

## ***Miss Jean Brodie* – Telling names**

Sometimes, character traits can be anticipated by a character's name. So-called **telling names** implicitly state the quality of a character, or they refer to characters' typical behaviour.

Examples:

Squire Allworthy (= worthy, honourable) in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*

Lemuel Gulliver (= gullible<sup>1</sup>) in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*

Willy Loman (= low man) in Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*

Holden Caulfield (= to "hold on") in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

Napoleon in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

The name Brodie is strongly linked to a famous person in Scottish history and thus also a telling name:

**William Brodie** (1741–1788) was a Scottish cabinet-maker, deacon of the trades guild and Edinburgh city councillor, who maintained a secret life as a burglar, partly for the thrill, and partly to fund his gambling. By day, Brodie was a respectable businessman. Part of his job in building cabinets was to install and repair their locks and other security mechanisms and repair door locks.

At night, however, Brodie became a burglar and thief. He used his daytime job as a way to gain knowledge about the security mechanisms of his clients and to copy their keys using wax impressions. He used the illicit money to maintain his second life, including five children, two mistresses who did not know of each other, and a gambling habit.

Brodie was hanged at the Tolbooth on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1788, using a gallows Brodie had designed and funded the year before. According to one tale, Brodie wore a steel collar and silver tube to prevent the hanging from being fatal. It was said that he had bribed the hangman to ignore it and arranged for his body to be removed quickly in the hope that he could later be revived. If so, the plan failed. However rumours of his being seen in Paris circulated later and gave the story of his scheme to evade death further publicity.

The dichotomy between Brodie's respectable façade, and his real nature inspired Robert Louis Stevenson to write *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Stevenson's father had furniture made by Brodie.

*Explain how Miss Brodie's surname is the key to her character.*

*What do the names "Sandy Stranger" ("Sister Helena of the Transfiguration"), "Rose Stanley", "Miss Lockhart", "Miss Gaunt" possibly signify?*

*Characterise Miss Gaunt. (p. 57)*

<sup>1</sup> too willing to believe or accept what other people tell you and therefore easily tricked