

**ON THE TOPIC OF NOMINATIVE SYMBOLISM  
(AN OVERVIEW OF CHARLES DICKENS’S  
“MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT”)**

*Yana Manova-Georgieva*  
*Neofit Rilski South-West University*

Literary names have long been in the focus of attention by linguists, onomasts, linguo-cultural specialists, etc., with the clear idea that the creation of a literary image is closely related to the name an author chooses for them. Therefore, this paper aims at revealing the symbolism of proper names in literature, and more precisely in the two-volume novel “Martin Chuzzlewit<sup>1</sup>” by Charles Dickens. Proper names are hereby considered significant in completing the image of characters in the novel, thus developing certain features embedded in personages themselves.

*Key words:* literary onomastics, nominative symbolism, literature, proper names

**Introduction**

The notion of nominative symbolism has got rooted in literary works since the thirteenth century as correlating with genres of literary works and distributing certain features of characters (Fowler 2012: 33). Therefore, the interpretation of the meaning of literary names can be seen as a bridge towards the better understanding of characters in a given piece of writing. Literary names carry relatively the same weight when identifying a personage as do the images of personages themselves. And when Charles Dickens is concerned, his names of characters are so vivid, so meaningful that they “speak” for themselves.

Dickens (1812-1870), renowned for his style of realistic personalities, images, closely related to the idea that their names suggest as well as symbolic features his characters possess, writes his novel “Martin Chuzzlewit” in 1844 after his journey to America. The novel, considered the last of his picaresque novels, examines the concept of selfishness,

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the literary work is hereby given using inverted commas and the names of the literary characters are henceforth italicized.

present to different extent in all members of the Chuzzlewit family. The novel abounds in characters, vivid and intriguing, multi-layered and distinguishable, yet their names as symbolic as the characters themselves.

In order to discuss what a literary name suggests and reveals, one is to distinguish between “ordinary” non-symbolic, and “extraordinary” or symbolic proper names.

A proper name is to be considered symbolic if it possesses certain characteristics. Vlahov and Florin (Vlahov and Florin 1990: 233) suggest that a name is seen as “meaningful” when it fulfills certain characteristics, such as *allusiveness*, i.e. the name of interest should allude to a real folklore, literary, or proverbial character. Another circumstance under which proper names can be realized as symbolic is the presence of a phonetic form which can promote a certain effect of the name itself. However, the mere attempt to identify a name as symbolic lies in the meaning it bears in a literary work. Therefore, the following paper appears to be an attempt to find the core of nominative symbolism in Charles Dickens’s novel “Martin Chuzzlewit”, focusing on the etymology and meaning of literary names, outlining the division between symbolic and non-symbolic names and assuming the effects nominative symbolism creates in the novel.

### **Nature and typology of proper names**

Before delving into the features and typology of literary names, a definition of the general phenomenon of the proper name is to be given. Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines the proper name as being „*the name of a particular person, place or object that is spelt with a capital letter*“<sup>2</sup>.

Frey gives a definition of proper names as follows: “*There is a single name for each individual, and the names are usually made up of two elements taken from a stock of special words used in name-making.*” (Frey 1888: XIX).

Van Langendonck (Van Langendonck 2007: 22) even suggests that proper names possess lexical, associative and emotive meaning, which lies in the concept of the importance of nominative symbolism as well. Following Van Langendonck, the lexical meaning is related to the meaning of the lexeme, the associative is connected to the connotations it provokes upon defining the referent, whereas the emotive meaning is sought with diminutives.

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<sup>2</sup> Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Version 2.0.

Having in mind the definitions given, a categorization of proper names is to be presented. Every person in English culture and tradition has at least two names – a proper (a fore, first or given name) and a family name. There is, yet, a second name which is sometimes seen as an initial or a full name after the first one.

The first name of a person is given by their parents and follows their beliefs and wishes for a better life and future of the individual. A proper name falls into one of three categories – names with symbolic meaning, wishing and protective. Names with symbolic meaning are, for example George (farmer), Calvin (bald), etc. The category of wishing names carries the desire of the parents for their children to be beautiful, successful, good-natured, etc. Here, names such as Victoria, Daisy, Faith, etc. can be found. The group of protective names comprises mainly names of saints, in which situation the fore names are believed to protect the individual and lead their faith into a positive direction. Such names are Mary, Joseph, etc. A contemporary view in the English naming tradition is also the presence of pop group names. Yet, there is another category which is characteristic for first names in English. In English culture, there is a tradition for a surname to become the first name of a person – a desire to “keep” the family name through generations. For example, the name James may appear as a family name, but can be used as a first name in order to be preserved in the family. It is a tradition with families where there are girls, who expectedly will change their family names when married. That is why, the daughter, when giving birth to a son, may name him James and thus preserve the family name.

