NAMESAKES

An Entertaining Guide to the Origins of More Than 300 Words Named for People

ADONIS•AMPERE•APHRODISIAC•BABBITT•BERSERK
BLOOMERS•BOYCOTT•CASANOVA•CRAPPER•HOOCH
BOURBON•CARDIGAN•DIONYSIAN•DAGUERREOTYPE
DECIBEL•DERRICK•EIFFEL TOWER•EPICURE•ECHO
FERRIS WHEEL•FRISBEE•FINK•MAN FRIDAY•FUDGE
FETTUCCINE ALFREDO•GERRYMANDER•GATLING GUN
GOODY TWO SHOES •HOBSON'S CHOICE•JOHN DOE
JUGGERNAUT•JEZEBEL•JACK FROST•JACKHAMMER
KLIEG LIGHT•MACADAM•TYPHOID MARY•MAVERICK
MASON JAR•REAL McCOY•MATA HARI•BLOODY MARY
MONKEY WRENCH•MURPHY'S LAW•SALISBURY STEAK
MIDAS TOUCH•NAMBY-PAMBY•NERD•NICOTINE•OGRE
ODYSSEY•OSCARS•PANACEA•PANDORA'S BOX•CRAPS
PAP TEST•PAPARAZZI•PASTEURIZATION•POLLYANNA
PUCKISH•PLUTOCRACY•QUISLING•RITZY•MAYONNAISE
QUIXOTIC•RICHTER SCALE•RORSCHACH TEST•SADISM
RUBIK'S CUBE•SAXOPHONE•SHLEMIEL•SIDEBURNS
SOPWITH CAMEL•SPOONERISM•STETSON•SVENGALI

TAD TULEJA

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BOOK DESIGN BY KATHRYN PARISE

Introduction

"Why do they call it a Ferris wheel?"

This question was put to me by my twelve-year-old as we swayed high above the cotton candy stands at a recent summer carnival. I gave it two seconds' thought. "It was invented by a guy named Ferris."

"Amazing, Dad. What was his first name? Did he work in a carnival? What did he—"

"Eat your cotton candy," I advised. "When we get home you can look it up."

"You always say that," he grumbled. I had been pitching him this Stengelism lately—Casey was fond of capping his baseball stories with the tag line "You could look it up"—and he had begun to resent it. What he didn't know was that, in this particular case, I had no choice. For all I knew, Ferris was an acronym or somebody's pet piranha.

When we got home we took Casey's advice and looked it up. Ferris was an engineer, which we agreed was a good thing. A very American engineer, having been christened George Washington Gale Ferris. He lived at the turn of the century and designed his famous midway attraction for the 1893 Columbian Exposition. No indication in the source books if he got rich off the deal or worked as a barker on the side.

So far, so good—but then the rub. As soon as we had disinterred old G.W.G.F. from a century of neglect, I began to hear voices. Sometimes proud, sometimes indignant, often plaintive. "You got Ferris straight," they said. "What about us?"

The voices had names and claims. Achilles' heel and the Dop-

pler effect. Pollyanna and the Rube Goldberg contraption. The Geiger counter and chicken à la king. Who were these forgotten souls who had lent their names to principles and inventions and carnival attractions—and now were vying for the title of Most Obscure Hero with St. Aloysius and Millard Fillmore?

Consider the casual, nay cavalier, attitude that most of us have toward these folks. How many times have you referred to some potential, brooding disaster as a "sword of Damocles" without wondering who Damocles was? How often have you read a thermometer without giving a thought to Daniel Fahrenheit or Anders Celsius? Are hookers really named for Joseph Hooker? And who was Tom Collins, anyway?

It was to answer questions of this order that I put together the volume in your hands. Terms named for people are called eponyms, from the Greek *onyma,* for "name." *Namesakes* is a dictionary of such terms.

