EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN:
AN ONOMASTIC ANALYSIS OF OVER THE GARDEN WALL

by

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Abstract: Exploring the Unknown: An Onomastic Analysis of *Over the Garden Wall*

"Antelope, Guggenheim, Albert, Salami, Giggly, Jumpy, Tom, Thomas, Tambourine, Leg-Face McCullen . . . ." These are the first lines of dialogue spoken in *Over the Garden Wall*, Patrick McHale's new mini-series on Cartoon Network. Clearly, names figure prominently in the show, released in 2014. The series follows the story of Wirt and Greg, two brothers who find themselves lost in a forest called the Unknown. When their path becomes blocked by a sinister figure called the Beast, Wirt and Greg must escape the Unknown before it is too late.

As the audience travels the forest alongside the boys, we discover that names and naming are particularly important in the series. They fulfill many essential roles: providing plot development, contributing to characterization, imparting literary allusion, and conveying complicated character dynamics. In this thesis, I explore the various roles names and naming play in *Over the Garden Wall*, focusing on the main characters Wirt, Greg, Beatrice, the Beast, and Jason Funderburker. I analyze how their names function according to current naming practices and theory within the context of the show, its characters, its interactions with other texts, and its place in the narrative traditions of Western society.

Keywords: onomastics, names, linguistics, animation, characterization

Exploring the Unknown: An Onomastic Analysis of *Over the Garden Wall*

Onomastics and *Over the Garden Wall*

"Antelope, Guggenheim, Albert, Salami, Giggly, Jumpy, Tom, Thomas, Tambourine, Leg-Face McCullen, Artichoke, Penguin, Pete, Steve." These are the very first lines of dialogue spoken in *Over the Garden Wall*, a new mini-series from Cartoon Network. They may sound like nonsense, and in fact they are, as providing humor is one of the many purposes names fulfill in the series. Created by Patrick McHale, the creative director of *Adventure Time*, and directed by Nate Cash with art director Nick Cross, the mini-series won two Emmy Awards in 2015, one for Outstanding Animated Program and one for Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animation, having premiered November 3, 2014 ("*Over*"). The main plotline of the show follows the story of Wirt and Greg, two young brothers who find themselves lost in a forest called the Unknown, reminiscent of the dark, fantastical forests of fairytales passed. The boys, traveling with a frog they will eventually name Jason Funderburker and a bluebird named Beatrice, must find their way back home, but their path is blocked by darkness and a foreboding figure: the Beast. On their journey to escape the hopelessness of the Unknown and evade the sinister Beast, Wirt and Greg meet a wide variety of characters and share numerous adventures, leading up to a groundbreaking plot twist and a final face-off against the Beast. Names figure prominently in the series, particularly in the depiction of the show's main characters and in the continuation of themes and allusions that make up the complex intellectual environment surrounding this complicated text. In this thesis, I explore the various roles names and naming play in *Over the Garden Wall* by focusing on the characters Wirt,

Greg, Beatrice, the Beast, and Jason Funderburker. Specifically, I analyze how their names function according to current naming practices and theory and within the context of the show, its characters, its interactions with other texts, and its place in the narrative traditions of Western society.

Based on standard practice in television studies, the mini-series *Over the Garden Wall* will be analyzed as a twenty-first century text. By treating "television as text," I am able to analyze names as a literary device used in the show and, in doing so, to engage with the mini-series on a level encouraged by what Jason Mittell describes as "narratively complex television" (Edgerton and Marsden 2-3; Mittell 38). Mittell explains, "At its most basic level, narrative complexity is a redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration . . . . Rejecting the need for plot closure within every episode that typifies conventional episodic form, narrative complexity foregrounds ongoing stories across a range of genres" (32). *Over the Garden Wall*, with its convoluted timeline and multiple storylines, falls into this category, and, as such, it "demands an active and attentive process of comprehension" in order to evaluate the show to its full storytelling potential (Mittell 32). In this active decoding of the narrative, names and naming strategies can be evaluated as one of many tools utilized by the show's creators to communicate with the audience (Mittell 32; Klein 167). In her article on the mode, Harriett E. Manelis Klein explains that all narratives are based on interaction which is facilitated through various tools and methods (167). Names and naming are used as literary tools in complex television and specifically in *Over the Garden Wall* in the same ways they are used in any other narrative. The different episodes of the show are even referred to as "chapters" in their titles; as such, specific references to the series in this

thesis will be noted parenthetically by chapter number. This format easily facilitates the combination of television analysis and literary naming analysis.

Although the process of character naming in stories fascinates modern-day readers and researchers, no definitive set of steps to character naming success has been laid down as of yet, and approaches vary greatly among authors (Fowler; Black and Wilcox; Nilsen and Nilsen). In one post on his blog, which is sponsored by the Oxford University press, Alastair Fowler compares the naming methods of particularly well-known authors, explaining that whereas George Bernard Shaw and others could "get going without deciding on names for their characters, simply drafting dialogue for anonymous characters," Charles Dickens and Henry James could not and in fact would create lists of names they came across in their everyday lives in case they decided to use them in their writing. Fowler writes, "It was as if they had to know the true name before the character came into focus, or into existence; as if only one name was exactly right for the character's personality and social standing." Clearly, names are an important literary device that can be used to an author's advantage. "An artist's naming of his or her characters frequently involves calculated and conscious choices in order to deliver a message through the onomastic medium," observes onomastic researcher Frank Nuessel (39). "Creative writers give names to their characters to send messages to prospective readers" (Nuessel 39). These messages can then be deciphered by readers through onomastic analysis, adding a new layer of interpretation and analysis to a text and prompting the audience to "make deeper connections and thereby gain added pleasure from reading" or, in this case, watching (Nilsen and Nilsen xv). Thus, analysis of names

provides clarity in creator purpose and illumination of the text, improving the reading experience.

Notwithstanding, literary character names are just one small sliver of an expansive discipline: onomastics, the study of names and naming. Frank Nuessel's *The Study of Names: A Guide to the Principles and Topics* (1992) was one of the pioneering works to comprehensively document the wide variety of extant name studies and naming practices, and it is still a staple text in many onomasticians' libraries today. Nuessel's work is quoted throughout this analysis, as it establishes the core principles of onomastics, including approaches to literary naming that are lesser known in general academia, the adaptation of literary character names into common terms, and the principle used most often in this thesis, the association of specific character traits and storylines with biblical and, by my extension, Christian names (39). In regard to the relative obscurity of the field, Nuessel writes: "Despite the interdisciplinary nature of onomastics, the study of names has remained at the periphery of formal linguistic theory simply because questions and issues that involve names are different from those that relate to linguistic theory" (5-6). Thus, onomastics, much like television studies, is a field still expanding its reach, but both fields open up possibilities for viewers and readers to participate in a text, thereby allowing them to derive not only a deeper appreciation for the text but also an increased sense of joy from it, as Klein and Nilsen and Nilsen discuss in their respective works (167; xv). These end results are especially satisfying when the analyses they facilitate are as complex and multifaceted as those surrounding *Over the Garden Wall*.

Names and Time Period

One interaction between creator and audience in this innovation is the push and pull of names that helps to pull off the twist ending in the final two chapters of the series. Every name mentioned in Chapters 1-8 of the show is of Western origins, whether Germanic, Jewish, or Greek, and has been in existence since prior to the mid-1800s, which is when the mini-series initially seems to take place; in fact, several of these names, such as *Beatrice*[1] and *Gregory*, were popular in the mid-1800s-early 1900s (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Beatrix"; Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Gregory"; "Popular"). Records on names from this time period are difficult to find, but the United States Social Security Administration publishes statistics on personal names based on records dating back to the 1880s. These statistics include lists of the 200 "most popular names for male and female babies born" in the US in each decade ("Popular"). When the lists begin in the 1880s, *Beatrice* is within the top 200 female names, holding the 130th position. The name remains in the top 200 up until the 1940s, peaking as the 38th most popular name for girls in the 1910s and ending in position 166. In the 1940s, the full name *Gregory* jumps onto the board of the 200 most popular names given to males, possibly influenced by the rising popularity of actor Gregory Peck at the time (Fishgall). *Gregory* and its variants *Greg* and *Gregg* remain in the top 200 boys' names consistently into the current millennium, with *Gregory* peaking in position 26 in the 1950s and 23 in the 1960s. The Social Security database shows that *Jason* enters the list the latest in position 87 in the 1960s, holds the position for the third most popular name given to males in the 1970s, then drops to the eleventh position in the 1980s and rounds out the 2000s, the final decade of name statistics available on the database, in 49th ("Popular"). In addition to these 200 most popular names lists, the Social Security database also includes

a list titled “Top Names Over the Last 100 Years,” which gives the 100 most-given male and female names from 1915 to 2014 and their rank by popularity. *Beatrice* does not make the list, but *Gregory* is ranked 43rd with 703,345 *Gregory*s out of 170,607,267 total male babies, and *Jason* is 28th with 1,013,934 (“Top Names”). *Wirt* is on none of these lists, as *Wirt* has never been an established first name.

These Western, nineteenth- to twentieth-century names seemingly fit right in with the larger setting of the show. Until Chapter 9, all of the characters we meet are White and speak either American or British English. We see no technology popularized after the early 1900s. The steamboat is the latest technological advancement, established in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, the first eight chapters of the story take place in a vast forest dotted with an occasional cottage or small village and in the sun, rain, or snow. Most importantly, though, except for the citizens of Pottsfield, who are skeletons and mostly wear pumpkins, the characters are all dressed in mid-nineteenth-century garb: the women wear floor-length skirts with aprons or button-up blouses and often kerchiefs, bonnets, and/or shawls, while the men wear breeches or trousers with suspenders, button-up shirts, and suit jackets or capes. The Woodsman even wears a stovepipe hat. Thus, everything about the show indicates that it is set in a tall-tale version of the northern United States in the mid- to late-1800s, from the weather and the wardrobe right down to the characters’ names. These clues as to the setting of *Over the Garden Wall*, including the period-appropriate names, make it all the more fun when the audience finds out that Wirt and Greg live in the twenty-first century and are only visiting the Unknown, which appears to be frozen in time.

