

# A name is a name is a name: some thoughts and personal opinions about molluscan scientific names

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Zool. Med. Leiden 83 (7), 9.vii.2009: 565-576, figs 1-9.— ISSN 0024-0672.

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Key words: Mollusca, scientific names.

Since 1758, with the publication of *Systema Naturae* by Linnaeus, thousands of scientific names have been proposed for molluscs. The derivation and uses of many of them are here examined from various viewpoints, beginning with names based on appearance, size, vertical distribution, and location. There follow names that are amusing, inventive, ingenious, cryptic, ideal, names supposedly blasphemous, and names honouring persons and pets. Pseudo-names, difficult names and names that are long or short, over-used, or have sexual connotations are also examined. Pertinent quotations, taken from the non-scientific writings of Gertrude Stein, Lord Byron and William Shakespeare, have been incorporated for the benefit of those who may be inclined to take scientific names too seriously.

## Introduction

Posterity may remember Gertrude Stein only for 'A rose is a rose is a rose'. The meaning behind this apparently meaningless statement, she said, was that a thing is what it is, the name invoking the images and emotions associated with it. One of the most celebrated lines in twentieth-century poetry, it highlights the importance of names by a simple process of repetition. Gertrude Stein, a poet, is saying that a rose is, uniquely, a rose. She had something in common with Carolus Linnaeus, a scientific man, who perfected a method of giving unique names to animals and plants. Names mattered to them both.

For various reasons, names also matter to me. I touched briefly upon some of the topics discussed here in my book *Out of my Shell* (Dance, 2005), but the subject deserves a fuller treatment. I am well aware that the naming of molluscs is an essentially serious exercise, but I shall allow myself a little innocent fun as I investigate the sometimes weird and wonderful scientific names that have been applied, or misapplied, to molluscs during the past two and a half centuries.

Thousands of scientific names have been proposed for molluscs and although many are disappointingly uninformative, a certain amount of thought has gone into the creation of all of them. A name may tell us something about the physical characteristics of the mollusc, or more frequently of its shell, may indicate where it was found, and may be a means of honouring or mocking an individual. It may be long or short, simple or complicated, occasionally sexy, and may display a sense of humour. Recently José Leal showed that a name may also reveal some uncertainty in the mind of the proposer. Having been unduly puzzled over the relationships of a small group of deep-water bivalves, he chose the generic name *Dilemma* for them. 'Dilemma' is the Greek noun for a proposition consisting of questionable alternatives. 'It is used in this case', he said, 'to denote the impasses faced by the author in the course of this work' (Leal, 2008).

Many molluscs are known by non-scientific names, too, and when there is some doubt about the correct scientific name for one of them, it may be expedient to use a vernacular name for it. The mollusc bearing the scientific name *Buccinum undatum*, for instance, has many different vernacular names, often several in the same language. Among other names it is known in English as Whelk; in Dutch as Wulk; in German as Wellhorn; in French as Buccin; in Norwegian as Kongsnegl; in Portuguese as Búzio; in Spanish as Bocina; in Finnish as Metsätörvikotilo. I shall say little more about vernacular names for the simple reason that they lack international currency. Linnaeus gave this well-known edible gastropod its current scientific name in 1758, in the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae*, long established as the starting point for scientific names in zoology (Linnaeus, 1758). Unless and until someone has just cause to modify it, *Buccinum undatum* is its unique and universal scientific name (the second part of the name being known, more precisely, as the 'specific epithet').

### Useless names

Before examining some of the various categories of molluscan scientific names it may be worth pointing out that many names do not transmit any useful information. They suggest, to me anyway, that little time or effort has been devoted to creating them. The sheer number of molluscan genera and species, of course, may be why there are so many such names. Often-used epithets such as *vulgaris*, *incerta* and *modesta*, for instance, tell us only that a species was considered to be common, doubtful or unassuming. Even a featureless mollusc, or its shell, deserves a better nomenclatural fate than this.

### Names based on physical attributes

Inevitably, the physical attributes of molluscs are reflected in many scientific names proposed for them. Epithets relating to structural features, such as *canaliculata*, *cancelata*, *lamellata*, and *coronata* are, or should be, appropriate to their subjects. Usually they are. Appropriate, too, are epithets such as *elongata* and *ovata*, describing shell shape. It is also reasonable to use epithets describing colour, such as *rosea*, *viridis*, or *brunnea*. It seems futile, however, to propose a name indicating that a mollusc or its shell merely displays colour, as in *Helicina colorata* Pease, 1868, and *Donax tinctus* Gould, 1850.

