Meaningful Fictive Names in English Literature

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FICTITIOUS CHARACTERS with characterizing names are to be found in all literatures known to me. A good Greek example is the Mentor of the Odyssey, whose name means 'counselor' and whose function is that of giving counsel to young Telemachus. In this paper, however, I am restricting myself to names of this kind found in English literature. And because of the great number of such names I shall have to rest content with a mere sampling of the English material. I will give my examples in chronological order, beginning with our oldest English poem, *Widsith*, composed in the seventh century.

Widsith took name from its chief character, a minstrel who in the exercise of his profession had traveled far and wide. The name means 'long journey' and serves to characterize the minstrel as a great traveler. Other characters in the poem have meaningful names; thus, King Wald of the Woings (line 30), whose name means 'ruler.' But since it is possible, though most unlikely, that a king so named actually lived, I do not include the name *Wald* in my survey, which is restricted to the names of fictitious persons. For the same reason, I leave out some very striking names found in the English epic poem *Beowulf*. Thus, the would-be trouble-maker who engages in a fliting with the hero early in the poem has a name, *Unferth*, that means 'disturbing the peace, dissension, trouble-making' or the like. He may well be fictitious, but since there is some reason to think that he goes back to a historical character I am not putting him in. The Danish king Scyld, however, who figures in the introductory part of the poem, is undoubtedly fictitious and his name therefore comes within the scope of this paper. It means 'shield,' that is, 'protector,' and denotes an important function, if not indeed the chief function of a king, that of protecting his people against invasion, crime, and other troubles, including a failure of the crops, something that the right kind of

king in olden times was supposed to keep from happening. I might add that even in our own enlightened day bad economic weather makes trouble for rulers and political parties in power, though it is no longer the custom to try to improve the weather by putting the king or president to death.

A familiar kind of meaningful name is that of the personified abstraction. English literature swarms with fictitious characters that represent abstractions and are named accordingly. The beginnings of such personification may be found as early as *Beowulf*. The author of this poem speaks both of death and of wyrd (i. e. fate) in such a way that we may well suspect him of having personified these abstractions. Thus, in line 1205 we are told that Wyrd carried King Hygelac off. Later on, under the influence of classical mythology, Wyrd was made into three sisters, and by Shakespeare's day the Weird sisters had become mere witches, a degradation which their Greek counterparts were spared.

Many personified abstractions appear as characters in Chaucer, but in nearly every case they were taken from the poet's sources and he usually plays them down rather than up. Thus, in the *Parlement of Fowles* a large number of male and female characters of this kind are to be found: e. g. Delight, Gentleness, Beauty, Youth, Flattery, Desire, Peace, Patience, Jealousy, and Riches. But these are disposed of with a mere mention. Love and his daughter Will get more space, but the only personified abstraction who plays an important part in the poem is Nature. When we turn to *Piers Plowman*, a poem of the same century, we find a very different state of things: nearly all the characters are personified abstractions and the characterization of most of them is worked out vividly and at length. Typical of this difference in treatment is the character Mede (i. e. bribery); both poets have her but Chaucer merely mentions her whereas in *Piers Plowman* she plays a leading part.

In the medieval drama personified abstractions belong especially to the morality plays. In the *Castle of Perseverance*, for instance, the characters are nearly all personifications: e. g. Meekness, Charity, Abstinence, Chastity, Industry, Generosity, Patience; Lechery, Sloth, Gluttony; Lust, Folly, Covetousness; Confession, Penance; Mercy, Peace, Truth, Righteousness; Death. The main character, Mankind, personifies human nature besides representing

the human species and goes back to an abstraction on both counts. The moralities were serious plays to start with, but a comic element got into them by way of the wicked or evil characters, who tended to degenerate into mere mischief-makers, practical jokers, or wise-crackers as the medieval drama developed. In this way the personified abstraction Vice (i. e. depravity) came to be little more than a stage jester or buffoon. In later times we find personified abstractions in a great variety of literary compositions; they are especially common in lyric poetry. I illustrate with the first sonnet of Rossetti's *House* of *Life*:

> I marked all kindred Powers the heart finds fair: –
> Truth, with awed lips; and Hope, with eyes upcast;
> And Fame, whose loud wings fan the ashen Past
> To signal-fires, Oblivion's flight to scare;
> And Youth, with still some single golden hair
> Unto his shoulder clinging, since the last
> Embrace wherein two sweet arms held him fast;
> And Life, still wreathing flowers for Death to wear.
> Love's throne was not with these; but far above
> All passionate wind of welcome and farewell
> He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of;
> Though Truth foreknow Love's heart, and Hope foretell,
> And Fame be for Love's sake desirable,
> And Youth be dear, and Life be sweet to Love.

