

## "Roosevelt"

From the New York SUN,  
May 25, 1903

**President Accused of Mispronouncing His Own Name.**

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SUN—Sir: In the course of my daily work I recently had occasion to show that the name Roosevelt is subject to over 200 variations of pronunciation. The President pronounces his name Ro'-zi-velt, in three syllables. How do the majority of us pronounce it? Is it not Roos'-velt, the first vowel sound being like that in room, while the syllables are but two? The people have followed analogy, and have on that account established the only mode that will endure.

Perhaps our President does not think as deeply about the matter as academicians do; nay, he might adopt the current usage himself if good reasons for doing so were placed before him. I neither blame his preference nor say that he has no right to maintain it; I merely raise the question, and here repeat it, to emphasize the absence of dogmatism from my thoughts. What is there to justify him in his endeavor to perpetuate a practice against which are set the principles of usage?

RICHARD E. MAYNE, Chairman,  
Department on Reading and Speech Culture, New  
York State Teachers' Association.  
New York, May 2.

**The Hon. Robert B. Roosevelt Closes the Discussion.**

TO THE EDITOR OF THE SUN—Sir: My attention has just been called to an amusing letter by Mr. Richard E. Mayne, chairman department reading and speech culture, New York State Teachers' Association, calling the President to account for his pronunciation of his own name, and closing with the simple if somewhat supercilious question, "What is there to justify him in his endeavor to perpetuate a practice against which are set the principles of usage?"

It is rather a dangerous proceeding to assume that a man does not know how to pronounce his own name, and the writer who attempts not only to criticize but to dictate may find himself in that unhappy position in which "angels fear to tread," even if he be a "chairman of reading and speech culture." A little culture and even less reading would teach most men and might teach a chairman that there is no analogy or usage of pronunciation according to spelling in the English language. The chairman's own name might have suggested that much to him. I presume he calls himself "Main." How dare he do so according to analogy and enduring mode? What is he doing with that inappropriate "y" and superfluous "e"? Hereafter he must call himself "May-why-nee" or suffer the punishment of the inconsistent.

While his mind, which I suppose he spells "mynd," as on the subject—if, indeed, it bothers him at all—he might pause to think how some sounds are produced by English letters. Above all the sound "oo" or "ue." "To do this he may have to feel blue before I get through, and you may find him in a stew, too."

And still the wonder grew  
That one small head could muddle all he knew.

Pardon me for writing all this nonsense. My only excuse is that I could write so much more of it, and dictation about the pronunciation of one's own name justifies reprisals. You should thank me that I have so much self-restraint. The ancestors of the wife of the President spelled their name "Quereau." I leave your critical correspondent to worry out how he would pronounce that. The great-grandfather cut the Gordian knot by writing it "Carow." But, as there are readers of your paper who are justifiably anxious to know the proper pronunciation of the President's name, I will explain that it is Dutch. Now, I do not insist that the Dutch language is inherently superior to the English. That might be as offensive to some of my fellow citizens as criticizing their right to their own patronymics, but that language possesses at least one advantage—it has a positive pronunciation. In English when we try to distinguish the long from the short "o" we get into trouble. In Dutch they do not. The double "o" is simply a long "o." The word "Roos" means rose and is pronounced in identically the same way under all circumstances and in all combinations. So the first syllable of the President's name is "Rose," pure and simple.

But the following "e," like the short German "e," or like the silent French "e," when read in poetry is slightly aspirated. An English analogy is the word "the," a word that our chairman must have come across in his "reading and speech culture." It is not pronounced at all as it is spelt, not like "thee," but with a sort of "th" and a breath stopped by the tongue on the teeth. So the name is "Rose-tuh-velt," in spite of whatever mistaken analogies misdirected chairmen may strive to find to the contrary.

ROBERT B. ROOSEVELT.  
New York, May 8.