Character Names

Wirt

Wirt is the main character of *Over the Garden Wall*, the character whose story is followed from the beginning and who experiences the most dramatic changes during the series. Our young hero is an unusual boy of about fourteen or fifteen who plays the clarinet and panics in social situations. He spends the series dressed in a Civil War-era cape and a pointy red hat. Wirt has a crush on a girl named Sara, although it is doomed to be an unrequited love from afar until Wirt can work up the courage to tell her how he feels. He is older half-brother to Greg, and he has a short fuse when it comes to his younger sibling; one of the changes Wirt undergoes over the course of the show is a transformation from Greg's reticent companion into his willing caretaker. The character Wirt, although not a direct connection by name, bears similarities to Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, providing one of the many parallels between *Over the Garden Wall* and Dante's work, primarily the *Inferno* section of the text, that we see throughout the series (GlobeGander). Like Dante, Wirt is an artistic soul, and he frequently spouts his own poetry when the mood strikes him on his travels (GlobeGander). This poetry often centers around Sara, just as Dante's poetry often centers around his tragic love for Beatrice (GlobeGander). While not an allusion to Dante, Wirt's name carries great weight. In "Sense and Serendipity: Some Ways Fiction Writers Choose Character Names," Sharon Black and Brad Wilcox write about the approaches several authors use when naming characters in fiction. In a paraphrase of author Scott Nicholson's "What's In a Name?," Black and Wilcox write, "When a character first enters, a reader does not receive as many immediate nuances of appearance, expressions, voice, carriage, and charisma as someone who is actually meeting a new individual" (152-53). This means that the nature of a

created character places added emphasis on the character's name as a source of characterization, as the character has no physical attributes to fall back on (Black and Wilcox 153). Accordingly, there are many factors expressed in the one syllable that makes up Wirt's name, from the individuality of his character to a hint at the heroic role this young boy is destined to play.

Wirt is a highly unusual first name, almost unheard of in the tradition of personal names. It registers no direct entries in *A Dictionary of First Names* (2006) (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, *A Dictionary*).[2] As a second name, however, *Wirt* exists: it is a variant of the German and Jewish family name *Wirth*, meaning 'innkeeper' or 'head-of-household' (Hanks, *Dictionary*, "Wirt"; Hanks, *Dictionary*, "Wirth"). Although Wirt has no inn and lives at home with his parents when not lost in an allegorical purgatory, these positions of responsibility foreshadow Wirt's transition into Greg's protector. In the beginning of the series, Wirt blames Greg for everything that goes wrong; when the mill is destroyed in the first chapter, Wirt scolds his brother for it, "You're always messing up, Greg!" (McHale, *Over the Garden Wall* (*OTGW*) Ch. 1). Moreover, in the flashback shown in "Chapter 9: Into the Unknown," Wirt declares, "I don't want to have anything to do with you or that frog!" (McHale). By comparison, at the end of the season, when he realizes that his stubbornness and his wrath toward Greg have driven the brothers into the clutches of the Beast, Wirt accepts the blame for the boys' predicament: "It's my fault we ended up here. Everything's been my fault" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). After this realization, Wirt frees the barely conscious Greg from the Beast's trap, and the boys head home, Greg safely on Wirt's back and Jason the frog tucked securely into Wirt's cape (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). By becoming Greg's protector, Wirt becomes, in a sense, a

‘head-of-household’ figure, tending to and defending his own. By extension, the family name *Wirt* is also closely related to the Germanic *Werdo*, which comes from a root meaning ‘worth’; thus, *Wirt* can be interpreted as meaning ‘worthy,’ a particularly relevant adjective for the character who turns out to be the series’ secret hero (Hanks, *Dictionary*, “Wirth”). Patrick McHale even stated that this connection to ‘worthy’ is the reason he and his team named the character *Wirt* (McHale, Tweet).

Real-world *Wirt*s, although in existence, are not very widely known. The *Oxford Reference* database suggests for further investigation Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson and William Wirt Sikes, both writers (*Oxford Reference*). Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson, 1905-2002, a journalist, fiction writer, and pilot, is best remembered for her work on the Nancy Drew mystery books (Gavin). “ . . . Benson produced her most significant work when, from 1930 to 1953, she wrote twenty-three of the original Nancy Drew mystery novels, starting with the first in the series, *The Secret of the Old Clock*, under the collective pseudonym ‘Carolyn Keene’” (Gavin). William Wirt Sikes was a nineteenth-century writer best known for his studies of Welsh folklore, including fairies, goblins, and more (Sikes). Although probably not a purposeful namesake because of the obscure nature of Sikes’ work, the link does pose a curious coincidence of time period as well as encourage a theme of fantastical Germanic fairy tales. Next, a general *Google* search of the name turns up William Wirt, 1772-1834, an Attorney General of the U.S. (Kennedy). There is a county in West Virginia named after this public official: Wirt County. Additionally, while this relation is not a living person, the top non-*Over the Garden Wall* search result is a character in the *Diablo* video game series, “Wirt the Peg-Legged Boy”

("Wirt" *Diablo*). Again, although not a direct namesake, Wirt the Peg-Legged Boy provides a glimpse of the small presence of *Wirt*s in pop culture.

Unlike many of the other character names in the series, *Wirt* does not have ties to the Bible. In fact, *Wirt* is one of the few names in the show that does not have significant Christian connections. In his work, Nuessel explains that the employment of biblical names (which I have extended in this thesis to include general Christian names) is a "device used by authors to give their characters' names special connotative significance . . . to link a protagonist's behavior to that of a recognizable figure from the Bible" (39). *Greg* and *Beatrice*, *Jason* and the *Beast*, and even *Enoch*, head of the Pottsfield Chamber of Commerce, all have salient connections to figures in Christianity, giving the reader some preliminary idea of the significance of the character as well as the role he or she will fulfill in the storyline of the show, as indicated by Nuessel (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 2; Nuessel 39). Wirt's name, in contrast, does not connote this legacy. Rather, while the others have direct connections to antiquity, Wirt seems to be off on his own, uninvolved in the Christian tradition. The implication here is not, however, that Wirt is less than the others because there is no biblical or Christian context for his name. Rather, Wirt has a separate lineage to live up to, and his unique name is fulfilling its own storyline.

Rather than Christian origins, Wirt's name may have an Arthurian connection.[3] *Wirt* is extremely close to *Wart*, the name of the young King Arthur in T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, which tells the story of the legendary King Arthur who famously pulled the sword Excalibur out from a stone to become ruler (American). If this allusion is valid, then this reference serves to set Wirt apart from the other characters and their names. This allusion suggests that Wirt's storyline will be significant, distinct from those

of the other main characters, including the saintly Greg's or the demonic Beast's. If we as the audience keep this allusion in mind, we know where Wirt's story is going: at some point, in some way, shape, or form, Wirt, like his namesake, is going to rise to greatness. At the same time, *Wart* is the name of Arthur before he becomes *Arthur*, before he achieves greatness; thus, from the beginning of the series, viewers who pick up on the reference will know that Wirt has enormous potential, but that he has not yet realized it. Because both Wirt and Arthur go through such extreme changes, the allusion is foreshadowing, which means that, when Wirt's, like Arthur's, journey begins, he is still developing, still forming into the hero he will be at the end of the story (White).

When Wart famously pulls the sword from its stone, he realizes his destiny, as this event marks his appointment as king; Wart's life shifts in this moment from squire to king, and his name shifts with it (White). Wirt's name remains the same throughout his story, but he undergoes a life-changing shift similar to Arthur's: in Chapter 9 he accepts responsibility for the events that have landed the boys in their current predicament ("Wirt and Responsibility"). Furthermore, after all of their travels and toil, Wirt proceeds to outsmart the Beast and free Greg, becoming the savior of the story through his emotional transformation (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). Wirt's transformation mirrors Arthur's legendary transition from Wart to King Arthur (White). In the end, Wirt lives up to his name in every sense of the phrase. Not only does he achieve an Arthurian transformation, but he also becomes 'worthy' in his acceptance of authority over Greg, Jason, and himself (Hanks, *Dictionary*, "Wirth"; McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Wirt's Arthurian allusion therefore connotes the dynamic nature of his storyline and indicates his rise to greatness; however, the name is not an exact match—*Wirt* is not *Wart*.

All allusions considered, Wirt's name is still original, and it establishes Wirt as an original character. While there is certainly a link between *Wirt* and *Wart*, the names are not an exact match like the allusions incorporated in the names of *Greg* and *Beatrice*. Because Wirt's name is only an imperfect match for his namesake, his character is granted the "special connotative significance" that Nuessel describes in connection to long traditions of biblical character names, but there is still room for qualities specific to Wirt and independent of Wart (39). Wirt is destined for great things, as we see in the end of the show, but he gets there his way. For example, as Wirt faces the Beast in the final episode, the climax of both the young boy's storyline and the entire show, he calls the demonic dealmaker on his bluff: the Beast menacingly threatens, "Are you ready to see true darkness?" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Wirt, seemingly preparing to blow out the lantern we now know contains the Beast's soul, counters, but his voice cracks the first time he tries to speak, and he has to clear his throat before he can deliver his comeback: "Are yo- Are you?" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10).

