

Cultural References in *Lost* Anthroponomastics: Revealing or Misleading Hints?

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Abstract

On 23rd May 2010 some 13 million American viewers watched the series finale of *Lost*, one of the most popular TV shows of the last decades. Over six seasons and 114 episodes, the destiny of the survivors of the crash of flight Oceanic 815 on a not-exactly-deserted island fascinated the public, stimulating any kind of speculation and interpretation.

This audience paid attention to the web of cultural references created by some of the characters' names: among the crash survivors and their enemies/allies we find homonyms of philosophers, physicists, famous anarchists, etc.

In this article, I will analyse this cultural name-dropping and, more generally, the anthroponomastic practice of the show, in order to ascertain to what extent the characters' names are functional to the story's narrative development and to suspense creation. In particular, I will consider whether this abundance of famous homonyms can really be considered revealing of the characters' features or if they simply contribute to catching the audience's attention and creating expectations.

1. The show

Created by Jeffrey Lieber, J. J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof, *Lost* debuted on ABC on 22nd September 2004, immediately becoming one of the biggest critical and commercial successes of the following season. The drama series follows the destiny of the survivors of the crash of a jet flying from Sydney to Los Angeles, on a mysterious, only-apparently-deserted island in the South Pacific. The narration is highly serialised: each episode features a primary storyline set on the island, whose development is interrupted by a series of flashbacks showing a particularly relevant moment in the character's pre-crash life.¹

This narrative formula in addition to the series of mysterious events taking place on the island, as well as the unexpected connections among both the former passengers of flight Oceanic 815 and the other inhabitants of the island ('the Others'), captured the attention of millions of viewers, who followed the drama over six seasons and 114 episodes, thus determining the show's popular success (Wikipedia 2001a). Along with the increasingly complex storyline, a true mythology developed around the show with viewers wondering about the ultimate and hidden reason of the one or the other detail. In this latter regard, an important role was played by the Internet and, in the last few years, by social networks as well (Ziegenhagen 2009: 83, Grossi 2010: 93 and Aprile, Pezzuto, Pizzileo and Saura 2010: 290): thanks to the virtual community 'Losties' were (and still are) able to expose and compare their theories and interpretation about, for example, the presence of a polar bear on a tropical island (Lostpedia 2005v).

One of the most debated and stimulating topics is certainly represented by the onomastic practice of the show, since it contributes – along with the connections among the characters, recurring numbers and religious references – to possible interpretations for the events seen on the screen.

¹ From the beginning of the fourth season, the flashbacks were replaced by flash-forwards and, in the sixth and final season, flash-sideways, "glimpses of what would have happened to the principal characters if the island had been destroyed and Oceanic 815 had landed safely in Los Angeles" (Barnbaum 2011: 63).

2. Names in *Lost*

While choosing the names for their characters, the show's creators spun a web of cultural references, continuously dropping famous homonyms and evocative anthroponyms to suggest subtly interpretation of the characters' behaviours. Taking into consideration the structure of the names used in *Lost*, it is possible to identify the following categories:

Complete homonyms

Partial homonyms

Other potentially revealing anthroponyms

2.1. Complete homonyms

To this category belong all those characters whose surname and first name both correspond to those of a famous person. Over the 114 episodes of the show, viewers have met and sided with or against:

- Katherine (Kate) Austen: the fugitive who, at the moment of the crash, was being brought in handcuff back to Los Angeles by a US-Marshall has the homonym of the feminist and anarchist Kate Cooper Austin (1864–1902). *Lost*'s Kate “witnessed repeated abuses of power in her young life and, like Kate Austin, refuses subservience on behalf of not only herself but of the women in her life as well” (Parker 2011: 325). Her murder of a violent stepfather can, therefore, be interpreted as a feminist and anarchic act.

- Richard Alpert: this mysterious character, who during the first five seasons of the show repeatedly appears in the story's different timelines without showing any signs of ageing, bears the name of the psychologist and spiritual teacher also known as Ram Dass (born Richard Alpert in Boston, on April 6th 1931). For the most attentive audience, who were able to discover this homonymy, the character's name probably hinted at an India-related explanation of Richard's unchanged physical appearance through the decades. However, once his true story is narrated towards the end of the show, this theory proves to be wrong, while his special condition is to be ascribed to his having been touched and made immortal by Jacob. In fact, he turns out to be a humble Spanish peasant, Ricardo, who, some 150 years before, had been planning to leave Tenerife for the New World, but ended up being sold as a slave to the captain of a vessel, the *Black rock*, which during a storm foundered on the Island (Terry and Bennett 2010: 298).

