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Martyna Gibka, *Literary onomastics: A theory*, Łódź: ArchaeGraph, 2019, 170 pp.

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Dr. Martyna Gibka's book, *Literary Onomastics: A Theory*, is a substantive addition to a relatively neglected area of onomastic studies. Specialists, i.e., academics and those in governmental agencies, have generally focused on place names and personal names (toponymy and anthroponymy) because they help measure cultural contacts, continuity, and assimilation. Each name is an historical record, a linguistic fossil that has practical significance in its self.

Less attention has been given to names in literature because, at least in part, less practical significance is attributed to literature itself. However, in literature names are important parts of an artistic whole, i.e., parts of an extended discourse that is deliberately crafted with aesthetic goals. Unlike toponyms, anthroponyms, or commercial names, the names we find in literature need to be understood not only in terms of one another but also in relation to other words nearby; they are parts of a narrative strategy reflecting a thematic purpose.

Gibka's book is a serious and valuable attempt to demonstrate the value of literary onomastics as a discipline. Appropriately, it offers a theoretical frame for essays in this volume, which is the second volume of *Onoma* dedicated to literary onomastics and thereby indicates a growing interest in this field (see *Onoma* 40, Debus & Smith).

This book has three main sections: 1) a survey of recent scholarship in this field, 2) an explication of the author's proposed analytical models, and 3) the application of these models in the analyses of three distinctive types of recent novels. The author is careful to note that her analytical models apply to novels only. She disclaims any application to the other primary modes of literature – poetry or drama. Presumably, similar models can be developed for

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these other modes, but significant hurdles would be met, as I shall note below.

Her review of scholarship emphasizes the work of her colleagues in Poland, such as A. Raszewska-Klimas, K. Górski, H. Górny, A. Cieślíkowa, J. Głowacki, C. Kosyl, I. Sarnowska-Giefing, S. Reczek, E. Rzetelska-Feleszko, M. Szelewski, Ł. M. Szewczyk, and many others. However, she develops her models from the seminal work of A. Wilkoń, *Nazewnictwo w utworach Stefana Żeromskiego* (1970), which delineates one primary function of names, distinguishing the authentic (corresponding real people) from the inauthentic (fictive creations), and a set of five secondary functions that names have within a narrative context, 1) localizing, 2) sociological, 3) allusive, 4) descriptive, and 5) expressive (detailed 18-20). Gibka then describes how other scholars have modified this set of functions with additions or varied definitions. Her survey includes references to works in English but none from the Italians (centered in Pisa) or elsewhere. Nonetheless, her survey is very useful and enlightening. It illustrates that Polish scholars have had a sustained interest in literary onomastics and certainly have made very substantive contributions.

Dr. Gibka's book adds to this valuable tradition and follows the same trajectory, focusing on specific name functions. She argues for an elaboration of the many and varied functions that names perform in a work of fiction, especially in novels, for which she borrows the definition of M. H. Abrams (47-48). She argues that several scholars have wrongly asserted that the classification of name functions is limited and/or that the types are already well described. Gibka concludes that the name functions described in her survey need to be significantly expanded to account for the contextual relationships and pragmatic possibilities suggested by communication theory (e.g., by R. Jakobson and M. Rutkowski, 26, 47).

Gibka builds her analytical models on a distinction between "two acts: the naming act in a literary work and the act of using a name in a literary work" (47). She describes the *naming act* as a "permanent function" of designating something and the *using act* as a "momentary function" reflecting pragmatic variants among characters (48).

Gibka develops sophisticated analytical models in ways similar to the tripartite models of names, referents, and speakers common in communication theory, but she adds many more elements implied by situational contexts. Her diagram of "the basic naming act" (60) illustrates the additional functions of a name at the simplest level:

Figure 1: The basic naming act (Gibka 2019: 60)

Gibka gives succinct definitions to the additional elements, but her models become increasingly complex for novels with narrative frames and stories within stories. For example, she provides the following “model of the act of using a name in a novel: [in which] a character from the fictional world 2 uses a name from the same world” (73):

Figure 2: Model of the act of using a name in a novel (Gibka 2019: 73)

Gibka does not refer to specific examples as she explains her models, which makes the increasing complexity of the models difficult to follow. However, the third part of her book compensates in a major way. She applies them in detailed analyses of three recent novels, *Waterland* by Graham Swift, *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* by Terry Pratchett, and *The Silkworm* by Robert Galbraith (aka J.K. Rowling).

These are not random examples. As Gibka explains,

Waterland is an example of a novel with one fictional world; *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* presents two fictional worlds: the first (frame) and another created within it; and *The Silkworm* exemplifies a novel that not only includes a fictional world within a fictional world, but also contains characters' proper names from other literary works that function in the non-literary world. Thus, the complete theory will be applied in the analyses in this chapter. (89)

These analyses are very helpful in explaining the specific name functions. For example, Gibka analyzes six functions in *Waterland*. First, there are the functions "served by character' proper names in relation to THE DENOTED CHARACTER" (92). For example, we see the semantic function when Tom calls Lewis "Santa Claus" because he always brings "'gift-wrapped promises'" (93). Secondly, we see functions "served by characters' proper names in relation to THE Namer" (93) – as when a character refers to his daughter with the pet form *Cathy*, "revealing his positive feelings" (93).

Examples of the other four types of functions need not be described here. In her analyses of Pratchett's novel with two fictional worlds and of *The Silkworm* with two fictional worlds plus external references, Gibka applies increasingly complex models on each overlapping plot, i.e., on each contextual layer. Of course, each contextual layer is interwoven with the other.

These analytical models are invaluable guides for the analysis of the many narrative functions of names in these novels. The differences in the functions are subtle and important, and Gibka does an excellent job of describing the functions in the three novels. However, it is also important to consider the cliché in science (attributed to [G. E. P. Box](#)) that "all models are wrong, even though some are useful," and the principle of parsimony (alá Occam's razor) added thereto recommending the simplest models to evoke the most comprehensive truth.

Gibka's models are certainly useful for describing the individual functions, but the resulting analyses do not point us to a general understanding of a novel or to a sense of thematic purpose, even if nihilistic. Similar modeling might be done for drama, which also has a narrative structure, but poetry focuses on feeling and uses names allusively to evoke themes.

In all modes of literature, the individual functions of names are clearly

important, but they must also be seen as parts of an extended discourse that is deliberately crafted with aesthetic goals. The distinguishing feature of literary onomastics is to study names as parts of an artistic whole with a thematic purpose. The weakness in Gibka's analyses, even though useful, is the relative lack of thematic focus.

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