Names in Derivative Literature and Parodies

W.F.H. Nicolaisen
SUNY Binghamton
Names in Derivative Literature and Parodies

W.F.H. Nicolaisen

State University of New York
Binghamton, New York

It is a little disconcerting to find that, when one thinks of oneself at one's most innovative and involved in the process of breaking new ground, the furrow one is about to plow is nothing like as new as one had imagined. While working on this paper and accumulating the required illustrative substance, I discovered - and I should have known this all along - that three of the major aspects of this study have been part and parcel of my infatuation with literary onomastics for quite some time now. First, the genre which I want to explore for my purposes - the novel - has been, besides the ballad, my principal pre-occupation ever since I first started dabbling in the study of names in literature in 1973,¹ the year in which coincidentally like-minded scholars gathered for the first time in Brockport, N.Y., to discuss exclusively the literary facets of onomastics, or the onomastic facts of literature, depending on the way in which one approaches this complex topic. Secondly, the special focus of this presentation, the investigation of the function of names in what I have called 'derivative' literature, has also been one of my pet themes for many years, whether in an author's own extension and enrichment of a particular regional and social setting in a number of works, as in Hardy's Wessex novels² or Trollope's Barsetshire series, the adoption of a setting created by one author for another as in Angela Thirkell's choir
of Trollope's fictitious county as the geographical backdrop to her own new fictions,\(^3\) or the thematic proliferation of stories about castaways on desert islands in the so-called Robinsonades.\(^4\) Thirdly, this essay is a further contribution to the basic theme of names as intertextual devices which I examined in some detail last year in Montreal, mainly in connection with Sir Walter Scott's Waverley Novels.\(^5\) I might even add a minor point by reminding you that I have already had a brief onomastic encounter with one of the novels central to this discussion - Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights.\(^6\) Come to think of it, it looks, doesn't it, as if far from putting my hand to a plow that will turn over virgin soil, I will be indulging in the repetitive act of re-plowing, re-harrowing and re-planting a well-worn field, and a pretty small field at that.

And yet, as long as nobody expects any generalizing definitions and all-embracing theories at the end of the exercise, there will be something new and different about this literary onomastic excursion, and that is the particular relationship of the derived pieces of fiction to the originals on which they are based and without which they would not exist. For want of a better word, I have termed the literary works in question 'derivative' although there may well be a more appropriate term to describe and define them. On publishers' blurbs they are often known as sequels, especially if they continue a story at the point at which the original left off, thus violating, in a sense, the unity of plot deliberately devised by the original author. For this and other reasons,
it is easy to sneer at them and to refer to their derivative second-handedness in derogatory language. For the purposes of this essay, however, I want to take them seriously because it seems a fascinating task to search for the ways in which, in addition to other literary means, the evocative bonding of the intertextuality of names has been utilized in order to make derivation a legitimate creative act with plausible results. In this context and pursuit, I see parodies as special variants of the derivative enterprise, in so far as they often mock, burlesque or debunk the originals with which they are linked while not only owing their very existence to them but also feeding on the tension between model and ironic imitation and satirical exaggeration which is at the heart of most parody, whether serious or humorous, as a secondary literary phenomenon. There is no parodia, no parallel or counter song, without an oide, a song. The question which arises in this connection is not so much how names are deployed in parody - both the trivial travesty and the existential criticism - but rather how names are parodied, function as onomastic parodies.

But, first of all, a brief glance at non-parodic derivative extensions. This discussion will focus on two recent novels - Anna L'Estrange's Return to Wuthering Heights (1977) and Jeffrey Caine's Heathcliff (1978) - both of which, as their name-dominated titles indicate, are concerned with events either not told, or following those depicted, in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights (1847), that other toponymically entitled novel that preceded them by about 130 years. It is
thus through their onomastic titles that these two later works of fiction are directly, overtly and aggressively linked with their earlier progenitor, one condensing its intensions into the intertextual echo of the fateful toponym, the other telescoping its artistic concerns into the identity of a personal name.

Naturally, there is no need here for plot summaries but in order to understand the ambience of Return to Wuthering Heights, we have to remember the complex human relationships embedded both in the Earnshaw-Heathcliff-Linton onomastic triad and in the toponymic Thrushcross Grange-Wuthering Heights contrast. As I said in my earlier tussle with this novel:?

