

Book Reviews

A Charm of Names. By Ivor Brown. London, & c.: The Bodley Head, 1972. Pp. 160.

Evelyn Waugh has a gripping story about the man who liked Dickens. A biography of Ivor Brown might be called "The Man Who Liked Dictionaries," for from the first his "word books" (including *A Word in Your Ear* and *Just Another Word* of 1945, reissued together in paperback by E. P. Dutton, 1963; *Mind Your Language* of 1962, a Capricorn reissue of 1967; and the Penguin *Chosen Words* of 1961 which reprinted the summary of the eight word books 1942–1953 Brown prepared for Jonathan Cape in 1955) have been full of the gleanings of a browsing word-fancier, aided and abetted by a fascinated public who kept sending him corrections, additions, and demands for more from this self-confessed "play-boy and . . . amateur on the fringe of this professional field, a field which I have found Elysian, rich in flowers." And, as everyone ought to know, one who binds flowers together into bunches is called an *anthologist*.

By profession Ivor Brown (born 1891 in Penang) is a dramatic critic. He has, at various times, written for the Manchester *Guardian*, the *Saturday Review*, *Sketch*, *Punch*, and other periodicals. He is the author of half a dozen books on Shakespeare, studies of Dickens, Shaw, and other worthies, a history of London, *Balmoral* and *Winter in Scotland*, chronicles of the London theatre seasons, "and much else" (as the list ends in *A Charm of Names*). He was long connected with the *Observer* and edited it 1942–1948, finding time to write about democracy, H. G. Wells, and many other topics as well as turning out graceful essays and the novels *Years of Plenty*, *Lighting Up Time*, and *Marine Parade*. In his spare time he seems to have browsed happily among lists of dialect and obscure words, "gnarled lingo of the parish and the shire," slang and gobbledygook (battling the latter as vigorously as his mentors Sir Alan P. Herbert and Sir Ernest Gowers, tilting at what he calls the *barnacular*). His word books, he said in the Preface to their omnibus *Chosen Words*, "were intended for pleasant browsing rather than for edification or for scolding." He inveighed against those who describe a place as "fabulous" when they know exactly where it is and those who do not know what the *lurch* in "left in the lurch" might mean. He dwelt lovingly on the interesting backgrounds of common words (*marmalade*, *sleazy*, *tinkle*, *balderdash* and *crumpet*) and more like a philatelist than a philologist pasted into his books rare specimens (*barm*, *borborygmy*, *catzerie*, *titivil*, *convallariaceous*, *scobberlotcher*, *succedaneum*, *tweate*, *usky*, *wame*, etc.). "I am not a specialist in semantics or a scholar of philology," he said – and kept on collecting. *I Break My Word*, *A Word in Edgeways*,

Words in Season, A Ring of Words, A Rhapsody of Words, Random Words, and others appeared, always highly personal and highly popular.

Now we have another amateur book – with the emphasis on the concept of the lover of the thing dealt with – called *A Charm of Words*, “charm” meaning (he tells us, quoting the *Oxford English Dictionary*) “a blended noise as of birds and children, a song,” another “ring” or “rhapsody” of words. This one is of given names, which he calls Christian names, despite objections from “a Jewish correspondent . . . that there are many parents among us who have other religions or none.” His personal approach will be seen in remarks such as this:

But Britain is still supposed to be a Christian country and I see no offence in using a term which is generally employed though it is often theologically inaccurate. Many British people who have no close attachment to any faith or sect do go to Church or Chapel for a ceremony at the font and the names given there are commonly called Christian.