Withycombe (Withycombe 1947: xix) suggests that names are given to the individual and usually consist of two parts. In the course of name choice there is the tendency to look for religious names, ones suggesting moral values or physical characteristics.

One of the most detailed categorizations of given names is presented by David Crystal (1989), whereby names can show physical characteristics (Kevin (handsome at birth), Adam (red complexion)); they can be related to the time and place of birth of the offspring (Barbara (foreign, Noel (Christmas))); they can be wishing (Agnes (pure), Hilary (cheerful)); or they might express the feelings of their parents (Lucy (light), Benjamin (son of my right hand, son of the south, which can be interpreted as to be happy)). Crystal also allows place for religious names, such as Joseph, Joan, Jeremy, as well as names of plants, valuable stones and natural elements (Susan (lily), Rosemary (rose), Ruby). The category of first names which were previously family names is also present with Crystal.

The second name in English culture is usually seen as a wish of the parents for the prosperity of their offspring, therefore it is more or less related to and categorized as a wishing name. It can also be given to the child to show respect or seek a wealthy relative's high esteem. English second names can be one or two, they can be written in full or as initials, or they can be absent.

As far as family names are concerned, what can be said is that they date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and are divided into several categories, following Weekley: *...every surname must be (i) personal, from the sire or ancestor, (ii) local, from the place of residence, (iii) occupative, from trade or office, (iv) a nickname, from bodily attributes, character, etc.* (Weekley 1914: 2).

Netsova (2016) categorizes family names in accordance with the grounds for their formation into family names motivated by personal names (Richardson, Dixon, Robinson); toponyms, or place names (Blackwell, Minton (a farm in the mountains)); names of topographic peculiarities of the region of residence (Oak, Stow (living in a sacred place)); occupations, handicraft and activities (Arkwright (a master of coffins), Marber (one who digs marble)); nicknames (Calf (looking like a calf), Dumbrell (stupid)) as well as other sources (Treasure, Lodder (beggar)) (Netsova 2016: 57).

### **Names of characters in “Martin Chuzzlewit”**

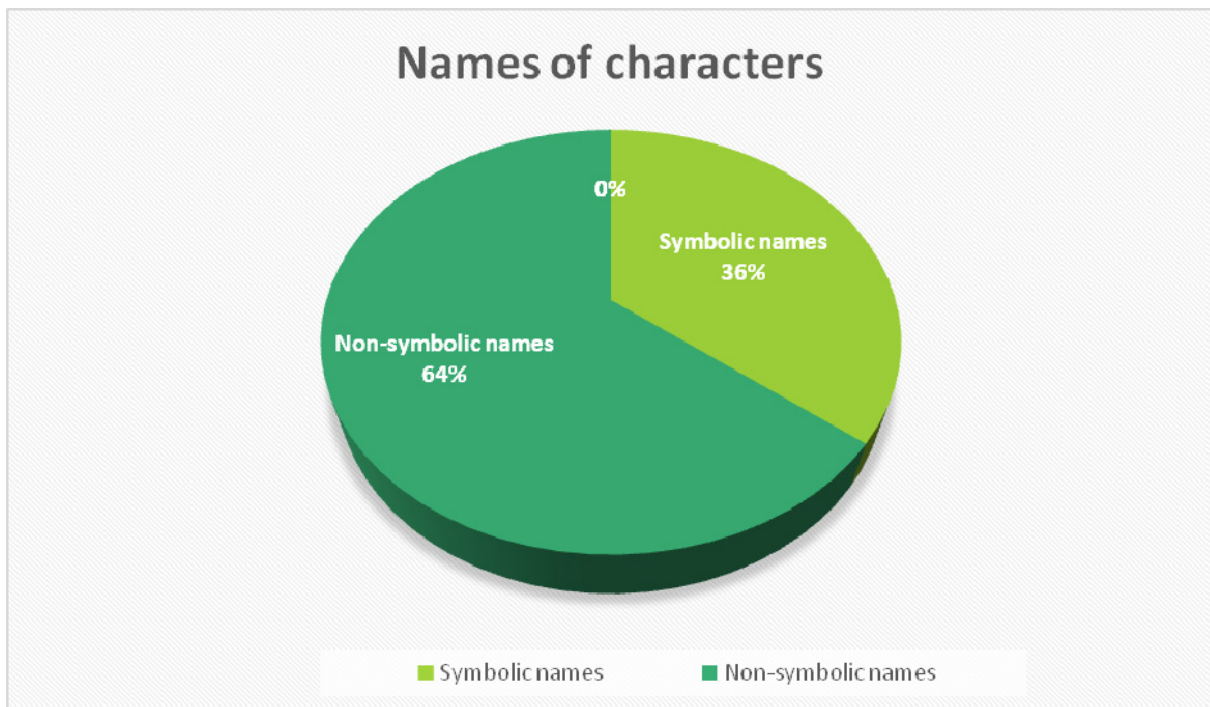
When literature is concerned, it is believed that writers are the creators of their characters. Thus, parenting a character, the author gives life to a certain personage, attaching positive or negative features to them, which at hand leads the reader to the way towards the full image of the literary “offspring” of the author, whether bringing the concept of love, hatred, selfishness, honour, etc. to the attention of the perceiver.

