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Fiction and Folklore, Etymology and Folk Etymology, Linguistics and Literature

Leonard R.N. Ashley

Brooklyn College, City University of New York

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At these conferences on literary onomastics, and at regional institutes and annual meetings of The American Name Society and in the journals both onomastic and more traditionally linguistic (all of which, I am glad to say, have seemed to take an increased interest in literary onomastics since the Conference on Literary Onomastics and the journal LOS began), I have on occasion complained that there has been, in my opinion, too much attention to impressionistic reports of names (often in fiction, too often in fiction unfamiliar to the audience or readership) and too much emphasis on etymology, not enough on function. I have also noted and regretted that literary onomasticians have tended to play the same sort of name-explaining games in one work of fiction after another and neglected their responsibility to form general hypotheses and to address the basic questions of some "rules" for naming in literature and for criticizing literary names.

At this conference and in this journal, as elsewhere, I have also put an emphasis on the need to broaden our definitions of "literature" and move on from examinations of naming in prose fiction such as novels and short stories to considerations of the special needs of names in poetry and drama, allegory and realism, popular entertainments and other more neglected fields than those which are so
easy (say, the comedies of manners) or established (say, "high art"
 novels rather than detective stories, science fiction, fantasy, soap
 operas, films, television, and other concerns which have, after all,
a far greater if perhaps less lasting effect upon the general public
 than do highly-acclaimed and largely-unread fiction by the darlings
 of the intellectual critics in what one poet called "the little maga-
 zines that died to make verse free"). I have called for general com-
 ments (such as my own that the obviously artificial names of certain
didactic works have a "distancing" effect which can be and in the most
artistic productions is manipulated by the ingenious writer) and gen-
 eral interests.

Moreover, in common with many other onomasticicians, I have of
course reacted to charges that onomastics is not "science" by respond-
ing that while we ought to try to systematize our knowledge and move
from individual comments to hypotheses about names and how they work
in literary works, and while we ought to "interface" with sciences
such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, literary
criticism must always remain an art to a large and to an important ex-
tent. Nonetheless, from sciences we can learn high standards of re-
sponsibility, which is all to the good, as well as the need to con-
struct edifices of thought, not merely piles of curiosities. From
our point of view we can teach the more narrowly scientific invest-
igators something of the usefulness of cross-cultural and inter-
disciplinary research and the value of the personal and aesthetic
elements in the appreciation of facts.
In the present paper, then, I propose to eschew describing (or merely listing) names in a novel you have not read, to reach out for material a little bit unfamiliar, to examine that material in such a way as to permit me to take a chance at making some general comments, and to connect onomastic (or humanistic) materials with linguistic (or scientific) concerns. I shall venture into folklore and what used to be called "popular antiquities" in connection with a sampling of names both anthroponymic and toponymic. I hope that historical and etymological research will throw some light on particular examples of folk imagination and also on general tendencies of people in connection with name-giving behavior and belief in life and literature.

The linguistic focus has one pitfall: boredom. I have heard enough linguistic talks at meetings of (say) The International Linguistic Association and The American Society of Geolinguistics—to name two organizations on whose executive committees I serve—to realize that most often linguistic points are better read by one than at one. And then I have read enough in the linguistic journals to realize that the study of words has become as inarticulate (or as unreadable) as the study of philosophy these days, depriving me of much of the pleasure I used to take in reading the scholarship in both of these fields. "Science" now produces this sort of thing (from a fairly recent article in philosophy I threw down in disgust):

But from (15) and the fact that \( \mathbb{W} \) includes \( A \)

it follows that (19) is false. So \( GC \) does not include \( GT \); so \( GC \& GT \) is possible. But \( \mathbb{W} \) includes
GT; hence GT includes \( \overline{W} \); and from this together with the possibility of \( GC \& GT \) it follows that (18) is false. The same goes for (17); since GT includes GC, (17) is true if and only (19) is; but (since \( \overline{W} \) includes A) if (15) is true, (19) is not.