### Names based on size

Size-related epithets have been chosen for various species, a familiar and appropriate example being *Tridacna gigas* (Röding, 1798). Sometimes, however, a size-based epithet may be ill-chosen. In 1927 William Healey Dall proposed the name *Stilifer minuta* for a tiny species belonging to a genus of tiny species. Temple Prime erred in the opposite direction in 1852 when he named a small Sphaeriid clam *Cyclas gigas*.

### Names suggesting vertical distribution

It seems reasonable enough to choose a name indicating that a species lives in deep water, for example *Limopsis abyssicola* A. Adams, 1862. It should not be assumed that the

use of an epithet suggestive of altitude, however, indicates that a species occurs at high levels. Such an assumption would be correct for *Helicostyla montana* Semper, 1891, a land snail found on high ground in the Philippines. It would not be correct for *Megaspira elata* (Gould, 1847) and *M. elatior* (Spix, 1827). The specific epithets imply that the molluscs named are raised up, which they are, but only in the sense that their shells have high spires.

### Names derived from places

Many generic and specific names have a geographical connotation. Specific epithets such as *americana*, *neozelandicum*, *mauritiana*, *barbadensis*, and *africana* are common and have been around for a long time. This cannot be said of generic names. The earliest I have found, a reference to Spain, is *Iberus* Montfort, 1810. Another early one is *Vanikoro*, proposed by Quoy and Gaimard in 1832, this being also the name of a small island in the Solomon group. Few such names were proposed in the nineteenth century, but they became more common during the first half of the twentieth, when creating them became something of a habit for one malacologist.

Horace Burrington Baker specialised in obscure groups of land snails, such as the island-dwelling Microcystinae, and in a series of publications he proposed a number of new generic names that may be identified with the names of islands in the Central Pacific. For instance, the islands of Raiatea, Kusai, and Guam clearly lend their names to the genera *Raiatea*, *Kusaiea*, and *Guamia* (see Baker, 1938). Similarly, the island of Koror in the Palau group lends its name to the genus *Kororia* (see Baker, 1941). He was not the only malacologist infatuated with small, island-dwelling land snails. C. Montague Cook and Yoshio Kondo showed a similar tendency in a monograph of the Achatinellidae, in which they proposed the genus *Tubuaia*, named after the island of Tubuai. High points of Pacific islands infatuated them even more. In the same monograph they proposed *Taitaa*, named after the highest peak on Tubuai, and *Tautautua*, *Pukunia* and *Mitiperna*, all named after peaks on the island of Rapa (Cooke & Kondo, 1960).

### Amusing and inventive names

Félix Pierre Jousseume created two names that strike me as amusing: *Extra extra* in 1894, and *Diabolica diabolica* in 1897. I am sure Jousseume also thought them amusing – and possibly controversial. In the twentieth century Tom Iredale became noteworthy for bringing humour and inventiveness into the serious business of naming molluscs. The many names he proposed for molluscan genera and species are often witty, although it helps to have more than a passing acquaintance with the English language to appreciate them. From the extensive list of his generic names I select three of the more original. *Berylsma*, 1924, he named after his wife, she being the mother (or Ma) of their daughter Beryl! *Ovatipsa*, 1931, typified by *Cypraea chinensis* Gmelin, 1791, refers to the tendency of some specimens to ‘tip over’! In 1929 he named a genus of bubble shells *Osorattis* because, so it is said, working on it made him feel ‘Oh so ratty’ (i.e. irritable)!

Others followed suit with some amusing and apt names. In 1966, for instance, Dwight Taylor introduced some Iredalean humour into his account of the unique molluscan fauna of a valley in Coahuila State, Mexico, when he christened one of his

discoveries *Paludiscala caramba*. The specific epithet 'caramba' is a colloquial Spanish word expressing surprise. He said the word was 'loosely translated from my original remarks at seeing the shells' (Taylor, 1966). Understandably, he had been surprised when he saw how closely the ribbed shell of this tiny gastropod, collected from a freshwater marsh, resembled shells belonging to the exclusively marine family Epitoniidae, a resemblance echoed in the name he gave to the genus. *Paludiscala* derives from *palus*, the Latin for marsh, and *scala* refers to the generic name formerly given to many members of the Epitoniidae, *Scala*.

