name are Koumar Ashembe Bodrog Fotas. Koumar
> Ashembe are merely personal. Bodrog indicates I am of the hereditary ex-
> ploring or war-fight science. Fotas indicate my rank in identical class. All
> the people thus named in my country ...'

A bit more comprehensible is the explanation given in Charles Eric
Maine's novel, *He Owned the World*, an intriguing tale of a stranded
space pilot revived after his death in space some thousands of years
later, and finding himself in control of vast corporate finances. On
the entrance of a character named Competence, the following
discourse on names takes place.

> 'That is her first name,' he explained. 'It is the custom to use a first name
> which expresses in some degree our job or personality or function in society.
> For example, my name is Aptitude Shenn – I happen to be a rather good
> vocational psychologist. Your Mr. Jaff is known as Mentor Jaff, because it
> is his duty to supervise and instruct. I have a friend named Excision Horther
> who is an excellent surgeon. Do you understand ?'

Other characters later mentioned are Dr. Semantic Groor, his lan-
guage teacher, and Sublimity Zenna, a concubine and female servant.

Another nomenclature is found in Edgar Rice Burrough's *Escape
on Venus*, which combines numerical and caste features. I quote
in extenso:

I asked Ata-voo-med if there were different castes among them.

'Oh yes,' he replied; 'all the kloo-meds and above are servants; voo-meds who have no du are in the next higher class; they are the artisans; then come the voo-meds with a du — that is the class I am in. We are just below the nobles, who run from voo-yor-yorko to voo-med; royalty is always under yorko. There are other caste divisions, but it is all rather complicated ...'

Perhaps the above has not interested you; but in English it is a little more interesting, as it gives some meaning to their strange numerical names. What he said was that all the 2,000,000's and above were servants; the 1,000,000's with no prefix letter (du) were in the artisan class; then came his class, the 1,000,000's with a letter; the nobles run from 100,000 to 1,000,000 and royalty is always under 1,000. Vik-vik-vik's 999 is always the jong's name or number.

These high numbers do not mean that there are that many people in Voo-ad; it is merely a naming system, and just another indication to me of their total lack of creative genius.

The above general categorizations of some practices in naming systems do not by any means begin to treat the subject comprehensively. It would be possible, for instance, to study the names created by individual authors (many of whom are very prolific under several names), as, say, Edgar Rice Burroughs, who, in spite of the dismal quality of many of his swashbuckling adventures, has a considerable degree of linguistic sophistication.

The question of symbolism should also be raised, as for instance in Isaac Asimov's story, *Adam Link, Robot*, where the force and symbolism of the chief character's name are quite obvious. A subtler variation on the foregoing is the name of a clever detective-robot sent out to solve mysteries on distant planets (from a story which I cannot trace at present), Daneel. By employing a slight variation on a legitimate name Daniel, the author very well makes his point that the robot, for all his attainments, is not quite human (or, that he is almost human). Finally, from C. S. Lewis's allegorical trilogy, (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra* and *This Hideous Strength*, also called *This Tortured Planet*), the earthman hero who goes to Venus to do battle with the personification of Evil on the virgin world there is appropriately named *Ransom*, clearly alluding to the sacrifice of Christ, whom he represents in the allegory.

The names of persons are not the only type of names which could be more thoroughly investigated. Other topics might include city names, names of stars and galaxies and planets, names of countries and languages, and many others. Generally speaking, especially when stories are short, there is insufficient opportunity for the

author to develop this aspect enough for the reader to discern any underlying pattern. However, I have noted two attempts to systematize the planets in our own solar system. The first is Edgar R. Burroughs' *Barsoom* (Mars), *Rasoom* (Mercury), *Cosoom* (Venus) and *Jasoom* (Earth), which are, by the way, just scattered throughout his works. The second is C. S. Lewis' *Perelandra* (Venus), *Malacandra* (Mars), *Thulcandra* (Earth) and *Glundandra* (Jupiter). It should perhaps also be mentioned that in many novels of the future, in which Earth is considered from a viewpoint of its astronomical importance as just a minor planet of a relatively insignificant star, we find a variety of names for earth itself, as Earth, Terra, Sol-Three, Tellus, and so on, with similar formations for the inhabitants (Terrans, Tellurians, Solmen, etc.).