--Journal of Philosophy

Here is linguistics:

The rules for vowel mutation presently as formulated, reported here for convenience, are

\[
(2) \begin{cases} y \rightarrow \emptyset \end{cases}
\]

\[
(4) \begin{cases} y \rightarrow \emptyset \end{cases}
\]

and additionally,

\[
(5) \begin{cases} \# \rightarrow \emptyset \\
\end{cases}
\]

Even ignoring schwa and \# (comment:\@\$\$\$\$\$!!), why "for" not "of," why "presently" not "now" (and why not simply "formulated" or just "are"), and why "additionally" with "and"? Even for Word, this is outrageous. Has the learned author no competent editors?

Let us be certain that Names, LOS, and other onomastic journals never get this "scientific"!

Let me see what I can do to link onomastics with scientific linguistics without perpetrating anything of that sort, and after balking at "and additionally" I had better get right to it.

Certainly literary works are altered over time and must be examined in each age in cultural contexts, the author's and our own. Linguistics knows that language alters in the course of time, and this means not just vowel shifts and such technical matters but also cultural and such historical matters.
It is a commonplace to remark that many times words are corrupted, their origins and original intentions obscured, new and often more useful or attractive (from the new speakers' point of view) forms being imposed. A quelque chose becomes a kickshaw; later soldiers who make Ypres "Wipers" coin napoc="death" (il n'y a plus). Inflammable gives way to flammable. Disinterested comes to mean one thing to the die-hard purist and something else to everyone else. In American place-names, Purgatoire gives way to Picketwire and Cap d'Espoir reverses to Cape Despair, just to stay with French-English examples, because I began with quelque chose.

Here is a generalization not without application in all areas of onomastics: a new population struggling with the names of an earlier population, especially when ignorant of foreign languages, attempts to make found names more significant in their own tongue. OK, consider:

\[ W_1 P(I) + \text{\#} = W_2 P(II) \]

The English, for instance, if you will not dismiss examples as anecdotal and unscientific, had enough trouble with French invasion and other local languages in Britain that (for political and linguistic as well as historical and psychological reasons) they mangled Gaelic and altered abhir-croisean (confluence of troubles) to Applecross, baile uachtar (upper town) to Ballywater, bun'-a-gleanna (end of the glen) to Bonnyglen, leaving later generations to seek apples, water, or beauty where there never had been any. There was often a coill (wood) where they placed a hill, a mointin (bog) where they said there was a mountain, much to the confusion of toponymists. There was no
doe at The Doe (Donegal); this is what the English-speakers did with a simple description, hardly a name in some senses, na d'Tuath (the districts).

What's the application to onomastics? It comes when one starts looking for apples around Applecross. For literary onomastics? When one sees that a story has been woven around a non-existent doe.

Sometimes legends are lost as Gaelic (for example) is corrupted. Pointe-na-sige becomes Cheek Point and the "fairies" vanish, but that is more a matter for folklorists per se, and we must turn our attention here to legends that are born from misunderstood names. There now is a tale that at Carrigogunnel, a ruined castle near Shannon, a candle burns nightly in a broken window, all that remains of an ancient enchantment. But to ascribe Carrigogunnel to Gaelic carrig-n-gcoinne (rock of the candle) is flat wrong; rather, it was the carraig-o-gCoinell, the stronghold of the O'Connells. Similarly, all over Ireland there are tales that go back to no more than ignorance of Gaelic, folktales in cities and out in the country as well. In Cork, Coach-and-Six Lane comes merely from the surname of a Hugenot settler, Couchаноex being mangled in English, and Fuar cnocs is Gaelic for "cold hills," having nothing to do with any mysterious "four knocks" on a door in a fairytale.

Consider what a simple battlecry, Farrih!, can give rise to. Here is the Sassenach Edmund Spenser writing in The State of Ireland: a Scottish word, to weete, the name of one of the first kings of Scotland, called Farucus, Fergus, or
Ferragus, which fought against the Pictes, as ye may read in Buckhanan De rebus Scoticis.