Alan Solem, like Baker, was well known for his work on land snails of tropical islands, especially the Endodontidae, and he had his own brand of nomenclatural humour. He wanted to be the author of the first and last entries in any alphabetical arrangement of molluscan generic names, at least that was what I had assumed. As Baker had already claimed the first entry with *Aa*, Solem had to settle for second place with his *Aaadonta*.

He made sure of the last entry, however, with *Zyzyxdonta*! I now know my assumption may have been incorrect. In his impressive study of the diminutive and distinctively sculptured Endodontoid snails of Pacific islands, Solem had this to say: 'Species of the genus *Aaadonta* represent the extreme development of fine sculpture and have the westernmost range of existing Endodontidae. The single known species of *Zyzyxdonta* represents the extreme gross sculptural development within the family and is at the southwestern fringe of distribution. It was thought appropriate that their names be as widely separated as their sculpture' (Solem, 1976: 466). Perhaps I am not the only one who thinks it may have been inappropriate to separate their names in this absurd manner.

### Ingenious names

Names may be odd, outlandish, or amusing, but they are not necessarily ingenious. An ingenious name is one that is original, imaginative and appropriate. Three names that come to mind each have a specific epithet that, in my opinion, cannot be bettered: *Cypraea ovata caputviperae* Martin, 1899, *Kondoa asteriscus* Baker, 1941, and *Trubatsa pavlova* (Iredale, 1936). The names apply to three very different shells. The first, a Miocene fossil from Indonesia, has a dorsum that,



Fig. 1. *Paludiscala caramba* Taylor, 1966. Length 2.5 mm. Redrawn, after Taylor, 1966.

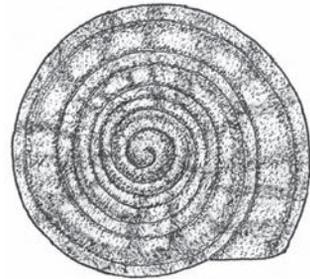


Fig. 2. *Aaadonta constricta constricta* (Semper, 1874). Diameter 4 mm. Redrawn, after Solem, 1976.

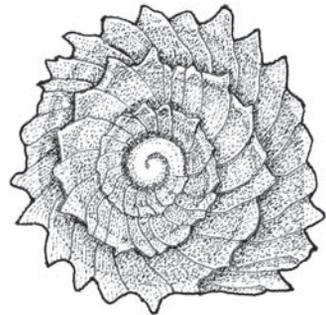


Fig. 3. *Zyzyxdonta alata* Solem, 1976. Diameter 4 mm. Redrawn, after Solem, 1976.

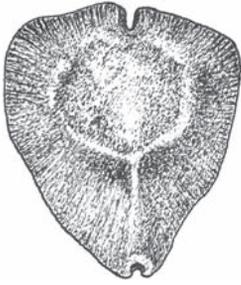


Fig. 4. *Cypraea ovata caputoiperæ* Martin, 1899. Length 38 mm.

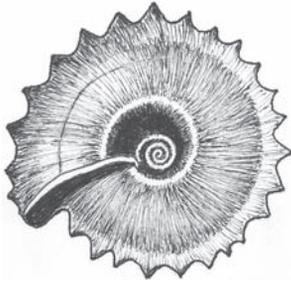


Fig. 5. *Kondoia asteriscus* Baker, 1941. Diameter 8.5 mm. Redrawn, after Baker, 1941.



Fig. 6. *Trubatsa pavlova* (Iredale, 1936). Length 16 mm.

viewed from above, bears a striking resemblance to a snake's head. The second, a small, low-spired land snail from the Caroline Islands in the Pacific, has a disc-shaped shell, ornamented with evenly spaced lamellae projecting at the circumference, in the manner of an asterisk (Baker, 1941). The epithet *asteriscus* occurs in the names of two or three other molluscs, but Baker's use of it for a small snail with a flattened shell is singularly appropriate. The third, a shell from the coastal waters of New South Wales, has an anal canal projecting upwards from its apertural edge, while its siphonal canal projects downwards. This distinctive configuration inspired a malacologist with an unconventional attitude to scientific nomenclature to create what I regard as the most ingenious name ever proposed for a mollusc. Tom Iredale may have had little in common with Anna Pavlova, but when he named a small, deep-water gastropod in her honour, he showed that, in one respect anyway, he shared something with the most famous ballerina of her day – a touch of genius!