Here truth, hope, fame, oblivion, youth, life, death, and love are personified. One may compare another passage from the same sonnet-sequence, in which today, yesterday, and tomorrow are personified:

> "Thou Ghost," I said, "and is thy name Today? –
> Yesterday's son, with such an abject brow? –
> And can Tomorrow be more pale than thou?"

Another very old kind of fictitious character, the representative of some occupation, type of person, social class, or the like, may either go nameless or be given a name that brings out his representative function. He goes nameless in the *Wanderer*, an Old English poem which has for chief character an old retainer whose lord has died and who in consequence has become a lordless man, a wanderer on the face of the earth. In another poem, *Eadwacer*, which has come down to us in the same MS, we find a character

named Wulf (i. e. outlaw), but unhappily the poem is very obscure and we cannot be certain that Wulf was really an outlaw, though this is the usual interpretation. As everybody knows, most of Chaucer's pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales* have no names: thus, the knight, the squire, the yeoman, and many others. Some of the pilgrims do have names, but these are almost never used in the narrative. Thus, in one line of the poem we are told that the host was named Harry Bailly, but everywhere else he is called simply the host (i. e. the innkeeper).

By way of contrast, let us look at the sixteenth-century play Roister Doister. The play begins with a speech by Mathew Merrygreek, whose surname means 'merry fellow, roisterer' and who behaves accordingly, as he himself tells us. More particularly, he explains that he keeps body and soul together by dining now with one friend, now with another, and these friends all have names indicative of their way of life. To quote,

> My living lieth here and there, of God's grace:
> Sometime with this good man, sometime in that place;
> Sometime Lewis Loiterer biddeth me come near;
> Somewhiles Watkin Waster maketh me good cheer;
> Sometime Davy Diceplayer, when he hath well cast,
> Keepeth revel-rout as long as it will last;
> Sometime Tom Titivil maketh us a feast;
> Sometime with Sir Hugh Pye I am a bidden guest;
> Sometime at Nichol Neverthrives I get a sop;
> Sometime I am feasted with Bryan Blinkinsop;
> Sometime I hang on Hankin Hoddydoddy's sleeve,
> But this day on Ralph Roister Doister's, by his leave.

Of the surnames in this passage, *Loiterer*, *Waster*, *Diceplayer*, and *Neverthrives* need no comment. *Titivil* is a word of doubtful etymology but it was current in fifteenth and sixteenth century English in the sense 'scoundrel,' with particular application to a mischiefmaking tell-tale, and Tom Titivil is to be taken as such a character. *Pie* (i. e., magpie), applied to a man, may mean either 'chatterer' or 'wily, cunning person.' One cannot tell which of these two senses is meant here. *Blinkinsop* may be compared to our modern phrase *blinkin' idiot*, though the element *sop* means not 'idiot' but 'worthless person.' *Hoddydoddy* means 'blockhead, dolt, fool.' Compare the obsolete words *hoddypeak* and *doddypoll*, both of

which have this meaning. The last surname in the passage, *Roister Doister*, is obviously a riming compound. Its first element *Roister* is a well known sixteenth-century word with the sense 'swaggering, blustering bully.' The second element *Doister* may be the same as the modern dialectal *doister* 'tempest' (compare Scottish *dois* in the same sense); if so, it serves to mark the character wild in behavior.

Other characters in this play that have meaningful names are: Gawin Goodluck, Tristram Trusty, Dobinet Doughtie, Tom Trupenie, Sym Suresby, Harpax, Christian Custance, Madge Mumblecrust, and Tibet Talkapace. Of these, Goodluck is truly well named, since he has won the heart of a rich widow. His friend Trusty in the course of the action shows himself indeed one to be trusted, and the servants Trupenie and Suresby live up to their names by their conduct. Of Roister's two servants, Doughtie has a name that means 'capable' and he serves his master accordingly; at any rate, he obeys orders. Harpax, whose name means 'robber,' is a proper servant for a man who tries to rob Goodluck of his betrothed. The widow Custance (i. e. constancy) is so named to emphasize her faithfulness to the absent Goodluck. Of her servants, the old woman Madge Mumblecrust is named in terms of a physical disability that goes with old age: she has no teeth and must mumble the crusts that she eats. The verb *mumble* used to mean 'chew with toothless gums.' Tibet Talkapace is a great talker, as her name indicates. The only character in the play with a name that makes trouble is Annot Alyface, the housemaid. Here the element *-face* is clear enough but what does *Aly-* mean? Various guesses might be made but I find none of them satisfactory.