George Buchanan (1506-1582) published in the year of his death Rerum Scotiarum historia, which the Concise Dictionary of National Biography claims was then "chief source from which foreigners derived their knowledge of Scotland." (What about Raphael Holinshed?) But back to Spenser:

but as others write, it was long before that, the name of their chief captayne, under whom they fought against the Africans, the which was then soe fortunate unto them, that ever sithence they have used to call upon his name in their battles.

From the battlecry Farrih! which it would not be unusual to discover Spenser got all mixed up came a strange story that Scota (who was alleged to have colonized Scotland with Egyptians) had a father whose name was Pharoah. Richard Stanyhurst (1547-1618), who contributed the description of Ireland to Holinshed's famous collection (so relied upon by Shakespeare), perpetuated that story.

Even the Picts to whom Spenser refers were not, as so often reported, "painted" as they battled the Romans but simply Gaelic peicta (fighters). In England the English got many names wrong, in life and in literature, and farther afield, in Scotland or Ireland, in Guernsey (where The Cherry Tree was once a tannery: Le Tcherotterie; where The Ugly Pier was once La Hogue à la Pierre, not ugly but stone) or in Fair Isle (once a faer isle, with sheep) or The Isle of Wight (where there was no brook at Carisbrook, only Wiht-gara byrig or a burg of the men of Wight), or in Wales or in Cornwall (oh, those place-
names and the weird ways they turned out in English mouths and maps!), indeed everywhere, from Rotten Row and Shotover Hill (Chateau vert) to their farthest settlements and most distant colonies, the English-speakers were often ludicrously unable to cope with strange tongues and occasionally lively in their imaginations, turning mistranslations into folklore tales, corruption into creation.

A certain contempt for things Irish is responsible for mangling the Gaeic, the same sort of superior attitude and prejudice we see in English slang: Irish banjo, Irish harp, Irish fortune, Irish toothache, Irish local, Irish confetti, Irish pennant—the list could go on. Welsh (the language of the original Britons, whom the English drove West to be "strangers") is still widely spoken in the tight little island, so perhaps it has less excuse for mangling than Irish or Scots Gaelic or the French of the Channel Islands, but still there are many names in folklore and on the map that are to be traced to no more than linguistic errors. Penmark may prompt a tale but is no more than pen (head) + march (horse). The Rivals cries for a "history," but is just Yr Eifl (The Fork). Scotland Bank, oddly enough, seems to have a Welsh connection and in the last century Saturday Review XLIII (p. 703) had this:

Near Bach Tumulus...is a spot called "Scotland Bank," to which the tradition clings that it got its name from a Scot having been hunted to death by dogs here in the [seventeenth-century] Civil War; but as the Welsh name for thistles would correspond in sound to the name Scotland, there is probably no real basis
for the tradition, except the general fact that the
Scots pillaged and overran the country during the
troubles at this period.

In Cornwall there has been no native speaker since the last quarter of the Eighteenth Century and about 90% of the placenames are in a dead language, offering lots of opportunity for getting them wrong—and getting the imagination working. Names that look English may not be English at all: Cornish are Mousehole (pronounced "mowzell" and derived from either moz-hayle=maiden’s brook or moz-hal=sheep moor), Start (stret=street), Truthwell ("Trawell," tre=farm and weel=high, though there is nothing at all high in the vicinity), Park Bean (park byghan=small field), Upton (epow=horses, ton=field), and more. Around a name such as Truthwell, considering all the holy wells of the West Country, it is almost inevitable that a false if interesting story will be woven. At the same time, folklore is lost when a name such as Venton East is created, for the English destroys Fenton Ust, St. Just’s Well. Some of the new names are charming: I like Penny Come Quick which once was but pen y cum gwic (head of the creek valley). I like The Lizard, once Celtic for a high cape. Jolly Town now stands on a desolate moor; it was diaul-to-wan (devil’s sandhill). Thursday’s Market (Marcajew) became Market Jew, and thereby hangs a tale.

