

Onoma 53
Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences

ISSN: 0078-463X; e-ISSN: 1783-1644
Journal homepage: https://onomajournal.org/

Literary onomastic theory – An introduction

DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/1

Martyna Katarzyna Gibka

Koszalin University of Technology
Kwiatkowskiego 6e, 75-343 Koszalin
martyna@gibka.pl

Richard Coates

Bristol Centre for Linguistics
University of the West of England
Bristol BS16 1QY
United Kingdom
richard.coates@uwe.ac.uk

To cite this article: Gibka, Martyna Katarzyna & Coates, Richard. 2018. Literary onomastic theory – An introduction. *Onoma* 53, 7–10. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/1

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/1

© *Onoma* and the authors.

BDD-A31174 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:08:30 UTC)

Onoma 53 (2018), 7–10. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/1

Literary onomastic theory – An introduction

MARTYNA KATARZYNA GIBKA AND RICHARD COATES

There are 195 countries and almost 7.8 billion people in the world today. They speak thousands of languages, the number of which is estimated to be between 5,000 and 7,000. Many of these human beings produce works of verbal art just like their predecessors did in the past. Almost every culture has its literature and some scholars devote their lives to finding and completing old pieces of writing. Nevertheless, literary onomastics, a branch of the study of names devoted to onyms in literature, is often regarded as secondary with regard to other subdisciplines of onomastics.

The only current international academic journals dedicated entirely to the study of proper names in literature are *il Nome nel testo – Rivista internazionale di onomastica letteraria*, an important review published annually in Italy since 1999, and the *Journal of Literary Onomastics* (successor to *Literary Onomastics Studies*, 1974–89) which has appeared annually since 2010 (with the exception of years 2018 and 2013). *JLS* claims on its web-site to be "the only scholarly periodical devoted to the study of names in literary texts", but *il Nome nel testo* has priority.

One collection worth mentioning is *Onomastyka literacka* (*Literary onomastics*) published in Poland in 1993. More recently, two special issues of journals have been published. The first is an issue of *Romance Studies* entitled *Naming, Unnaming, and Renaming* (volume 31, number 3/4 (2013)), and the other, titled *Names in Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, and Mystery*, is an issue of *Names. A Journal of Onomastics* (volume 64, number 2 (2016)). Moreover, an entire section consisting of five chapters by prominent scholars has been published in *The Oxford handbook of names and naming* (2016).

Apart from the specialized periodicals mentioned above, literary onomastics has received some attention resulting in monographs, a few collections of articles and a great number of individual texts scattered in different journals and series with wider scope. Most prominent among the series in onomastics which include monographs on literary themes is *Nominatio*, produced in Pisa, Italy. The general onomastics journals which most regularly carry literary material are *Rivista Italiana di Onomastica* (*RIOn*) and *Names*.[1]

The aim of the guest editors of this issue of *Onoma* is to add to this literary onomastic research a work which not only concentrates entirely on proper names

[1] We are indebted to Enzo Caffarelli for pointing out certain omissions in his note in *Onoma* 54 (2019). The original text of this Introduction, as published online in 2019, has been amended post-release to take account of his important remarks.

BDD-A31174 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:08:30 UTC)

in literature but is also devoted solely to the theoretical aspects of this subdiscipline. The six articles appear in alphabetical order of the authors' surnames.

Richard Coates develops the ideas forming The Pragmatic Theory of Properhood to explore what *meaning* means in relation to proper names in artistic products, principally literature. He focuses especially on the linguistic bases of name creation as a purposive historical act, deliberately contrasting what is necessary with those approaches to literature which tend to minimise the role of the author. Two further onomastically relevant issues, the involvement of names in the process of reading and the impossibility, from one perspective, of their translation, are also dissected.