- Mikhail Bakunin: in the fifth episode of the third season (*The Cost of Living*), the audience see for the first time a man wearing a patch on his right eye, whose identity is not revealed until six episodes later (3x11, *Enter 77*). He is Mikhail Bakunin, a former soldier of the Soviet Army, who served in a listening post in Vladivostok. After the end of the Cold War, he was decommissioned and went to the Island, after having seen a newspaper advertisement recruiting volunteers to save the world. Once there, he became the Others' Communication Officer (Terry and Bennett 2010: 248). The onomastic reference is clearly to the Russian revolutionary and father of collectivist anarchism Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (1814–1876). Apart from the Russian origin, however, Mikhail does not have much in common with his famous homonym: far from rejecting any form of government, he is rather a loyal and fervent supporter of Jacob, the Island's ultimate authority (Lostpedia 2005q).

- Jeremy Bentham: this is the alias John Locke uses when, after turning the wheel and vanishing from the Island, he is picked up in Tunisia by Charles Widmore, who asks him for help to find and reunite the Oceanic Six. Recalling the English philosopher and father of 'utilitarianism' Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the show's authors probably wanted to hint at the very nature of the mission Locke is going to undertake, a mission whose ends – bringing back to the Island those who have left and thus saving it – will justify any means (Terry and

Bennett 2010: 227). In this respect, the choice of this name contributes to creating expectations about the story's future development.

- Edmund Burke is the ex-husband and colleague of Juliet Burke, the fertility doctor brought to the Island to try and understand the reason why no woman there could carry full term. This fully secondary character, who is finally struck by a bus and killed, bears the name of the Irish political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1797), even though no clear connection between the two can be detected. Rather than hinting at some specific feature of the character, this very onomastic choice was probably determined by the wish of inserting in the show another philosopher, along with Bentham, Locke, Rousseau, etc.

- Anthony Cooper is one of the many names used by John Locke's cold-hearted and remorseless biological father. A swindler by his own admission, he used, among others, the aliases of Tom Sawyer, Adam Seward, Ted MacLaren, Louis Jackson and Paul.² This alias – after Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683) – can be considered indicative of the dramatic development of the father-son relationship between Cooper and Locke. When, in 1666, the philosopher and doctor John Locke first met his future patron Lord Shaftesbury, he impressed him treating a liver infection and, thus, saving his life. In the nineteenth episode of the first season, *Deus ex machina*, Locke first meets Cooper, who soon traps the son into giving him one of his kidneys and, in this way, saving his life (Terry and Bennett, 2010: 30).

- Dōgen: the member of the Others and master of the Temple we get to know during the show's sixth season has the name of a prominent Japanese Buddhist philosopher, Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō Zen tradition. Some extremely attentive viewers even noticed that the date of the Japanese philosopher's death – 22nd September – corresponded to that of the crash of Oceanic 815. However, *Lost*'s writers Cuse and Lindelof revealed in a podcast that this coincidence was not intentional. Despite being transliterated in the same way into Roman alphabet, when written in Japanese, the name of the Temple master shows different characters than those employed for the Buddhist philosopher. The Japanese fan community has, therefore, helped to explain the meaning of these characters: 道 *do*, *dō* 'the way, the path of' and 嚴 *gen*, which alone means 'strict, rigid', even though it probably derives from the word 威嚴 *igen* 'dignity, majesty, solemnity, gravity'. This name can also be considered a reference to the fifth book in Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series, *Wolves of the Calla* (2004), where a fictional novel *The Dogan* is mentioned (Lostpedia 2005f).

- Daniel Faraday: the brilliant physicist specialised in the study of space-time, who is parachuted on to the Island at the beginning of the show's fourth season (ep. 4x01) and who, as a consequence of his own time-consciousness experiments, shows a form of dementia, bears the surname of the physicist Michael Faraday and of the first victim of the so-called Zodiac Killer³ (David Arthur Faraday). He also has the homonym of a time-traveller appearing in the finale of the sixth season of *The Outer Limits*, a science fiction series aired on Showtime from 1995 to 2001 and on the Sci Fi Channel in its final year (2002) (Wikipedia 2001b). The connection between Daniel Faraday and time-travelling must have been evident to all the viewers who remembered in detail that particular episode of *The Outer Limits* (Lostpedia 2005d).