Toponyms are especially interesting to deal with, I think, in linguistic context. I once wrote an article using them to establish and to some extent to date cultural points of contact and ancient trade
routes: where else can you find words with the place of origin so clearly stamped right on them? Toponyms can tell you how spices and silks from the East reached Western Europe, and many more things of historical import. Toponyms can help you to stick close to historical fact and analyze how the nature of one language affects what it does with the borrowed word-elements of another language, why Caso Hueso became Key West. American toponyms are a lot of fun and very revealing. They tell us (to pick an odd fact) that people naming a town in early America often used to meet not in the church or the post office but the general store: right off the shelves (as it were) they took the names for Cocoa Beach (Florida) and Coffee (Illinois) and even Marvin (they were looking for "a good safe name," and there was MARVIN on a safe in the corner of the store). They show us how people who don’t know the language of origin will think up or imagine a very strange explanation for a name: Azusa (California) was Gabriellino Indian for "skunk" but is sometimes said to be "A to Z in the USA," while Coalinga (California) sounds foreign (maybe Spanish or Amerindian) and was no more than Coaling Station A on a railroad. There's even crackerbarrel humor: Taintsville "Taint in Olviedo and taint in Cholula."

Our colleague Robert Rennick, tackling Arjay, Ep, Bypro (from Byproduct Oil Company, 1926), Crummies (a cow with a crooked horn is called a crummy there), and Williba (confected to be short enough to fit on a rubber stamp to cancel the mail) from the surname Willoughby, has eruditely and entertainingly reported on Kentucky Place Names, not missing Grab or Uz or any. Similarly, Gerald L. Cohen has delved
in the etymologies of Missouri placenames, and others have studied the toponymy of all the states. What's the connection with literary onomastics? Simply that if we understand how and why people make names of all sorts, confect them, corrupt them, we shall understand more of the same psychology of naming that informs the creation of fictional names and the effects they produce on readers. Also, because the place-names can often give rise, as I repeat, to folk literature.

Here are two such folk stories. Albany in Clinton County, Kentucky, is a fifth-class city with a first-class folk story. Professor Rennick first told it to me in a letter. Here is how he put it with admirable succinctness and point in his book Kentucky Place Names (1984, p. 3):

> When the county was organized in 1835, its seat was at Paoli, now an extinct village 2 mi s of the present courthouse. Here a post office was established on July 25, 1833. When an election was held in 1837 to find a permanent location for the seat the site of Benny Dowell's tavern was chosen. While the town is now generally believed to have been named for the capital of New York, it is said that, as the voting began, some of the more mellowed citizens began shouting "all for Benny," which got slurred to "All Benny"... still a variant pronunciation....

The folk, always inventive, will stick with weird explanations if they are colorful. I think Oroongo comes from the rich mines of South America being recalled in the hills of West Virginia, but folklorist Vance Randolph in Pissing in the Snow discovered that in the
Ozarks they won't hear (or never thought) of Orinoco becoming Ozonogo. Instead they explain that once upon a time the miners of the area used to rely upon a certain maid in a boardinghouse who, for money, would relieve their tensions after a hard week at work. She did, however, insist upon cash before delivery; in fact, "ore or no go" was her cry, and it has echoed down the years, for it still is the name of the little community where she lived so obscurely but so usefully those many decades ago.

If that ain't literature encapsulating the American spirit, I don't know what is! I'd trade all of Edna St. Vincent Millay, and perhaps throw in the complete works of some other ladies with three-barrelled names, for a book full of American tales like that one. Wouldn't you? And for a few volumes more of real Americana you can have all of Archibald MacLeish, Maxwell Anderson, and much more in exchange, say I.