Žaneta Dvořáková writes about literary onomastic research in the Czech Republic. She summarises its accomplishments taking into account not only Czech linguists but also literary theoreticians. She also compares different terms used by scholars to refer to (almost) the same functions of proper names. To this, Dvořáková adds her ideas about the issue of onymic functions. She believes that because they are intertwined, complement each other and work together, functions are to be understood in their mutual relations and not in isolation.

In the first of her articles, Martyna Katarzyna Gibka addresses the issue of functions served by characters' proper names in novels. She does not analyse all types of onyms in literature in general, but only this particular group of proper names in one form of literature. This is because the tools in the theoretical approach that she proposes are based on the structure of the novel as an art-form. Moreover, to examine other groups of onyms, these tools will most probably have to be adjusted. Since the methodology is founded on the act of naming and the act of using a name, the author has characterized it as the theory of two acts.

Gibka's second article is about functions of characters' proper names in television series. She wants to develop the theoretical framework introduced in her first article and verify whether it can be applied to genres other than novels. She does not, therefore, change the group of onyms under analysis, but applies the theory of two acts (the act of naming and the act of using a name) in an examination of the onyms in a television series. As one might expect, these acts differ in some respects from those established in the first essay; however, the two pairs have also some elements in common. Having shown the applicability of the theory of two acts to two forms of human creativity, Gibka intends to confirm whether the methodology can be used to study all groups of onyms.

Volker Kohlheim addresses the issue of a total reevaluation of proper names used in literary texts (as against names in real-world contexts). He challenges the claim that onyms in literature have the same main task as onyms in real-life communication. In addition to this, Kohlheim discusses other functions and aspects of proper names, e.g. their semantic role, ambivalence and ambiguity, in and outside of literary works.

BDD-A31174 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:08:30 UTC)

Grant Smith discusses names as a type of sign. Using *The tempest* by Shakespeare, he shows the symbolic potentiality of onyms. Having claimed that *nomina propria* often refer to multiple referents in Shakespeare's plays, Smith tries to distinguish six types of reference in the writer's last play. Even though he does not find examples of all types in *The tempest*, he shows the importance of the symbolic meaning of proper names.

The article section is followed by reviews of three important works on onomastics published in 2019. These publications include two books on literary onomastics and a collection of articles about proper names not only in literature. Hopefully, these reports will bring their objects, and promote the discipline in general, to a wider audience.

Literary onomastics is too vast an area of research to be accommodated in one special issue. Nevertheless, a considerable part of the subdiscipline's theory and method has been assembled here. It is our hope to draw more attention to this field of study as well as to keep the attention of those already interested in it. It is also our desire that tools and methods of literary onomastics are developed, advanced, improved, that a strong international society for literary onomastics and a platform for international cooperation in the subject are created. Finally, that a school for young literary onomasticians is established and all valuable research is translated into English and available to scholars investigating proper names in literature all over the world.

References

Biolik, M. (ed.). 1993. *Onomastyka literacka* [Literary onomastics]. Olsztyn: Wydawnictwa Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Olsztynie.

Hough, C. (ed.). 2016. *The Oxford handbook of names and naming*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

il Nome nel testo – Rivista internazionale di onomastica letteraria. 1999–. (https://riviste.edizioniets.com/innt/index.php/innt).

Journal of Literary Onomastics. 2010–. (https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/jlo/).

Names: A Journal of Onomastics. 1952–. (https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ynam20).

Nominatio. Collana de studi onomastici. 2002–. (http://www.edizioniets.com/view-Collana.asp?Col=Nominatio.%20Collana%20di%20studi%20onomastici). (Book series published by Edizione ETS, series editors: Maria Giovanna Arcamone, Davide Di Camilli, Bruno Porcelli, and Alda Rossebastiano.)

Rivista italiana di Onomastica (RIOn). 1995–. (https://web.archive.org/web/20120627010719/http://www.editriceromana.com/4/Abbonamenti/Rivista_Italiana_di_Onomastica_RIOn_Abbonamento_annuale/#italian).

BDD-A31174 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:08:30 UTC)