Four measurable miles may seem but a little distance but when they separate Wuthering Heights from Thrushcross Grange they spell out the chasm between Heathcliff and the Earnshaws at one end and the Lintons at the other, between a brutal, gloomy place where 'no conventional morality prevails,' and a place that is altogether more human and secure, less invaded by primitive passion. For once the lexical meaning of the two names chimes in with the atmosphere of the places they designate. Thrushcross is gentle, inviting, agreeable, while Wuthering Heights is tumultuous, bare, elemental. Our toponymic symbols are a perfect fit, appropriate labels both for the localities and for the people who live there. And in the background the Penistone Craggs loom as natural manifestations of local tradition and threatening lore, and Gimmerton Kirk decays.

What is so remarkable about Anna L'Estrange's Return to Wuthering Heights and what makes it such a successful novel is the way in which she sustains this onomastic symbolism in all its fateful, tragic dimensions, mirroring in the course
of another two generations the stark contrasts, the severe juxtapositions, the inescapable intertwinings of Emily Brontë's masterpiece. There is another Lockwood, son of the Brontë narrator, to investigate and cast the story into publishable form; there is another female member of the Dean family, Agnes, great-niece of Ellen Dean, to be the actual raconteur; and there are more Earnshaws and Heathcliffs to continue the feud, with a wilful Catherine usually in the thick of it. Name consciousness, name power, name mischief are ever present, and Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange continue to be the onomastic foci as well as dramatic loci of the events that shape the story. Generational repetition dominates the relationships between the two families and their properties, 'the Grange and the Height,' as they are known for short.

The second Cathy about to be married to Hareton Earnshaw, her cousin, at the end of the Brontë narrative, and now Hareton's wife at the beginning of the sequel, identifies more and more with her mother, both in her hallucinations and in her lucid moments; 'her obsession with her mother was turning her into a copy of her,' says Agnes Dean. Her motivation is as much onomastic as anything else: '... in her books,' Cathy reports after a long-desired visit to the Heights, 'I found scribbings she had made and little notes and then her name in her girlish handwriting, Catherine Earnshaw, and I realized I was Catherine Earnshaw, too, having been Catherine Linton just as my mother was.' Like her mother, she falls hopelessly in love with a Heathcliff, Jack, the elder Heathcliff's natural son begotten during his father's three-year
absence from Wuthering Heights as recorded by Emily Brontë. He turns up at the Heights with a Mrs. Ibbitson, his mother, who has leased the property from Hareton Earnshaw. Without knowledge of his descent, Agnes recognizes obvious Heathcliff qualities in him:

He was a tremendously tall fellow and muscular, with a dark, sallow face and eyes almost hidden beneath great black brows.

And sums up his character as 'at once masterly and sinister.'

As part of his mother's campaign for what she perceives as 'justice' ('let the Earnshaws suffer for what they did to Heathcliff'), he seduces Cathy, and their son, Anthony, although brought up as Hareton Earnshaw's favorite child, becomes the typical Heathcliff thorn in the flesh for the next generation. Cathy dies, still a very young woman, at the Heights in the same room as her mother. Her previous refusal, however, to have her second child, a daughter, named after herself - 'I think we have had enough Catherines already' - does not prevent her child - called Margaret Catherine Earnshaw after her husband's and her own mutual grandmother - when grown into a marriageable young lady, to suffer in the same fashion as herself from Jack Heathcliff with whom she elopes to Brussels, only to be rejected as boring after conceiving twins. Having followed her back to Thrushcross Grange and having treated her cruelly during her enforced stay with him at Wuthering Heights, he comes to a similarly gruesome end as his father. The remaining Heathcliff, Anthony, abducts his half-brother's, Rainton's, wife Jessica, sister-in-law to Margaret in her
second, happier marriage, and lives with her and their daugh-
ter - another Cathy - at the Heights at the conclusion of the
narrative. One has the impression that the continuing Lock-
wood quest concerning 'the Earnshaw family and one Mr. Heath-
cliff'⁰¹ is not over at the end of The Return to Wuthering
Heights and that it is a struggle likely to be repeated in
generations to come. As Margaret complains to her former
nurse after her own unwilling personal return to the place:
'Oh what fatal thing do these Heathcliff men have that draws
us Earnshaw women to them, Agnes?'⁰²