Roister Doister, though a school play, has only one character with a name drawn from a classical tongue: *Harpax*, which is Greek for robber. A later play of the same century, Lyly's Endymion, is classical throughout in its name-giving, and the author presumably took for granted that his audience would know enough Latin and Greek to tell what the names of the characters meant. It must be added, however, that only a few of the names can reasonably be taken for characterizations. Endymion's friend Eumenides has a name that means 'the wellmeaning or well-minded one' and the name fits his character beautifully; he is indeed a true friend. His adviser, the old man at the fountain, is called Geron, the Greek

word for old man. Other characters with obviously meaningful names are Tellus (the earth), her friend Floscula (little flower), the court ladies Scintilla (spark) and Favilla (glowing ashes of the dead), the old witch Dipsas (snake), and her servant Bagoa (poisoner).

The name *Bagoa* is of special interest. It is the feminine of *Bagoas*, a Persian name borne, among others, by a notorious poisoner who was put to death by King Darius III, the opponent of Alexander the Great. It was this historical character who gave the name *Bagoas* the association with poisoning which Lyly made use of in naming the servant of Dipsas. Yet though Bagoa poisons Endymion by fanning him with a hemlock leaf, she does this unwillingly, obeying the orders of her mistress, and the poison merely puts Endymion to sleep; it does not kill him. In other words, Lyly made Bagoa a character reminiscent of the historical Bagoas yet different from him not only in sex but also in spirit. In the same way, Lyly's Dipsas has remarkable powers but does not use them to give her victims a raging thirst, as the snake Dipsas does in Greek story. At any rate she put Endymion to sleep instead.

The ladies-in-waiting Scintilla and Favilla were so named in order to make possible the action with which the second scene of the second act begins. Favilla has called Endymion's page a silly boy. The page retorts: "Alas, good old gentlewoman, how it becometh you to be grave." And Scintilla adds: "Favilla, though she be but a spark, yet is she fire." The two speeches, taken together, give us the meaning of the Latin word *favilla* if we take into account the pun on *grave*. As everybody knows, the Romans practised cremation of the dead. The body was burned and the ashes, so long as they still glowed, had the special name *favilla*, a name no longer applicable after they had lost their glow. It befits our character Favilla, then, to be grave (i. e. seriousminded), since by virtue of her name she is dead and in her grave; yet not quite, for there is fire in her ashes still. One is reminded of Chaucer's reeve in the Canterbury Tales, who in his prolog speaks for old people as such, saying

Yet in our asshen olde is fyr yreke.

But Favilla can play the etymological game herself. She responds: "And you, Scintilla, be not much more than a spark, though you would be esteemed a flame." The give and take goes on for a number

of lines more, but I have said enough to show that the meaning of these names is functional in the play.

The queen in the play is called Cynthia; that is, she goes by the same name that the English poets of the day gave to Queen Elizabeth. Since *Cynthia* had long been familiar as a name for the moon-goddess, the author could use it with perfect propriety in his play about Endymion's love-affair with the moon. But in so doing he made the name doubly meaningful: in many passages it applies to the moon and to Elizabeth at the same time. This feature of the play has led scholars to seek hidden meanings throughout and to connect characters other than Cynthia with historical persons. But it would take me too far afield to go into these matters here.

Italian as well as Latin and Greek was fashionable in the England of Queen Elizabeth and King James, witness the many characters with Italian names in Shakespeare's plays, names found even when the setting is not Italian, as the Horatio of Hamlet. Most such names are not meaningful, though they give a certain flavor that the public of that day evidently liked. Sometimes, however, they serve to characterize their bearers. In Ben Jonson's play Volpone (i. e. the fox), named after its chief character, most of the names have a characterizing function. Besides Volpone himself we have Mosca (fly), Voltore (vulture), Corbaccio (raven), Corvino (crow), Bonario (good-natured, credulous), Nano (dwarf), Castrone (eunuch) and Androgyno (hermaphrodite). The English audience was expected to know enough Italian to understand the meaning of these names.

