

NOTES ON NAMES IN IAN FLEMING'S DOCTOR NO

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Ian Fleming, the author of the popular James Bond spy novels and the children's classic Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang, relished the names of his characters. He punned outrageously on them, as in Goldfinger, Pussy Galore, and Sir Hilary Bray. He even punned in languages other than English, as when, in From Russia With Love, he has a Russian officer "allow himself the joke on Stalin's name" in referring to the foreign policy of the U. S. S. R. as a "policy of steel,"¹ and when, in Casino Royale, he gives a French financier and gambler the name of Le Chiffre (number, cipher). His concern for names is further shown in Live and Let Die when he tells us that Solitaire gets her nickname from her aloof demeanor, Tee-Hee Johnson from his falsetto giggle when he is hurting someone, and Mr. Big from his initials (his full name is Buonaparte Ignace Gallia) and "his huge height and bulk" (he is six-foot-six and 280 pounds).² And that this onomastic delectation is not mere dillentantism is shown in On Her Majesty's Secret Service, where the villain, Ernst Stavro Blofeld, is trying to establish his right to the

title of Comte de Bleuville, and James Bond, posing as a representative from the College of Heraldry, takes his enemy on a genealogical joyride through various Blofelds, Bluefields, and Blumfelds. Bond incidentally learns that he himself might be related to Bond Street in London. Ian Fleming's credentials as an onomastician seem to be quite respectable; he knows what he is doing with names.

Now, what does a writer of popular spy thrillers want to do with names? To the extent that his emphasis is merely on action and suspense, he may wish to use names as alienating devices, as Jack Wolf pointed out last year, to keep the reader's interest on plot rather than character.³ Some of Fleming's names clearly serve this purpose, such as those already mentioned as puns. In fact, some such idea must have led Fleming to choose the name of James Bond, for he told a reporter for The New Yorker,

When I wrote the first [novel], in 1953, I wanted Bond to be an extremely dull, uninteresting man to whom things happened; I wanted him to be the blunt instrument. One of the bibles of my youth was "Birds of the West Indies," by James Bond, a well-known ornithologist, and when I was casting about for a name for my protagonist I thought, My God, that's the dullest name I've ever heard, so I appropriated it. Now the dullest name in the world has become an exciting one.⁴

But even this explanation leads us to the second reason for choosing names: to support theme. In thinking of Bond as a "blunt instrument," Fleming apparently had some theme in mind, for a blunt instrument is used by someone for some purpose. In fact, James Bond's usefulness is part of the theme of Doctor No, as I see it. So the name of James Bond relates to the themes of the stories he appears in, and, as we shall see, so do the names of other characters.

Still a third reason for selecting certain names is to create a context for the central characters and events, and we had better take up this matter before returning to thematic names. The context, in a spy thriller, should evoke mystery and exoticism so as to heighten the reader's suspense and entertainment, and yet it must help to make extreme and implausible events somehow believable. It must create distance and reality at the same time. What the foggy streets of London do for Sherlock Holmes and the back streets of Los Angeles do for Philip Marlowe, the reefs of Jamaica or the Alps of Switzerland or the Orient Express do for James Bond. But while places and place-names assist in creating this context, Fleming's method is to use selection rather than invention; he primarily uses real place-names--Paris, Marseilles, Monte Carlo, Istanbul, Jamaica, St. Petersburg--rather than invented ones (as Hardy and Emily Brontë do). In Fleming's novels the significant contextual names are

those of characters. Here we find characters whose unusual names create a bizarre, distancing effect to balance the realism of actual place-names and to evoke a plausible exoticism. These contextual names also prepare the reader for the symbolically meaningful names of more important characters by providing a matrix within which the symbolical names can comfortably fit without drawing excess attention to themselves.

