LITERARY TERMS: LIMITATIONS OF NAMING

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The papers that have been given at the Literary
Onomastics Conference and published in Literary Onomastics
Studies over the years have told us many things about the
processes and effects of naming. We have observed that
authors select names for persons, places, and things for
all sorts of reasons: symbolism, social class, location
in time and place, comic effect, eroticism, evocativeness,
rhythm, and biographical import, just to name a few. And
we have seen that, while study of these names can open
many avenues of understanding for the reader, the names
themselves are delimiting. The names shape our perceptions
and help us to structure the literary world we are dealing
with, but structures require a certain amount of rigidity.
Consequently, the names can say much and suggest more, but
there will always be limitations to their ability to com-
municate. If one seeks to transcend those limitations too
far, one risks complete chaos and meaninglessness. A source
of names that can tell us more about both the processes
of naming and the limitations of names is the body of
terms used in the critical study of literature.

In one sense, many of these are authentic names in

that they derive from the names of people, places, charac-
ters and the like. In another sense, even the terms we
would call common nouns have the impact of names in that
they are used side-by-side with proper nouns--and in fact
are often properized themselves--in the study of literature.
For example, is there an essential difference as to manner
of usage in critical study between an alexandrine and an
ode? Of course there is a difference in meaning, and the
one derives from a proper noun whereas the other does not,
but both are used at the same level of discourse. Or
again, is there a difference in level of usage (of course
there is in meaning) between Gongorism and Realism? This
very shifting between common and proper noun is itself
interesting and should help us expand our notions of what
a name is, but instead of focusing on it I will merely
note that the distinction is often blurry in the examples
I propose to use.

Perhaps the most obvious source of names for literary
types is that of the authors who invented or first used
the form.[1] And so we have, for instance, the Spenserian
stanza, for no one before Edmund Spenser had thought to
add an alexandrine line to ottava rima (and few thereafter,
although Byron made effective use of it in Childe Harold's
Pilgrimage). Skeltonics, that peculiar tumbling verse
invented by John Skelton, have a naive charm, as in "The
Tunning of Elinour Rumming":

> Tell you I chill
> If that you will
> A while be still
> Of a comely gill
> That dwelt on a hill
> But she was quite grill...
> And her visage
> It would assauage
> A man's courage....

But I don't know of anyone else who used the form. The clerihew is named for its inventor, Edmund Clerihew Bentley, whose boredom in a chemistry lecture led him to write

> Sir Humphry Davy
> Abominated gravy.
> He lived in the odium
> Of having discovered sodium.

And thereby he formed a new literary type. It seems probable that Leonine rime, a particular form of internal rhyme split by the caesura, was first used by the medieval writer Leoninus, canon of St. Victor in Paris, in such a line as "Ex rex Edvardus, debacchans ut Leopardus," but certainty is impossible. The mists of time are also too thick for us to know for sure whether Alcaeus really invented alcaics, the verse form named after him, or if Sappho invented sapphics, Pindar invented the particular type of ode called Pindaric, or Horace the type known as Horatian, or Menippus the menippean form of satire, or Anacreon the erotic and Bacchanalian poetry that is called anacreontic. At this point we slide over into a second source of literary terms, the names of the most famous

practitioners of a particular form. (Before I leave the
paragraph, however, I would call attention to the mixture
of capitalized and uncapitalized terms in the above list;
the names are sliding back and forth from proper to common.)

