

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*Tales of nom and nomen*

Once upon a time, a very, very long time ago, a god made a man in his own image. That god made lots of other things too. There's an old word, nom, and it means law, order, and it still exists today, buried in words that we still use like astronomy, economy, gastronomy. It also existed within another old word, nomen or nomin, which means name, and that word still exists buried in words like nomenclature, nominate and ignominious. Nom and nomen were part of this god's making; he made light and then he made order between the light and the dark by separating them from each other. He made sky by separating the water and then he made land by collecting the water in one place under the sky. When he made birds and animals he brought them to the man to be named, and the man named them. Then the god took part of the man's body and from it he made a woman. The man named her too; he gave her the name woman, with the word man buried in it, because she was part of him. The story also tells us that because she was part of him, that meant that she was his and that she was his wife.

Once upon a time, a very long time ago, there was a man and there was a woman who was his wife. Then the woman had a child. And the birth of this child, it made the man wonder... The woman was made from part of the man's body, and the child was made from part of the woman's body — he watched the child come out of her body, he could see that it was part of her. But how did he know that it was part of him as well? He named the child, just as the man before him had named the

birds and the animals and the woman, but this time he gave the child his own name so everyone would know that it was his.

Once upon a time, a long time ago, a man owned his land and so he named his estate after himself. He owned his livestock and so he branded them with his name. He had many possessions he valued and so he engraved his name on them. He owned his slaves and he gave them his name; he owned his children so he put his name on them. And he owned his wife and so when they were married he signified his possession of her with his name.

Once upon a time, not so long ago, a woman had a child. She thought she would give the child her name, since it was her child. But that was against the law. The state would allow her to name the child but only if she gave the child the father's name, for that was the only name that the state would allow the child to have. The state would allow the father to name the child, but only if he gave the child his own name because that was the only name the state would allow the child to have. So the state was the only one who was really allowed to name the child.

Once upon a time, not long ago at all, if somebody wondered what's in a name, he might end up wondering if someone owns us now...