As is to be expected, the feud between them is just as
much onomastic as it is genealogical, psychological and eco-

omic. It is the Grange vs. the Heights, and no number of
journeys between the two, covering that all too real four-mile
distance, can reduce the gap. It is above all, however, the
bitter Heathcliff vs. Earnshaw dispute in which names really
matter. 'Say Captain Heathcliff calls -,' demands Jack on an
unwelcome visit to Thrushcross Grange and the Earnshaws, 'and
mind the Heathcliff Agnes, for I have changed my name [from
Ibbotson] to that my father bore.'⁰³ And in the naming of
his twins he insists peremptorily on their being given the
names Josiah and Elizabeth as an onomastic gesture clearly
intended to demonstrate non-Earnshaw proprietorship by his
side of the family:⁰⁴

'Is there aught wrong with two good English
names like that?' queried the Colonel. 'Josiah,
after my stepfather, that good man who provided
the wherewithal for me to make a fortune, and
Elizabeth which is my mother's second name - I
care not for Dorothy [her first name] as such;
it has not enough command in it.'
Names, then, structure and shape Anna L'Estrange's derivative novel as much as Emily Brontë's original. They color and invite family loyalties and genealogical possessiveness. Not only do the surnames - Earnshaw, Linton, Heathcliff, and even Agnes's maiden and married names, Dean and Sutcliff - emphasize links with the land but many of the Earnshaw's first names, Hindley, Hareton, Rain - also confirm this sense of place, in the original as well as in its sequel. On the matrilineal side, in four generations of Earnshaws there is always at least one woman who bears the fateful name Catherine, and even Anthony Heathcliff's and Jessica Earnshaw's illegitimate offspring is another Cathy, although they are no blood relations. The believability of the sequel is achieved through a variety of stylistic means but the most compelling, because most immediately intertextual and most convincingly textual, of these are the onomastic devices, with regard to the naming of both persons and places, of which, by the way, Liverpool still remains the major place of origin for the outsider although London, a few continental places, names prominently connected with the battles of the Napoleonic Wars, and some Yorkshire towns of industrial significance indicate additional locations of otherness and escape.

In this connection, I claimed in 1979 that the four place names of the Brontë novel - Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange, Penistone Crags and Gimmerton - 'spell it all out, are symbol enough for a severely focused existential juxtaposition and Heathcliff can only disappear into, and return from, the unknown, the unknowable during his temporary absence.'
Within the covers of Emily's book this is undoubtedly true, and yet that three-year lacuna in Heathcliff's life when he is absent from the knowable life on the Yorkshire Moors, i.e. knowable through the observing and reporting presence of Nelly Dean, has had a curious fascination for other writers attracted to the magnetism of Wuthering Heights. In Anna L'Estrange's sequel, as we have seen, some of Heathcliff's activities during that period, though otherwise not specified, produce Jack, the Earnshaw scourge of the next two generations, for, as Hareton Earnshaw explains to his wife Cathy, 'Dorothy Ibbitson was Heathcliff's mistress on and off for three years when he left the Heights after hearing that your mother would not marry him, but preferred the nice manners of your father and the comfort of Thruscross Grange.' While the conception of the diabolus ex machina, Jack Heathcliff, is undoubtedly a major event, it far from fills the whole gap between his father's disappearance and re-appearance, and the remainder of his activities continue to remain relatively unknown; a complete violation of the silence which Emily Brontë imposes on those years is therefore avoided. After all, for a while Heathcliff simply and not unpredictably seeks refuge again in the same unknown from which Hareton's grandfather once extracted him, introducing him into the thoroughly known world of Wuthering Heights.