Out of names misunderstood we got two extra sons of Zeus (the Dioskoroi) and the Discorides—who knew Sanskrit Dvipa-Sukadara, "island and abode of bliss"—and the wrong idea about Formosa (it's not beautiful in Spanish, it's Harmuza in Persian) and the false ideas that Eskimos (Samoyeds) were cannibals (when they were Russian samodin-individuals mistaken for other people) or that the Florida Indians called themselves Seminoles (their neighbors called them that, "fires over there") or that Sahara was a name (it translates "desert") or that Tartars were related to Tartarus (Hell) when they only spoke a language the Chinese considered to be "blah-blah" (just as the Creeks considered those who did not speak Greek to be barbarians just making bar-
bar noises). Speakers of other languages often seem to the stupid (or the arrogant, such as the Chinese and the Greeks) to be making senseless noises. We try to teach them our (sensible) language—or we fiddle with theirs. The desire to make significant is the cornerstone of literary onomastics, and even ought to warn writers that people may insist on seeing significance even where it was never intended as well as being hopelessly dense about picking up hints the writer thought obvious or (if obscure) at least worth working on until deciphered.

Language distorted has built edifices of distortion, even actual buildings. Take the Tomb of Abel north of Damascus, which is no such thing, only the ancient site of Abila. The Amazons lost one breast each to "scholars" who confused Greek māzos (breast) with an Asiatic deity (Mazu=moon). Anna Perenna, a Roman goddess who bestowed fruitful seasons, was never any more real than St. (now Mr.) Christopher: "she" was just Sanskrit apa-purna=food giver, gone wrong. Areopolis in the land of Moab was a city of rabbits, not Ares. Achterstrasse in Bonn (a dinky German town that was thrust into prominence) was never a "back street," only the way out to Aachen. London's Battersea was never battered by the sea (it's on The Thames) but St. Peter's Eye (where eye=island, the abbey church of St. Peter's is what we call Westminster Abbey). Bayswater has no bay; it was Bayard's watering place. Black Heath was never black, just bleak, nor Brooklyn anything to do with a brook—it was Dutch "broken" land. So one could work one's way through the alphabet collecting curiosities as strange as
--permit one more-- Blind Chapel Court, an odonym from London which may be said to stand out even in that maze of crazy etymologies and incredible corruptions and even mysteries (Piccadilly) and errors we absolutely hate to give up (Rotten Row from route du roi and Charing Cross from à ma chère reine are two ascribed to corrupted French when they are, unfortunately, only unrecognizable English). Blind Chapel Court is, believe it or not, Blanche-Appleton (which is to be found in John Stowe’s Elizabethan Survey of London), a corruption, according to Edinburgh Review 267 (January 1870) of “the manor from which it derived its name.” Archeologists seeking ruins of a chapel there would be disappointed as those looking for a bridge or water’s signs at Bridgewater, the burg of Walter (Water or Wat).

What, once again, is the connection of this trivia with literary onomastics? We learn that people like names to be redende Namen and will make them so if they can, which ought to warn writers to close off avenues of approach they do not wish to have investigated, which is not always easy, with ill-educated readers and unbalanced critics (especially the narcissistic using the text as a pretext), and readers to keep in check their interpretations of fiction, restricting themselves to what is there or likely to be there, unless all fiction and all art is to be a Rorschach not a reading, point of departure not point to be made. Note also that it seems to be a corollary, in the creation of meanings where vagueness leaves a void or lexical opacity a lexical opportunity, that the more colorful the story the more it will be enjoyed and the better it will stick. These are significant observations, I think, in connection with authorial intention and (as the poet said) the words of the poet as they are mod-
ified "in the guts of the living." Languages as well as literary and other artists seek to structure our world, just as we in using them and in interpreting them seek to control everything ourselves insofar as we can.

The Greeks, who (as you are always being reminded) claimed that the beginning of study is the beginning of the study of names, made up stories to explain their mistakes with names such as Ethiopia and Euphrates. They even showed us how words misunderstood can give birth to personages.