In this next category goes the Shakespearean sonnet,
which seems to have actually been invented, at least in
its English form, by Sir Thomas Wyatt a generation or so
before Shakespeare, but Shakespeare gets the glory. The
same is true for the Petrarchan sonnet, a form that
Petrarch brought to high perfection but did not invent,
and for Senecan tragedy, which is greatly imitative of
Euripides. Gongorism and Marinism, named respectively
after Luis de Gongóra y Argote and Giambattista Marini,
are densely ornate poetic styles resembling the meta-
physical verse of John Donne. As with the Petrarchan
sonnet, the basic elements pre-existed Gongóra and
Marini, but these authors developed them into full ex-
pression and influenced other writers. Thomas Bowdler
was not the first literary expurgator, but we still know
the practice of omitting offensive passages as bowdlerizing
and Dr. W. A. Spooner was certainly not the first person
to mix up words so as to speak of a blushing crow instead
of a crushing blow, but spoonerisms still bear his name.
Even the existence of Bishop Golias is dubious, but a
type of lilting Latin verse satire that celebrates wine,

women and song is called goliardic. Not quite identical
with this source of names and so forming a third category
is the process of naming by _association_ with a famous
user of the form, especially one of noble birth. An
example is rime royal, brought to excellence by Chaucer
but named in connection with James I of Scotland, who
later used it in his _King's Quhair_. Since there is no
obvious way to distinguish between those sources who are
originators and those who are famous practitioners, other
than historical research, it seems evident that those who
adopted these names for literary terms saw no significant
difference between them. This should alert us to a sig-
nificant item to be taken into consideration when analyzing
names used within literary works. To what extent was the
author concerned with historical realism and to what extent
was he concerned with the popular interpretation of history?

Certain literary terms, forming a fourth category,
come from well-known fictional characters. Malapropism,
from Mrs. Malaprop of Sheridan's _The Rivals_, gives a name
to a comic mistaking of words that is actually at least
as old as Aristophanes. Similarly, Homer's Ajax and
Plautus' braggart soldier were engaging in rodomontade
long before the term acquired its name from Ariosto's
bragging king Rodomonte in _Orlando Furioso_. There is
really no answer to the question why these terms were
named after characters centuries later than their first
appearance in literature.

Plautus' braggart soldier <u>did</u> give a name to a character type, however, the <u>miles</u> <u>gloriosus</u>, but since that is also the title of the play in which he appears we have a fifth related category, that deriving from titles of literary works. Other title characters who gave us literary terms are Euphues, appearing in John Lyly's <u>Euphues: An Anatomy of Wit</u>, after whom is named that elaborate prose style known as euphuism, and Samuel Butler's <u>Hudibras</u>, after whom the satiric poem in octosyllabic couplets with outrageous rhymes is called hudibrastic verse. Familiar terms like utopia, essay, aphorism, geste, and apocryphal were also originally titles of books by, respectively, Sir Thomas More, Montaigne, Hippocrates, the anonymous compilers of the <u>Gesta Romanorum</u> (ca. 1250), and the scholars who named those books of the Bible called the <u>Apocrypha</u>. Macaronic verse gets its name from the <u>Liber Macaronicus</u> of Teofilo Folengo, and the Imagist poets are so called after the title of the first anthology of their work, <u>Des Imagistes</u> (1914). What seems to have happened in still another case is a conflation of titles. Robert Blair's <u>The Grave</u> (1743) and Thomas Gray's <u>Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard</u> (1751) combine to give us a name to characterize this school of poetry, the graveyard school.

A considerable amount of early literature was written in celebration of a particular god or demigod. Such literature was named after the deity being celebrated, giving us a sixth category that includes adonic verse,

that particular combination of dactyl and spondee named
after Adonis or his festival the Adonia; bacchius, the
three-syllable foot of short-long-long named after Bacchus;
and erotic literature, celebrating Aphrodite's naughty
son Eros.

