CONTRARY COGNOMINA

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For as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name and folly is with him —1 Samuel 25:25

Many of our surnames have origins in the nomenclature of trades and professions. Once upon a time Smiths were smiths, Butchers were butchers and Carpenters were carpenters. Holgate, for example, derives from the common noun tollgate. Back in the eleventh century my ancestors were rewarded for collecting tolls and swelling the royal coffers with a Norman castle in Shropshire. Nowadays a profession-based patronym does not oblige its owner to continue in the cognominal business. Just as well—I have no desire to work as a toll collector on the motorway or an assessor in the Tax Office.

However, there are some whose family names are entirely appropriate for their chosen profession, like Tiger Woods (golfer), Layne Beachley (world surfing champion), Henry Armstrong (Hall of Fame boxer), Gary Player (South African golfer), Fanny Ardent (fervent French actress), Anna Smashnova (Russian tennis player), and Roger Moore (as James Bond the Lothario).

On the other hand the history of civilisation is littered with inappropriate surnames belonging to high-profile celebs who chose to ignore Nabal’s Law—which states that name should echo fame—and thus missed their logologically correct vocation. (Nabal was a wealthy sheep owner from Carmel near Ziph, foolish enough to deny David hospitality, so God smote him and David married his widow Abigail. A nabal is a fool in Hebrew, and also a long straight bass horn in Korean music—poor old Nabal missed his vocation too. And nabal transposes to banal—that may be why the Great Anagrammer decided to take him out!)

It was to honor these unfortunate folks that the inaugural TMTV (They Missed Their Vocation) Awards were recently held in Jobstown, New Jersey. The presenters were Miss Nomer, a dippy hippie from Mississippi, and Pat Ronym, a barmy barman from the Bahamas. Sadly none of the awardees turned up for the ceremony and issued lame excuses like being dead or too busy with their careers. We publish the Top One Hundred list in the various categories to honour those contrary individuals and their contrary cognomina.

Literature
SAUL BELOW, spruiker (barker)
ROBERT BROWNING, indoor tanning consultant
SAMUEL BUTLER, manservant
NOEL COWARD, war deserter
HART CRANE, derrick operator
HENRY FIELDING, cricketer
CHRISTOPHER FRY, fish and chip shop owner
OLIVER GOLDSMITH, jeweller
HEINRICH HEINE, proctologist
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, actor in adult movies
NORMAN MAILER, postman
SAMUEL PEPYS, voyeur
EDGAR ALLEN POE, chamber-pot manufacturer
ALEXANDER POPE, Pope Alexander VIII
EZRA POUND, proprietor of a lost dogs home
JOHN CROWE RANSOM, kidnapper
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, medieval foot soldier
DAME EDITH SITWELL, artist's model
FRANK G SLAUGHTER, abattoir worker
STEPHEN SPENDER, investment banker
JONATHAN SWIFT, sprinter
ANTHONY TROLLOPE, streetwalker

History and Politics
NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, orthopaedic surgeon
JULIUS CAESAR, obstetrician
JIMMY CARTER, cocaine trader
HERBERT HOOVER, vacuum cleaner salesman
LYNDON JOHNSON, actor in adult movies
HENRY KISSINGER, romantic lead in musical comedies
RICHARD NIXON, male stripper
POL POT, politician with a dope habit
JAN SMUTS, adult bookshop proprietor
JACK STRAW, competitor at pick-up-sticks (where players clutch at straws)
WOODROW WILSON, actor in adult movies, also known as Woody Willy

Business
BILL GATES, fencing contractor
STEVE JOBS, odd jobs man
JOHN D ROCKEFELLER, stone mason
DONALD TRUMP, professional bridge player

Science and Inventions
ALFRED BUTTS, proctologist
THOMAS CRAPPER, country and rap singer
KARL POPPER, amyl nitrate addict
B F SKINNER, fur trader

Music
LOUIS ARMSTRONG, prizefighter
CHUCK BERRY, fruit picker
FATBOY SLIM, weight-loss consultant
FRANZ LIZST, archivist
GUSTAV MAHLER, painter
ROBERT SCHUMANN, cobbler
PICK WITHERS, equerry

Fine Art
JOHN CONSTABLE, policeman
DAVID HOCKING, pawnbroker
JOSEPH TURNER, lathe operator
JAMES WHISTLER, flautist
Religion
JIMMY and TAMMY BAKER, pastry cooks
WILLIAM BOOTH, pay phone installation contractor
CHARLES FILLMORE, bowser (gas pump) attendant
CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBEATER, plumber
JAIME CARDINAL SIN, cardinal sinner
DESMOND TUTU, ballet dancer

Film and Television
JENNY AGUTTER, roof plumber
CHEVY CHASE, hot-rod driver
TOM CRUISE, cruise ship operator
JAMES DEAN, Anglican clergyman
OLIVIA DEHAVILLAND, bomber pilot
MINNIE DRIVER, touring car racer
GRETA GARBO, garbage collector
TOM HANKS, hairdresser
GENE HACKMAN, cab driver
ALFRED HITCHCOCK, vasectomy surgeon
DENNIS HOPPER, hop-skip-and-jump competitor
JEREMY IRONS, laundryman
MARGOT KIDDER, standup comic
JAY LENO, weaver
DAVID LETTERMAN, tournament Scrabble player
DAVID LYNCH, hangman
TOM MIX, deejay
MICHELLE PFEIFFER, flautist
BILL PULLMAN, railway passenger car attendant
ROY ROGERS, actor in adult movies
GEOFFREY RUSH, crack addict
MOIRA SHEARER, sheep shearer
TOM SIZEMORE, salesman of extra-large menswear
WESLEY SNIPES, marksman
AARON SPELLING, proofreader
TERENCE STAMP, philatelist
RIP TORN, upholsterer
DEBRA WINGER, soccer player

Tennis and Cricket
BJORN BORG, fictional character in Star Trek
PAT CASH, bank teller
MARGARET COURT, tennis court surface supplier
PAT RAFTER, roofing contractor
MARTY MULLIGAN, golfer
BETTY STOVE, cooking consultant
ROSCOE TANNER, leather manufacturer

DON BRADMAN, boss of the Small Nail-maker’s Union
WESLEY HALL, Methodist preacher
MICHAEL HOLDING, stock and bond trader
VICTOR TRUMPER, champion bridge player