One of the most successful ways to fulfill the purpose of establishing a full idea of a character is by means of the appropriate choice of proper names and Dickens is a master. “He searched always for the “right name” – “the name that conveyed the outward show and inward mystery of a character or a book, the name which revealed and yet concealed” (Fowler 2012: 150).

Charles John Huffam Dickens (7 February 1812 – 9 June 1870) is one of the best painters of characters when the notion of nominative symbolism is concerned, and the novel “Martin Chuzzlewit” is a proof to how relevant proper names can be in the environment of a piece of writing. Considered as one of his best works, the novel presents characters “never so full of meaning thoroughly grasped and understood, or brought out with

such wonderful force and ease.” (Collins 2005: 191). It is a commonly known truth that Dickens “needed to determine the names of characters before he could tell their stories” (Fowler 2012:150). Therefore, attention is to be paid to the nominative symbolism in the novel of interest.

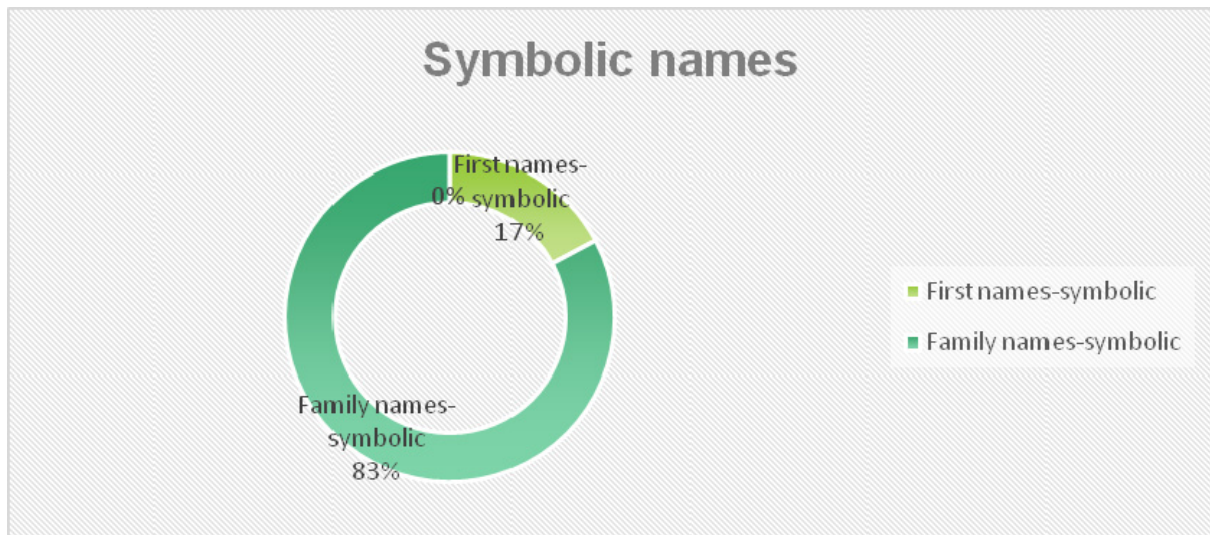
For the purpose of the analysis, 73 proper names have been excerpted and their etymology and meaning have been sought. Out of all first and family names, 26 appear to be symbolic, which is 36 % of the overall names in the novel (Table 1).