Let me illustrate with Pan and Prometheus, two Sanskrit bits that became Greek deities. The Greeks confused Sanskrit pavanna (wind) with pan (their "all") and created a pastoral deity, Pan, who was everywhere and scattered things before him, like the wind, causing panic. Surely you will agree that he subsequently held quite a place in literary circles. Sanskrit pramantha was the word for the spindle that you and I as Boy Scouts may have employed to start a fire without matches, for the bow and arrow gave us fire, you know, as well as stringed instruments for making music. The Greeks confused, or fused, this with promēthes (their way of expressing "forward thinking," what today's imprecise jargon might render "future planning" or "prophetic forecasting") and came up with the story of how the "providing" Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to man—causing considerable friction on Mount Olympus. It is still not too late for someone to take a very close look at Greek mythology from the point of view of linguistics giving rise to personages. In the
beginning may well have been The Word, just misunderstood.

In similar fashion the Romans made stories, created myth. They occasionally were way off target and occasionally lucked out, as the students say today: with Heliogabalus they said they saw the Greek helios (sun), and that emperor was indeed a priest of the sun god, but there was nothing Greek about it at all, just that his Syrian name was Egabalus. Later Mons Hymettus became Monte Matto and the Italians invented an appropriately "crazy" folktale explanation. Monte Felto involves no felt hat but a forgotten temple there of Jupiter Feretrius. In Switzerland they will show you a mountain lake in which Pontius Pilate (in remorse) drowned himself—but it was only a mons pileatus ("capped" with snow, or just clouds). Pilatus is as unauthentic as the faked Acts of Pilate, and what would he be doing in Switzerland anyway?

Pontius Pilate brings me to illustrating my remarks here with one particular book, the book, The Bible, a compendium of many kinds of literature. There was recently, not without fierce opposition from the American Civil Liberties Union, an American celebration of The Year of The Bible. We can afford it a couple of pages, at least.

The Bible proves the point that characters in literature can result from mere misinterpretation or corruption of words, for it contains some characteronyms of "people" who were never people at all, some toponyms which were never authentic placenames, even some things which have persuaded commentators to create out of whole cloth names for people The Bible does not name at all.
In The Bible you will find one Alkimos, for instance, who appears as a priest in I Maccabees. Alkimos is given as his name (to suggest Greek for "valiant") but he is Hebrew elyakim (he whom God has set up); Alkimos is not a name at all. Mammon is taken by Martin Luther, and other commentators (such as Tyndale), as the proper name for "the devil of covetousness," but it is not a name but simply a noun: Aramaic mamon, mamon (riches, gain). Beelzebub occurs as if it were the name of "The Lord of the Flies," a demon in Matthew 10:25. But Beelzebub is no more than Hebrew Baalzebul (Lord of the Dwelling), which is a description and not a name, a reference, in fact, to an unnamed personage said to occupy a mansion (in the Seventh Heaven) in II Kings 1:2.

As there was no one named Alkimos, or Mammon, or Beelzebub, so there was no one named Belial. We read "the sons of Belial" in The Bible in Judges and also in II Samuel, but there is no name in that, only mis- or half-translation. It would be better, more accurate, as "the sons of worthlessness," which is what belial means. By the time that Archbishop Cranmer (1539) rendered a line as "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" the idea that Belial was a person (or a demon) was well established. In fact, demonology is peopled with many figures who are merely misreadings of texts, just as St. Cecelia is foolishly credited with having invented the organ because someone misread a Latin sentence. In the same way Christopher (mentioned above) and St. Hope and some others, though there have been recent attempts to correct the age-old mistakes, never existed, except that you might say that they have had a long and undeniable existence as fictional characters.
Ask anyone who claims to have detailed knowledge of Christianity—those people are becoming ever harder to find these days—and he or she will confidently give you a name for the place where Christ was crucified: Golgotha. But that was never a name (until it entered folklore or ecclesiastical fiction), just Aramaic for "graveyard," from Hebrew golgôle we should call it a "place of skulls." We talk in connection with His Passion of the Garden of Gethsemane, and in Matthew 14:34 we see Gennesareth, which is only a corruption of Chinnereth (or Chinneroth) which turns up in Numbers and in I Kings: it is decidedly not the gannah (garden) of Sharon. There are other "places" in The Bible given names which have no known names at all.