It is also convenient to distinguish literature
according to the era in which it was written, and many
eras have been named after the reigning monarch. So we
have Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline, Georgian, Victorian,
and Edwardian periods in literature, but more particularly
what we identify as Jacobean drama or Caroline verse or
Victorian novel or Edwardian poetry has specific character-
istics that seem to transcend the era. The baroque structures,
sinister intrigue, and sardonic wit of Jacobean drama, for
instance, can be identified in varying degrees in earlier
drama (The Spanish Tragedy, for example) and later lit-
erature (some of Browning's dramatic monologues and even
Pinter's plays). So the name takes on characteristics
certainly not shared by the monarch (James I was not the
ironic intriguer of the plays) nor by all of the literature
produced in the era (George Herbert's gentle poems of
devotion bear little resemblance to The Duchess of Malfi),
but that can be seen in work not of the era. Names of
this class I would designate a seventh category, that of
naming by association with an important, nonliterary
person or group. Also in this category might be included

the term Augustan, describing the characteristics of English literature of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Writers of the era strove to emulate the classical grace and rationality that they perceived in the writing created under the Emperor Augustus. Writing of less sophistication might be called gothic, after those rude barbarians or "bearded ones" the Goths, or even philistine, after the supposedly insensitive inhabitants of Philistia. Pre-Raphaelite writers and artists attempted to recreate the primitive simplicity of the era before the artist Raphael, and so this term also derives from association with a prominent person. The savage invective known as philippics is named by association with the orations of Demosthenes berating Philip II of Macedon. Finally, the hexameter alexandrine might get its name from the many poems about Alexander the Great written in this meter during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, or possibly, as an alternate source, from the poet Alexandre Paris, who was an eminent user of the meter.

Still another source of literary terms, an eighth category, is place names associated with particular forms or styles. We hear of Attic, Doric, and Ionic styles, associated with those various places. Arcadian pastoral and areopagite classicism are also rooted in Greek place names. Association with the ancestral home of the

language of early fiction gives us Romanticism and the
roman. From France we have the blustering gasconade from
the supposed manner of speech in Gascony; the villanelle
or poem appropriate for a little country house or villa;
and two forms named for the single Norman village of
Vau-de-Vire: vaudeville, supposedly originated there,
and virelay, a narrative poem of indefinite length in
tercets, distinguished from the more familiar Breton lay.
In England, Grub Street hacks might sling billingsgate,
but the Lake Poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey)
were above such scurrilous language. No one seems to
know why the limerick is named after that Irish county,
but the homely subject matter and dialectical style of
such Scottish writers as J. M. Barrie and "Ian Maclaren"
seem to justify the term Kailyard School. Kailyard is
Scottish for a cabbage garden, and might be intended as
a criticism, since anyone driving past rotting cabbage
fields in the early spring knows how offensively they smell.

Up to this point we have been considering terms that
come directly from proper names of persons and places,
names ordinarily converted into common nouns to describe
characteristics of literature. The process is also reversed
as common parts of speech are elevated into proper nouns,
as in the cases of Realism, Naturalism, and Classicism,
or Restoration drama and Revolutionary Age literature.
The distinction between proper names and common nouns

becomes blurred, but this very blurring helps to identify
the process by which names are created. After all, if
Sextus Empiricus could be named after the number six and
Publius Ovidius Naso got part of his name from the word
for nose, then it isn't surprising if literary forms
like the triolet and sestina are named after numbers or
if costuming terms like masque and bombast become adopted
as critical terms.

Instead of taking you tediously through the remaining
twenty-two categories of name sources I have identified,
I will simply refer you to the appendix and comment only
on those that seem to need additional explanation. For
example, one source of literary names that also operates
in the formation of ordinary words as well as in the names
of persons and places is metaphor. A cliché was originally
a stereotype plate used in printing, an anthology was a
collection of flowers, and a trope was a physical turning
(still retained in tropism). A satire (from satura) was
originally a bowl of mixed fruit to signigy its medley of
metrical forms, but the word became conflated with satyr
to suggest a message appropriate to such a mocking beast-
man. Anatomy, a separation into little bits, added a
literary meaning to its medical senses in such titles as
Anatomy of Wit, Anatomy of Melancholy, and Anatomy of
Criticism. A symposium was a drinking together, and then
the word was applied to meetings and talk of a more serious
but equally convivial manner. Farce meant "stuff" (it is

still possible, I think, to find sausage called "farce meat" in parts of England), referring to the extra jokes and gags that comic actors tended to add to their written parts. (Remember Hamlet telling the clown not to speak more than is set down for him.) Similarly negative connotations are conveyed in poulter's measure, a meter of alternating 12- and 14-syllable lines, based on Elizabethan eggsellers' practice of including 12 eggs in the first dozen sold and adding two eggs to the second dozen. Writers who used this measure were thought to be better farmers than poets. Metaphor (or perhaps chauvinism) also seems to be present in distinguishing between firmly monosyllabic masculine endings and droopingly disyllabic feminine endings.