### Cryptic names

Two molluscan names involving a so-called cryptic sense of humour deserve special mention. The first of these is a bivalve from New Zealand waters, *Ascitellina urinatoria* (Suter, 1913). A. W. B. Powell said that when Suter, a fellow New Zealander, chose the specific epithet *uratoria* he was 'merely striving to point out that the original specimen owed its discovery to the fact that it was washed out of the dredged mud, lodged in the scuppers of the research vessel, by a method suggested by the choice of name' (Powell, 1979: 2). In other words, someone had urinated upon the mud. Whether or not someone had done so may be beside the point because *uratoria* derives from *urator*, Latin for a diver! The second cryptic name is *Abra cadabra*, proposed for a sub-fossil bivalve unearthed from an alluvial deposit near Basrah, Iraq (Eames & Wilkins, 1957). Many years ago, when I asked Dr Eames to explain the name, he joked that the mollusc in question had been dead a long time, so it could be considered a

cadaver, hence *Abra cadabra*! He also told me that he could not resist the temptation to incorporate a familiar magical incantation into the scientific name of this otherwise mundane shell! Sadly, the species has since been allocated to the genus *Theora*, so its name has lost its magic.

### Ideal names

In this category I would place names showing a knowledge of various languages, a respect for the meanings of words and an ability to use them cleverly. A good example is *Mexithauma quadripaludium*, the name Dwight Taylor gave to another of the strange gastropods he described from Coahuila. The generic name *Mexithauma* is derived from 'México' and 'thauma' (or 'thaumatos'), Greek for a marvel or wonder. The specific epithet *quadripaludium*, he said, is the Latin translation of 'de las cuatro ciénegas' or 'of the four marshes' (Taylor, 1966).

### Blasphemous names

For obvious reasons it is not a good idea to devise names that may offend religious sensibilities. I have found only one scientific name that could – but probably would not – offend a devout Moslem: *Helix mahometana* Bourguignat, 1860. On the other hand, religious sensibilities came into play in 1957 when the generic name *Jumala* Friele, 1882, was rejected by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature. The Commission, in its wisdom, pointed out that *Jumala* is the Lapp word for God and decreed that Friele's genus should be deleted in favour of *Beringius* Dall, 1886 (ICZN, 1957). Tucker Abbott was quick to point out that *Jumala* means Jehovah or Maker and does honour to God (Abbott, 1974: 207), but he was not quick enough. *Jumala* had already been banished from the Pantheon of molluscan names on the specious grounds of blasphemy.

### Honorific names

There are two principal reasons for honouring a person with the name of a genus or a species: either that person has provided a service or has achieved distinction in some way or other, usually in the cause of science. There are other reasons, of course, one of them being to flatter, another because the honour has been purchased. Hugh Cuming may hold the record for the greatest number of species named after one person, Deshayes being not far behind. The way Cuming made available his huge shell collection to specialists guaranteed that many supposed new species would bear his name. Ironically, Linnaeus, the inventor of the system enabling a passionate shell collector to be so honoured, has had relatively few molluscs named after him.

One of the strangest honorific names to be brought to my attention was devised by Ernst Marcus in 1957 for a nudibranch belonging to the genus *Hallaxa*. To honour Alice Pruvot Fol, a fellow worker, Ernst joined up the initial letters of her name in such a way that the sounds of the initials A, P and F, when spoken, made up most of the specific epithet, *apefae!* Ernst's wife, Eveline, admitted that she and her husband were happy to use 'nonsense words' when creating scientific names for molluscs. 'We tried to avoid using descriptive words describing morphological characters', she said, and added, 'we used any words that sounded good or that we liked' (Marcus, 1987).

For some years I was involved with a project that concluded with the publication of a substantial book, *Seashells of Eastern Arabia*, published in 1995. The driving force behind this project was Dr Donald Bosch, well known for his shell-collecting activities in

Oman where he and his wife Eloise have found a number of species new to science. Over the years it became customary not only to name a new species after him, but also to honour members of his extended family in the same way. In 1992, when Robert Moonenbeek, Henk Dekker and I published an article in which we named a new species we had discovered, *Umbonium eloiseae*, Donald remonstrated with me – in the kindest way, naturally! Why honour his wife, Eloise, again? Tucker Abbott had already done so, in 1973, with his *Acteon eloiseae*. Were we not aware he and Eloise had a grandson who had never had a species named after him? I said we had chosen to name the new *Umbonium* after his wife because it was such a pretty pink colour, so feminine we thought. We assured him his grandson would be the next Bosch to be honoured – and he was!