- Henry Gale: this character, who we never see alive, arrived on the Island in a balloon and, at some point, broke his neck, died and was buried near the balloon. His name, later taken by

² Some viewers have even noticed that putting together and anagramming the two aliases Anthony Cooper and Adam Seward forms the phrase "Sawyer, the con man, a poor dad" (Ziegenhagen 2009: 47).

³ The Zodiac Killer, whose identity is still unknown, was a serial killer operating in Northern California in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The name "Zodiac" appeared in a series of taunting letters addressed to the local newspapers, through which the killer communicated with the authorities and claimed to have murdered thirty people, of whom, however, only the identity of five have been confirmed (Wikipedia 2001c).

Benjamin Linus when captured, corresponds to that of Dorothy's Uncle (Uncle Henry) in the 1939 movie inspired by L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a children's book in which – as pointed out by Terry and Bennett (2010: 144) – balloons play an important role: the Wizard of Oz turns out to be an average man from Kansas stranded in Oz because his hot air balloon was blown off course. This case of complete homonymy has been noticed by many viewers who make other connections between this movie and the show, such as the quotations contained in the titles of episode 3x20 *The man Behind the Curtain* and 4x13 *There's No Place Like Home* (Lostpedia 2005y).

- Captain Gault: a minor character, the captain of the Kahana, the cargo freighter sent by Charles Widmore to locate the Island. His name seems to have been inspired by the work of William Hope Hodgson who, in 1917, published a collection of sea-stories under the title *Captain Gault, Being the Exceedingly Private Log of a Sea Captain*. Similar to the captain in *Lost*, Hodgson's character is morally ambiguous and primarily interested in money (Terry and Bennett 2010: 198).
- John Locke: the man in a wheelchair who, after the crash, is inexplicably healed and develops an unfaltering faith in the Island and its power derives his name from the famous philosopher (1632–1704) of the English Enlightenment, who defined the human mind as *tabula rasa*, thus implying – in opposition to both Jean Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes – that each individual was in charge of his own destiny. The main connection between the character and Locke's philosophy has been summarised by Lee (2008: 67):

“Throughout his initial days on the island, *Lost*'s Locke shares his namesake's optimism and faith in the basic goodness of others. The miraculous recovery of the use of his legs provides empirical evidence for his belief that he and the other survivors have been brought to the island for a reason”.

Later on, however, *Lost*'s Locke will move beyond the rational faith of his homonym and develop a sort of devotion to the button inside the Swan station, which reminds of the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) (Lee 2008: 67). As I mentioned above, in 1666 Locke, who at the time was studying medicine in Oxford, persuaded his future patron Anthony Ashley Cooper to have an operation and saved his life (Terry and Bennett 2010: 227).

- (Tom) Sawyer: under this alias, some thirty years before the crash of flight Oceanic 815, Locke's father seduced Mary Ford. This drove Mary's husband crazy and, finally, brought him to a terrible murder/suicide witnessed by their eight-year-old son, James, who, later, would adopt the name Sawyer and become a fraudster himself. According to the authors of the *Lost Encyclopedia*, Paul Terry and Tara Bennet (2010: 314), “considering James' love of literature, it's appropriate that his adopted name of Sawyer is a direct homage to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*”. Twain's character was often described as an immature, mischievous and fascinating young man, who was often able to bypass social rules in order to selfishly pursue his own pleasure. In this respect, it is possible to detect an analogy between the behaviour of James 'Sawyer' Ford and that of his famous literary namesake.
- Jack Shephard: the spinal surgeon flying from Sydney to Los Angeles to bring home his father's body becomes, from the very beginning, the *de facto* leader of the Oceanic 815 survivors. Despite being universally recognised by the public as one of the most positive characters in the show, he bears the name of a thief active in London in the 18th century and mentioned in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (Jack Sheppard). Repeatedly imprisoned, Sheppard was always able to escape. This last feature probably represents the connection with *Lost*'s Jack Shephard, who, throughout the series, has to make several escapes. Jack Shephard is also the name of the serial killer in the movie *Frequency* (2000), though no connection with the show's character can be established. The scene of episode 5x15 *Follow*

the Leader, in which Jack swims through an underwater cave had been seen by some viewers as a reference to Jack Sheppard, born John Arthur Sheppard (1909–2001), the pioneer of cave diving in the United Kingdom (Lostpedia 2005l).