**Table 1**

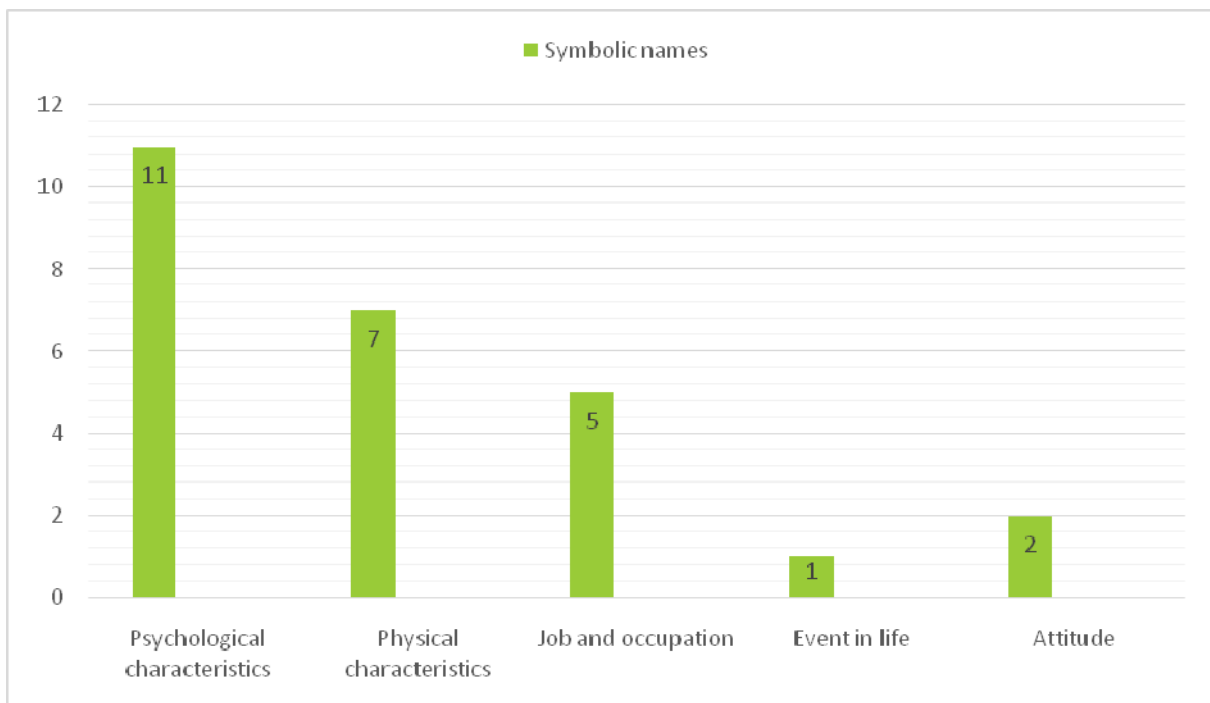
Since the aim of this paper is to identify and analyze the nominative symbolism in “Martin Chuzzlewit”, special attention is to be paid to symbolic, meaningful names. The basic concept under which the following analysis and assumptions are performed is based on the belief that names in literature do have meaning and the choice of the author upon a specific name for a character is deliberate.

What attracts the attention at first sight is the presence of far more family names which are meaningful rather than fore names. The share of symbolic family names is 83%, whereas the first names which appear to carry a degree of special meaning is 17% (Table 2).



**Table 2**

The etymology and analysis of the family names in the novel “Martin Chuzzlewit” reveal five groups under which they can be categorized. They comprise **psychological characteristics**, where eleven personages fall, **physical characteristics** with seven members, **job and occupation** with five representatives, **event in life** is represented by one character and the category of **attitude** comprising two members (Table 3).



