

About the Word Robot

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A reference by professor Chudoba, to the Oxford Dictionary account of the word robot's origin and its entry into the English language, reminds me of an old debt. The author of the play *R.U.R.* did not, in fact, invent that word; he merely ushered it into existence. It was like this: the idea for the play came to said author in a single, unguarded moment. And while it was still warm, he rushed immediately to his brother Josef, the painter, who was standing before an easel and painting away at a canvas till it rustled.

"Listen, Josef," the author began, "I think I have an idea for a play."

"What kind," the painter mumbled (he really did mumble, because at the moment he was holding a brush in his mouth).

The author told him as briefly as he could.

"Then write it," the painter remarked, without taking the brush from his mouth or halting work on the canvas. The indifference was quite insulting.

"But," the author said, "I don't know what to call these artificial workers. I could call them *labori*, but that strikes me as a bit bookish."

"Then call them robots," the painter muttered, brush in mouth, and went on painting. And that's how it was. Thus was the word robot born; let this acknowledge its true creator.