Jeffrey Caine's Heathcliff, on the other hand, is almost solely concerned with those supposedly unknowable three years, which by the end of his narrative are at least as known as the many years of his stay at the Heights. The author treats
us to a boisterous, rollicking, swash-buckling, wenching adventure story of intrigue and counter-intrigue, confining imprisonment and daring escape that could undoubtedly be a satisfactory explanation for Heathcliff's absence from Yorkshire for so many years. Lockwood is again the final narrator although his account is, as usual, second-hand. The first part of the novel is a long letter, accidentally discovered and surreptitiously despatched to Lockwood by the faithful Nelly Dean, a letter, as it turns out, written by Heathcliff to Cathy while the former is waiting for his execution in a London jail. This account is supplemented, from Heathcliff's secretly engineered survival of a hanging to his return to Wuthering Heights, by his would-be paramour, Mrs. Elizabeth Durrant or Basset, whose narrative as told to Lockwood fills the second half of the novel. Admittedly, there are some of the onomastic trimmings of the Brontë original, particularly in Nelly's covering note and in the opening chapter of Heathcliff's own account, and Cathy Linton or Earnshaw is a never-to-be-forgotten presence, a promise to one, a threat to another; admittedly, there is also a certain conjuring with the Heathcliff/Earnshaw name when the protagonist, unable to carry out his original intention 'to be nothing, to have come from nowhere and lived as a stranger, finally to die alone, a nameless thing that perished one night in a storm,' 18 is challenged to identify himself to a fellow traveler: 'I said my name was Heathcliff Earnshaw, having determined to call myself by that love-hated name which defines the scale of my passions....' 19 Nevertheless, in spite of these deliberate though infrequent
onomastic hints and the general frame of the story, one has
the impression that the hero's name, Heathcliff, is spurious,
perhaps even falsely adopted and therefore easily replaceable
by another one, and that the implied Wuthering Heights connec-
tion is not an essential one in what is, in its own right, a
novel well worth reading. Whereas the intertextual potential
of names is fully and successfully exploited in Anna L'Estrange's
derivative sequel, it fails to do its job convincingly in
Jeffrey Caine's narrative, partly perhaps because the unknow-
able is ultimately nameless and cannot be conjured up through
onomastic trickery. In order to make persuasive connections,
it is not enough to re-use names; they have to be vital parts
of the new as well as the old. If employed with skill and
care, however, there seems to be no limit to what names can
do to help create acceptable intertexts.

As already indicated, the connection between original
and parody is very different from that between an original
and its ordinary derivative, and we therefore also have very
different intertextual expectations. On the onomastic level,
for example, one would not expect the mere reaffirming rep-
tition of names but rather some form of manipulative reshaping
which somehow echoes the name models without striving for
accurate duplication. The subject matter of this part of the
essay will be Stella Gibbons' novel Cold Comfort Farm (1932)
and two of the novels which it so successfully parodies,
Constance Holme's The Lonely Plough (1914) and Mary Webb's
Precious Bane (1924), both not untypical examples of the
earthy, melodramatic novels of their period. Parodies are
not always condemnations but through their ludic exaggeration often manage to point up the weakness of a work, author or genre. Mary Webb's novels, for example, have sometimes been compared to those of Thomas Hardy, 'but there was a naive primitiveness about her work which prevented it from ever attaining tragic stature.'\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, John Buchan praised its 'rare beauty and simplicity,'\textsuperscript{21} and Stanley Baldwin, in an introduction to a reprint of Precious Bane in 1928, not only spoke highly of her lyrical intensity but also applauded her 'blending of human passion with the fields and skies.'\textsuperscript{22}

Obviously, parodies can leech on to many aspects of a literary work - imagery, style, linguistic expression, personnel, world view, plot, setting, and so on - and when playfully exaggerated or burlesqued, even the best work tend to dissolve or disintegrate, and are somehow never the same again. Reverence and awe are not stances appropriate to the parodist, whose aim is to distort and to displace. It is also well worth remembering that one has to have some knowledge of the target work in order to appreciate a parody fully. Presumably, it is possible to read Cold Comfort Farm without knowing anything about the fictions of Constance Holme, Mary Webb, and others of their ilk, but since it was not primarily written to stand on its own feet, most of the tension which is such an important ingredient of a parody's very existence loses its creative quality as an essential motivating force. For our purposes, this means that Stella Gibbons' onomastic inventory, though delicious for its own sake in its hilarious wickedness,
gains its genuine effectiveness only in comparison with or when contrasted to, or measured against, similar inventories in the target genre.