Everyone will tell you the Jews strayed in worshipping a false god named Baal. Wrong. Baal translates "Lord," not a name, any more than Jehovah or Adonai or Elohim is a name. How many non-names of this sort can you find in The Bible? How many of these names (so-called) can we say have an existence not in fact but in fiction, not in history but in literature? The Bible has a lot of literary onomastic items with a distinct emphasis on the literary.

In that connection, we had best not venture in this place into an examination of what is actually conveyed by the extreme aptness of names in that literary masterpiece, The Bible. If indeed Adam means "clay" and Saul "desire" and so on, are we to take the Scriptures as history or is it not clear that they are poetical constructions, replete with confected, unhistorical, redende Namen? What this means for Bible study and faith we shall have to examine another time.
It is more comfortable, less controversial certainly, to look at what names tell us of the religion of other people (which we are pleased to call "myth"). We see that the pantheon of the Greeks has a number of linguistic errors elevated to the rank of gods and goddesses, that the Romans made "people" out of linguistic misconceptions, just as their revered forebears, the Greeks, got Harpocrates, the god of silence, out of misreading Egyptian. Harpocrates is from Egyptian Hor-(p)-chrot (Horus the Son, which is to say the offspring of Isis and Osiris). In ancient Egypt the hawk-headed Horus was shown often as a child with a finger to his lips. This was intended to suggest infancy, but the Greeks took it for a call to silence. Horus was supposed to be too young to speak, not a god of silence at all. But the Greeks got it wrong.

Maybe they liked it that way. We hate to give up our Rotten Row and Charing Cross, as I said, or Goonbell (just Cornish gun pell=far down) or American Podunk (which Allen Walker Read and others have told us, does not, unfortunately, come from "the sound of a sawmill, po-DUNK, po-DUNK, po-DUNK) and we treasure the most transparently false folk etymologies for places such as Huntingdon (West Virginia) and Perth Amboy (New Jersey).

Tourist brochures from Huntingdon assure me, with a straight face (if a brochure may be said to have a face and any tourist information can be described as "straight"), that the place in West Virginia was named because Indians came through there in the Fall rejoicing that their work was over: "Hunting done! Hunting done!" The Perth Amboy story is no more likely but more elaborate:
The New Jersey place named for Perth in Scotland undertook to celebrate an anniversary of its founding by inviting there the Earl of Perth. Now, there were members of the Drummond family who were earls and dukes of Perth in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, and still may be, for all I know or care. He arrived, so the story goes, in a kilt. An Amerindian chief—what he was doing at the ceremony remains unexplained—asked: "Perth am girl?" "No," replied his lordship, "Perth am boy." Hence the new name of the Jersey city.

Just as clever as Elephant and Castle from Infanta de Castille, right? Just as true?

Sure, we may use anything from common sense to linguistic science to keep in check the wild inventions of folk etymology, but let us not forget that the desire to be clever, to think up something either convincing or patently false but amusing, to explain or entertain—well, that is the very wellspring of all literary art, isn't it?

Is it the job of literary onomastics only to detect the logical and linguistic flaws in the argument that a name implies, or should we not rather concentrate chiefly on how that name works? The Tower of Babel in The Bible is both a symbol of the genesis of much folk etymology and itself an example of confusion, for the "name" is often said to be historical (which it is not) or connected to Hebrew בָּבָל (when really it is "Gate of God," a Hebrew version of an earlier and Accadian toponym of the same meaning).

Before I leave The Bible and this paper, I do want to touch upon one more matter which earlier I hinted I would discuss: some biblical
characters are so important to us that we deeply resent and regret that literature (or revelation) did not trouble to equip them with names that would more fully humanize, historicize, amplify, identify, intensify, decorate or document them. So we have made up names for them. Tradition supplies what the original work failed so painfully to provide. The Cabalalah will give you (if you look hard enough) the secret Name of God which God Himself was so loath to speak when asked. The magical tradition will provide you with the "real" names of demons who go unnamed elsewhere—you will need these actual names if you wish to call up the demons—though it troubles me personally that so many of the names in demonology seem to derive from the native languages not of the underworld but of the writers on demonology who first provide the names: some of the French "experts," for instance, are first to reveal the names of demons such as Leonard and Raymond (just to take two of my own names). Very suspicious. The Bible does not vouchsafe the names of The Three Magi, or of The Good Thief who was crucified with Christ, or of the soldier who pierced the side of Christ on the Cross with a lance. But we "know" them, don't we?