On another occasion my choice of a name to honour someone was more felicitous. In 1970 I published an account of the Streptaxidae found on the island of Borneo, including two new species I had placed in the genus *Sinoennea* (see Dance, 1970). After corresponding with Dolf van Bruggen, widely known as a leading authority on this family, I decided a new genus was required to accommodate these two species (Dance, 1972). *Bruggennea*, the name I chose for it, was appropriate and deserved!

The idea of having your name immortalized in that of a new species of mollusc has reached a new level in the twenty-first century. It is now acceptable to openly pay someone to do it. At least one leading malacologist has been prepared to offer his services in this way, the proceeds going to a worthy cause. At a convention I attended in the USA recently it was possible to place a bid at auction for such a service. Fortunately, I found it easy to resist the temptation to pay for a tiny shell to bear my name. I could not have afforded it anyway.

### Names honouring pets

Ernst and Eveline Marcus were devoted to nudibranchs, but judging from some of the scientific names they proposed for these shell-less molluscs, they may have been equally devoted to their four-legged pets! There was a dog in the Marcus household in Brazil, known as Tecus. One day someone stepped on it, an event marked by Ernst in 1955 when he proposed the name *Piseinotecus* for a genus of nudibranchs. Virtually a short sentence in Portuguese, this generic name translates as 'I trod on Tecus'! In 1960, when Ernst and Eveline named a new nudibranch *Catriona maua*, they honoured a cat. The German near-equivalent of 'pussy cat' is 'Mies' (also 'Miez' or 'Mieze'), from which Ernst devised *Mieseae*, the name he proposed in 1961 for yet another nudibranch genus. In 1977 Jerry Walls honoured another pet cat when he named a shelled mollusc *Conus tribblei*.

### Pseudo-names

Sometimes, being honoured with a generic or a specific name may not be such a good idea. For personal reasons, I have reservations about names beginning with *Pseudo* (meaning false) and ending with an individual's surname. There is a genus *Caldwellia* H. Adams, 1873, and a genus *Pseudocaldwellia* Germain, 1908. There is a genus *Guppya* Mörch, 1867, and a genus *Pseudoguppya* Baker, 1925. There is a genus *Austenia* Nevill, 1878, and a genus *Pseudaustenia* Cockerell, 1891. Clearly, there was a Caldwell, a

Guppy, and an Austen. It matters not who they were or what they did. It does matter that there also appears to have been a false Caldwell, a false Guppy, and a false Austen! This situation worries me. In 1960 Adolf Zilch proposed *Dancea* as a replacement name for the pre-occupied *Pseudocaelatura* Wenz, 1947. *Dancea* is placed in the Helixarionidae, along with the other genera I have just mentioned. It is unnerving to think that a malacologist with a liking for this superfamily and a grudge against me might be tempted to add to it one more generic name – I hesitate to spell it out – implying that there is a false Dance! Hopefully, this may not happen, but Adolf Zilch may have done me no favours by honouring me with a replacement name!

### Difficult names

Among names that have struck me as odd are two published in 1857 by Philip Pearsall Carpenter. In his *Mazatlan Catalogue* he gave the specific epithet *C-B-Adamsii* to a species of *Chemnitzia* and a species of *Liotia* (see Carpenter, 1857: 249, 427). More than a century later, Myra Keen, a staunch upholder of the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature, commented on these names (Keen, 1968: 404, 432). She was well aware that all scientific names should be written without hyphens, but she chose to ignore the Rules on this occasion because, she said, *cbadamsii* would have been unpronounceable! I became aware that some scientific molluscan names may be difficult to pronounce – and to transcribe accurately – when my friend Bunjamin Dharma sent me a species of *Amphidromus* he had described. It took me several attempts before I completed an accurate label for *Amphidromus djajasasmitai* Dharma, 1993! No doubt I should have had no difficulty with it if I was a native of Indonesia, as is Mr Machfuds Djajasasmita, but I come from Europe, where personal names are simpler – or are they?