**Table 3**

The biggest group of meaningful names is expectedly associated with the psychological characteristics of the protagonists. As previously

mentioned, eleven family names fall into this category, the most vivid representative of which is the old *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Analysis of his family name reveals that “chuzzlewit” bears the meaning of “a stupid accident prone idiot, one who makes mistakes frequently”<sup>3</sup>. Michael Slater gives the origin of the family name *Chuzzlewit* from the verb “to chizzle” – a variant of “chisel”, namely to “defraud, cheat”<sup>4</sup>. It is to hereby mention that Dickens himself spent time finding the best names for his characters, going through different variations. For example, the name of Chuzzlewit underwent changes from Chuzzletoe, Chuzzlebog, Chubblewig, Chuzzlewig, and finally became Chuzzlewit (Fowler 2012: 147). The character unfolds in the course of the narrative, yet at first he in a way wrongly assumes who his close people and who his enemies are. Throughout the novel, old Martin Chuzzlewit realizes his wrong estimate towards most of his relatives and acquaintances, and sets his attitude right.

Another important and vivid image in the novel, *Seth Pecksniff*, also falls in this category. A cousin to the elder Martin, an architect with presumably high moral values and honorable attitude towards his family and relatives, he appears to be one of the most cunning and greedy personages in the narrative. “His name expresses him perfectly, suggestive as it is both of carping criticism and of supercilious disapproval” (Slater 2009: 208). He bears no inhibitions when Jonas Chuzzlewit chooses one of his daughters (Mercy) for a wife and totally ignores the feelings of the other one (Charity); his character develops and reaches true and unsurpassed selfishness and greed up to the end of the narrative. As for the name of the character, “pecksniff” is referred to as “a person who affects benevolence or pretends to have high moral principles; (also) a person who interferes officiously in the business of others”<sup>5</sup>. Pecksniff’s first name also completes the general image of the character, etymologically suggesting “(biblical) third son of Adam, literally “set, appointed,” from Hebrew Sheth, from shith “to put, set.”<sup>6</sup>

A representative of the category of psychological peculiarities of the personage is also *Tom Pinch*, an assistant of Mr. Pecksniff’s, whom Pinch blindly adores and worships. Unfortunately for the poor servant, however, everyone else except for him realizes what evil lies in the soul of Pecksniff. It is at the mere end of the novel that Pinch becomes aware of the real nature of character of his master. The protagonist’s family name

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Chuzzlewit> (last retrieved 5/11/18).

<sup>4</sup> Slater M. (2009: 208). Charles Dickens, Yale University Press=

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pecksniff> (last retrieved 2/11/18).

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.etymonline.com/word/Seth#etymonline\\_v\\_23294](https://www.etymonline.com/word/Seth#etymonline_v_23294) (last retrieved 2/11/18).

bears the meaning of “to cause to shrivel or wither”<sup>7</sup> which is in fact the attitude of his master towards him as well as the consequence of Pecksniff’s attitude.

Two other representatives of the group revealing psychological characteristics are *Mercy* and *Charity Pecksniff*, whereby the first names of Seth Pecksniff’s daughters appear symbolic. *Mercy*, sometimes called *Merry* (“full of gaiety or high spirits”<sup>8</sup>) is a complex image possessing “compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one’s power”<sup>9</sup>). The category of symbolic names which are related to the character of the person is completed with *Montague Tigg* (the name is of Norman origin and one from La Manche in France, so named from Old French *mont* ‘hill’ with “agu” (Latin *acutus*, from *acus* ‘needle’, ‘point’<sup>10</sup>)), *Mrs. Prig* (“a thief”)<sup>11</sup>, *Mr. Wolf*, *Mr. Spottletoe* and *Prof. Mullit* (his family name meaning “to consider at length, ponder”<sup>12</sup>).

The second category is the one related to the physical characteristics of the bearers, again concealed in their proper names. The members of this group are seven, and it is again the family names which give the idea of the appearance of the personage related to the names Dickens attributed to them. An example of this category is *Mrs. Lupin*, a widow, and the landlady of the “Blue Dragon”, whose name reveals “a flowering plant”<sup>13</sup>, and who in fact is quite young and attractive. Throughout the narrative, *Mrs. Lupin* appears to have feelings for another very positive personage, *Mark Tapely* and by the end of the novel their romance is announced in public.

Other examples falling in the category of physical characteristics are *Mr. Bullamy*, the porter at the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance, who wears a red outfit<sup>14</sup> and introduces clients to the Assurance Company, as well as *Miss Codger*, who is in fact an old lady.<sup>15</sup> The category further develops with *Mr. Chuffey* (his family name meaning “chubby”), an elderly man and a clerk at *Antony Chuzzlewit*’s residence,

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<sup>7</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pinch> (last retrieved 1/10/18).