But how does one distinguish between character names that are merely or primarily contextual and those, perhaps equally bizarre or apparently alienating, that are complexly related to character and theme? Probably the first clue is the extent of our knowledge about the character and his or her contribution to the plot. For instance, in Doctor No, the first three characters we encounter are Commander John Strangways, his secretary Mary Trueblood, and Brigadier Bill Templar. Immediately we are tempted by such names to look for symbolic associations with plot or character. Is Templar an evocation of Simon Templar, the "Saint," or of a medieval knight-at-arms? Should we analyze Strangways into "Strange ways" or into "Strong ways"? And in this novel full of half-breeds, is there a message in Trueblood? But since Templar never reappears in the novel and both Strangways and Trueblood are killed in the first chapter, we never learn anything important about them as characters

and they do not contribute significantly to the plot. The purpose of their transparent names, then, is apparently to establish a context of characternyms within which the names of more important characters will seem to be at the same time acceptable, not outlandish, and yet unusual enough to attract attention to their hidden meanings while evoking exoticism and mystery. While the names of minor characters in literature occasionally contribute to theme, about the only thematic meaning certainly detectable, in absence of other information, in the names of Strangways, Trueblood, and Templar is that these characters are on the side of virtue.

A more ambiguous name is that of James Bond's supervisor, the head of the Secret Service, who is known simply as M. This name may also be primarily contextual--it is certainly mysterious enough--but since M is a more important character and since we learn a good deal about his crusty and yet warm-hearted personality and sharp intellect both from his appearance in other Fleming novels and from what we are told in this one, the function of this name (or acronym)⁵ must be different from that of the previous category of names. Not only does the acronym give a realistic effect (governmental agencies are fond of acronyms) but it is also the most appropriate name for the secret head of a secret organization. Think of the other possible

single-letter acronyms from A to Zed, and you will observe that not even X, that traditional letter of mystery that marks the spot, is as suitable. Most of the letters have other connotations or double entendres that make them unsuitable, and none is as anonymous and as close-mouthed, either in pronunciation or in shape, as M. The semantic content is almost nil. And yet M, for all its reticence, has a warm, comforting sound that corresponds to the paternal role played by James Bond's supervisor. Consequently, M starts the sequence of names that serve the more complex function of creating mystery, stirring sympathy or antipathy, and generating meaning suited to character and theme. It is probably just coincidence that M also starts the sequence of letters that produce the name of the title character, No.

The four central characters in Doctor No are James Bond, his antagonist Dr. Julius No, the girl (there is always a girl!) Honeychile Rider, and Bond's assistant, a Jamaican named Quarrel. The names of these characters all, to some extent or other, reveal character and theme. But before we can see these relationships, we must first have some idea of the plot. James Bond is sent to Jamaica to investigate the deaths of Strangways and Trueblood, which seem to be somehow related to the disappearance of a flock of roseate spoonbills ("a sort of pink stork") and the destruction of an Audubon Society camp on an island owned by a mysterious

Chinaman named Dr. No. On his arrival in Jamaica, Bond instinctively distrusts a basket of fruit sent to his hotel room and discovers that, sure enough, it has been poisoned. His instincts also help him to avoid a couple of other traps and to trust the powerfully-built Quarrel, his assistant. In Jamaica, Bond learns that Dr. No is apparently an ordinary businessman, harvesting guano left by the thousands of birds that inhabit his island, because guano has been found superior to chemical fertilizers. But this doesn't explain why he protects his privacy with armed guards nor the terrifying rumors of a fire-breathing dragon on the island.

Naturally, James Bond and Quarrel sail to the island one night to investigate, and Bond gives way to some uncus-
tomary ruminations during the trip:

The pulse of the sleeping sea seemed slower. The heavy swell was longer and the troughs deeper. They were running through a patch of phosphorus that winked at the bows and dripped jewels when Bond lifted the paddle out of the water. How safe it was, slipping through the night in this ridiculously vulnerable little boat. How kind and soft the sea could be. A covey of flying fish broke the surface in front of the bows and scattered like shrapnel. ...Was some bigger fish after them or did they think the canoe was a fish, or were they just playing? Bond thought of what was going on in the hundreds of fathoms below the boat, the big fish, the shark and barracuda and tarpon and sailfish quietly cruising, the shoals of kingfish and mackerel and bonito

and, far below in the grey twilight of the great depths, the phosphorus jellied boneless things that were never seen, the fifty-foot squids, with eyes a foot wide, that streamed along like zeppelins, the last real monsters of the sea, whose size was only known from the fragments found inside whales. What would happen if a wave caught the canoe broadside and capsized them? How long would they last? Bond took an ounce more pains with his steering and put the thought aside.⁶