What distinguishes this collection from other books which Brown mentions (Ernest Weekley’s *Jack and Jill*, 1939; Miss E. G. Withycombe’s *Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* of 1945; Eric Partridge’s *Name This Child* of the same year and *Name Your Child*, 1968) and the ubiquitous “what-to-call-the-baby” books is precisely that personal approach. So he goes on about Cressida, Miranda, and the “Shakespeare Girls,” the habit of naming children after film stars, the wisdom of John Enoch Powell’s presenting himself to the public as more independent by dropping the common “John” in favor of the aggressively different “Enoch” (the Biblical man who “walked with God,” not the Enoch Arden of Tennyson nor the Enoch Soames of Max Beerbohm), the first names of prime ministers, the avoided names (Judas, Jasper, Uriah, Oscar), and so on. We learn that the first musical comedy he saw in London as a boy “had the now impossible title of *Lady Madcap*,” that he thrilled to Vesta Tilley and Daisy Jerome “The Electric Spark,” that one of his first assignments as a critic was to review a production of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* with Noel Coward as Ralph, that he thinks Dame Peggy Ashcroft ought to call herself Dame Margaret (but that he approves of her as an actress), that he is a great admirer of Dickens (especially for the names) and that a favorite character of his is the Reverend Septimus Chrisparkle, minor canon of Cloisterham in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, that he had a sister called Fionna and thinks it “a fine name,” and that he started to translate Latin at the age of six or so at “a Dame’s school.”

The book is full of such personal touches and some personal quirks. It rambles. It goes off on tangents. It launches into little articles with introductions such as, “The history of Ambrose is odd.” It tells us that

since "Jessica" means "God is looking" it "should have been a warning to Shylock's daughter." It does not say whether Shakespeare invented it or got it in one of the sources for *The Merchant of Venice* (Giovanni Fiorentino, "Ancelmus the Emperor" in the *Gesta Romanorum*, Alexander Silvayn, or Masuccio Salernitano) and whether he, his audience, or any audience is supposed to get any point from the name in the play. He notes that Dorothy is "the nominal sister" of Theodore "since both describe their owners as God's gifts" but fails (as Leslie Dunkling pointed out in a review in *Viz*) to note that Daphne's name is related to Lawrence. He is not sure whether "Greta" comes from Scandinavia or from "Margaret." He recalls forgotten sportsmen named Mordecai and Elias (a. k. a. Patsy). "Obadiah" will cause him not only to quote the Music Hall song:

Swing me just a little bit higher
Obadiah, do . . . ,

but to add a reference to

Joshua, Joshua, sweeter than lemon squash you are.

He does not, however, look up what he does not know: for instance, that *Joshua* (Arthurs – Lee) was made famous by Miss Clarice Mayne (1891–1966) on the stage and recorded by her in 1912; which is too bad, since lovers of odd names might be interested to know that her husband (James W. Tate), who always accompanied her at the piano, was invariably referred to and billed as "That." In discussing "Ivy" he goes into detail about a friend "the novelist Ivy Low who married Maxim Litvinoff when he was a Communist agent in London" and even mentions Ivy St. Helier "who had a long run in Noel Coward's *Bitter Sweet*" – he does not tell us that that was a stage name – but neglects to mention the first "Ivy" novelist that ought to spring to everybody's mind, Ivy Compton Burnett. He covers a lot of names from the plays of Bernard Shaw (*Candida*, *Britomart*, *Lavinia*, etc.) but neglects many interesting names in the work of other playwrights, personal acquaintance being apparently his principal criterion for inclusion.

Such a book is only a trifle more advanced than lists of "funny names" which represent the lowest level of onomastic interest. It misses so many opportunities to go deeper into areas that ought to be explored, for example the psychological affects of the given names of children upon their self-image and upon others, or the use of "doubles," as he calls them (names such as Hilary or Leslie or Evelyn, given indiscriminately to both boys and girls). It does not record or explain much the fashions in names, though it notes that Thomas is more likely these days to be called Timothy, a name once "somewhat restricted to Ireland."*

All in all, *A Charm of Names* need not go on your reference shelf but perhaps might be a good browsing book in your guestroom. As I have said, it is too personal to be at all scholarly, though it might possibly start a potential scholar of names on his way – one hopes to become, in time, more professional than this. Such a book calls for a highly personal reaction, so I must say I found it charming and more disarming than a review (which must pick nits) like this can suggest. It is an onomastic snack, not a dinner, or (at least, in the words of Dr. Johnson) not the sort of dinner you would *invite* a man to. It is like having tea with a delightfully garrulous old man.