At least the name of this *Amphidromus* includes a reasonable number of vowels, which is more than can be said for the names of some species described by malacologists in Central Europe. The virtue of littering scientific names with vowels is sufficiently demonstrated by three examples in which they are outnumbered by consonants: *Krinikillus dymczewiczii* Kaleniczenko, 1851, *Turbo czjzeki* Zekeli, 1852, and *Congeria czjzeki* Hörnes, 1868. These specific epithets honour real people, I know, but I wish I could pronounce them! I am unlikely to do so as my homeland is an island at the western edge of Europe, where names like Smith, Jones and Brown prevail. I wonder what Myra Keen would have done about names like these?

### Long names

Some names are long, some very long. Hunting for the longest, I have found three genera with 18 letters each. In 1912 Pfeffer proposed *Octopodoteuthopsis* and, in 1978, Radoman proposed both *Pontobelgrandiella* and *Falsibelgrandiella*. Harry Lee has forwarded to me another four, of similar length: *Cylindroturbonilla* Nordsieck, 1977; *Nipponocrassatella* Kuroda and Habe, 1971; *Pseudohelenaconcha* Germain, 1932; and *Pseudogracilinenia* Loosjes, 1984. The longest specific epithets, also with 18 letters each, occur in the following names: *Circomphalus foliaceolamellosus* (Dillwyn, 1817), *Pecten duodecimumlamellatus* Bronn, 1831, *Leiostracus cinnamomeolineatus* (Moricand, 1841), and *Micantapex striatotuberculata* (Yokohama, 1928). There are probably others as long or longer.

### Short names

Some names are short, some very short. Generic names formed of four letters are not rare. Much rarer are three-letter names, such as *Mya* Linnaeus, 1758, *Ena* Leach, 1831, and *Hua* Chen, 1943. A name, in order to be validly proposed, must comprise at least two letters and it is no surprise that very few two-letter names have been proposed for molluscs. I can find only three generic names: *Io* Lea, 1831, *Aa* Baker, 1925, and *Ba* Solem, 1983. Two-letter specific epithets are almost as rare, only four having come to my notice: *Turbo yo* d'Orbigny, 1850, *Fasciolaria io* Gabb, 1864, *Gulella io* Verdcourt, 1974, and *Aylacostoma ci* Simone, 2001. I asked Luiz Simone why he chose the specific epithet *ci* for a freshwater gastropod. He told me that the word 'ci' means 'mother' in the Tupi vocabulary of the Tapuia Indians living in the Amazon basin. His new species, a member of the family Thiariidae, is parthenogenetic, so every example of *Aylacostoma ci* is potentially a mother!

### Taking names to extremes

Occasionally an author may set an unusual precedent when creating scientific names for molluscs. For instance, in a single publication, Cotteau described many species as new to science, but gave 16 of them the same specific name, *censoriensis*, possibly a record (Cotteau, 1853-1857). The Marchese di Monterosato may have set a record of a different kind when he proposed at least 40 helicid generic names, each beginning with the letter X, in a single treatise (Monterosato, 1893). Few of these names for helicids, it is safe to say, are now in general use.

### Sexy names

This survey would be incomplete without a consideration of names referring to parts of the human body or bodily functions, especially names with a sexual connotation. These names are usually explicit and often appropriate. Linnaeus started the sexual ball rolling in 1758 with *Solen vagina*. He followed this with *Serpula penis* (now *Brechites penis*). The genitalia of humans are referred to frequently by some of his successors. Among early examples are *Conus circumciscus* Born, 1778, *Buccinum phallus* Gmelin, 1790, *Terebra phallus* Bosc, 1801, *Sunetta vaginalis* Menke, 1843, and a near cousin, *Sunetta menstrualis* Menke, 1843. A few have reference to women of doubtful virtue. The earliest of these seems to be *Venus meretrix* Linnaeus, 1758 (for which Lamarck proposed the genus *Meretrix* in 1799, 'meretrix' being Latin for 'public prostitute' or 'harlot'). There is an uncomplimentary meaning, too, behind the name *Cytherea impudica* Lamarck, 1818. The Latin for 'unchaste' is 'impudicus' and an 'unchaste woman' is 'femina impudica'. Similarly, the Latin for 'brothel' is 'lupanar' (genitive 'lupanaris' which is also the adjective) and this is the inspiration behind the name *Pitar lupanaria* (Lesson, 1830). The sexual implications of all these names are obvious from the shells they refer to. The opening at the end of the alimentary canal also receives a justified reference in *Murex anus* Linnaeus, 1758 (now *Distorsio anus*), though it is possibly less justified in *Dosinia anus* Philippi, 1848. A more recent name with a possible anal reference is that of a freshwater mussel from New Guinea, *Haasodonta fannyae* (Johnson, 1948). Fritz Haas was a

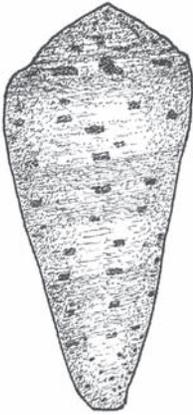


Fig. 7. *Conus circumcisis* Born, 1778. Length 45 mm.