2.2. *Partial homonyms*

This category includes all the *Lost* characters, who share a surname (or first name) with a famous person. They are:

- Katherine (Kate) Austen is not only a complete homonym of the feminist Kate Cooper Austin, but the character also shares her surname with the English novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817). According to Grossi (2010: 53), Kate's search for freedom and redemption, as well as her ambivalent attraction to both Jack and Sawyer – the reassuring spinal surgeon and the damned swindler – parallels the behaviour of Jane Austen's female characters.
- Boone Carlyle: the middle section survivor of Oceanic 815 in love with the step-sister he is travelling with (Shannon Rutherford) shares the surname with the 19th century Scottish satirical writer, essayist and philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). The connection between the two can be represented by Thomas Carlyle's book *Heroes and Hero Worship*, where he discussed the flaws of heroes and the challenges they faced. On *Lost*, in fact, Boone continuously strives to be recognised as a hero and dies attempting an heroic act. The reference to heroism contained in this character's name has double significance, since his first name alludes to Daniel Boone (1734–1820), a prototypical American folk hero (Lostpedia 2005u).
- Ana Lucia Cortez: the ex-police officer dismissed from LAPD after taking revenge on the woman who had shot her causing her unborn child's death has the same surname as the Spanish *conquistador* Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro (1485–1547). Cortés initiated the conquest of the Aztec Empire on behalf of Charles V and was responsible for the death of thousands of indigenous people he tried to subdue. The use of this surname for Ana Lucia can be considered indicative of her tendency towards violence (Terry and Bennett 2010: 24).
- Naomi Dorrit: the young mercenary in charge of protecting the science team arrived on the Island onboard the Kahana freighter. She owes her surname to Charles Dickens' novel *Little Dorrit*. Her biblical first name, on the other hand, reminds us of the personal helicopter pilot of the villain Karl Stromberg in the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977). As her namesake on *Lost*, Naomi is destined to die: in fact she is the first female character ever to be indisputably killed by Agent 007. Some viewers have also noticed the homonymy Naomi James, the first woman to sail solo around the world via Cape Horn, similarly to what Desmond undertook before landing on the Island (Lostpedia 2005s).
- Mr. Eko: the Nigerian war lord and drug smuggler who, after his brother's death, decided to take his place as a Catholic priest, has a name which is homophonous of the surname of the Italian writer and essayist Umberto Eco (1932–). A possible connection between *Lost* and Umberto Eco is the latter's book *The Island of the Day Before* (1994) narrating the story of a 17th century nobleman, Roberto, who is the only survivor from a sunken ship in search of the 180th meridian (the one marking the time border between today and yesterday). Furthermore, in *The Island of the Day Before* the protagonist is said to have made up an imaginary bad twin, Ferrante, when he was a child (Lostpedia 2005g). This calls to mind the relationship of Jacob and his twin, the Man in Black. Probably inspired by the abundance of philosophers on the Island, some viewers have also noticed the assonance of this name with that of the German Medieval mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1327/28) (Manzocco 2010: 16).
- Daniel Faraday: as previously mentioned, the researcher parachuted on to the Island at the beginning of the fourth season has the surname of the English physicist Michael Faraday (1791–1867), who is remembered for inventing the Faraday Cage and for discovering the Faraday Constant in electromagnetism. The latter is clearly hinted at in the title of episode 4x05 *The Constant*, where Desmond discovers the side-effects of time-travelling. The

reference to Michael Faraday is also made explicit in one of the flashbacks about Daniel and his mother Eloise, who named him after the English physicist, because, thanks to his time-travelling, she knew he was destined to become a great scientific mind. This last name could guarantee her son some anonymity, in case his father ever looked for him (Terry and Bennett 2010: 122). Faraday is the surname of the first victim of the Zodiac Killer as well. A possible reference to this homonym can be seen in the scene where Daniel rides a Zodiac raft to reach the Kahana (Lostpedia 2005z). Some viewers have also noticed the homonymy with the Faraday Institute at St. Edmund's College, Cambridge, a research institute mainly investigating the correlation between science and religion, a theme often dealt with on *Lost* (Lostpedia 2005d).