The scene of the play is laid in Venice and the characters with Italian names are Italians, but Jonson adds three English characters, tourists who turn up in Venice and play a part in the action. These are Peregrine (traveler or falcon), Sir Politic Would-be, and Lady Would-be. Both meanings of the word *peregrine* fit the character so named: he is a traveler and he plays the falcon when he pounces on Sir Politic in the fifth act. The surname Would-be is most appropriate both for Sir Politic and for his lady, but in the dialog the knight is often called Sir Pol (i. e. parrot), and his flow of words makes this name very apt. It will be seen that the characterization in terms of birds, so conspicuous in the Italian names, extends to the English names as well.

In Jonson's play characterizing names are the rule. In some plays of the period, however, only comic characters are given such names. A good example is Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. The scene of this play is laid in Illyria, but two of the characters, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Anthony Aguecheek, have English names nevertheless, names with a characterizing function. The verb *belch*, alongside its literal meaning, has had since Old English times the figurative sense 'utter, speak with vehemence or violence.' Compare Latin *eructare*. In Shakespeare's day *belch* in this figurative sense was restricted to "the utterance of offensive things, or to furious vociferation" (NED). Now as a character Sir Toby behaved in just this way, especially when he was in his cups. Shakespeare's name for him is therefore obviously meaningful. With him goes Sir Andrew Aguecheek (i. e., shivering or shaking cheek), whose name is indicative of his cowardice, a characteristic made much of in the play. A third comic character is Malvolio (i. e. ill will). He is a straitlaced spoilsport who takes himself so seriously that he becomes a figure of fun; his very lack of humor makes him comic. Finally, we have Feste, the clown, whose name means 'the festive one, the gay one,' and who lives up to the name beautifully. The serious characters of the play do not have meaningful names.

In the course of the seventeenth century French replaced Italian as the fashionable tongue of western Europe and fictive name-giving changed accordingly. Thus, the two main characters in Congreve's play The Way of the World have characterizing names French in form and meaning. The heroine, Millamant, (i. e. *mille amants* '1000 lovers') seems to have been so called because all the gallants in town paid court to her. Her suitor Mirabell (i. e. Latin *mirabilis* 'wonderful') bears a name that was actually current in Middle English; Congreve used it in its older French form, equivalent to modern French *Mirabeau.* The meaning of the name fits the character perfectly; certainly all the ladies of fashion thought he was wonderful and envied Millamant her suitor. One of the minor characters, too, has a French name: the maidservant Foible (i. e. feeble, weak). Her weakness was that of disloyalty to her mistress. But most of the characters in the play have English names, names that serve to characterize them neatly enough. Lady Wishfort, for example, plays the coquette in spite of her age; she wishes she were a fort to be besieged and stormed by some man or other;

almost any man would do. Fainall, her son-in-law, would fain have all and in the end lost all. Squire Witwoud is a would-be wit, and his half brother Sir Wilful has a name that sums up his character if we take *wilful* in the old sense 'willing; consenting; ready to comply with a request, desire or requirement' (NED): first Lady Wishfort persuades him to marry Millamant and then Mirabell persuades him not to marry her. Squire Witwoud's companion Petulant owes his name to his insolent, rude ways; *petulant* meant 'rude, insolent' in Congreve's day, though this meaning is now rare if not obsolete. Finally, Mrs. Marwood is indeed well named; she mars the hero's plans one after the other almost to the end.

To illustrate our theme in the eighteenth century I have chosen the personal names in Sheridan's play The School for Scandal. I include not only the names of the characters but also the names of persons mentioned in the speeches of the characters. We begin with Lady Wormwood, mentioned in the Prolog:

> "Lord!" cries my Lady Wormwood (who loves tattle,
> And puts much salt and pepper in her prattle) ...

The lady is smacking her lips over the scandalous items of news she finds in the morning paper but changes her tune when she finds an item about herself:

> "A certain lord had best beware
> Who lives not twenty miles from Grosvenor Square;
> For should he Lady W. find willing
> Wormwood is bitter" – Oh! that's me! the villain!
> Throw it behind the fire, and never more
> Let that vile paper come within my door.

Next comes Lady Sneerwell, who throughout the play shows how good she is at sneering. Her confederate Mr. Snake has the bad qualities associated with that reptile. The next three names, Lady Brittle, Capt. Boastall, and Mrs. Clackitt, hardly need any comments, but I will quote a bit from the dialog:

Lady Sneerwell: Did you circulate the report of Lady Brittle's intrigue with Capt. Boastall?