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* There is work to be done on fads and fashions in names. Gary Steindler of Paper Trends (name-printed stationery) says the ten best-selling names nationwide are Barbara, Cathy, Debbie, Donna, Judy, Linda, Lisa, Mary, Nancy, and Susan (among the girls). A survey last year showed that Jennifer was the most popular name for little girls in the New York area, but Steindler does not even include it in his full 120-name list. "Some of the big names at Gimbels," states *New York Magazine*, for scratchpad holders in plastic or ID bracelets and pins are "Karen, Gail, Kim, Mary, Susan, Terri (also Terry) and Carol." The decline in the use of saints' names is significant, since several religions theoretically demand their use.

English Field-Names. A Dictionary. By John Field. Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1972. Pp. xxx, 291. Price £5.75.

There is much to be said in behalf of Mr. Field's dictionary. He was fortunate, for example, to have had excellent research material from which to draw: the volumes and archives of the English Place-Name Society and the various works of such scholars as Cameron, Dodgson, Dunkling, Ekwall, Foxall, Gelling, Reaney and A. H. Smith. Mr. Field, on the other hand, is to be commended for his very helpful introductory remarks on the morphology and etymology of English field-names, and for the clear and concise dictionary format in the pages which follow.

Field-names have been recorded in English for about 1,200 years. In its original definition, *field* meant a portion of open country, cleared of trees (e. gg., *Hatfield*, *Sheffield*, *Enfield*); later, cultivation altered this definition to "unenclosed land used for agriculture," each division of common arable land being so designated (the larger such unit was known as a *great field*). Subsequent divisions of great fields were called *furlongs* or *shorts*, being subdivided into plots for individual tenants; subdivisions of the plots did not have names except as each might be designated by its tenant's name within a particular furlong. The *close* is the hedged, walled or fenced "field" of today, smaller than either the *field* or *furlong*

mentioned above. This last and smallest division was made in the fourteenth century; by the eighteenth century entire parishes had been transformed from open-field to enclosed-farm status, and so it has come about that current field-names are closely bound up with the enclosure history of each place.

Fields may be named for size, shape, natural features, crops, persons (actual or fanciful) and historical events (a curiosity of English field-naming was Thomas Hollis, an eighteenth century land-owner and scholar who bestowed about 100 names in Halstock, Dorset). A field-name regularly has two parts: a qualifier and a denominator (e. gg., *Bean Acre*, *Candlestick Hill*), and one can readily see that qualifiers will be more varied and developed than denominators: in Appendix I, Mr. Field lists the commonly found denominators in seven pages, whereas the qualifiers which have been combined with them account for the remainder of the dictionary listings.

Some representative entries are as follow:

Heartache, Swanmore Ha, a derogatory name for land that disappoints.

How Call that Field, Meathop We, refers to land so indifferent as not to be worth naming.

Napple Piece, Hope Mansel He, 'land near an apple-tree', from misdivision of ME *atten appel (tre)* [OE *æppel*].

Roman Field, Fyfield Ha, 'land containing Roman remains'. It is the site of a villa.

Stink to Tetbury, Didmarton Gl, indicates that the smell was very powerful since Tetbury is about five miles away.

Time of Day, Nether Alderley Ch, fanciful name for a very small field – of a size comparable to a greeting rather than a dialogue.

Wham, Goosnargh La, Inskip La, Woodplumpton La, Midgley WRY; *Whoms*, Stayley Ch: 'small valley, marshy hollow' [ON *hvammr*].