The Three Magi were named Balthasar, Caspar, and Melchior. One was "minority," helpfully. The Good Thief was named Dismas. The Soldier who used the lance (Greek δοξος, spear), Tertullian calls it in his Latin lanceus (lance), was named Longinus. John Evelyn's diary for 17 November 1644 tells us that in Rome he saw a statue of Longinus with his name on it, which I do not doubt. I have seen a statue of St. Veronica and lots of St. Christopher medals....
English folklore carries the tale along. The Longine Tower at Chepstow Castle, they say, was built by one Longinus, a Jew, whose father (same name, though that does not exactly fit Jewish tradition, but then this is an English and not a Jewish story, after all) was--are you ready?--the soldier with the lance at the Crucifixion. A Jew as a Roman soldier? Never mind. Go figure. In any case, that soldier appears in the Chester Mystery Cycle as Longes. He appears in Lackland's Piers Ploughman as Longeus. He is Longinus in The Legends of the Holy Rood (Early English Text Society).

Longinus gets a lot of press, like Judas Iscariot. It seems unfair that so important a character should be so sketchy. Fine. We fill him in. Judas had red hair. He hanged himself on a Judas Tree. And so on. After all, he was the most essential character: had it not been for him, Christ would not have been caught and crucified, and if He had not been crucified, well, what could He have done? As the aged prostitute said to the moralizing judge, berating her in London Criminal Court, acting ever so righteous, "If it weren't for me, and the likes of me, people like you wouldn't even have a job!"

The point in connection with literary onomastics is just this: names are an extremely important and very special kind of literary information, often considered to be an essential detail, one that (like God) if it didn't exist it would have to be invented. We insist that names be there and we hope they will be significant. Monte Rosa has no special glow at sunset: it's just Celtic ross (peak). Try to convince the natives of that. If necessary, evidence can be manufactured after the fact: in St. Just in Roseland (my favorite part of Cornwall)
the *ros* (peak) was the real explanation of the name but the natives have planted enough roses now to make it seem otherwise. Most people having forgotten what *ros* meant, a new explanation was needed, just as—and this is my final example in a piece peppered with them, I fear, but "salted," too, I hope—the original gospel had to be improved when it limited itself to merely "a rich man" and "a leper." The Vulgate of St. Jerome rendered these terms in Latin: *Dives* and *Lazarus.* That was more like it. As Latin became less familiar, the "names" functioned even better: becoming "lexically opaque" to many, *Dives* and *Lazarus* were even better able to function as "real names." It made the story of the gospel, as it were, better documented, more convincing, historical. Now linguistics and especially onomastics comes on the scene to call these names into question and disturbingly may go farther: that the whole passage is not reportage but poetry, that Christ raised a leper (not named Lazarus) not from actual death but from the death in life that leprosy (or sin, if that is what the bodily corruption signified) constituted. Perhaps Christ gave that unknown not a second life but a new lease on life, perhaps it was medicine and not miracle, perhaps religion can do for us all what the embodiment of religion did for one person, real or purely literary in a story fathered upon Christ....

In any case, I wanted to say this much and to suggest more about names in linguistics and in literature and to toy with science and folklore, and I conclude now with the observation that the report (or parable or fiction or fable?) of Lazarus has a message for onomasticians. Recognize how tradition and transmission can confuse and corrupt and
simultaneously render more artistic and powerful and psychologically and aesthetically satisfying. See how the magic of words can make the dry bones live. In such studies, science, linguistic knowledge, can be quite as useful as taste.

Leonard R. N. Ashley
Brooklyn College
City University of New York