

# Names: Form and Function in Worldbuilding and Conlangs

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# Outline

- Function
- Form
- Why does it matter?

# The function of names

## Names as signals of . . .

- gender
- ethnic/cultural background
- age
- class
- . . . what else?

# The form of names

- Given names
- Bynames
- Name patterns and usage



# The form of names

- Given names
  - ▶ “Christian” vs. “secular”
  - ▶ Hypocoristics and diminutives
  - ▶ Saints names
  - ▶ Literary/mythical names
- Bynames
  - ▶ Relational: husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, nephew, foster-child, grandmother
  - ▶ Locative: ethnic adjectives, proper toponyms, generic toponyms
  - ▶ Occupational
  - ▶ Other
- Name patterns and usage

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  - ▶ Other
- Name patterns and usage
  - ▶ What given names are the most popular?
  - ▶ How many given names and bynames did people have?
  - ▶ Are the bynames descriptive or literal?
  - ▶ What bynames were used in what contexts?

# Why does it matter?

- Don't let your heroine be *yet another* Maeve/Aoife/Morgana/Morgaine/Alanna/etc.
- Scholars/specialists will notice
- Verisimilitude
- Exploit all the tools you have!



...and what can you do about it?

- Match period and place
- Pay attention to language
- Pay attention to broad patterns
- Make things multicultural!
- Exploit diminutives

## Balancing truth vs. accessibility

- ① Use the Latinate forms of the names
- ② Attempt to reconstruct plausible vernaculars
- ③ Use modern vernaculars
- ④ Use modern English forms

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- 1 Use the Latinate forms of the names (*Fridericus*)
- 2 Attempt to reconstruct plausible vernaculars
- 3 Use modern vernaculars
- 4 Use modern English forms

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## Some resources

- *Dictionary of Medieval Names from European Sources*, <http://dmnes.org/names>
- The DMNES blog, <http://dmnes.wordpress.com>
- Drop me a line! @thedmnes, [s.l.uckelman@durham.ac.uk](mailto:s.l.uckelman@durham.ac.uk)