Wirt's name also lends humor to the show's storyline and to his character. In *Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature*, Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don L.F. Nilsen examine "names for fun," citing instances where authors use "humorous names to balance serious issues" in young adult literature (7). *Over the Garden Wall* is a serious show. In fact, the main plotline is oppressively dark, as our protagonists are caught in a fairytale forest from Hell trying to avoid the Beast, who wants them to succumb to the cold and hopelessness that surround them. In a setting such as this, especially one that is expected to appeal to children, a name like *Wirt* is a welcome instance of lighthearted quirkiness. Nilsen and Nilsen state that many humor researchers consider surprise a

necessary component of humor, some element that is unexpected and out of place, and *Wirt*, rhyming with the words “dirt” and “squirt” and sharing the same r-colored vowel as “smirk” and even “quirk,” is certainly a surprising name in this dark setting (Nilsen and Nilsen 1). The subtle humor which Wirt’s name supplies helps lighten the mood of the show.

Moreover, Wirt’s name has the same ameliorating effect on his character. With Wirt’s tendency to deflect blame onto his little brother, to dwell on the negatives in his life instead of the positives, and to run first and think of Greg later, he is an easy character to dislike. Consequently, the surprise created by the fact that such a sullen character has such a light and quirky name establishes another instance of humor in the show (Nilsen and Nilsen 1). In turn, this humor allows the name *Wirt* to act as a sort of buffer, softening the elder brother’s behavior in the eyes of the audience and keeping viewers interested in him. Wirt’s name is even a source of laughter between Greg and himself, as, at the end of the first episode, Greg declares he is going to call his frog *Wirt*, while he is going to call his brother *Kitty*, the frog’s most recent name before *Wirt* (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1). Wirt considers this for a moment; then, to make things fair, he says he is going to call Greg *Candypants* (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1). This moment, entirely centered around names and Wirt’s name in particular, is one of the first pleasant moments between the brothers that the audience witnesses. Therefore, Wirt’s name serves as a source of cheerfulness and comfort, both for the audience and for the brothers, bringing a sense of warmth and lightheartedness to Wirt’s character that is not always apparent in his behavior.

Greg

Although Wirt may be the main character of the mini-series, Greg is its heart and soul. His full name is *Gregory*, as we know from his interactions with the Beast, but he is called *Greg* by all other characters in the show. This familiar version of his name also plays into his characterization, which will be discussed below. Greg is about eight or nine years old and inexplicably wears a teapot on his head throughout the series. He is unquestioningly loyal, especially to Wirt, exceptionally brave, and unfailingly kind, all traits enhanced by the lineage of his Christian name. Greg is also caretaker of and friend to Jason Funderburker, assigning various names to the frog throughout the series. The complex relationship between these characters and the effect it has on Jason's names will be discussed in full in my analysis of Jason.

The full name *Gregory* has a long history in Western civilization, extending all of the way back to the beginnings of Christianity. Originally, *Gregory* comes from the Latin *Gregorious*, meaning 'watchful' or 'to watch, be vigilant' (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Gregory"). According to the *Oxford Dictionary of First Names*, the name "was borne by a number of early saints," including Gregory of Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Tours, and Pope Gregory the Great (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Gregory"). These great figures are namesakes of our little teapot-wearing, frog-carrying Greg, who is a modern-day continuation of this Christian tradition. He is the strongest example in the series of Nuessel's biblical names principle, or, by extension, pervasive Christian names principle, whereby a Christian name is used as a "literary mechanism" meant to "link a protagonist's behavior to that of a recognizable figure," granting "special connotative significance" to the name and, therefore, to the character (39). The show's creators capitalize on this connection, using the name to augment Greg's characterization,

drawing connections between their character and the famous *Gregory*s of Christian tradition and highlighting the qualities one associates with such a prestigious name.

For example, Pope Gregory the Great demonstrates the kind of commendable qualities expected from a *Gregory*. Already, from the title "the Great," we know this historical figure left big shoes to fill. In *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought*, F. Homes Dudden documents the life and extensive influence of the saint in a multivolume work. He quotes Gregorovius: "'Gregory and Mohammed were the two priests of the West and East. Each founded a hierarchy on the ruins of antiquity, and through the concussion of the two systems the future fate of Europe and Asia was decided'" (qtd. in Dudden v). Here we see Pope Gregory's importance in international historical events. Moreover, "Almost all the leading principles of the later [post-sixth century] Catholicism are found, at any rate in germ, in Gregory the Great" (Dudden vi). Dudden delves further into his report on the indispensability of Pope Gregory on a global stage:

> Gregory was by far the most important personage of his time. He stood in the very centre of his world, and overshadowed it. . . . If the history of the latter part of the sixth century is to be studied intelligently, it must be studied in close connexion with the life and labours of that illustrious Pontiff, who for many years was the foremost personage in Europe, and did more, perhaps, than any other single man to shape the course of European development. (vi)

As this excerpt demonstrates, Gregory was an epicenter of European and Western history, and such a large role as this, as the man who embodied and founded the "leading

principles" of Catholicism, will have repercussions through his name indefinitely, so this choice of name does not come lightly (Dudden vi). Fortunately, we see the greatness bestowed by the name *Gregory* in McHale's Greg, especially through specific parallels.

First, Gregory the Great and little Greg have music in common. Pope Gregory is the originator of Gregorian chants, steady, slow-paced, low songs sung in prayer, while Greg makes up songs and keeps them going throughout the series (Bewerunge). For example, one of his greatest hits is "Potatoes and Molasses," which he sings as he pours molasses over some bland mashed potatoes, livening things up with the sweetness and a song and making the potatoes easier to stomach for the orphan student-animals who must eat them (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 3). Thus, both Gregory the Great and Greg have a passion for writing songs.

In addition to writing songs, both figures patronize the musical arts whenever possible. Pope Gregory is often considered the patron saint of musicians, among many other arts and acts and persons ("Pope"). McHale's Greg throws a benefit concert for the same animals he presents with "Potatoes and Molasses" (Ch. 3). The animals are in school, so many of them know how to play instruments, but their school is running out of funds and might have to shut down soon. Greg comes up with the solution: a benefit concert. The animals play on stage while wealthy donors give to the school to keep it running. In celebration for all of the funds raised, Greg leads the band in another rendition of "Potatoes and Molasses" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 3). Whether through strange coincidence or the use of purposeful parallels, both Gregory and Greg are associated with music and musicians.

Both Pope Gregory and McHale's Greg are associated with angel figures. Gregory, as a central figure in the development of Christianity, is already associated with angels, and Greg has an experience in which he speaks to angel figures. In "Chapter 8: Babes in the Woods," when Wirt gives up on the boys finding their way out of the Unknown, Greg makes it his job to get them home. He then takes a nap in order to rest up for his new leadership role. As he sleeps, he dreams that he leaves his body and sails up into the clouds to a place above the Unknown called Cloud City, where he is greeted by cherubs, singing animals, and angels and where he is even given the opportunity to return home (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). However, the angel says that, since Wirt has given in to the forest, he cannot leave with Greg, so the younger boy decides to stay and help his brother escape. This religious iconography solidifies not only Greg's connections to early Christian figures like Pope Gregory, but also the overall ties to Christianity that Wirt's name and character lack. Greg's goodness and other admirable qualities come easily to him, to the point where he has the opportunity to escape the forest and return home to his friends and family, but he does not because he stays to help Wirt. Such qualities almost have to come easily with a name like his, especially in the world of fiction, where every character detail is significant.

Greg, as suggested by his illustrious name, embodies many of the qualities considered most admirable in a person, and they express themselves in both big and small ways during the show. Kindness is included on this list. One of the most telling interactions in the show takes place in the episode "Into the Unknown," where we find Greg in his own, modern-day time period leaving the house of an elderly neighbor, Mrs. Daniels. Greg has just finished helping Mrs. Daniels with some yardwork in return for

candy, even though, as Wirt points out, “Greg, it’s Halloween. Candy is free” (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). As Greg turns to say goodbye to Mrs. Daniels, he calls, “Goodbye! Thank you, Old Lady Daniels!” When Mrs. Daniels asks Greg not to call her “old lady,” Greg immediately replies in a sincere tone, “Yes sir, young man!” (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). This short interaction sums up Greg’s kindness and consideration for others. He does not call her “young man” to be rude or clever, but rather because she told him being called “old lady” bothers her, so he came up with the complete opposite of those words so he would not offend her again (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). Additional examples of Greg’s kindness abound, including one from Chapter 1 when the transmogrified dog has Greg cornered in a barrel. Despite the fact that the dog is opening its jaws to swallow him whole, Greg feels compelled to give a compliment where he feels it is due, admitting as he cowers in the barrel, with no hint of guile, “You have beautiful eyes” (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1). Greg’s kindness, so pervasive that it even expresses itself at the most unexpected and darkest times, is one the qualities that make him who he is, especially augmented by his renowned name.

In addition to being unfailingly kind, Greg is loyal, almost to a fault. In “Babes in the Wood,” before Wirt, Greg, and Jason settle in for the night, they cross a body of water in a boat made out of an outhouse with a guitar and a spoon for oars. As the boys drift on, Greg enthusiastically and Wirt less so, the Beast begins to sing in the background. Greg asks, “Hey Captain, do you hear that singing?” When Jason responds, Greg says, “Not you, Skipper, I’m talking to the captain. Captain Wirt, do you know who’s singing?” (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). Greg has assigned everyone in the boat positions as they float; while he could have very easily appointed himself captain, he

made Wirt captain (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). This is just one example of Greg's loyalty to Wirt, not to mention his faith. Greg never stops believing Wirt will do the right thing. In the same way that Greg cannot do anything right in Wirt's eyes for most of the series, Wirt can do no wrong in Greg's eyes. Even as Greg keeps trying to find a way home after Wirt has given up, and Greg finds out that Wirt will not be able to leave the forest, he blames himself and not Wirt: "Oh, I should have been leading better. I was goofing off again like always, and now you're stuck here" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). Greg believes he has let Wirt down, that he was not a good enough leader to save his older brother. That is when he makes his bravest move of all.