The dictionary is arranged with head words in bold face (these are the modern names, usually from the Tithe Awards, ca. 1840); early names (those no longer in use) are printed in italics. Locations are listed immediately after the entries: by county, alphabetically, and then within county groups and parishes. For source details the reader must consult the EPNS county surveys. There are three appendices: I, a glossary of denominatives; II, a select, classified index of field-names, and III, the list of names bestowed by Thomas Hollis in Halstock, Dorset.

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Les noms de lieux et le contact des langues / Place names and language contact. Édit., Henri Dorion. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1972. Pp. x + 374; end maps.

A major contribution to onomastic study, this collection of essays, each supplementing the other and each pointing to major areas of research still to be investigated, needs to be most seriously attended by all involved in the place-name discipline. Although areas in the United States reflect the interfacing of place-names, very little, except to take note of such phenomena, has been accomplished in the provenance of the juxtaposition of one or more languages with another. An article from the United States would have rounded out an almost perfect selection.

The United States and Canada seem to be prototypes of such mingling of place-names. In the United States, in particular, the schematic acceptance of Indian place-names, usually fancied out of all semblance of meaning, deserves closer study than has so far been performed. No adequate study of the impact of one language upon another has recognized the process that transliterates, for example, an Indian name into a borrowed European one. For instance, many place-names in the United States have at least three layers of "recorded" names, perhaps more when different Indian languages and dialects layer each other to designate one place. The three included an Indian name, a language name other than English, and then an English one, sometimes that one superseded by an Americanizing form, almost always personal, such as a post-master's name, or that of a railroad official, or of anyone else convenient and fairly well known.

Contact place-names occur in the United States in conjunction with Spanish in Florida, the Southwest, the Rocky Mountain area, and the Pacific Coast. French influence occurs in the Mississippi River Valley, in the northern sector of the Rocky Mountains, and along the Canadian border, especially the central lakes' region and the northwest. Indian contacts occur everywhere. A scattering of German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, and Russian (in Alaska) names occurs. The situation in Hawaii represents a special case, for there Polynesian names predominate. For romantic reasons, these names may survive in more or less their original form, although even there subtle changes probably will take place.

Professor Dorion says, "Il faut aussi replacer la science des noms de lieux dans son contexte épistémologique qui lui confère une situation de confluence: l'histoire, la géographie, la linguistique, la psychosociologie, l'anthropologie, voire la politique sont des sciences qui recèlent des éléments d'explication souvent indispensables à l'analyse choronymique (non seulement génétique)." This order is rather inclusive, but necessary in context. Place-name study still remains in its infant stage in the Western

Hemisphere, and a call to understand that other disciplines need inclusion should trigger a series of articles and books that will have far-reaching consequences in onomastics, in imitation and emulation of European studies in the field, we hope.

In his lead article, Professor Dorion notes that the situation in Canada is complex. Not only are there Indian names, but also Eskimo (different from Indian), French, and English ones, with some ethnic interminglings in the western provinces. The major political problem, however, exists in Québec, where French language partisans represent a majority and insist on linguistic separatism. As the matter now stands, two forms for each name appear, even on road signs, as anyone who travels in the area knows. How the linguistic problem is resolved remains to be seen.

In scanning the way in which names run shapelessly rampant, perhaps a note from Virginia Woolf might be appropriate, at least in the idiocy of scrambling of who names what for why and where, "until it seem[s] as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself." This, however, does not settle the situation of duplicates and triplicates in place-names that occur when a dominating military or cultural society dictates which place-name shall become superior and decisive.

Invaders and conquerors bring along their linguistic baggage and leave much of it behind if they are driven out and keep it if they stay. The North and South American continents are show cases of what happens to names when one culture sweeps over another. Usually, the invaders bestow names of their choosing, mainly descriptive; later, they begin, for some reason, to accept some of the names of the conquered, giving them inventive or even poetical interpretations, regardless of the meaning or connotation of the originals. The last stage is more prosaic, usually commemorative. Land developers and exploiters in modern times have somewhat altered the pattern by using "euphemistic" names.

