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## Naming the Evil One: Onomastic Strategies in Tolkien and Rowling

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### Abstract

Investigates name magic associated with evil characters in Tolkien and Rowling, such as acts of naming and self-naming, avoidance terms, and the use of true names. Describes the naming plots associated with Melkor/Morgoth, Sauron, Saruman, and Voldemort.

### Additional Keywords

Name magic; Onomastics; Rowling, J.K.—Characters—Voldemort; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Morgoth; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Saruman; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Sauron



NAMING THE EVIL ONE:  
ONOMASTIC STRATEGIES IN  
TOLKIEN AND ROWLING

JANET BRENNAN CROFT

WHAT IS A NAME? LINGUISTS, PHILOSOPHERS, GENEALOGISTS, AND LAWYERS will give different answers. *Having* a name can mean different things to psychologists, folklorists, etymologists, or anthropologists. A personal name is a nexus for many deeply important concepts and feelings about being a person and having a place in the world in relation to other people. There is much more to a name than just what it *means*—that is, its etymological derivation. Tolkien himself warns against limiting the study of names to this approach as “the spirit of philately,” or mere stamp-collecting (“Philology” 58). Leonard Ashley also cautions that literary onomastics “too often means no more than listing the names that appear in some novel (when it should, of course, concern itself with analyzing why and how names function in fiction)” (77). What I want to explore here is one particular function of names: the name as an indicator of the power relationship between the namer and the named. Specifically, I’ll examine how people in two fantasy series, *The Lord of the Rings* and its background legendarium and the Harry Potter books, deal with naming the personifications of evil, and thus indicating their power relationship to these personifications, in their respective universes.

Returning to defining the term *name* for a moment: at a very basic level, a name has three essential components. First, there is the word itself – the name, along with whatever etymological or historical baggage it might carry with it. What does the name mean? Who has held it before? What hearers are likely to understand this background, and what will it mean to them? Then there is the person, entity, or thing being named, which becomes associated with that word—even, as we shall see below, sometimes considered equivalent to it. Behind both of these is the name-giver—the namer. This can mean either the entity that originally connected that particular name with that named person or object; or it can mean the entity that is using an already-given name to refer to that person or object. The name-giver, through giving or using a name, may assert a certain amount of power over the named, or indicate their equality with, neutrality about, subservience to, or admiration for the named entity. To complicate matters further, in many cases it is the named person who gives him

or herself a name, thus asserting power over his or her own name and all it indicates.

For example, consider Professor Jane Smith. In the course of a day she may be addressed as *Dr. Smith*, *Professor Smith*, *Mrs. Smith*, *Smith*, *Jane Smith*, *Mom*, *Jane*, *Janey*, and *Freckles*. To the postman, she is an address; to the payroll department, she is an employee number; at the deli, she is *next, please*; to the cat, she is whatever internal symbol the cat has created for *the person who feeds me every evening*. In each case, the name chosen by the name-user indicates something about their mutual relationship and power levels—anything from “I am more important than you” through “our relationship is neutral or equal” to “you have power over me.” The use of an inappropriate name in a given situation tells us that something is off-kilter in one way or another; a student calling her *Jane* when she’s introduced herself as *Professor Smith* might indicate a lack of respect or a certain social ineptitude, or it might mean the student is celebrating his newly-earned Ph.D. by claiming equality with his professor.<sup>1</sup> Her spouse calling her *Jane* instead of using her nickname might indicate a strain in the relationship or a serious subject being broached. In all these cases, the negotiation of the appropriate form of address between the namer and the named is part of the broader, ever-shifting power negotiation between them.

The name/power nexus is also complicated by the concepts of magic and taboo, which are ultimately based on the idea of the name being an essential and inseparable part of the named being. As Frazer puts it in *The Golden Bough*, in this form of magical thinking

the link between a name and the person or thing denominated by it is not a mere arbitrary and ideal association, but a real and substantial bond which unites the two in such a way that magic may be wrought on a man [or other entity] just as easily through his name as through [...] any [...] material part of his person. (Frazer 3:318)

Philosopher Ernst Cassirer confirms the central importance of this concept in myth:

The notion that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relation to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually *is* the essence of its object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in its name—that is one of the fundamental assumptions of the mythmaking consciousness itself. (Cassirer 3)

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of how fraught with angst this situation can be, see the series of *Piled Higher and Deeper* comic strips from March 25 through April 3, 2009, including a handy flow-chart for determining how to address one’s professor after obtaining one’s Ph.D.

This concept of equivalence is at the root of the idea that it is dangerous or undesirable to use the names of supernaturally powerful and potentially harmful beings where they might be overheard. Why? What harm could saying the name do? First and most simply, because the name *is* the essence, it could summon the being or at least attract the being's attention; as the old saying goes: "Name the devil and his horns appear."<sup>2</sup> As Edward Clodd noted, "To name the invisible is to invoke its presence or the manifestation of its power" (109). He gives the example of one tribe which "will not mention the name of a tiger lest the beast, hearing himself called upon, should come to the speaker" (90-91). In order to avoid calling up the spirit, one should avoid using the name and say *Him* or *That One* or *He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named*.