This has been my personal experience for I read Cold Comfort Farm first and, always alert to the possibilities a work might offer for literary onomastic analysis, chuckled at the witty constellation of names associated with the Starkadder family who have always entered their house by the back door because it had been Red Raleigh Starkadder’s whim in 1835 to have ‘the front door of the farm [face] a perfectly inaccessible ploughed field.’

There are the grieving Judith and her husband Amos who preached in the Church of the Quivering Brethren in Beeshorn, their sons Reuben and Seth, the latter smouldering with sex, Micah mightiest of the cousins but now a ruined giant of a man, his nephew Urk with foxy ears, his brother Ezra, horse where Urk is foxy, Caraway, a silent man, wind-shaven and lean, with long wandering fingers, Harkaway, his son, also silent but given to bursts of fury about very little, Amos’s half-brothers, Luke and Mark, and Mizpah, poor daft Rennet, and Elfine the dryad, the writer of poetry, in need of a little polish because she is engaged to Richard Hawk-Monitor of the Hall, and, of course, old Aunt Ada Doom who ‘had seen something nasty in the woodshed when she was two’ and has not yet got over the shock at the age of seventy-nine. Even Adam Lambsbreath and Mark Dolour, the farm-hands, have Biblical names, as has Meriam, the daughter of Agony Beatle, the hired girl, to whom something uncontrollable happens every year ‘in
the fullness o' summer, when the sukebind hangs heavy from
the wains . . . .25 This assembly of pseudo-Biblical manhood
lives or works on a farm, well named Cold Comfort, where the
vicious gelding that pulls the buggy is called Viper, the
ploughing team are Arsenic and Travail, and the milch cows
have names like Graceless, Pointless, Feeless, and Aimless,
served admirably by Big Business, the bull. The farm, with
field names like Nettle Flitch and Ticklepenny's Corner, is
'crouched under the bulk of Mockuncle hill,'26 and the nearest
village is Howling, where the only public house, the Condemn'd
Man, is presided over by Mrs. Murther, the landlady. Outsiders
- apart from Micah's Susan, Mark's Phoebe, Luke's Prue,
Caraway's Letty, and Ezra's Jane - are cousin Flora Poste
from Mouse Place in London, Mr. Mybug the writer who believes
that Branwell Brontë, not Emily, wrote Wuthering Heights, and
Earl P. Neck, of Beverly Hills, Hollywood. It's a world in
whose depiction the author has conveniently marked, Baedeker-
like, with one, two or three asterisks the passages particu-
larly striking or worth reading, a self-contained world of
exaggerated earthiness, simplistic naturalness and a kind of
rustic retardation of people too close to the land. As seen
through the eyes of the modern Londoner, Flora, it is a world
crying out for new ideas, washed curtains and, in view of the
annual influence of the sukebind, contraceptive devices. It's
all very witty, very funny and very entertaining, as it is.

It was only when I re-read Cold Comfort Farm after having
read The Lonely Plough and Precious Bane, however, that its
parodic brilliance dawned on me. 'The pull of the land, like
the pull of the sea, is in our blood," says Constance Holme in the Preface to the 1931 edition of her novel. "... The land teaches us these virtues - loyalty, straight dealing and confidence in our fellows - for it will be satisfied with nothing less."27 And Mary Webb, in her own Foreword to Precious Bane, pronounces that "there is permanence, a continuity in country life which makes the lapse of centuries seem of little moment."28 One might perhaps add that there is an attitude of beatification of the land here, a 'Blut und Boden' romanticism, a veritable worship of the festive, enduring earth, that is ripe for more than ridicule.