<sup>8</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/merry> (last retrieved 13/1/19).

<sup>9</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mercy> (last retrieved 1/10/18).

<sup>10</sup><https://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=montague> (last retrieved 1/10/18).

<sup>11</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prig> (last retrieved 2/10/18).

<sup>12</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mull> (last retrieved 13/01/19).

<sup>13</sup><https://www.etymonline.com/word/lupin> (last retrieved 2/10/18).

<sup>14</sup> The family name of the character can be associated with a corrida where the red colour attracts the bull.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/codger> (last retrieved 2/10/18).



devoted to his master and later caring towards Mercy Pecksniff, *Mr. Pawkins*, *David Crimple* (wrinkle<sup>16</sup>), as well as *Miss Toppit*.

The third category is the occupation category. The names falling into this group are five and their meaning is associated with the job of the people they are attached to. Examples of symbolic names bearing the meaning of some type of occupation can be *Mr. Mould*, the undertaker, whereby the meaning of the name is directly connected to his job<sup>17</sup>; *Mr. Tacker*, who is his assistant, the meaning of his family name suggesting “to fasten, to fix”<sup>18</sup>, and his job of a chief mourner is directly related to being close to the deceased person; *Doctor Jobling* (the name bears the idea of work); *Madame Todgers*, who is the owner of a boarding house where only men reside (her name reveals the idea of masculinity as it suggests “the male organ of copulation in higher vertebrates”<sup>19</sup>) as well as *Mrs. Gamp*, a midwife and a watcher of the dead, her family name meaning “a large umbrella”<sup>20</sup>.

The category of attitude is completed with two members, and what attracts the attention of the reader is that the symbolism here is revealed in the first names of the characters, not in their family names, as it is the case with all other categories. One female representative of the group is *Ruth Pinch*, whose first name suggests “sorrow for the misery of another; repentance, regret”<sup>21</sup>. Her appearance in the novel is incidental, yet when she realizes her brother is in love with Mary Graham, she feels so bitterly sorry for him “from the Present, and the Past, with which she is so tenderly entwined in all thy thoughts, thy strain soars onward to the Future” (Dickens 1951: 480). The other representative of the category is *Mr. Augustus Moddle*, the youngest lodger at Todgers, often underestimated and sorely attached to Mercy Pecksniff. His first name reveals the meaning of “masc. proper name, from Latin augustus – “great, venerable””<sup>22</sup>, yet the attitude of the other residents of the boarding house suggests opposition – the men frequently make fun of Mr. Moddle, his love and his seriousness in general.

<sup>16</sup><https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/crimple> (last retrieved 13/01/19).

<sup>17</sup>a soft, green or grey growth that develops on old food or on objects that have been left for too long in warm, wet air (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mould>)(last retrieved 20/10/18).

<sup>18</sup><https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/tack> (last retrieved 20/10/18).

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.thefreedictionary.com>(last retrieved 13/01/19).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gamp> (last retrieved 20/10/18).

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.etymonline.com/word/Ruth#etymonline\\_v\\_16675](https://www.etymonline.com/word/Ruth#etymonline_v_16675) (last retrieved 15/10/18).

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.behindthename.com/name/augustus> (last retrieved 15/10/18).

The last category of interest is related to an event in the person's life and has only one representative – *Mr. Lewsome*. He is a friend of Mr. Westlock's and a sick patient whom two nurses take care of at the Bull. His family name reveals the meaning of "a place of shelter: the side sheltered (as from the wind)"<sup>23</sup> which fully corresponds to the situation he is presented in.

### Conclusion

All of the above-analyzed examples of nominative symbolism in Charles Dickens's "Martin Chuzzlewit" suggest that names are more or less "carriers" of meaning, related to the nature of the characters of a certain literary work, sometimes unveiled with the immediate introducing of personages, yet in the case of the hereby analyzed novel of interest, with the development of the characters throughout the narrative, still always present. The symbolism in names can be found as they are seen as having derived from common nouns whereby their meaning can be identified. The percentage of the symbolic names suggests that names are to be chosen and used purposefully by the author and consequently perceived by the readers so as to complete the image of characters in a novel or any literary work.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lew> (last retrieved 15/10/18).

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