When Greg realizes that Wirt is in trouble and that he cannot get them home on his own, he makes a courageous, self-sacrificing deal to buy some time for Wirt. Greg strikes a bargain with the Beast, a terrifying proposition not only because the Beast looks like a nightmare shadow-figure, but also because Greg knows the Beast is bad news. The boys have been running from him the entire show, all leading up to the moment where Greg makes an agreement to save Wirt. As Greg and the Beast walk away together and the audience finds out what Greg has done, the Beast croons, "Yes, come, Gregory. There is much to be done" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). "And then you'll show us the way home, right?" asks Greg. "Of course. We made a promise, didn't we?" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). And with that, the two disappear into the forest, leaving Wirt to wake up and realize his mistakes, discover what has just happened, and recognize that he was the one to drive Greg to such extremes (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). In the final chapter, we find Greg has been fulfilling the Beast's pointless tasks and solving his riddles in the snow and the freezing cold, all to stall until Wirt comes to rescue him. As Greg solves another one of

the Beast's riddles and hypothermia is setting in, Greg sings to himself, "Just gotta wait, just gotta wait" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Clearly, Greg is brave and courageous as well as loyal. He does all of this on his own, without hesitation, in hopes of saving his brother. Fortunately, his loyalty and bravery pay off in the end, and both boys make it out of the Unknown alive and relatively unharmed.

Before the boys get their "happily ever after," though, we see an interesting dynamic play out centered around Greg's full name. In fact, the only characters who call Greg by his full name in the show are the Beast, the Queen of the Clouds, and Mrs. Daniels. Although the case of Mrs. Daniels is most likely the result of a generation gap, Greg's interactions with the other two figures serve as interesting areas for speculation. One possible reason for the formality is the common theme of transactions occurring. In his report on patterns of formal and informal name use based on geography, Edward Callary points out the tendency to use full, formal names in the workplace or "among business acquaintances" (494). When Greg's full name is used in *Over the Garden Wall* by the Queen of the Clouds, he has just done her a favor by bottling the Old North Wind, a storm who was causing trouble in Cloud City, and, as thanks, the Queen is going to grant Greg a wish; "What do you wish for most of all?" she asks (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). In this interaction, the Queen's tone is formal, specifically evidenced by her greeting of "hello" and by the lack of contractions in her speech in addition to her use of the full name *Gregory*. This formality thus indicates a business-like relationship between Greg and the Queen in direct opposition to the friend-like relationship Greg has with everyone else by being *Greg*. However, the business principle, when it is flipped and applied to Greg's situation with the Beast, becomes very dark. In effect, Greg has entered into a

multilayered contract with the Beast. Superficially, the agreement is that Greg is going to help the Beast with some tasks, then the Beast is going to get the boys home (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). However, Greg is just trying to buy time for Wirt to wake up and come rescue him, again evidenced by his chant, "Just gotta wait, just gotta wait" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). On the most haunting level, the Beast is trying to bide his time until Greg surrenders to the cold and to the forest (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Greg has unknowingly entered into a bargain for his soul, as emphasized by the Beast's use of his full name. The final impression is the business-like nature of the contract, as if the two were business partners.

Aside from business transactions, the use of Greg's full name is also closely associated with divinity and power. The Queen of the Clouds lives in the heaven-like world that Greg visits in his dream (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8). She looks and acts similar to Glenda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz* but with wings, paralleling an angel. Moreover, because she can grant wishes, almost anything that Greg could want, she is clearly very powerful, although not powerful enough to interfere with the Beast's plans. The Beast, on the other hand, has many parallels to the devil in Christianity, not the least of which is that he likes to make deals for people's souls: like the Queen, the Beast also has ties to divinity and power. When the Queen and the Beast address Greg as *Gregory*, the situation is reminiscent of the fairytale *Rumpelstiltskin*, in which the dark deeds of a magical trickster are foiled by knowledge and control of his name. In *Over the Garden Wall*, the Queen and the Beast demonstrate intimate knowledge about Greg, his full name—the name given to him by his parents, the name on his birth certificate—and, by extension, exert an element of control over him. In these situations, instead of invoking

formality as it usually would in a day-to-day context, because these characters have associations with divinity and power, the use of Greg's full name establishes a certain unsettling familiarity with him, an intimacy with his character and his identity. Again, this idea becomes especially chilling when applied to the Beast. By using *Gregory* instead of *Greg* when he speaks, the Beast is, ironically, suggesting a familiarity with who the boy is at his core, with his inner character, and with his soul, exercising a kind of control over him through use of his full name. Therefore, Greg's name and other characters' uses of it not only contribute to his own personal characterization, but they also reveal fundamental relationships between characters and carry certain overarching themes of the show including elements of Christianity and a distinction between good and evil.

Finally, while Greg does have these ties to Gregory the Great and other momentous figures in Western history, he is only called by his full name a few times in the show—he usually just goes by *Greg*. This shortened version of his given name adds a friendliness and an informality to his character. It makes Greg seem familiar to us as the audience, as if he is one of our closest friends, good ol' Greg. The familiarity in *Greg* versus *Gregory* removes some of the loftiness and formality that can come with such a prestigious name; however, as is the case with *Over the Garden Wall*'s Beatrice, the alteration does not affect the esteem associated with the name, it only repurposes the title. The result is Greg, a character who is, by default, a friend to all, including anyone watching the show.

Beatrice

For most of the series, Beatrice remains just as much of an enigma as Wirt does. We meet her in Chapter 1, and she is the audience's and the brothers' first encounter with the unusual in the Unknown. Wirt does not cope well when Beatrice, a talking bluebird, offers to help the boys find their way (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1). He explains to Greg how a "bird's brain isn't big enough for cognizant speech," which Beatrice does not let slide, snapping, "Hey, what was that?" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1). After this acerbic first encounter, Beatrice flies away, and she does not appear again until Chapter 2, when Greg finds her caught in a thorny bush and frees her. She then promises to return the favor by leading Wirt and Greg to Adelaide of the Pasture, the "Good Woman of the Woods," and we learn more about her as they travel (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 2). Beatrice is a particularly fascinating character because her actions are driven by deception and past mistakes, while her name, in the context of the show's allegories, promises heavenly goodness and divinity: her name is a contradiction.

Beatrice's name is one of the strongest connections in the Dante allegory seen in the show. Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy* is the name of the woman who leads Dante through Paradise. She is based on a real woman named Beatrice with whom Dante became infatuated. The two were kept separate from one another by extenuating circumstances including childhood, marriage, and death. After this actual Beatrice died, Dante immortalized her in his most famous work. In fact, in a general search of the name *Beatrice*, Beatrice Portinari, Dante's real-life inspiration, is the second top result. Dante made the name *Beatrice* synonymous with *The Divine Comedy*, meaning that McHale's Beatrice is aligned with the Beatrice of lofty virtue, sparking associations of goodness, beauty, and perfection robbed from Earth too early. This name tells the audience that

everything about Beatrice's tragic story is going to be okay, that her goodness will shine through in the end. It encourages the audience to hold out hope for her, even when her deeds are dark and misguided and it looks as if the Beast might win.

In *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice guides Dante through Paradise; in *Over the Garden Wall*, Beatrice guides the brothers through the Unknown, which directly parallels Dante's Inferno. This brings a new perspective to the traditional characterization of Beatrice. While Dante's Beatrice is literally heavenly, McHale's Beatrice is a cursed bluebird wandering an inferno-like purgatory. The miniseries turns the allusion on its head here, creating a character who has the same elevated status as the traditional *Beatrice*s but who is much more realistic than the *Beatrice*s remembered by history and by literature. McHale's Beatrice makes mistakes and loses her way, but she is just as much a *Beatrice* as the others, and she works to correct her mistakes and make things right. Moreover, Beatrice the bluebird contradicts Dante's idea of a perfect woman who dies young and spends the rest of eternity floating through Heaven. She is sarcastic and full of uncertainty and regret, but she is still not more or less than the traditional Beatrice because she has the same name. She is a novel take on a traditional character, introducing a refreshing new viewpoint to this naming tradition.

Aside from the name's allegorical significance, its history is also quite extensive and is interwoven with Christian influences. It is the Italian form of the name *Beatrix*:

> From a Late Latin personal name, which was borne by a saint martyred in Rome, together with Saints Faustinus and Simplicius, in the early 4th century. The original form of the name was probably Viatrix, a feminine version of Viator 'voyager (through life)', which was a favourite name

> among early Christians. This was then altered by association with Latin Beatus 'blessed' (Via- and Bea- sometimes being pronounced the same in Late Latin). (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Beatrix")

Specifically, like *Gregory*, the name *Beatrice* has strong Christian ties. This is in opposition to *Wirt*, which is part original, part Arthurian. Beatrice's character thus becomes somewhat predictable, as, based on her name, we know that she will eventually be a do-gooder, despite the fact that she begins the show in an understandably dark place.

The idea of *Viator* or 'voyager' brings a poignant depth to Beatrice, discovered by the boys on her own in the woods (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Beatrix"). The first level of this depth is that Beatrice is a bird, and birds are known for their travels. They fly quickly, effectively, and as far as they wish, flitting from branch to branch or migrating thousands of miles at a time. A name like 'voyager' captures the essential spirit of a bird, traveling freely through the skies and over lands unknown. The phrase "free as a bird" is particularly relevant here. Therefore, *Viatrix* or *Beatrix* is an especially apt name for a bird.