Another category that provides interesting terms is that deriving from physical movement. Parts of an ode or a drama are derived from the movements of the chorus or dancers in performance: the strophe or turn, the anti-strophe or counter-turn, and catastrophe or down-turn. A jig as a name for a short, sprightly comedy as in **Attowell's Jig** is still a dance term as well, and a ballad, related to the word "ball" (dance), was originally any song appropriate for dancing. Ballad presents an interesting example of a term both narrowing--to mean a narrative poem in quatrains of alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines--and broadening--to mean any melodic or lyrical verse, as in Tinpan Alley ballads. The envoy

or final stanza of several poetic classifications was
originally a literal sending-off, and an epithalamium
or wedding song was originally sung, as its derivation
tells us, outside the bridal bedroom. Repartee, that
exchange of wit, was originally a fencing term for a
more literal kind of combat. Irony takes its name from
the _eiron_, the character who stood aloof and commented
on the action of the other characters. The protagonist,
or first doer in a play, was literally the one who began
the action; he could be either hero or villain. In fact,
identifying the one who begins the action helps to deter-
mine the structure of a play and is a useful critical
tool. The antagonist, of course, is the one who moves
in opposition to the protagonist.

Those names derived from the relationship of one
literary form or style to an earlier one also deserve
explanation. Mimes were among the earliest dramatic
forms, but in the later Roman theatre they began to be
amplified by speech. Consequently the term pantomime--
entirely mime--was devised to refer to those performances
from which speech was absent. The term "novel," like
its Italian source "novelle," indicated that this was
a new way of writing, despite the fact that the prose
tale was of much older vintage. Now, of course, we have
second-generation derivatives for the convenience of
publishers, diminutives such as novelette and novella.

Neo-Classicism was an attempt to revive classical regularity and polish, but the manner of thinking and the classical meters were impossible to recreate. Adding the prefixes "neo-" and "post-" to almost any term is a practice that is both popular and distorting. Neo-Platonists are no more Platonic than Neo-Classicists are classical, and Post-Romantics and Post-Impressionists bear little resemblance to the respective originals. One wonders what is gained by such prefixes when so much precision is lost.

This brings me to my final point. It is astonishing that, with so much fertility of imagination in creating names for literary genres, styles, eras, and types, so that it is possible to identify at least thirty different sources of such names, there should be so little precision in these terms. Literary critics are constantly saying things like "such-and-such a poem is ballad-like in narrative effect but the stanzaic pattern varies from quatrains to quintains with occasional couplets" or "The meter is predominantly iambic pentameter" when the accentual verse is not precisely iambic at all, since iambs are feet of short and long syllables, not stressed and unstressed. Free verse is not really free except by comparison with regularized forms, serenades are no longer sung in the evening, and terms such as expressionism, impressionism, realism, and romanticism may never be precisely defined. Possibly such frustration is part of any attempt to communicate. Words and names never seem to be adequate to transmit

all the nuances of thought and imagination. Without
words as message units, we could never communicate, but
the words themselves limit us in what we can say. In
frustration we bend old words and invent new ones, but
we will never be satisfied and so the process continues
as long as language lives.

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NOTE

[1] Terms in the paper and appendix are primarily from
William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to
Literature, rev. and enlarged by C. Hugh Holman (New York:
The Odyssey Press, 1960), supplemented by suggestions
from my colleagues Dr. Walter P. Bowman and Dr. Wayne
Finke.

