

The New Criterion

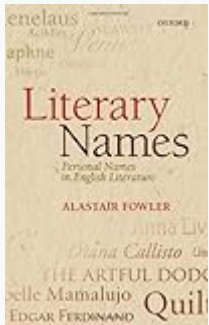
Books May 2013

Household names

by Alexandra Mullen

A review of *Literary Names: Personal Names in English Literature* by Alastair Fowler

BOOKS IN THIS ARTICLE



Alastair Fowler

Literary Names: Personal Names in English Literature

Oxford University Press, 304 pages, \$44.95

Is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose? There seems little to distinguish Rose Maylie (who sweetly tends Oliver Twist in 1837) from Rosa Budd (the sweet childhood fiancé of Edwin Drood in 1870) or from Rose Maybud (the sweetly satirical heroine of *Ruddigore* in 1887). But from a literary point of view, would these Roses be as sentimentally one-dimensional by any other name?

Alastair Fowler made his name as a particularly learned Miltonist in 1968. Now officially eminent, he has written a physically slight book on many aspects of how names function in literary works that should prove differently enticing to both scholarly and common readers who have their own mental name-hoards. The book has already inspired, for instance, a glittering riff of a review by Colin Burrow in the *London Review of Books*.

Some chapters take up individual authors—Shakespeare, Milton, Thackeray,...

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Alexandra Mullen is an advisory editor at *The Hudson Review*.

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