Snake: That's in as fine a train as your ladyship could wish. In the common course of things, I think it must reach Mrs. Clackitt's ears within four-and-twenty hours; and then, you know, the business is as good as done.

Lady Sneerwell: Why, truly, Mrs. Clackitt has a very pretty talent, and a great deal of industry.

Snake: True, madam, and has been tolerably successful in her day. To my knowledge, she has been the cause of six matches being broken off and three sons disinherited, of four forced elopements and as many close confinements, nine separate maintenances and two divorces.

Evidently Mrs. Clackitt was a scandal-monger indeed, and fully deserved the name Clackitt (that is, blab it, spread it far and wide).

Sir Peter Teazle, who plays a more important part than the characters just mentioned, has a name that befits him well enough. The teazle is a plant "the heads of which have hooked prickles between the flowers and are used for teasing cloth" (NED); that is, for combing its surface so as to make a nap. The word is derived from the verb *tease*, which originally meant 'shred' or the like but is now chiefly used in the figurative sense "worry or irritate by persistent action which vexes or annoys" (NED). Sir Peter is well equipped with verbal hooked prickles and is fond of using them. As he tells us in the first scene of Act II, with reference to his wife, "though I can't make her love me, there is great satisfaction in quarreling with her," and in Act III he says, "How happy I should be if I could tease her into loving me." Lady Teazle was anything but a tease before her marriage, but with the new name she took the behavior proper to one so called, and in the play she shows herself fully her husband's match.

Three characters in the play have Surface for surname: the rich old bachelor Sir Oliver Surface and his young nephews Charles and Joseph. All three play a surface part that differs greatly from the reality beneath. To begin with, the uncle has just come back from the East Indies, where he had lived for fifteen years. In consequence, he does not know his nephews by sight nor they him, and on both sides any identification must depend on surface appearances. Sir Oliver takes advantage of this fact to visit Joseph in the character of an impecunious relative begging for a loan, and to visit Charles in the opposite character of a professional money-lender. In each case the false surface deceives the nephew but enables the uncle to penetrate beneath the surface: Joseph, who in the eyes of the world is a model of manly virtue, shows himself to be a scoundrel, whereas Charles, who by all surface indications is a hopeless profligate, shows himself to be a man of good heart. Be it added that Joseph Surface's given name has its significance too: unlike the son of Jacob in the Bible, our Joseph has a clandes-

tine affair with another man's wife, thus proving that he is a Joseph only on the surface.

Our next group of characters comprises Sir Benjamin Backbite, Mr. Crabtree, Mrs. Candour, Miss Gadabout, Sir Filigree Flirt, and Miss Prim. Of these, only Mrs. Candour has a name that needs comment. The word *candour* here means 'friendliness, freedom from malice' and Lady Sneerwell duly gives Mrs. Candour a character to correspond, saying that though she is "a little talkative, everybody allows her to be the best-natured and best sort of woman." The dialog continues thus:

Maria: Yes, with a very gross affectation of good nature and benevolence, she does more mischief than the direct malice of old Crabtree.

Joseph: I'faith, that's true, Lady Sneerwell; whenever I hear the current against the characters of my friends, I never think them in such danger as when Candour undertakes their defense.

Two characters with Italian names follow: Mrs. Festino (i. e. entertainment) and Colonel Cassino (i. e. casino, used in eighteenth century England in two senses: 'public hall for dancing etc.' and 'kind of card game'). These characters, and many others in the play, are obviously personifications. With them go Mr. and Mrs. Honeymoon, Miss Tattle, Lord Buffalo, Sir H. Bouquet, and Mr. Tom Saunter. I have no information about Lord Buffalo, but Sir H. Bouquet is presumably Henry Bouquet, famous for his successes against the Indians in the American colonies. One wonders what he is doing in this galley.

Our next is a group of four: Lord Spindle, Sir Thomas Splint, Captain Quinze, and Mr. Nickitt, all of whom, according to Mrs. Candour, are facing financial ruin. *Spindle* and *splint* seem to be derogatory epithets. Quinze got his name from the gambling game, and presumably he lost his money at cards. As for Mr. Nickitt, his name means 'cheater' and perhaps he is to be thought of as having cheated once too often.