At dawn, Bond is greeted by the vision of a beautiful girl, standing nude on the tropical beach in the attitude of a Greek goddess risen from the sea and contemplating a seashell called Venus elegans, the Elegant Venus. The girl is Honeychile Rider, daughter of aristocratic Jamaican planters but orphaned at age five. For ten years she lived with her black nanny in the burned-out ruins of the plantation house, living hand-to-mouth and becoming intimate with the ways of the many small animals, snakes, and insects that took refuge in the ruins with her. Since the death of her nanny five years ago she has been foraging on her own, using her knowledge of nature for both income and protection (she revenged herself on a man who raped her by putting a Black Widow spider in his bed). Like Bond, she is aware of the beauties and dangers of nature. Also like him, she trusts her instincts and is resolute of character. This complexity is reflected in her name: she is a Rider,

a chivalric aristocrat who has stayed erect despite everything, and she is willing to come along for the ride with Bond. Of course, in another sense, the name Rider could be, and eventually is, a lecherous invitation, as Bond ends up in bed with her. Simultaneously she is Honeychile, the naive nature-girl whom Bond paternally wishes to protect.

Soon Bond, Honeychile, and Quarrel must flee Dr. No's guards. Although they fight well, Quarrel is killed by a flame-throwing swamp buggy disguised as a dragon, and Bond and Honeychile are captured. Quarrel's death completes the implications of his name. He is a fighter (quarrel in the sense of argument) but a primitive one (quarrel in the sense of the bolt or arrow of a cross-bow). He is honest and four-square (quarrel in the sense of a four-sided pane of glass or tile, and quarry in the sense of a source of solid rock), but he dies as the prey or quarry of the forces of evil. Like Honeychile, Quarrel also fits into a vision of nature that is both innocently beneficent and yet full of danger for the unwary.

Bond and Honeychile are taken by their captors to Dr. No's stronghold, a multi-leveled cavern carved out of the island's rocky hillside. On top of the hill they see the busy, ant-like guano harvesters going about their work and learn that these laborers, lured from Jamaica by promises of high pay, are kept as virtual slaves, forbidden to leave

the island or visit their families, and kept in subjection by the guards and the threat of the "dragon." Inside the cavern, Bond and Honeychile are led through the guards' quarters to extravagant "guest rooms," built to resemble a modern hospital or rest home, and presided over by obsequious Chinese matrons. The "rest home" is actually, of course, a prison. Bond and Honeychile are soon taken to Dr. No's elaborate suite, whose dominant feature is a huge, lens-like window looking out at the underwater life of the lagoon. The guano business proves to be a cover for Dr. No's real purpose of electronically interfering with the guidance systems of rockets launched from Cape Canaveral and using them to dominate the world. The entire effect is of the utmost artificiality and violation of nature.

This artificiality is carried out in the person of Dr. No. In order to disguise himself from those he has betrayed, Dr. No changed his appearance: "I had all my hair taken out by the roots, my thick nose made thin, my mouth widened, my lips sliced. I could not get smaller, so I made myself taller. I wore built up shoes. I had weeks of traction on my spine. I held myself differently" (p. 138). In addition, he has replaced his severed hands with steel claws, wears black contact lenses over his eyes, and boasts of being the one man in a million whose heart is on the right, not left, side. On his first approach, "He seemed to glide rather than take

steps. His knees did not dent the matt, gunmetal sheen of his kimono and no shoes showed below the sweeping hem. ...It was impossible to tell Doctor No's age: ...there were no lines on the face. ...There was something Dali-esque about the eyebrows, which were fine and black and sharply upswept as if they had been painted on as make-up for a conjurer. ...The bizarre, gliding figure looked like a giant venomous worm wrapped in grey tin-foil..." (p. 130).