Within this context and as part of a general parodic enterprise, from where did Stella Gibbons get her names and what does she do with or to the originals? It seems as if both Constance Holme and Mary Webb made their contributions. One of the major features of parodic distortion is accumulation as part of hyperbolic exaggeration, and the Starkadders' fortidding Old Testament array of names - Amos, Reuben, Seth, Mikah, Ezra, etc. - may well have its origins in Gideon Sarn, brother, and one of the major protagonists, of the first person narrator Prue Sarn in Precious Bane, and Harkaway and Caraway are likely to be rhyming echoes of the Winnerahs and Dockerays of The Lonely Plough. It is, however, more the general atmosphere of unusual names that has been re-located in Cold Comfort Farm. Where Constance Holme's Westmoried scene is populated with people called Helwise and Lancelot Lancaster, Harriet and Fawcett Knewstubb, Bracken Holliday, Hamer Shaw, Ollivant Thorne, and the like, as well as the Winnerahs and the
Dockerays, and where Mary Webb’s Shopshire has produced people like Kester Woodseaves, Felix and Hepzibah Beguildry, Tulvyriah Sexton, Farmer Huglet, Granfer Collard, Mr. Camlet the apothecary, Felena, the tavern-keeper’s wife at Silveston, and Sukey and Moll, daughters of the ox-driver’s wife at Plash, Stella Gibbon’s Sussex offers us the Starkadders, including Caraway, Harkaway, poor daft Rennet and Elfine the dryad, Urk the foxy and Aunt Ada Doom, and, of course, also Deborah Checkbottom, Adam Lambsbreath and Agony Beatle. How many of us have ever come across names even closely resembling these, names that are obviously meant to represent teeming earthiness and rugged rusticity, juxtaposed socially by Jeffrey Kennet Cospatrick, tenth Baron Bluecaster in The Lonely Plough, Squire Camperdine and daughter Dorbella in The Precious Bane, and their caricature Richard Hawk-Monitor at the Hall in Cold Comfort Farm?

Place names are similarly employed by Stella Gibbons to expose mannerisms and weaknesses in her target works: It does not take long to discover the models or toponymic stimuli of her Howling, Beeshorn, Mockuncle Hill, Nettle Flitch Field and Ticklepenny’s Corner in Constance Holme’s Rakestraw, Gilmichel, Tophorns, Dick Crag, Gilthnotin, Watters, Sondurath, Crabtree, Whygills, Meadows Ivy, Cunswick, Bythan Knott, and the like, and in May Webb’s Sarn, Plash, Brauntun, the East Coppy, Callard’s Dingle and Silvertun. It is not so much that individual names have been persiflaged but rather their general demeanor, so to speak, their rustic preciousness. There can be no doubt in any reader’s mind that Cold Comfort Farm
is situated in a landscape similar to those by which Rakestraw
and Sarn are surrounded, landscapes exaggeratedly non-urban,
and almost laughably unsophisticated.

In a way, the onomastic parodist has therefore her task
made easy by the two novelists at whom she is throwing her
darts, for the original names, both of persons and of places,
are, one might claim, already parodies in and of themselves
that require very little change, if any, in order to be exposed
as what they are. Only the merest hints are needed to turn
them into self-burlesquing caricatures. While it would there-
fore be rash to suggest that Howling reminds one of Plash,
Mockuncle of Gilthrotin, or Ticklepenny's Corner of Callard's
Dingle, these names have nevertheless an intertextual quality
which is generic rather than individual, hyperbolically imi-
tative rather than neutrally re-creative. Their main purpose,
of course, is to make us smile and through our smiles to
reflect on our own weaknesses, to think anew and to start
afresh. Stella Gibbons succeeds admirably in this enterprise
of sophisticated tomfoolery.

Naturally, this brief investigation has to be regarded as
no more than a beginning supplemented by additional studies
with similar aims. Tentative and limited as its findings may
be, however, there can be little doubt that names, as easily
recognizable bearers of highly condensed, and therefore inten-
sive, intertextual freight, play a significant role in the
shaping of derivational literature and, especially, in its
important sub-genre, the parody.

W. F. H. Nicolaïsen
State University of New York
Binghamton, New York
NOTES

1. My first published attempt in this respect was "The Place-Names of Wessex," Literary Onomastics Studies 2 (1975) 58-82.

2. Loc. cit.


7. Ibid., 97.


9. Ibid., 34.

10. Ibid., 79.

11. Ibid., 60.

12. Ibid., 68.

13. Ibid., 286.

14. Ibid., 158.

15. Ibid., 278.


17. L'Estrange, Return, 112.


19. Ibid., 25.


24. Ibid., 85. also 113.

25. Ibid., 64.

26. Ibid., 33.