On an even deeper level, though, in addition to being a bird, Beatrice is one of the many figures we meet wandering the Unknown. She is on a voyage of the soul, as we later come to find out the Unknown is a sort of purgatory, an in-between state between death and an afterlife. On their travels, Wirt and Greg encounter many souls such as Beatrice who are looking for some sort of resolution; we see these characters first in the introduction of the miniseries, caught or about to be caught in their perpetual dilemmas of sorting bones or looking for love (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1). Greg and specifically Wirt unknowingly bring these characters, their friends, the resolution they are seeking, as we

know from the show's conclusion, where we see these hitherto lost characters in their newly completed states, drinking tea or enjoying a love they never found in life (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). However, until the boys bring resolution, these souls feel unfulfilled and restless, and Beatrice is one of them. Since she is the reason her family were transformed into bluebirds, Beatrice's soul cannot rest until she turns them back into humans. Until then, she is left to voyage alone through the Unknown, always searching for a way to right her wrong.

In addition to her physical travels, McHale's Beatrice goes on a moral journey. Her quest to correct her original mistake leads her to contemplate doing dark deeds, to the point where she tries to trick the boys into working for Adelaide, an evil witch who in return has promised a cure for Beatrice's family (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). In "Mad Love," Beatrice confesses to Wirt, "All I know is I am never going back until I can make them human again. I'd do pretty much anything" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 5). Although she does not realize that Adelaide wants to keep Wirt and Greg as slaves, she gets the boys to the witch's house under the false pretense that Adelaide will help them get home. Beatrice is the one who introduces Adelaide as "Adelaide of the Pasture, the Good Woman of the Woods," promising that Adelaide can help the brothers (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 2). The bird then ushers the boys along the path to Adelaide's, becoming increasingly exasperated the longer the trek takes and the more the boys get sidetracked. However, as the trio gets closer to its destination, Beatrice starts to rethink her agreement with Adelaide. In "Lullaby in Frogland," as the group crosses a river that bears a striking allegorical resemblance to the River Styx in classical mythology and in *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice has become sullen, and Wirt notes that she seems "uncharacteristically wistful"

(McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). She then tries to get them kicked off the boat, and when that does not work, she sneaks off to Adelaide's alone to try to back out of the deal. When Beatrice finds out that Adelaide actually wants a "child servant," she is shocked, exclaiming, "I thought you just wanted some yard work done!" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). She protects the boys and tries to take their place: "I found two brothers lost in the woods, but I can't give them to you, Adelaide. They need to go home. . . . What if I became your servant?" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). When Greg and Wirt walk in on this conversation, the jig is up, and the boys run off without giving Beatrice a chance to explain. Wirt comes around to Beatrice later when she pulls him from a freezing pond and then flies through the snowstorm to find Greg, sticking by Wirt's side as they search for his brave little brother (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 8; McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). This completes Beatrice's inner journey, her "voyage" to morality. She comes to rediscover her sense of right and wrong and to be reminded that some costs are too high, and she is rewarded when Wirt gives her the cure for her family which he stole from Adelaide (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). The voyages of both Beatrice and the brothers then come to happy endings, and the last we see of Beatrice, she and her family are human again, and they all happily sit down to dinner together (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10).

The Beast

The Beast, pervasive and sinister, is the main antagonist of the series. He is also the character with the most extensive literary connections, particularly to mythologies and fairytales. Because his characterization is so complex and multifaceted, it would be impossible to include a comprehensive explication of it in this paper; however, I will examine some of the most important aspects of this character relating to his monickers.

This figure is referred to as both *the Beast* and *Beast* in the series.[4] The "the" attached to his label dehumanizes the Beast by highlighting the fact that he has no true name, as personal names do not receive articles, but the Beast uses his mysterious title to his advantage, as discussed below (Nuessel 2). *Beast* as a title connotes a non-human creature, but *the Beast* connotes a monster.

The immediate association of the title *Beast* for many people today is the misguided but ultimately loveable hero in the fairytale and popular Disney movie, *Beauty and the Beast*. Other than the coincidence of the name, the only commonality between the two characters is the fear the nearby villagers have of them. Belle's Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* is furry and misunderstood, dejected to the point of believing no one can love him, until Belle breaks through his coarse-haired emotional armor to reveal the empathetic man within. In contrast, the Beast in *Over the Garden Wall* is a humanoid creature that lurks in the shadows of the forest, making deals with the lost and the desperate, collecting the souls of those who give up searching and succumb to the forest. Whereas Beast of *Beauty and the Beast* embodies the title both ironically to highlight his inner humanity and literally to denote an animal-like creature, the Beast of *Over the Garden Wall* embodies the depravity and lack of humanity associated with the term.

Because *Beast*, like *Wirt*, is not a traditional proper name, its history as a personal name cannot be traced. For example, at no point was *Beast* an honored family name passed down from father to son for generations. Rather, the title is a common noun functioning as a personal name in this context, much like the names of the other archetypal characters in the show including the Woodsman and the Tavern-keeper. The origin and definitions of the word are available to all. In addition to the definitions that

refer to animals and livestock, the *Oxford Dictionary* defines "beast" as follows: "[a]n inhumanly cruel, violent, or depraved person"; "[a]n objectionable or unpleasant person or thing." Synonyms for "beast" include "monster," "demon," and "devil" ("Beast"). "Beastly," by extension, describes a person or thing that is "[v]ery unpleasant," "[u]nkind, malicious," "[c]ruel and unrestrained" ("Beastly"). When used as labels, these words imply a figure with an extreme air of "otherness" and a conniving maliciousness so out of place in the world that they merit an antiquated term. Furthermore, because of the age of the term "beast," its use simultaneously contributes to the time twist at the end of the show and adds a dose of timeless terror to this figure whose form is the stuff of nightmares.

"Beast" is found in Middle English and comes from the Old French "beste," earlier from Latin "bestia" ("Beast"). Furthermore, some of the definitions for both "beast" and "beastly" are labeled "archaic" or "dated," highlighting the age of the word ("Beast"; "Beastly"). Therefore, the term contributes to the impression that the series is set in the nineteenth century, the time-worn *Beast* blending in perfectly with pre-colonial names like *Beatrice* and *Gregory*. The fact that "beast" dates back to Old French speaks to the age of such a sinister character, this "voice in the night" whose pedigree dates back to the very origins of folklore, at least a thousand years ago (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6; Gannon). He is a figure immortalized in fairy tales: the monster lurking in the darkness of the forest, preying on children who have wandered too far from home. The Tavern-keeper even has a song advising listeners to avoid the Beast at all costs, using one of the most ancient expressions of cultural values, songs, to form a direct connection between the fear the Beast inspires in the patrons of the tavern and the fear humankind has known

since we first felt the eyes of some unknown creature watching us from the shadows. The Tavern-keeper warns:

> He lurks out there in the Unknown,
>
> Seeking those who are far from home,
>
> Hoping never to let you return.
>
> Oh, better beware.
>
> Oh, the Beast is out there.
>
> Oh, better be wise,
>
> And don't believe his lies. (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 4).

The Beast, then, is a figure taken from the most ancient origins of folklore, labeled with a word that dates back centuries, highlighting his insidious omnipresence in the nightmares of humanity ("Beast"). Moreover, as one might expect of a character so pervasive in Western civilization, the Beast in *Over the Garden Wall* has deep-seated ties to Christianity, specifically to the Christian Devil.

As an extension of his roots in fairytales and other mythologies, the Beast correlates to the Devil in Christianity, continuing the pattern of names with heavy Christian significance in the show. "Beasts" can be found throughout Christian writings and beliefs, from the dragon symbolizing forces that contradict the Christian God to the Beast of Revelation, "[i]n the Old Testament and New Testament the image of the beast is used to describe both the power and intensity of evil and to declare God's ultimate victory" (Elwell). Additionally, the term "beast" in Biblical writings is synonymous with the Antichrist, both denoting all things evil and un-Godly (Elwell). Therefore, to anyone familiar with the beast terminology found in the Bible, the cartoon Beast takes on an

additional lens of corruption, his very name connoting everything evil, everything un-Godly by definition. Through this lens, other qualities of the Beast are brought into clearer perspective, including his associations in the show with both light and darkness.

Because in the Bible beasts are associated with the Antichrist, they are also connected to Lucifer, a figure steeped in light-related symbolism, the angel who fell from Heaven and became the Devil. In her analysis "Archetype and Symbol of a Wise Old Man," Sevinj Bakish delves into Jungian archetypes, looking closer at the character Lucifer in the Bible. She explains that, although the name *Lucifer* means 'light-bearer,' Lucifer is "the personification of evil," associated with shadow in Christianity, as Jung observed, and thus, the "name of Lucifer indicates how the image could convert into its contrast, therefore, the relativity of good and evil" (179-180). In *Over the Garden Wall*, the Beast's paradoxical relationship with his lantern comes into play. Although the Beast cannot stand to be exposed by the light of the lantern, or by any light, for that matter, the light in the lantern is what keeps him alive. The show propagates this paradox as well, particularly in the final confrontation between the boys, the Beast, and the Woodsman when the Beast offers to put Greg's spirit in the lantern, explaining that Greg will "live on inside" as long as the lantern is kept lit, which will become Wirt's job (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Wirt refuses, and the Beast claims he is only trying to help the elder child. Wirt then makes the connection between the Beast and the lantern: "You're not trying to help me. You just have some weird obsession with keeping this lantern lit. It's almost like your soul is in this lantern" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Panicking, the Beast threatens Wirt, confirming the boy's theory. In this way, by identifying the Beast's ironic

dependence on the lantern, Wirt calls attention to the dual nature of Lucifer. The Beast is both light and darkness, the duality of Lucifer embodied in a children's cartoon character.