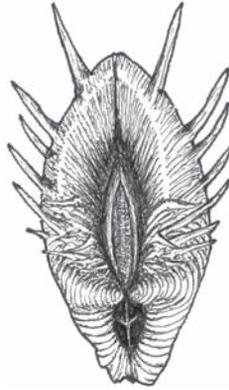


Fig. 8. *Pitar lupanaria* (Lesson, 1830). Length 50 mm.

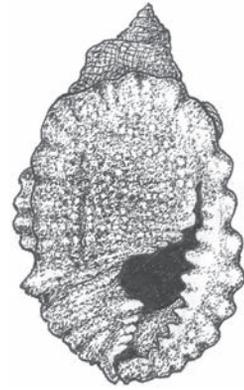


Fig. 9. *Distorsio anus* (Linnaeus, 1758). Length 65 mm.

world authority to freshwater mussels, hence *Haasodonta*, the generic name proposed by Don McMichael in 1956. Rumour has it that this name has been interpreted by some to mean 'Toothless Haas'! It is also possible that the name is a disparaging reference to a peculiar tooth structure of his. The specific epithet actually derives from a woman's Christian name, but 'fanny' is also a slang expression for the buttocks! That meaning, too, has not passed unnoticed. Fortunately, the malicious interpretations of this unusual scientific name are unlikely to trouble the world authority on freshwater mussels now.

### The Glory and the Nothing of a Name

The first mollusc to be given a valid scientific name was *Monoculus telemus*, a pteropod. Deceived by its unusual shape and structure, Linnaeus included it among the wingless insects in the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae*. He had received it from a fellow Swede, Erik Brander, a distinguished diplomat with an interest in natural history. Linnaeus named and described many insects received from him. He is also acknowledged by name in *Systema Naturae* for having provided Linnaeus with the shells of no less than 15 different molluscs; no-one is credited with more. A keen shell collector, Brander may have liked to see his name perpetuated in that of a pretty shell, perhaps one of those he had sent to his illustrious countryman. Instead, Linnaeus honoured him with *Cimex branderi*, a parasitic bug! In 1816, two years after Brander died, Lord Byron published *Churchill's Grave*, a poetic commentary on the transient nature of fame. A suitable epitaph for Brander – and a possible corrective for anyone craving nomenclatural immortality – may be found in the final line of Byron's poem: 'The Glory and the Nothing of a Name'.

### What's in a Name?

I have only scratched the surface of the subject, but I may have done enough to show that scientific names for molluscs have different meanings for different people

and may sometimes be problematic. In *Romeo and Juliet* William Shakespeare showed that non-scientific names could also cause problems. His play is a tragedy about a boy and a girl belonging to two antagonistic families. Irreconcilable family differences are represented by the family names. Realising this, Juliet says to Romeo, 'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet'. I can sympathise, but cannot agree. Shakespeare versus Stein may seem to be no contest, but I take sides with the minor literary figure and declare that a rose shall never smell as sweet by any other name. As it is with roses, so it is with molluscs. Like it or not, a name is a name is a name!

### Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to Dr Dolf van Bruggen on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Luiz Simone of the University of São Paulo told me about names proposed by Ernst and Eveline Marcus and explained the derivation of the name *Aylacostoma ci*. Harry Lee of Jacksonville, Georgia, provided some long generic names and useful information on shorter ones. José Leal, Director of the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum on Sanibel Island, shared his *Dilemma* with me. Bunjamin Dharma of Jakarta sent me examples of *Cypraea ovata caputviperae*. Practical help with literature and specimens in their care was provided by Mary Seddon, Harriet Wood and Jennifer Gallichan of the Department of Biodiversity and Systematic Biology at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. I am indebted to all of them for their prompt and willing attention to my many requests.

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Received: 24.ii.2009

Accepted: 2.iv.2009

Edited: A.S.H. Breure