Similarly, one often reads names of present-day Earth cities in a distorted form, indicating by convention the future phonetic shape of the name in the further development of our language. These are generally recognizable and require no particular textual explanation in the story. In Don A. Stuart's story, "Twilight" (in the Wollheim *Pocket Book of Science-Fiction*), a motorist of today picks up a hitchhiker from the future, who tells him something of his future world: "I tried calling different city centers shown on the map. ... Yawk City, Lunon City, Paree, Shkago, Singpor, others. ... Then I tried San Frisco. ... Some things are changed, names of cities, particularly, because names of cities are apt to be polysyllabic, and used a great deal. People tend to elide them, shorten them. I am in – Nee-vah-dah – as you say? We say only Neva. And Yawk State. But it is Ohio and Iowa still." Earlier, the speaker has introduced himself, with this dialogue.

> 'I am Ares Sen Kenlin. And you?'
> 'James Waters Bendell.'
> 'Waters – what does that mean – I do not recognize it?'
> 'Why – it's a name, of course. Why should you recognize it?'
> 'I see – you have not the classification, then. 'Sen' stands for science.'

The same process is sometimes applied to names of nations or ethnic groups, not always recognizably so. Hence, in Anthony Boucher's story, "Barrier" (in G. Conklin's *Six Great Short Novels of Science Fiction*), a time travel tale, the group name *Slanduch* baffles one until the author explains it is a corruption of the earlier *Auslandsdeutsch*.

The names of future languages, both Earthly and alien, could be made the subject of a long separate treatment by themselves. Very frequently, in stories involving the future, one finds reference to the present-day English in terms of its being early, archaic, dead or otherwise primitive in state. Typical phrases and sentences from a variety of stories are these: "... my exhaustive studies of the middle period American language and customs can be put to use ...; Naturally enough the language was ... not archaic English ...; ...she was the only philologist on her planet to specialize in Primitive English; ... and scrawled in the hasty characters of pre-Deluge English – a tongue now used ... only by monastics ...;".

It has also become conventionalized to imply future widespread *linguae francae*, either world-wide or spread over the solar system or galaxy, with names indicative of their extent. Some sample names, culled from many stories, are Galac, the universal and ageless language; Glot; Prime Galactic; ... said in excellent Terrestrial ...; most of them here are speaking Solarian; Galactalk vocabulary; ... called in guttural but fluent Cosmoglotta ...; and others.

The names of spaceships, which must be indicative of star-travel or stellar flight, could also yield an interesting harvest. In Poul Anderson's novel, *Star Ways*, a fast-moving tale of the Nomads, a gypsy people who roam the galaxies in their spaceship-based clans, quite a few names of their far-ranging ships are given. We also learn from this story that the residents of a ship take as first element the name of the ship followed by their personal names. Further, the author states that "There was a tradition which forbade using [for a starship] a name not taken from some human language." Names of ships mentioned are Wayfarer, Pilgrim, Traveler, Wanderer, Gypsy, Hobo, Voyageur, Bedouin, Swagman, Trekker, Explorer, Troubadour, Adventurer, Sundowner, Migrant, Romany, Stroller, Fiddlefoot, Vagabond, Peregrine, Hadji, Landlouper and Mountain Man. Characters mentioned include Trekker Petroff, Vagabond MacTeague Laurie, Peregrine Joachim Henry, Peregrine Thorkild Sean, Traveler Thorkild Helmuth, and others.

These brief remarks can only indicate in general outline the more usual practices which some writers have developed with respect to names and nomenclatures in science-fiction. It would be possible to

make many other studies. Perhaps this article will serve some readers as impetus to do so.

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