- James Ford: the real name of Sawyer is formed combining the surnames of probably the most famous 19th-century American outlaws, Jesse James (1847–1882) and his murderer Robert Ford (1862–1892), both mentioned in Bob Dylan's *Outlaw Blues*. Furthermore, *Lost*'s character has the complete homonym of Robert Ford's father, James Thomas Ford (Lostpedia 2005n). This onomastic choice suggests an extremely negative connotation, although the character develops throughout the show, finding his own balance and discovering the value of love and friendship (Grossi 2009: 57).
- Eloise Hawking: the mysterious elderly woman that we see for the first time in an antique shop showing Desmond a simple ring in his price range and, once he has decided to buy it, telling him he cannot have it, because in this way he will be able to participate in a yacht race and, thus, end up on the Island as fate requires, shares her surname with the famous British theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking (1942–). This homage is probably due to the fact that in 1988 Hawking wrote a popular science book entitled *A Brief History of Time* (Terry and Bennett 2010: 122). As far as the first name of this character is concerned, it can be considered a reference to the medieval tale of Héloïse and Abélard, their forbidden love and secret marriage. Not unlike Héloïse and Abélard, Eloise Hawking and Charles Widmore had an illicit relationship resulting in the birth of a son, Daniel Faraday, who destined to a tragic end (Lostpedia 2005h).
- Desmond Hume: the Scotsman who spent three years on the Island pushing a button in the Swan station and accidentally sparked the incident which crashed flight Oceanic 815 has the same surname as David Hume (1711–1776), the Scottish sceptic philosopher who argued that the notions of free will and fate did not exclude each other (Terry and Bennett 2010: 102). These two concepts are both crucial in Desmond's life, who is continuously torn between his wish to win the hand of his beloved Penny and the difficulties he encounters in trying to be what he wants to be.
- Sayid Jarrah: the first name Sayid is homophone of the surname of the Palestinian/American literary theorist and philosopher Edward Wadie Saïd (1935–2003), who, in his most famous work *Orientalism* (1978), argued that the traditionally false and romanticised images of Asia and the Middle East served as justification for European and American colonial and imperial ambitions. Saïd also reflected on how colonisers start to refer to the original inhabitants of their new land as 'the Other' (Lostpedia 2005w), exactly like the Oceanic 815 survivors, when speaking of the people they find on the Island.
- Lennon: the member of the Others living in the Temple and acting as a translator for Dogen, who despite being always referred to as 'the translator' in the show, shares his surname with the singer and musician John Lennon (1940–1980). Although this case of homonymy was not evident in the show itself, and could only be detected by consulting extra materials, such as more or less official guides to the series, websites and forums, the very physical appearance – in particular hairstyle and shape of glasses – of this character clearly hint at it. (Lostpedia 2005p).