Now the grotesqueness of this figure may be intended simply to accentuate his role as villain, as is the common method from fairytale ogres, through Spenser's giant Orgoglio and Shakespeare's Caliban, to the grotesque antagonists of Dick Tracy and various comic-book super-heroes.⁷ In fact, James Bond has been likened by one critic to Beowulf and his antagonists to Grendel and his dam.⁸ But put together with the whole texture of the novel, the conclusion seems unmistakable that we are intended to see a conflict between art and nature--art in the sense of perverse artificiality and nature as the instinctive, unreflecting power that can nurture or destroy. Besides being a parable of the triumph of justice over villainy, the novel is a 20th-century pastoral set in the spy-thriller mode. On the one hand are Bond's trust in instinct, the superiority of natural fertilizers, and the natural innocence and fidelity of Honeychile and Quarrel. On the other hand are the poisoned fruit (a frequent

symbol of the perversion of nature) and the artificiality of Dr. No's "dragon," demesne, and person.

The theme is carried out still further by Dr. No's perversion of life symbols into means of death. Honeychile is sentenced to die by being chained naked in the path of thousands of land crabs as they migrate to their spawning places. The crabs' procreative instincts are to be used to kill her. However, as Honeychile knows, the crabs won't hurt a motionless person and so she escapes unharmed. For James Bond, the means of torture and death is to make him crawl through a narrow steel tunnel, imperiled by heat, electric shocks, tarantulas, and other dangers, ending in a fall into the den of a giant octopus. This seems intended as a horrid parody of the birth process, with the deadly embrace of the octopus rather than the loving caress of the mother as its culmination. Of course, Bond's skill and hardiness enable him to survive.

Dr. No's perversions of nature are carried further in the choice of his name. Illegitimately born of a German Methodist missionary father and a Chinese mother (such cross-breeding is characteristic also of Dr. No's henchmen), he was brought up without love and parental care by an aunt whom his mother paid. He became involved with the Tongs. As he says, "I enjoyed the conspiracies, the burglaries, the murders, the arson of insured properties. They represented

revolt against the father figure who had betrayed me. I loved the death and destruction of people and things" (p. 136). After his need to escape those he betrayed, he says, "I changed my name to Julius No--the Julius after my father and the No for my rejection of him and of all authority" (p. 138). That seems clear enough and even somewhat simplistic, but Julius is not a common German name, and we never learn the father's full name nor the mother's name. The name Julius by itself suggests that the true "father" of Dr. No, as of other would-be emperors, was Julius Caesar. Dr. No seems to have been spawned by a ghost or an abstraction, as unnatural as his megalomania. And the rejection implied in the "No" is a rejection not only of his father and authority but also of the responsibilities of leadership, the natural bonds of family, the communal ties of society, and, in fact, of all life. Even the "Doctor" is a parody, since his medical studies were all in the means of hurting and destroying life rather than giving or aiding it, and he never earned a medical degree. As he says, "I called myself 'doctor' because doctors receive confidences and they can ask questions without arousing suspicion" (p. 138). In every respect, therefore, from appearance to actions to name, Dr. No is the embodiment of deceit and the unnatural.

Opposed to him is James Bond. In many respects, Bond does not resemble the pastoral ideal; he is urbane and

sophisticated, with gourmet tastes in food and drink, fastidious concern for apparel, and expertise in the arts of espionage and murder. And yet, not only does he, unlike Dr. No, devote these talents to the well-being of the social and natural order, but he also, as we have seen, relies as much on instinct as on training. He believes in community; although he might occasionally disagree petulantly with M, Bond never ceases to obey and admire him. In fact, Bond is involved in two social structures during the novel that complement the view of nature we are given and oppose the ménage of Dr. No. First there is the macrocosm of the Secret Service with M as its paternal head and the various members relating to each other with fraternal concern and cooperation. After being done a favor, for instance, one of the men says of M, "Just like the old boy. He'd always see the men right first. ...They didn't come like that any more" (p. 15). Then on the island, Bond, Honeychile, and Quarrel form a microcosmic society with similar features; the three interrelate with mutual care for each other, and Bond acts and sometimes feels like the father of a family. Of course, despite the apparent peacefulness of these societies, the latent violence implied by 007's license to kill, Honeychile's revenge on her rapist, and Quarrel's fighting skill corresponds to the destructive power of the sharks, octopus, and Black Widow. Opposed to these societies,

held together by bonds of mutual affection, is Dr. No, who has not only repudiated the larger society and its laws but has also formed on his island an unnatural social structure bound together only by fear and deceit.