Even the Beast's proclivity for deal-making ties him to the Christian devil, said to be seen at crossroads making deals with the desperate (Seiferth). In true trickster fashion, the Beast is so crafty that he has devised a way to keep his lantern burning without having to handle the bright object himself or do any of the physical labor required to sustain the flame. By way of deal-making, the Beast tricks unwitting passersby into thinking he has preserved the souls of their loved ones in the lantern and that, as long as they keep it lit using Edelwood oil, the lantern will sustain the fading soul. The Beast profits threefold from this hoax, as he presumably gets to keep the soul of the lost loved one, gets a lackey to extract oil and tend to his lantern, and gets an additional soul as the lantern-bearer wastes away harvesting the spent lives of others in the Edelwood trees. We see this pattern in the Woodsman, the Beast's latest dupe, who believes his daughter's spirit is kept safe in the lantern. When the Woodsman discovers where the Edelwood trees come from, though, and learns that the Beast wants him to harvest the lives of Wirt and Greg to keep the lantern lit, he is both disgusted and conflicted, crying "One cannot trade the souls of children as if they were tokens! There has to be another way" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 7). The Beast replies, "No. There is only me. There is only my way. There is only the forest, and there is only surrender" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 7). The Beast has the Woodsman fooled until the final chapter, when Wirt makes the connection that the Woodsman either never did or never could bear to make, and, in the end, it is the Woodsman who extinguishes the Beast's lantern, plunging the Unknown into darkness

while simultaneously eliminating the darkness completely (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). The Beast's final deal is broken.

Additional parallels between *Over the Garden Wall* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy* exist in the similarities between McHale's Beast and Dante's Devil, both beastly in form and in action (GlobeGander). However, aside from their multiple mouths, the Beast and Dante's Devil do not share many physical qualities. Dante's Devil is gargantuan with three colorful faces, bat wings and razor-sharp teeth that he uses to grind his traitorous victims into a fleshy pulp, while the Beast is, depending on the lighting, either a shadowy humanoid figure with glowing eyes or an actual pile of fleshy human pulp. That said, both figures are beastly in form, hauntingly not human in one way or another; the physical deformities of both villains unite them in title: "beast," despite the fact that in *The Divine Comedy* Dante does not use a word that translates directly to "beast" to refer to his Devil.

As an additional parallel between the two works, the final encounters with the Beast and Dante's Devil align. When Wirt, Beatrice, and Jason approach the circle of trees where the Beast is holding Greg hostage, they see the Beast through a storm similar to the one through which Dante sees the Devil in the Inferno (Alighieri Canto 34; McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Moreover, both villains have the same terrifying effect on the humans around them. This effect is so profound that Dante is almost incapable of describing it in his writing: "How then I became frozen and feeble, do not ask, / reader, for I do not write it, and all speech would be / insufficient" (Alighieri Canto 34; lines 22-24). "I did not die and I did not remain alive: think / now for yourself, if you have wit at all, what I / became, deprived of both," he instructs (Alighieri Canto 34; lines 25-27).

This depiction perfectly matches the effect the Beast has had on Greg by the time the trio finds him mid-transformation—deathly pale, freezing, and barely conscious—he has not died, but he is not fully alive, either (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). As they approach Satan's cave, Virgil, his guide, warns Dante about the room they are about to enter: "'Behold Dis, and behold the place / where you must arm yourself with courage'" (Alighieri Canto 34; line 19). As Wirt trudges on through the wind and the snow, carrying Jason and Beatrice in his arms and determined to reach his brother, the viewer gets the impression that he has all of the courage he could need, that he will get Greg back no matter what (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). The Beast is the big bad beast in the boys' story, while the Devil is the beast of Dante's story. Although the two are separate in name, they are alike in nature and therefore title; they are "cruel, violent, . . . depraved": beasts ("Beast").

Although the Beast, from the first glimpse we get of him, is clearly not animalian, he is also not human; his name describes this indistinction in the possible mixture of the human and the animalian in his form as well as in the otherness of his being. Until the final episode, the Beast is only ever shown in shadow, an outline against the dark forest: standing upright, tall, seemingly humanoid in appearance apart from antlers on his head, with two glowing eyes and a shape indicating a cloak of some kind. His voice, although menacingly deep, can unquestioningly be classified as human. This means that, initially, the Beast appears to be a combination of human and animal with some additional influence of the supernatural—bipedal with two arms, two eyes, and two antlers—"beastly" in the truest sense of the word. *Beast* thus connotes a figure somewhere between human and animal, a gruesome combination of the two, unclassifiable as either/or, and therefore classified as *Beast*. However, in the final chapter of the show,

after Wirt faces off with the Beast in order to rescue Greg, the Woodsman shines the light from the Beast's lantern on the Beast, himself, revealing the creature's true form. The Beast is made up of the disfigured faces of his past victims. Their eyes, nostrils, and mouths hang open in empty and haunting grimaces so that the Beast's skin is rife with holes; his figure is extremely pale, his face gaunt, housing two empty, luminescent eye sockets, thin antlers, and a torn and tattered cape. Although both the shadow-figure and the exposed image of the Beast are the stuff of nightmares, the Beast is, in his physical form, neither human nor animal nor somewhere in between the two. Rather, he is something other, something more sinister and unnatural, a product of corruption and evil. He is an abomination, a beast.

The Beast's name also denotes the disturbing, inhuman nature of his actions: he is somewhere between living and dead, sustained only through the consumption of the souls of the lost and the lonely. The implication of the Beast's illuminated appearance, an amalgam of the faces of the souls he has taken, along with the confrontation in the final chapter, is that the Beast cannot survive on his own, that his soul is sustained by the lantern. With this revelation, the dots of the series suddenly connect themselves: those who wander the Unknown eventually give up and gradually transform into Edelwood trees. The eerie, oil-dripping trees are the same ones the Woodsman has spent the season cutting down and processing, as he mistakenly thinks that he needs the Edelwood oil to keep the lantern lit and therefore to sustain his daughter's soul. In Chapter 8, before the introduction of this new information, we see the Edelwood process beginning when Wirt momentarily gives in to his hopelessness. Small tree limbs and leaves begin to envelop Wirt as he sleeps until he wakes and, realizing that Greg is gone, shakes off the tiny

branches. We see it again in the final chapter when Wirt and Beatrice find Greg, alone under the influence of the Beast for too long, dangerously pale and almost fully enveloped by limbs and leaves. We understand then why the Beast has been trying to lure the boys out into the woods: he needs the oil their lost souls will provide once they give in to hopelessness and transform into Edelwood trees to fuel his lantern and to keep him, for lack of a better word, alive. In terms of morality, the Beast is, as his name suggests, inhuman and depraved to the point of atrocity.

With the understanding of the nature and function of the Edelwood trees comes the notion that the Beast is possibly part Edelwood tree himself. For example, the Beast's antlers, especially when exposed in the light of the lantern, appear very similar to branches. This presents the possibility that the Beast is not part animal, but rather, is part Edelwood. The Beast could have once been a human wandering the woods just like the boys, just like all of the other souls who are trapped in the Unknown, but once he began to transform into an Edelwood tree, something went awry or his soul became corrupted, resulting in a creature somewhere between living and dead that must absorb the souls of others to remain animate to any extent or to keep his own transformation at bay. Once again, the Beast is disfigured both physically and morally. He is something that should not exist in nature yet is synonymous with it in the Unknown. If he was once human and began to undergo the Edelwood process, becoming half-enveloped in the fast-growing tree, though, that implies that the transformation can happen without him, that it was happening before he existed and that it can continue to happen without him. Alternately, the Beast could be an indispensable part of the Unknown, having been around since the very beginning of this purgatory. He might have branches as antlers because he was

grown from the forest, just like the countless other trees that make up the Unknown, as the forest is not made entirely of Edelwood; in fact, Edelwood becomes rather hard to come by at the end of the show, pushing the Beast to hurry along the boys' progress whereas he would otherwise be able to sit back and wait, slowly driving them to their demise. Either way, part of the forest or horrible result of it, the Beast is, as his name suggests, a sickly predator, a monster lurking in the dark, waiting to gobble up unwitting travelers.

Finally, the fact that the Beast does not have a person-specific name but rather a common noun used as a name adds one final layer of terror to his character. In the introduction of *The Study of Names*, Nuessel briefly discusses namelessness, stating, "It is not possible to refer to an item or person without that item or person having a name. In this sense, a name is a *sine qua non* for existence. Without a name, no linguistic means of reference is possible" (2). Accordingly, the Beast's lack of a personal name is dehumanizing and serves to make him unidentifiable, even giving the illusion that he does not exist at all. Despite the connotative and denotative impressions of the title *Beast*, it simultaneously makes him a mystery, something impossible to speak about specifically or to confirm as real. When the brothers, Beatrice, and Jason are hiding in the back of a runaway wagon in the fourth chapter, even though the boys cannot see anything chasing after him, the driver is hysterical, crying, "The Beast is upon me! The Beast is upon me!" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 4). Later, when the boys meet Adelaide and learn her plan for them, Adelaide explains her motivations: "I do as he commands, the voice of the night, the Beast of eternal darkness" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). In these instances, then, the Beast seems to become a driving force of paranoia and hallucinations, something that

characters suspect is following them or a voice they say is driving them to commit horrible deeds, despite the fact that he might in reality be doing just that. He is a force all the more impossible to lay a finger on because he has no name. This means that, to anyone who has not had a direct encounter with the Beast, he sounds like a hallucination, like the ravings of madness, a threat not to be taken seriously—that is, not to be taken seriously until there is no denying his existence, and even then, it is impossible to defend against an enemy that cannot be identified. On the other hand, those who do see him or hear him are clearly scared out of their wits, to the point of panic and debasement. The Beast's name (or lack thereof) is as lethal as it is frightening.