- Charlotte Staples Lewis: the cultural anthropologist hired by Charles Widmore to be part of the science team aboard the Kanaha is partially homonymous with the British writer Clive Staples Lewis (1898–1963), the author of the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Similarly to Susan, the character of the *Chronicles*, Charlotte, who lived on the Island until she was six years old, has been convinced that the Island is not real, but only a product of her imagination (Terry and Bennett 2010: 80, Lostpedia 2005b and Patterson 2011). However, despite the efforts made by her mother to keep Charlotte away from the Island, she is destined to go back there, just as the three young protagonists of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.
- George Minkowski: the Kahana communications officer, who will show the symptoms of temporal displacement and die of what seems to be a brain aneurism, owes his surname to a German mathematician. Hermann Minkowski (1864–1909) theorised interrelation between space and time and the existence of a four-dimensional entity known as spacetime or Minkowski space (Terry and Bennett 2010: 198 and Lostpedia 2005r).
- Danielle Rousseau: the semi-savage woman who captures and tortures Sayid in the ninth episode of the first season (*Solitary*) and who turns out to have been part of a French science team shipwrecked on the Island in 1988 shares her surname with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), the philosopher who praised the state of nature as a condition in which men are not subject to the vices of political society. If the connection between the life Danielle led during her sixteen years on the Island and Rousseau’s thought appears fully justifiable, the same can be said of another name-determined reference, that to the French painter Henri Rousseau (1844–1910), whose paintings often portray jungle scenes very similar to those we are used to seeing on *Lost* (Lostpedia 2005e).
- Shannon Rutherford: Boone Carlyle’s spoiled stepsister, who stubbornly refuses to lift a finger, while waiting to be saved, bears the surname of the New Zealand-born chemist and physicist Ernest Rutherford, First Baron of Nelson (1871–1937), who is considered “the father of nuclear physics” (Terry and Bennett 2010: 324 and Lostpedia 2005x).
- Jack Shephard: as pointed out by Fosl (2008: 161), “Jack’s surname also calls to mind the heroism and technological mastery of nature of Alan Shephard, the first American in space”.
- Harper and Goodwin Stanhope: the couple of Others owe their surname to the British statesman and scientist Charles Stanhope, Third Earl of Stanhope (1753–1816), who wrote a reply to Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution*. This literary work and its author’s opposition to Burke constitute the ultimate allusion in this name: Goodwin Stanhope, though married to Harper, had engaged in an affair with Juliet, Edmund Burke’s ex-wife (Lostpedia 2005j and 2005k). In this respect, Edmund Burke and Goodwin Stanhope represent opposite poles in the woman’s life, exactly like the two political theorists of the 18th century had antithetical opinions about the French Revolution.

2.3. Other potentially revealing anthroponyms

In this category I included a series of names of different typologies (evocative and intertextual names, *sprechende Namen*, as well as names containing a hidden message, such as an anagram of a another word or phrase), which attracted viewers’ attention for being potentially important for both predicting the show’s future development and for interpreting the events seen on the screen:

- Naomi Dorrit: not only is the name of this character a partial homonym of Amy Dorrit, the protagonist of Dickens’ novel, it can also be read as an anagram of Maid in Rotor or Raid Monitor. The former phrase can be interpreted as a reference to her being a helicopter pilot, while the latter refers to her role in the expedition financed by Charles Widmore (Lostpedia 2005s).
- Jacob: the ageless protector of the Island we do not meet until the finale of the fifth season (*The Incident, Parts 1 & 2*), but who has been referred to for large parts of the show, has the name of the third patriarch of the Hebrew people and the ancestor of the tribes of

Israel. His name alludes to his role in the story of the Island: born there of a woman, Claudia, who had survived a violent storm only to be brutally murdered by a woman known as Mother, Jacob lived on the Island for over 2000 years and can be considered the patriarch of the people on the Island. As the Biblical Jacob he had a twin, the nameless Man in Black. While, however, in the Bible Jacob is said to have been born after his brother Esau, whose heel he was holding at the moment of his birth⁴ (hence the origin of his name, meaning ‘the one who holds the heel’), in order to oust him from his birthright, *Lost*’s Jacob is the first-born. Some viewers have also connected the literal meaning of Jacob’s name to the fact that on the Island he lived in the foot of the statue of Taweret (Terry and Bennett 2010: 178 and *Lostpedia* 2005m).

- Sayid Jarrah: though differently pronounced, the name Sayid is originally an Arabic honorific denomination for the descendants of the prophet Muhammad, meaning ‘Master’, ‘Lord’, and is now used as an honorary title for addressing people in higher position, similar to ‘Sir’ or ‘Mr’ in English. As regards the surname Jarrah, in classical Arabic it means ‘cutter’ or ‘wounder’ and today is the most common Arabic translation for ‘surgeon’. The character’s complete name can be translated as something like ‘Master Butcher’ and probably refers to Sayid’s former occupation as torturer in the Iraqi Republican Guard (*Lostpedia* 2005w and Marcotte 2007).

- Frank Lapidus: the pilot originally scheduled to be on flight Oceanic 815 on the day of the crash, who, after having overslept and missed the flight, finds himself entangled in the destinies of the Oceanic Six wishing to go back to the Island, has a highly evocative name. His first name, Frank, can, in fact, be interpreted as a *sprechender Name*, referring to his being always very frank when commenting on the events that have taken place before his arrival on the Island. His surname might derive from Latin *lapideus, -a, -um* ‘made of stone’, and could be indicative of the character’s firm and cold-blooded attitude in the face of extreme situations (e.g. the take-off of the Ajira plane while the Island had started trembling beneath it) (*Lostpedia* 2005i and Terry and Bennett 2010: 134).