In Europe, where place-names have crystalized, the pattern is slightly different. A name in one language will usually become a variant of the same name in another language, but the linguistic laws of each language will apply. Armand Boileau, "Toponymie et contact des langues en Belgique," gives some examples, but probably the best ones, as noted by Stanislaw Rospond, in his article, "La rebaptisation des noms de lieux dans les territoires recouverts en Pologne," exist in Poland. There, the Germans renamed places and used the names in official documents. After World War II, the Polish names were restored; that is, the Polish people continued to use their own place-names. So far as we have been able to determine, no German names exist in Poland now. Rospond writes, "la germinisation s'en est prise cette fois même aux noms des champs, des forêts, des prés, des pâturages, des collines, et des ruisseaux." And the

renaming was complete. It was as complete in reversal also. The changes brought about through three centuries of French domination in Roussillon toponymy are discussed by Henri Guiter in "Catalan et Française dans la toponymie roussillonnaise."

In Bohemia, as Professor Lutterer describes it ["Czech-German Language Contacts in the Toponymy of Bohemia"], the situation was somewhat different. The thrust of the Germans came first from merchants and technicians needed to develop the towns from the thirteenth century forwards. The assimilation of the Germans into the native population somehow amalgamated the names so that Czech and German intermingled. In fact, there is ample evidence of persons with German surnames who thought of themselves as Czech. Sometimes a Czech place-name was "taken over by German without any change in its phonetic image," for example, *Strahov* = *Strahof*, with a reduction of syllables, *Seldec* = *Selz*, etc. On the whole, Czech names have now dominated and changes have been made to accommodate the pride of the people.

In "Balkan Language Assimilation and Onomastic Orientation," Professor Milivoj Pavlovic tells us that names have been changed almost continuously as different governing bodies have held power, carrying with them the dictatorial prerogative of calling a place whatever they desired. It is here that a "mixoglottic" integration occurred. The Romans gave names that have become characteristic of the area; but, overlaid with native names, they have in many instances themselves taken Latin forms.

In Russia, where the state, as in the United States, has a center for making official decisions on names, the problem is not so much of interfacings as of bringing local names into line with official decrees ["Interaction of Languages in the Soviet Toponymy" by E. M. Pospelov]. Russia is multi-lingual, in a way multi-national, and names must now be "fixed according to the Rules of geographical place names transcription obligatory for all organizations and offices in the USSR." On the local level, traditional names are probably still used.

Articles on problems that exist in North Africa, by Ralph Schnepf ["Les contacts choronymiques en Afrique du Nord"] and South Africa, by P. E. Raper ["Toponymy and Language Contact in South Africa"] point up mutual influences of languages in contact, although an article from the central areas would have been helpful. The African naming situation is in a state of flux now that the colonial powers have withdrawn and many new nations have been formed. In South Africa, the interrelationship between native languages and European ones is easily noted in the place-names, but this is not so much the case in other areas where nationalistic pride is developing. Of South Africa, however, Dr. Raper says, "The mutual interaction of [language] contact has so radi-

cally affected these names that in many cases it is impossible to ascertain what the original form was." Other articles, all of them on various aspects of Canadian names, conclude the volume: concerning French and English contact problems [Christian Morissonneau; J. B. Rudnyćkyj], on how government regulatory bodies attempt to control these problems [G. F. Delaney; Jean Poirier], and concerning generic names in Ontario [Michael B. Smart] and English and French hydronymy [Alan Rayburn].

This collection is obviously a much-needed beginning for the study of language contact in place-names. That the studies will end with this text is now impossible, for place-names somehow stir the emotions of the people concerned and have become the source of much friction. The more we study this phenomenon the more we shall know about it and somehow how to meet the problem in a less hysterical way. The boards and committees which set the official names may have to modify some of their seemingly arbitrary decisions, or at least set principles or guidelines that take local realities into consideration. This book is indeed important and should be widely read and studied.

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