APPENDIX: NAME-SOURCE CATEGORIES OF LITERARY TERMS

1. From name of original user

Spenserian stanza (f. Edmund Spenser),
Skeltonics (f. John Skelton)
Leonine rime (f. Leoninus)
clerihew (f. Edmund Clerihew Bentley)
? alcaics (f. Alcaeus)
  sapphics (f. Sappho)
  Pindaric ode (f. Pindar)
  Horatian ode (f. Horace)
  menippean satire (f. Menippus)
  anacreontic verse (f. Anacreon)
  Queredan satire (f. Francisco de Queredo)
Cervantine humor (f. Miguel de Cervantes)

2. From name of most famous user

Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets
Seneca tragedy (f. Seneca)
bowdlerizing (f. Thomas Bowdler)
spoonerism (f. Dr. W. A. Spooner)
goliardic verse (f. Bishop Golias)
Gongorism (f. Luis de Gongóra y Argote)
Marinism (f. Giambattista Marini)

3. From association with noble user

Rime royal (f. King James I of Scotland)

4. From name of fictional character

malapropism (Mrs. Malaprop, The Rivals)
rodomontade (King Rodomonte, Orlando Furioso)

5. From book title

miles gloriosus (f. Plautus)
euphuism (f. John Lyly's Euphues)
hudibrastic verse (f. Samuel Butler's
    Hudibras)
utopia (f. Sir Thomas More's Utopia)
essay (f. Montaigne's Essais)
aphorism (f. Hippocrates' Aphorisms)
geste (f. Gesta Romanorum)
apocrypha (f. Apocrypha)
macaronic (f. Teofilo Folengo's Liber
    Macaronicus)
imagism (f. Des Imagistes)
Graveyard school (f. Robert Blair's The
    Grave and Thomas Gray's Elegy
    Written in a Country Churchyard)

6. From name of deity or festival

adonic verse (f. Adonis or Adonia)
bacchius (f. Bacchus)
erotic (f. Eros)

7. From name-association with person or group	Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline, Georgian, Victorian, Edwardian (f. English monarchs Elizabeth I, James I, Charles I, George I and II, Victoria, and Edward VII) Augustan (f. Emperor Augustus) gothic (f. Goths) Philistine (f. Philistia) pre-Raphaelite (f. Raphael) philippics (f. Philip II of Macedon) alexandrine (f. Alexander the Great or Alexandre Paris)
8. From place-name	Attic, Doric, Ionic (f. Attica, Doria, Ionia) Arcadian (f. Arcadia) areopagite (f. areopagus) Romanticism, roman (f. Rome) gasconade (f. Gascony) vaudeville and virelay (f. Vau-de-Vire) villanelle (f. villa) Grub Street, billingsgate, Cockney school Lake Poets (f. Lake District) limerick (f. Limerick, Ireland) Kailyard school (f. kail=cabbage) Aldwych farce (f. Aldwych) Byzantine novel (f. Byzantium) English and Italian sonnet forms
9. From political event	Restoration drama (f. the Restoration of Charles II of England) Revolutionary age (f. the American Revolution) Generation of 1898 (f. Spanish defeat of Spanish-American War)
10. From appropriate subject	heroic couplet cavalier lyric chant royal chivalric romance cup and saucer or teacup comedy character (prose sketch of character type)
11. From appropriate audience and/or characters	bourgeois drama city comedy pastoral poetry or elegy folk drama domestic tragedy bucolic fiction the Decadents
12. From basis of material	sentimental novel revenge tragedy morality play novel of sensibility novel of manners

mystery story
problem play
larmoyant literature (f. larmer=to weep)
theatre of the absurd
Transcendentalism
science fiction
realism, naturalism (f. real, natural)

13. From character type

fairy tale
harlequinade
picaresque novel (f. picaro)

14. From source of information

chronicle play
miracle play
mystery play (f. mysteries of Christ and
    his Mother, but "mystery" could also
    be derived from "mastery," the
    special skill associated with the
    trade guild that sponsored the play)