- Ben(jamin) Linus: the name of the most hated character of the show is, again, in a way indicative of his role as leader of the Others. Both his first name and his surname, in fact, refer to his position as Jacob’s lieutenant. In the Bible, Benjamin was Jacob’s youngest son, named Ben-Oni (‘son of my trouble’) by his mother Rachel on her deathbed and then renamed Benjamin by the father.⁵ Similarly, Ben’s mother Emily died shortly after his birth and asked her husband to call the child Benjamin. The surname Linus seems, on the other hand, inspired by the name of the second pope of the Roman Catholic Church, St. Linus, who succeeded St. Peter. This is highly suggestive of Benjamin’s role as eternal Number Two on the Island, as confirmed by his final exchange with Hugo Reyes (ep. 6x17 *The End*), where the latter thanks him for the good job he had done as his right-hand man: “You know, you were a real good number two. And you were a great number one, Hugo” (*Lostpedia* 2005a and Terry and Bennett 2010: 46).

- Ethan Rom: the name assumed by the Others’ surgeon is an anagram of Other Man, which is exactly what he became after his parents and all his people – the members of the DHARMA initiative – died as a consequence of the Purge. The discontinuity with the past is emblematically marked by his changing the name from Goodspeed to Rom, an act which made him officially one of the Others (Terry and Bennett 2010: 127).

⁴ See Genesis, 25, 26: “The second baby grabbed on to his brother’s heel, so they named him Jacob.”

⁵ See Genesis, 35, 16-18: “Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don’t despair, for you have another son.” As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.”

- Christian Shephard: the name of the deceased surgeon, whose coffin is found mysteriously empty after the crash, is clearly a twist of the phrase “Christian shepherd” and refers to the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd.⁶ The metaphor of God as a shepherd is also present in the Old Testament, as in the *incipit* of the famous Psalm 23 (“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”), which provides the title for an episode of the second season (2x10 *The 23rd Psalm*). Apart from Christ and God, the image of the shepherd caring for his flock is commonly used to indicate the relationship between religious leaders and their congregations. For this reason, the name Christian Shephard does not refer specifically to Jesus, but is rather a more general symbol for the character’s function of spiritual guide (Lostpedia 2005c).
- Jack Shephard: the Island physician not only has the complete homonym of a criminal, a movie character and a famous diver, as well as the partial homonym of the first American in space, the surname Shephard, as shown above, reflects his position as leader of the Oceanic 815 survivors, which seems to be confirmed by his being, consistent with Psalm 23, the 23rd candidate on Jacob’s list. In addition, it is noticeable that Jack is a variation of John, the first name of Jack’s polar opposite John Locke. This could indicate that the *Man of Science* and the *Man of Faith* were the two sides of the same coin (Lostpedia 2005l).
- Miles Straume: the name of the spiritualist hired by Charles Widmore to kill Benjamin Linus is homophone of maelstrom /'meɪlstrəm/, as confirmed by Damon Lindelof in an interview on *Entertainment Weekly Magazine* (2008): “With Miles Straum[e], we just thought it would be cool if his name sounded like 'maelstrom’”.
- Penelope (Penny) Widmore: the first name of Desmond Hume’s soul mate is probably the most obviously intertextual name in the show, strongly reinforcing the similarity of Desmond’s story to that of Ulysses (Lee 2008: 72). In fact, similarly to Ulysses’ wife in the *Odyssey*, Penelope Widmore waited for her lover for years. As Homer’s character, she is not only faithful and devoted, but also clever and capable. A rich young woman, she leaves no stone unturned and spends a large amount of money trying to keep track of him. He is finally welcomed aboard the *Searcher*, the boat she had set out in to find him (Lostpedia 2005t and Terry and Bennett 2010: 286). It is interesting to note that in the flash-sideways timeline, Penny is called Penelope Milton, thus sharing the surname with the author of *Paradise Lost* (Grossi 2010: 54).
- Harper Stanhope: the first name of this character reminds us of the mythical Greek harpy, the monstrous minister of divine vengeance with the face of a woman and the body, wings and claws of a bird. This may refer to the message Harper delivers to Juliet, trying to set her up for a suicide mission and, thus, helping Ben fulfil his plan to kill everyone on the Island (Terry and Bennett 2010: 352). Some viewers have also noticed that her name is an anagram of Present Pharaoh and Perhaps an Other, whatever relevance this could have for the character’s interpretation (Lostpedia 2005k).
- Goodwin Stanhope: the first name Good–win and the element ‘hope’ of the surname are illustrative of Goodwin’s and the Others’ belief they were the good guys doing the right thing and, as such, they hoped to prevail against any intruder arriving on the Island (Terry and Bennett 2010: 138).