Jason Funderburker

Even though the Beast is the character with the most complex literary connections, Jason Funderburker is the character with the most complex role in the show. Jason, the frog that Greg totes around on the brothers' travels, does not speak to the boys once. In fact, it is not revealed that he can speak at all until "Chapter 6: Lullaby in Frogland," when we discover that he has an extraordinary singing voice. After that, he does not speak again in the main storyline of the show. Instead, he spends the vast majority of the season simply croaking as he hops along or as Greg carries him in his arms, his hat, or his clothing. Jason is also the subject of a running naming joke throughout the series: Greg can never find a name he thinks is fitting for his slimy green friend, so he keeps assigning names to the frog, trying them out, and then moving on to the next name. In fact, as mentioned above, the first lines of dialogue spoken in the show are Greg listing off frog names that he has considered but does not like, leading up to the "very worst name for this frog" which we never learn (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1). The

naming gag continues throughout the series, also functioning as a device that moves the plot forward, and it ends only when Jason Funderburker has his name and Greg is satisfied with it. However, the relationship between the frog and the boy is not as one-sided and hierarchical as one might think. Jason takes an active part in the group's adventures, even choosing to stick with his human companions when he has the option to leave. Strangest of all, Jason clearly has more power in the show than the two brothers do, as he is the narrator of the series.

The name *Jason Funderburker* is itself an onomastic adventure. The name *Jason* comes from the Greek *Iasōn*, most likely stemming from the Greek word *iasthai* meaning 'to heal' (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Jason"). Its most famous namesake is the Jason of Greek mythology who sailed with the Argonauts, stole the Golden Fleece, and was undone by Medea, but the name is also found in New Testament Greek and was used by Puritans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Hanks, Hardcastle, and Hodges, "Jason"). Thus, similar to most of the other main characters, *Jason* has Christian connections. Moreover, Jason of Ancient Greece is considered a hero on par with Odysseus and Hercules. This suggests that, although Wirt is the primary hero of the story in the sense that he undergoes great change and eventually carries his companions home, Jason Funderburker is at least a minor hero in the series. As discussed below, he contributes in his own way to the resolution reached by the brothers, playing his heroic part in the series' denouement.

In contrast to the first name *Jason*, the second name *Funderburker* has very different origins. *Funderburker* comes from the German *Funderburke*; in turn, *Funderburke* comes from *Funderburg*, which comes from the German *von der Burg*,

meaning ‘from the castle,’ referring to “someone who lived and worked at a castle” (Hanks, *Name*, “Funderburke”; Hanks, *Name*, “Funderburg”). Although we never see Jason at a castle, because his life is such a mystery to us it is quite possible he lives and works at a castle and we just never see. Nonetheless, *Funderburker* has no entry in the *Dictionary of American Family Names*, and it stands out among the other names in *Over the Garden Wall*, starkly foreign to general American audiences compared to *Greg* and *Beatrice* (Hanks, *Dictionary*). To many of us, *Funderburker* is an odd combination of consonants, an unfamiliar element of the show that does not fit the overall pattern. This contrast between *Funderburker* and the other names in the series is unexpected and creates a small spurt of humor for the viewer, proving that *Funderburker* is a funny name (Nilsen and Nilsen 1).

However, if the name *Funderburker* is funny, then the name *Jason Funderburker* is hilarious. The combination of the familiar *Jason*, which held the 49th position on the list of the 200 most popular names in the US as recently as the early 2000s, with the foreign-sounding and the already out-of-place *Funderburker* creates a jarring and unexpected juxtaposition (“Popular”). This juxtaposition thereby establishes an additional instance of humor derived from the frog’s name, and it also bolsters another example of name-created humor in the series (Nilsen and Nilsen 1). However, Jason’s name does more in the show than simply provide laughs.

Over the course of the series, Greg goes through dozens of names for the frog before arriving at *Jason Funderburker*. Including the list of “worst” names that the show opens with, there are 25 total names in the 100-minute series. The first name we hear Greg use to refer to the frog is *Kitty* in Chapter 1. After that, he uses *Wirt*, *Wirt Junior*,

George Washington, *Mr. President*, *Benjamin Franklin*, *Doctor Cucumber*, *Greg Junior*, *Skipper*, *Ronald*, and, finally, at Wirt's suggestion, *Jason Funderburker*. This name is not chosen at random and in fact has particular situational significance, representing multiple resolutions at once, as will be discussed later in this section. As for the rest of the names, there appears to be no rhyme or reason to them, no order or pattern, except that they do belie an unusual power dynamic between Greg and Jason that is still somewhat unclear. Ordinarily, Greg's names for the frog would be a simple fact of a child naming a new pet, perhaps trying out various names on a new puppy before deciding on the best fit as she romps about the backyard. Nothing is that simple in *Over the Garden Wall*, though: Jason is no ordinary pet, and the Unknown is no one's suburban backyard.

Unlike the average frog, Jason is fully cognizant of what is going on around him on a level that is equivalent to human awareness. Despite the fact that Greg is carrying him for much of the show, Jason is willingly along for the ride, actively participating through occasional croaks and through his facial expressions, which always match Greg's. When Greg is scared, Jason looks scared; when he is happy, Jason looks happy, and so on. Most importantly, though, when the frog has the opportunity to leave the boys, Jason chooses to stay and continue traveling with them, even going so far as to seek them out after they have been separated (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). This happens in "Chapter 6: Lullaby in Frogland": when the world learns of Jason's vocal capabilities, a team of frog music producers offers Jason (who Greg is calling *Mr. President* at this point) a record contract. Greg thinks his companion is going to accept the contract and leave the boys to develop his music career, so, convinced he is doing what is best for the frog, Greg sneaks away to let him follow his dreams, no strings attached (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). At the

end of the episode, however, after the gang's run-in with Adelaide, "Benjamin Franklin" has left the music producers behind and finds his way back to the boys, and he and Greg have a joyful reunion. This demonstrates that he is traveling with the brothers by choice and not just because Greg has abducted him, as children are apt do with animals. Jason is an autonomous being, no matter how little he speaks or how often he is carried by Greg. Therefore, because he is an independent personality, Greg's naming of Jason becomes problematic, the equivalent of one person exerting control over another.

There have been numerous studies on the topic of names and naming in oppressive situations. Nuessel notes that when a dominant power imposes control over another party, names are one of the ways that control manifests itself, citing the master-slave relationship as well as the assigning of numbers instead of names (3). He writes, "To be named by someone else means that that person can and will exert control over our existence" (3). The authority to assign names is often a power taken and not a power granted. Thus, Greg's naming of Jason could appear at first to be a power play between the two, with Greg exerting control over Jason.

Clearly, though, a power play is not the case here. In addition to Funderburker's fondness for his human friend, as shown by the frog's return at the end of Chapter 6, Greg also respects Funderburker's personal rights. The following scene attests to this respect. Greg and Jason are goofing off—Jason is tucked into the back of Greg's trousers with his head and arms sticking out, as if he were in a pocket, as the boy waddles around in circles singing to himself—when Wirt reprimands them: "Get that frog out of your pants" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). As the frog crosses his arms at Wirt, Greg replies, as if with a shrug, "He can do what he wants" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). Again, we see

evidence here of the independence of each of these characters and the simultaneous respect ingrained in their friendship, including the names that Greg assigns. Jason appears to be fine with Greg naming him, especially since it turns out the frog can sing and speak and could therefore tell the boys his real name at any point; otherwise, if he is truly unhappy, Jason is free to leave if he wishes. Between the two, the names are just a quirk of their relationship and not a power play of any kind, especially considering that Jason has the most situational control of any character in the series.

Jason Funderburker is the narrator of *Over the Garden Wall*. This fact is very easy to miss, especially during the first one or two viewings of the show.[5] The song and voiceover narration which only introduce the very first episode of the show and conclude the very last, acting as bookends on the series, are sung and spoken by Jason Funderburker. Just as the first lines of dialogue are Greg naming Jason, the first image in the series is Jason spinning into view playing a tiny piano against a black background, and the first words spoken at all are Jason singing the show's theme. The enigmatic character also closes out the show, narrating the ending and singing the second verse of the introductory song before spinning back out of view. The very last image we see is Greg's "rock facts" rock being put back in its proper place in Mrs. Daniels' garden, all the world as it should be (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). The sequences are set up to indicate that Funderburker is the one showing us the story, letting us glimpse into the Unknown. He has a kind of meta power in the production: he is the only character who knows there is a television show going on, and the introduction even suggests that Funderburker has control over what we see and hear, as he lets us in on the events of the show, from the state of the Unknown before and after the boys visit to the modern-day occurrences

surrounding Wirt and Greg. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that a name or two chosen by his best friend do not have a significant negative hold on Funderburker, who can apparently control time and space. He even seems amused by some of the names, croaking and smiling in response to Greg's ideas. Jason is happy to be along for the ride, and, lucky for us, he takes us along with him.