15. From manner of creation

expressionism
impressionism
personal essay

16. From method of composition

epistolary novel
shaped poetry
free verse or vers libre
rondeau, rondel, roundel, roundelay
    (their rhyme patterns are circular)

17. From method of presentation

ode (f. oidein=to sing)
comedy (f. comes=village or comos=
    festival)
deus ex machina (f. a god-figure lowered
    to stage-level to unravel plot)
dumb show
mumming (f. mum=keep still)
melodrama (f. melody)
coronach (f. Irish word for wailing, dirge)
montage (f. monter=to pile on
flashback (literal effect in films)

18. From physical movement

strophe, antistrophe, catastrophe (turn,
    counter-turn, down-turn by dancers)
jig
ballad (f. Fr. baler=to dance)
envoy (lit. a "sending away")
epithalamium (f. epi=outside + thalamos =
    bedchamber)
repartee (orig. a fencing term)
irony (f. eironia=distance, aloofness)
agonist (f. agein=act, do)
protagonist (f. proto=first + agein)
antagonist (f. anti=against + agein)

19. From costume

masque
bombast (lit., stuffing)
drama de capa y espada (capes and swords)

20. From place appropriate
    for performance/reading

closet drama
school plays
kitchen comedy
scene (f. skene=tent, referring to the
    tent-like structure of early stage
    scenery)

21. From purpose

occasional verse (for specific occasions)
tragedy (f. tragos=goat, because a goat
    was awarded to the winning play-
    wright, but possibly related to
    costume, since early tragic actors
    may have worn goatskins)

22. From period of time

aubade, alba ("dawn" in French and Italia
nocturne, serenade ("evening" in French
    and Spanish)
fin de siècle (specifically, end of the
    19th century, but generally the
    weary end of any era)
medieval (lit., "middle age" in Latin)

23. From relationship to an
    earlier style

pantomime ("all mime" as distinguished
    from mimes employing some speech)
novelle, novel, novella, novelette
    (f. novus=new)
Neo-Classic
Post-Romantic
avant-garde

24. From metaphor

cliché (lit. a stereotype plate)
trope (lit. a turning)
anthology (lit. a gathering of flowers)
anatomy (lit. a breaking into bits)
symposium (lit. a drinking-together)
satire (f. satura=mixed fruit, conflated
    with satyr=beast-man)
farce (lit. stuffed)
esperpento (f. espantar=to scare; dramati
    works of deformed vision)
greguería (short aphoristic definitions)
Poulter's measure (f. egg-sellers'
    practice of adding two eggs to
    second dozen sold)
engagée literature (lit. engaged, committ
masculine (strong) and feminine (weak)
    endings

25. From line of verse

requiem (f. "Requiem aeternam dona eis,
    Domine"--beginning prayer of the Mas:
paternoster (f. "Pater noster..." first
    words of the Lord's Prayer)

26. From a sentence or phrase

Lost Generation (f. Gertrude Stein's remark "You are all a lost generation.")

metaphysical poetry (f. "[Donne] affects the metaphysics..." [John Dryden, A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire, 1693] or "About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets..." [Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," Lives of the Poets, 1779])

muckrakers (f. Thodore Roosevelt's criticism of Upton Sinclair et al., derived from a passage in Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan)

portmanteau words (f. Lewis Carroll's coinage in The History of the Snark)

27. From numbers

couplet, quatrain, terza rima, ottava rima, triolet, sestina, tetrameter, etc.

28. From publishing format

broadside ballad (published on a single sheet or side of paper)
libretto (lit. "little book")
folio (folded in two)
quarto (folded in fours)
duodecimo (folded in twelves)
octavo (folded in eights)

29. From price of publication

chapbook (lit. "cheap book")
dime novel
penny plain and twopence coloured

30. From college degree

scholasticism, scholia (f. "doctor scholasticus")