3. Conclusion: Revealing or Misleading Hints?

In this analysis of *Lost* anthroponomastics I have tried to demonstrate how complex and multifaceted the web of cultural references created by the show’s creators is. Indeed, not only is the Island populated by characters with complete and partial homonyms of famous

⁶ See, for example, the Parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15, 1–7 and Matthew 18, 10–14.

philosophers, scientists, politicians and fictional characters, but very often one single name can be understood in many different ways, without the one necessarily excluding the others. Names such as Jack Shephard, Daniel Faraday, Harper and Goodwin Stanhope can, in fact, be interpreted on various levels, depending on whether to take into consideration their possible homonyms (e.g. Jack Shephard, the movie serial killer, criminal specialised in escapes, diver or spaceman; Daniel Faraday, the physicist, victim of a famous serial killer or TV time-traveller) or their sound (e.g. Shephard or ‘shepherd’; Harper or ‘harpy’; Goodwin or ‘the Good win’).

This complex of references is neither systematic, nor immediately evident to all viewers: while some groups of names, such as those of philosophers (Burke, Hume, Locke, Rousseau) and scientists (Faraday, Rutherford) quickly caught the audience’s attention, other cases of homonymy or evocative and intertextual names were evident only when looking for them (see, for example, the translation of the Arabic words corresponding to the name Sayid Jarrah or of the Japanese characters forming the name Dogen). Stimulated by these eye-catching names, the most attentive of the ‘Losties’ soon became conscious of the possibility that the show’s onomastics could hide some – potentially important – information about the characters, their mutual relationships and the plot’s future development. For this reason, people started researching the meaning of each name, even the most common ones (e.g. Kate, see *Lostpedia* 2005o), in order to discover some potentially illuminating detail about their favourite show.

Returning to the question in the title of this paper, whether this continuous cultural name-dropping involving philosophers, scientists, political theorists, as well as Biblical patriarchs, saints and literary figures should be considered revealing of character, or if it simply contributes to catching the attention and creating audience expectations, I would say it is mainly a cultivated game used by the writers to suggest one or the other interpretation of the events seen during the weekly 42-minute episode. Playing this game with the audience, the show’s creators cast a series of hooks, waiting for the public to swallow the one or the other. And *Lost* fans have definitely taken the bait, in some cases even finding hints which had not been deliberately given by the writers. Moreover, this extraordinarily attentive reaction of the public to elements such as names, recurring numbers and literary quotations appearing on the show probably encouraged the scriptwriters to find new evocative names for the characters introduced in the later seasons.

In this respect, the show’s names can be seen as both revealing and misleading hints, depending on how they are understood by viewers. Certainly almost every onomastic choice can, in some way and mainly in retrospect, be related to a particular feature of the character bearing that name. Nevertheless, it would be highly misleading to take these undertones too seriously, trying, for example, to find precise references to the thoughts of John Locke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the characters named after them. *Lost* names are unquestionably functional to the story’s narrative development. However, they do not so much reveal fundamental details which can help predict future events on the show, as convey – together with other information such as recurring numbers, dates, religious symbolism and literary quotations – the idea that there is something beyond the events seen in each episode. This very idea, which is at the heart of what can be defined as the *Lost* mythology, motivates the public to look for the ultimate explanation of every detail they notice and, in so doing, create a virtuous circle in which the most disparate theories contribute to enhancing suspense and expectations. In this way, the show becomes what Manzocco (2010: 161) describes as the “apotheosis of the hitchcockian McGuffin”. Throughout the six seasons, names – as, for example, the other previously mentioned elements – played a fundamental role in making the show open to the most diverse speculation and, probably, in determining the unprecedented success of the series.

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