This group is followed by a group of women: Lady Frizzle, named in terms of her hair; Mrs. Drowzie, one who puts others to sleep; Miss Nicely, so called because she is so careful, prudent, and cautious; Miss Piper, the shepherdess; Mrs. Ponto, whose name, if it is Latin, means 'bridge of boats' and whose assembly certainly made slanderous communications easier; and Lady Dundizzy, the *dizzy* of whose name means 'foolish' (compare Lord Dundreary of

a later day). In the next Act we get another such group: Lady Betty Curricle, whose name reflects her fondness for driving in Hyde Park; Miss Vermilion, who uses the rouge-pot freely; Mrs. Evergreen, who tries hard to look young in spite of her age; the widow Ochre, who paints her face with the pigment so called; Miss Simper, who smirks all the time, to show off her pretty teeth; Mrs. Prim, who keeps her lips primly closed to conceal the fact that she has lost her teeth; Mrs. Pursy, the fat dowager (*pursy* means 'fat'); Mrs. Quadrille, who may personify either the card game or the square dance; Miss Sallow, presumably so named to describe her complexion; Lady Stucco (i. e. imitation; plaster made to look like stone); and Mrs. Ogle, an eyeful of ugliness, a freak to be stared at. Truly an unsavory lot, if one listens to the scandal-mongers.

In Act III a Jewish moneylender, appropriately named Moses, is introduced, and he in turn introduces a Gentile moneylender, with equal appropriateness named Premium. We also learn that Lady Teazle had had a suitor named Sir Tivy Terrier (i. e. Sir Tory rent-roll) but had refused him to accept Sir Peter. In the next scene Charles Surface's servant Trip takes the stage, and plays a part lively enough to befit his name. In one of his speeches he mentions a friend of his named Brush. This name is suitable enough for a servant, who among other things has the duty of brushing his master's clothes. In addition, Brush may be there to remind learned playgoers of the Peniculus of Plautus's Menaechmi.

I conclude my look at the personal names in Sheridan's play with Mr. Careless, Sir Harry Bumper (i. e. one given to drinking bumpers), Sir Richard Raveline (i. e. outwork; Sir Richard is a military man), and William and Walter Blunt, plain-spoken members of parliament. The only characters in the play whose names are not meaningful are Rowley and Maria.

We come now to the nineteenth century. I illustrate with Bernard Shaw's play Candida, named after its chief character. The Latin adj. *candidus* properly means 'shining white' but it may have figurative senses, as 'clear, lucid' and 'honest, straightforward.' Both these figurative senses fit the Candida of the play, who has a clear, lucid mind and is honest, straightforward in her dealings. Her husband Morell[1] is described as a moralist by Marchbanks in

[1] The spelling *Morell* (instead of *Morel*) indicates that the stress falls on the first syllable and that the *e* has its obscure value. Here British differs from American pronunciation (compare *Purcell* etc.).

one of his speeches and the description fits the man: Morell lives by the conventional morality of his group, the Christian Socialists, and he thinks accordingly.

Candida's father has *Burgess* for surname. The word is the English counterpart of French *bourgeois*. It denotes an inhabitant of a borough (i. e. town) and applies in particular to a member of what used to be called the lower middle classes. In the play Burgess typifies one kind of *bourgeois*: a crude business man, lacking in cultivation and interested only in his business activities, which are not always strictly honorable. Candida's would-be lover, Eugene Marchbanks, has a given name that means 'well born,' and in fact he is a member of the British aristocracy. Morell's secretary, Miss Proserpine Garnett, is a jewel of a secretary but not one of great price. Her tragedy is that of unrequited love, and the Greek goddess's residence in Hades makes the secretary's given name not inappropriate.

I end with a twentieth-century play: Elmer Rice's Adding Machine. The leading character is Mr. Zero, whose name needs no explaining. His office mate, Daisy Diana Dorothea Devore, has a name indicative of the love stories and movie romances that she lives by. In one passage Zero comments on Daisy's name "Daisy. That's a pretty name. It's a flower, ain't it ? Well – that's what you are – just a flower." But Zero is too colorless and conventional to have a real love affair, even if the woman gives him every encouragement. His friends Mr. One, Mr. Two, Mr. Three, Mr. Four, Mr. Five, and Mr. Six, with their wives, are as empty-minded as he is. They are all no more than animated adding-machines. The only characters in the play who have normal names are the prostitute Judy O'Grady and the cosmic policeman Charles with his assistant Joe.

Our survey of the centuries has yielded an abundant supply of meaningful fictive names. As I pointed out in the beginning, I have made no effort to give you more than a sampling of the material. English literature swarms with names of this kind, so much so that a complete list would make a book. Here it will be enough to show by examples that such name-giving has always played an important part in our imaginative literature and is worth studying for its own sake.