And again, Bond's name reinforces the theme. As George Grella says, "His name indicates...facets of his character: he is entrusted with the mammoth task of safeguarding an entire civilization; the free world depends on his actions...."⁹ As a bond, he is trustworthy; as a binding agent, he helps to keep society whole; he helps to preserve the bonds of natural and social relationships. The bond is further emphasized by his habit of introducing himself as "Bond, James Bond"; the whole name seems to be made up of three parts, with a bond at each end, holding out hands, as it were, in both directions.

James Bond not only binds society together but he is also bonded into it. He is a servant of his government, and his recognition of that role is an expression of and a contribution to the social structure. In this regard it is useful to remember, as Leonard Ashley reminds us, that "James" is traditionally the name of English butlers.¹⁰ And we are never allowed to get informal with Mr. Bond and call him "Jim."

On further investigation, we find that James Bond is an appropriate name in another sense. James is Latinized as Jacobus, of which the French, Spanish, and Italian forms are respectively Jacques, Iago, and Iachimo. A Shakespearian

scholar would immediately recognize these as the names of three villainous (or ridiculous) malcontents, from As You Like It, Othello, and Cymbeline respectively. All three of these characters get pleasure out of causing discomfort to other people, and all have a jaundiced, cynical view of human beings and life in general. Jacques can suck melancholy even out of pleasant songs, Iago thinks all men besides himself are asses and puppies (and his view of women is even more negative), and Iachimo thinks there is no woman who can not be seduced, no man who can not be cuckolded. Upon investigating why Shakespeare might have chosen these names for such characters, our attention is drawn to the fact that in Elizabethan slang an outhouse was a jakes. Sir John Harrington puns on this word in the title of his book describing the invention of an indoor privy; he called it The Metamorphosis of Ajax (1596). Now if an optimist can be said to view life through rose-colored glasses, then a pessimist and cynic can--you guessed it--be said to have a view from the jakes or, mutatis mutandis, the James. James Bond's work necessarily exposes him to the nastier sides of life. A frequent gesture of his when he contemplates pain and death is a shrug. The cynicism and despair found in the James Bond novels has been often commented on.¹¹ And yet James Bond is never fully inured to man's depravity. He always feels it, if not as a surprise, yet as a wound.

Given his association with the jakes, together with the means of death employed by Dr. No, it is an appropriate irony that Bond kills Dr. No by burying him in tons of guano. Another thought: a spy must be, by profession, secretive, confidential, or, in Freudian terms, rectally retentive. In short, he must be a Bond James or jakes. By profession and choice, James Bond remains bound to his unpleasant duties; he can not or will not share his deepest self with anyone.

Little did Ian Fleming think, when he chose the name James Bond as the dullest name, that so many meanings could be found in it. James Bond has indeed become an exciting name, the name of a hero for our dark times, the name of one in a modern pastoral who upholds the social and natural order and buries the dirt where it belongs. And I'm sure that James Bond, the ornithologist, would approve.

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NOTES

- 1 Ian Fleming, From Russia With Love (Signet, 1957), p. 29.
- 2 Ian Fleming, Live and Let Die (Signet, 1954), p. 18.
- 3 Jack C. Wolf, "Naming as an Alienating Device in Popular Literature," Literary Onomastics Studies 6 (1979), 200-212.
- 4 The New Yorker, 38 (April 21, 1962), 32.
- 5 W. F. H. Nicolaisen, "The Toponymy of Literary Landscapes," Literary Onomastics Studies 6 (1979), 99.
- 6 Ian Fleming, Doctor No (Signet, 1958), pp. 66-67. All further references to this text will be inserted in parenthetical pagination.
- 7 Arthur A. Berger, The Comic-Stripped American (New York: Walker and Company, 1973), pp. 121-122, 201.
- 8 Bernice Larson Webb, "James Bond as Literary Descendant of Beowulf," South Atlantic Quarterly, 67 (1968), 1-12.
- 9 George Grella, "James Bond," The Critic as Artist: Essays on Books 1920-1970, ed. Gilbert A. Harrison (New York: Livewright, 1972), p. 139.
- 10 Leonard R. N. Ashley, "Mudpies Which Endure: Onomastics as a Tool of Literary Criticism," Literary Onomastics Studies, 6 (1979), 270.
- 11 See, for example, the article, cited above, by Bernice Webb, p. 4.