"Term" of course is imprecise, but that is inevitable given the ubiquity of eponymous influence. An eponym may refer to a physical principle (Doppler effect), a food (fettuccine Alfredo), an exclamation of surprise (by Jove), or a philosophical guideline (Occam's razor). It may be an obvious namesake such as the foregoing examples, or a subtler, "hidden" namesake such as saxophone, protean, or Frisbee. The *onyma* being invoked may be that of an actual person (Bloody Mary or Joseph Pulitzer), a mythical being (Mercury of the mercurial temper, Achilles of the vulnerable heel), or a fictional creation (Pollyanna or Scrooge). The source may be relatively obvious, as in Bowie knife and Nehru jacket; or relatively obscure, as in derrick, sideburns, and nerd.

Because of the range of eponyms in our language, the writer setting out to compile a list of possible entries is struck first by the latitude, and then by the vanity, of the task. To put together a "complete" list of such terms, you quickly discover, is about as viable a job, to quote Ring Lardner from another context, as "catching whales with an angleworm." In my original design for this book, I came up with something like 1,500 "possibles." Since I had not yet invented the thirty-two-hour day, and since I wanted *Namesakes* to appeal to the generally educated reader, not the pedant, it was clearly time to trim sail.

In getting the original list down to the slightly more than 300 entries you have here, I had to play Procrustes three times.

First, I weeded out all but the most common eponymous terms from the specialized vocabulary of the sciences. This meant that, with great reluctance, I had to bid adieu to such tasty morphological morsels as Fibonacci series and Chandrasekhar limit, islets of Langerhans and Boyle's law. To science-minded readers who wish the basic dope on such terms, I recommend Denis Ballentyne and D. R. Lovett's exhaustive *Dictionary of Named Effects*.

Second, I wiped out the history. This was hard going but inevitable, for if you held on to Braddock's defeat, pretty soon you had Hannibal's march and Custer's last stand and a Fibonacci series of minor battles. So it was goodbye to Shays's rebellion, Beecher's Bibles, and (my most sorely missed gobbet) the world-shattering War of Jenkins's Ear. I apologize to my fellow Cliophiles, and especially to my father and father-in-law, both historians, for this unwelcome necessity.

Finally, I said goodbye to those entries that were linguistically simply too archaic to mean much to a modern audience. In another incarnation, perhaps, I shall restore to their proper place in the word-hoard such once common expressions as Piso's justice, Fred Karno's army, and phaeton. *Namesakes* was not the place to do this.

What is left after this triple excision is, I trust, a moderately comprehensive, educational, and entertaining guide to terms that you hear, if not every day, at least once or twice a year; that derive from proper names; and whose eponymous owners have, in many cases, been unfairly forgotten by history. I will think of my time as well spent if *Namesakes* allows readers to distinguish between Niccolò Machiavelli, John Mack, and Ernst Mach; or to win bar bets on the dates of William Spooner.

With a few exceptions, the entries are arranged alphabetically. Interspersed throughout the text are a number of noneponymous subheadings under which I have arranged related namesakes that did not lend themselves to fuller treatment: for example, Caesar salad, Windsor knot, and Peeping Tom. These subheadings appear at the end of their alphabetical categories.

At the end of the book you will find two further sections:

"Collective Eponyms" and "False Leads." These contain entries that do not derive, strictly speaking, from personal names, but that are still relevant, and often fascinating, to the eponymologist: for example, the collective namesakes Spartan and thug; and the false leads tin Lizzie and blanket.

SMALL CAPITALS throughout refer to the text entries listed in the Index.

My indebtedness to printed sources is indicated in the Bibliography. My thanks also to Paul Fargis of the Stonesong Press, who squired the idea into a contract; Dr. Marios Philippides, who gave me advice on the classical entries; and the numerous friends and family members who helped to unstick my linguistic gears.

T. F. T.

Belchertown, Mass.
1987

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NAMESAKES

Achilles' Heel

The fiercest and most famous of the Greek heroes, Achilles is the tragic protagonist of Homer's *Iliad*. The unifying theme of that long MARTIAL epic is the anger of Achilles at being deprived of his favorite slave girl, Briseis, by the Greek commander Agamemnon in the final year of the Trojan War. Homer describes Achilles' refusal to fight with his fellow Greeks after the appropriation of the girl; the onslaught of the Trojans against the Greeks, now missing their most valiant warrior; Hector's killing of Achilles' friend Patroclus, who, dressed in the sulking hero's armor, had rallied the Greeks; and Achilles' return to the fray to avenge Patroclus by killing Hector. Homer hints at, but does not describe, the subsequent death of Achilles at the hand of Paris; according to several ancient traditions, Paris succeeded where all others had failed by shooting an arrow into the Greek's one vulnerable spot, his heel. Hence our terms *Achilles' heel* for an analogous point of weakness and *Achilles tendon* for the tendon between the heel and the calf.