Additionally, with all of his vast knowledge, Jason might realize that his name matters more to Greg and Wirt than it does to him and so leaves it up to them to assign it, which is his heroic act. The naming of Jason, while a running gag in the show, is also a huge point of contention for the two brothers. Right up until the final episode, Wirt wants nothing to do with the frog. He considers him to be Greg's frog for most of the series, and Greg is the one to carry the frog around and include him in the adventures until the end. For example, in Chapter 6, before Jason's surprise musical debut, Greg is worried that "George Washington" does not have clothes like the other frogs on the ferry and that he feels cold. When he asks Wirt to feel how cold the frog's feet are, Wirt declines, explaining, "No, he's supposed to be cold, Greg. He's a frog" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). Greg presses, telling Wirt, "He's our frog!" Wirt denies this outright, shirking responsibility of and association with "Mr. President": "Well, he's not my frog!" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 6). We later find out why Wirt refuses ownership of Jason so vehemently for so long, and, while the circumstances behind the denial seem sad, the situation's resolutions are made more meaningful because of them.

In "Chapter 9: Into the Unknown," as the episode unfolds, we learn the background behind Greg's ceaseless naming, piece by piece. The chapter takes us into the boys' modern lives the night they enter the Unknown. It is Halloween, and we learn

that Greg has been asking Wirt to go frog hunting with him for some time, but Wirt has not gotten around to it; as Wirt gazes at his love, Sara, through a chain link fence while she performs as the bee mascot at a high school football game, Greg asks his brother, “So you want to go look for frogs with me like you said you would a while ago and haven’t done it yet?” (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). Wirt brushes him off. Greg mentions the topic again four more times during the night. In the meantime, the boys try to get back a mix tape which Wirt made for Sara featuring “poetry and clarinet.” Greg, wrongly believing Wirt wanted to get the tape to Sara, has given it to her friends (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). When the boys cannot get the tape back in time and Wirt feels as if his social life is “crumbling all around” him, the elder boy’s pent-up resentment toward his little brother comes out as the boys hop a cemetery wall and land on some train tracks (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). It is at this point that Greg stumbles across the frog who will eventually become Jason Funderburker. Overjoyed with his discovery, Greg announces that the boys have found their “lucky frog” and that they have to name him for good luck (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). Wirt is exasperated with Greg at this point, and he declares, “I don’t want to have anything to do with you or that frog” just before a train surprises the boys, causing all three of them to tumble, unconscious, into a lake (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). For most of the series, then, Jason’s name represents a schism that exists between the boys. Notwithstanding, Greg is too loyal and kind to recognize Wirt’s anger, and he continues to search for a name for the frog on his own since Wirt does not want to participate: “Antelope, Guggenheim, Albert, Salami, Giggly, Jumpy, Tom, Thomas, Tambourine, Leg-face McCullen” (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 1).

Finally, the name *Jason Funderburker*, bestowed by Wirt, resolves multiple storylines all at once. Throughout the series, Wirt has been denying participating in Greg's frog fun, partly to shirk responsibility for everyone, including himself ("Wirt and Responsibility"). In the final two episodes, we see Wirt carry Jason for the first time, cradling him affectionately to keep him from the cold. When Wirt and Beatrice and Jason find Greg, Wirt destroys the Edelwood tree enveloping his brother, but Greg is sickly pale and weak, quickly losing hope (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). This is the first time in the series we see Wirt take care of Greg, who is fading fast. Wirt tries to motivate Greg to remain conscious, explaining, "We've got to get Jason Funderburker home, right?" (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Then, once the Beast has been dealt with, hoisting his brother onto his back and cradling Jason, Wirt wakes up in the lake where the three have been slowly sinking and freezing the entire time, caught between life and death (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Thus, naming Jason is representative of a larger change of heart on Wirt's part, the realization of the full potential of his illustrious name. By naming the frog, he is letting go of the resentment he has been harboring toward his little brother, participating in the frog hunt that Greg has been begging him for since before the Unknown as well as accepting responsibility for the situation and for Greg and Jason, repairing his relationship with his brother ("Wirt and Responsibility"). Therefore, Jason's name carries more significance for Wirt and Greg and for the storyline as a whole than it does for the frog himself, so he takes a step back and allows the boys to name him themselves. This selflessness is Jason's contribution to the boys and to the show; it is Jason Funderburker's heroic act.

Interestingly, the name *Jason Funderburker* has additional onomastic origins. It is based on *Jason Funderberker*, b-e-r-k, Wirt's romantic and social rival. Wirt curses Funderberker before his realization in the last two episodes of how unreasonable he has been. Funderberker has a crush on Sara as well, but Wirt is too self-conscious and insecure to see that Funderberker is not the "total package" that he makes him out to be and that Sara is not interested in him at all; she only has eyes for Wirt (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 9). Up until his epiphany, Wirt treats Jason Funderberker's name as if it were the scourge of the Earth, muttering it bitterly under his breath every chance he gets. However, by naming the frog Jason Funderburker, Wirt is recognizing that Greg is more important than his social life, which is the conflict that drove them over the wall and onto the train tracks in the first place. In order to say Funderberker's name without flinching, Wirt has to let go of a lot of animosity and anxiety very quickly, all in order to save Greg and Jason, realizing that holding onto his bitterness, both toward Greg and toward Funderberker, is not worth dying over. Thus, he names the frog *Jason Funderburker* and carries his loved ones out of the Unknown, then scoops them up under the water and gets them safely to shore (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Wirt's change of heart is also evident in the hospital where the boys are recovering and where his friends have come to visit. Wirt converses easily with the others, including Sara and Funderberker, which is something he could not accomplish before, although things do get a little confusing with both "Funderberkers" in the room (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Lastly, safe and dry in Wirt's hospital room, Greg accidentally refers to Jason Funderburker as his [Greg's] frog. Wirt corrects him, interjecting, "Our frog," thereby rounding out the storyline and giving the trio the happy ending it deserves—especially Jason Funderburker, who is wearing a top

hat and long socks in the trio's last scene (McHale, *OTGW* Ch. 10). Oh, that Jason Funderburker.

Conclusion

Clearly, names and naming fulfill essential roles in *Over the Garden Wall*, from providing plot development and contributing to characterization to accomplishing more subtle tasks such as imparting literary allusion, conveying complicated character dynamics, and propagating prominent themes that run throughout the series. However, this show is not alone in its intricate use of names. Names and naming facilitate communication between creator and audience in any work of fiction (Klein 167). They are tools at the author's fingertips, another mode of expressing an artistic vision. Television and, in particular, animation present relatively new mediums for the application of such nuanced naming, in turn opening up new areas for onomastic as well as other linguistic and literary studies. When television is treated as text and analyzed with the same commitment and care shown to works of literature, the possibilities for the products of these new mediums are limitless (Edgerton and Marsden 2-3). This is especially true when such innovative creations are viewed as the continuation of these works of literature, as the continuation of academic conversations that began thousands of years ago. *Over the Garden Wall* is an excellent example of such possibilities, referencing literary works and traditions Western civilization is founded upon in a manner only a product of the twenty-first century can: through the innovative medium of animation.

As such, we as viewers can strive to give television, including animation, the active viewership it deserves. Mittell writes of complex television that "[y]ou cannot

simply watch these programs as an unmediated window to a realistic storyworld into which you might escape" (38). He says, "[R]ather, narratively complex television demands you pay attention to the window frames, asking you to reflect on how it provides partial access to the diegesis and how the panes of glass distort your vision of the unfolding action" (38). This complex and challenging media is currently being produced for audiences who are paying attention. If no one is paying attention, though, then the details that go into complex television will go unnoticed and unexamined, and the effort that went into the production process will be lost. However, by tuning in to the "window frames" in addition to the image outside, we pick up on the author's interaction and can capitalize on the benefits that engaging with a text on such a deep level entail (Mittell 38; Klein 167; Mittell 34-35). In the end, everyone wins.

Moreover, the academic applications of *Over the Garden Wall* do not stop with this thesis. As stated above, the series is not only abundant with additional references to Dante's *Inferno* not explicated here, but it is also rife with references to traditional Germanic folk- and fairytales, particularly through the Beast, figures central to the foundations of Christianity, and Arthurian legend. Possible subjects for further onomastic analysis include almost any of the show's secondary characters, including those who continue the theme of Christian names such as Enoch and Adelaide and those with archetypal names such as the Woodsman and the Tavern-keeper. Finally, the philosophical and metaphorical implications of both the name of the series' purgatory, the *Unknown*, and the name of the show itself, *Over the Garden Wall*, are vast, and a comprehensive analysis of either term would yield substantial academic results.

In summary, from the first chapter to the very last, opening with Greg's search for the perfect name for his frog and ending with the resolution of this same dilemma, the significance of names and naming in *Over the Garden Wall* is established time and again. Without the specific names Wirt, Greg, Beatrice, the Beast, and Jason have, this work would not be *Over the Garden Wall*. It would not have the same characters, it would not have the same complex storyline or the same level of allegorical depth, and it would not have the same quirky sense of humor that has endeared this show to fans of all ages. As he sits at his piano and narrates the end of the series, bringing our experience in the Unknown to a close, Jason demonstrates this sense of humor and simultaneously expresses the wistfulness of the Unknown, his voice fading out as his final song begins and as images of the now resolved souls living in the Unknown flash across the screen: "And so the story is complete, and everyone is satisfied with the ending. And so on and so forth. And yet, over the garden wall . . . ."

Notes

1. Names and their meanings in this thesis are documented as they are in onomastic writing, where names that are being discussed are italicized and their meanings are written in ‘’ marks. For example, *Lucifer* means ‘light-bearer.’

2. *A Dictionary of First Names* provides a comprehensive list of personal names, their original meanings, their histories, any salient literary or “real-world” examples of the names, and any significant connections to them.

3. This connection was pointed out to me by an anonymous reviewer from the American Name Society when I submitted an abstract of this thesis for consideration.

4. The former title is used most often, but it cannot be confirmed that the article is definitely part of his name, so *Beast* is used in this thesis.

5. The fact that Jason is the narrator was brought to my attention by a colleague, Jarrod Mayes.

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