The petulant hero survived as long as he did because of a canny mother, the sea nymph Thetis. At his birth, according to a popular legend, she had dipped him into the underworld river Styx, whose waters had made him invincible—except at the spot where she held him, by the heel. No one has ever satisfactorily explained this oversight in her foresight.

Adonis

Like NARCISSUS and HYACINTH, Adonis was a handsome Greek youth whose tragic death is remembered by a flower—in his case the anemone. His name now means any handsome male.

Adonis figures prominently in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough,* which makes it clear that he was imported from Babylonia. In Babylonia he was known as Tammuz, the lover of the mother goddess Ishtar; as a personification of the seasonal cycle, he spends half the year above ground with her, the other half in the underworld with Ishtar's infernal counterpart, Allatu. The Semitic term *adon* means "lord," and it was as Adon Tammuz, and ultimately just as Adon, that he became known to the Greeks.

In Greece Adonis is the beloved of Aphrodite, goddess of love, who gives him to Persephone for safekeeping when he is still a child. Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and the unwilling bride of Hades, falls for him too, and will not surrender him to Aphrodite until Zeus decrees that Adonis shall spend half his year above ground and half below. Thus he becomes, like Tammuz and like Persephone herself, a mythic embodiment of death and rebirth. The terrestrial evidence of his death is the bright red windflower, or anemone, which blooms brilliantly for a very short time. The Greeks say it blooms from his blood, shed from the fatal goring he received on the horns of a fierce wild boar. Others contend it was Mars, jealous of Aphrodite's love for him, who assumed the beast's shape and ran him through.

Aesop's Fables

It is not known where or when Aesop lived, or indeed if he lived at all. Ancient traditions call him a slave from Phrygia the country of Gordius (see GORDIAN KNOT) and Midas (see MIDAS TOUCH), say he lived in the sixth century B.C., and often portray him as deformed; there is also some agreement that he died at the hands of a Delphian mob whose famous oracle he had insulted. But whether he was legend or fact, centuries of readers have appreciated the animal tales attributed to him.

Aesop's fables include such classics of folklore as the story of

the fox and the (sour) grapes and that of the tortoise and the hare. They were first written down in the first century A.D., by the rather pedestrian Roman author Phaedrus. His Latin version formed the basis for subsequent medieval tellings, and for those of La Fontaine. The tag lines or "morals" of the stories, considered so characteristic of Aesop, were probably added much later: the first popular English edition of the tales, the 1722 version by Samuel Croxall, with its series of social and political "applications," helped to make this aspect of "Aesop" widely known.

Aesopian is now frequently applied to any anecdote in which animals exemplify human traits. The adjective, like the title *Aesop's Fables* itself, is a misnomer, since some of his eponymous tales are depicted on Egyptian papyri dating from a thousand years before his time.

Horatio Alger Story

One of the most cherished of American myths is that of the self-made man: the idea that with enough determination and grit anyone can rise from poverty to prominence. Horatio Alger, whose name is synonymous with "rags to riches," probably did more to sustain this myth than Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Carnegie combined.

Born in Massachusetts, Alger (1834–99) was the son of a Unitarian minister and apparently inherited some of his father's sanctimoniousness: he was known among schoolmates as "Holy Horatio." Graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1860, he became a Unitarian minister himself four years later, but in 1866 he resigned and moved to New York City to devote himself to writing. There he became associated with the Newsboys' Lodging House, a street urchins' shelter whose inhabitants provided him with much material for his fiction.

His first literary success came with the story "Ragged Dick," serialized in 1867. It was followed by a string of *Ragged Dick* novels which set the pattern for all of Alger's work: an industrious working-class youth wins both the girl and his fortune by devotion to moral principles and hard work. This pattern worked its way through 119 books, including the bestselling series *Luck and Pluck*