To placate a powerful being, the speaker might find it advisable to use a flattering euphemism instead of a name they might consider an insult; Clodd points out how "substitutes, roundabout phrases, [and] euphemisms" are used as a "mode of flattery [...] employed to ward off possible mischief, [...] jealousy or spite in maleficent spirits" (88). A prime example is the way the ancient Greeks were careful to call the Furies the *Eumenides*, or the *Kindly Ones*.<sup>3</sup> Another function of the flattering euphemism is *logizomai*, or giving a name that one would like the being to live up to, using the force of name-magic to compel them to change their very natures; for example, calling the fairies the *Gentry* or the *Fair Folk*. Fleming Rutledge discusses Tolkien's frequent use of the concept of *logizomai* in her *The Battle for Middle-earth*: "[I]f someone is 'reckoned as righteous' (Romans 4:1-12), he actually becomes so; the root is *logos* (word), so the person is 'worded into' a new identity by being so 'reckoned'" (136).<sup>4</sup> In a more rebellious mood, one might mock the devil in attempt to decrease his power through ridicule, for example by calling him *Old Scratch*, or change a being's name to show its fall from greatness, like changing *Lucifer* to *Satan*. And the followers of that being might have their own in-group names for him, demonstrating their deference and privileged personal relationship.

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<sup>2</sup> Clodd quotes an old saying: "'Talk of the devil and you'll see his horns,' but he may be outwitted if called by some name unfamiliar to him, or that raises no suspicion that he is being talked about" (97).

<sup>3</sup> "The desire not to offend [...] explains [...] why a like euphemism was used by the Greeks when speaking of the Furies as the Eumenides [the Kindly Ones]" (Clodd 96), as well as why fairies are called by such varied names as *the others*, *the gentry*, or *the good people*, or the djinn are called *the blessed ones* (96-97).

<sup>4</sup> For example, contrast how Frodo calls Gollum *Sméagol*, hoping to call forth his good side, while Sam calls him *Slinker* and *Stinker*, causing Gollum to act towards Sam the way Sam calls him.

## Tolkien

In both Tolkien's legendarium and in the Harry Potter universe, there are personifications of evil that are named in very different ways by different individuals or groups of people. As in the examples of onomastic strategies listed above, there are those who avoid saying the name and use euphemisms out of fear of attracting attention or causing insult; those who specifically say the name to show they are not afraid or superstitious, or who use a different name to deny evil's powers; and those who use a flattering form of address to demonstrate their close and privileged relationship with the evil one.

In Tolkien's legendarium, three major villains demonstrate the power of names and naming: first Melkor, the Satan-figure, the mar-plot of his creation story; then Sauron, Melkor's lieutenant who grows to be the prime evil in the world after Melkor's banishment to the outer void; then finally Saruman, the pale imitation of these greater evils, but not so pale as to be safely ignored.<sup>5</sup>

Melkor was the Lucifer of Tolkien's creation-myth, and rarely referred to (and never by this name) in *The Lord of the Rings*. For his story readers must turn to the *Silmarillion*. Melkor was the mightiest of the Valar, the godlike first creations of Ilúvatar, the All-father. Melkor's name means "He who arises in Might" (*Silmarillion* [*Silm.*] 340). Ilúvatar directed the Valar in singing the music that revealed his design for the universe, but Melkor grew ambitious and tried to add themes of his own, seeking to "increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself" (16). His repeated attempts failed; Ilúvatar reprimanded him and said "no theme may not be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite" (17). After Ilúvatar brought the music into physical being by his command "*Ea!* Let these things Be!" (20), Melkor continued to work against his design, and in a speech act of his own, named himself king of the earth: "This shall be my own kingdom; and I name it unto myself!" (21). From this point Melkor, driven by envy and anger, never ceased trying to bring the earth under his dominion and reduce Ilúvatar's design to chaos. And he continued to award himself names and titles—"King of the World" (81), "Lord of Middle-earth" (156), "Master of the Fates of Arda" (197)—in an effort to make these titles come true by the magic of self-naming.

The most important act of naming in association with Melkor was his renaming by Fëanor, the most powerful of the Noldorian Elves. Melkor, in uneasy partnership with the giant primeval spider Ungoliant, destroyed the Two Trees of Valinor which gave light to the world, then stole the Silmarils, three

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<sup>5</sup> Methodology for this section involved charting the frequency of each name variation and which speaker used it throughout the entire editions of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* cited in the bibliography.

jewels created by Fëanor which contained light from the trees. At the moment the theft was known,

Fëanor rose, and lifting up his hand before Manwë [the chief of the Valar] he cursed Melkor, naming him *Morgoth*, the Black Foe of the World; and by that name only was he known to the Eldar ever after. (*Silm.* 79)

Tolkien describes Melkor as having “forfeited” the right to his original name (*Silm.* 31), and here we see an example of a name change used as punishment and rejection. Melkor no longer has a right to the name “He who arises in Might”; he is now to be known among Elves by the title “Black Foe of the World.” Indeed Tolkien, nigglingly careful writer that he was, never has any Elf use the name *Melkor* after this chronological point in the story; nor does the narrator of sections of the *Silmarillion* purportedly written by Elves use any term but *Morgoth*. Strikingly, the Elves are not afraid to utter the name *Morgoth* and do not resort to the sort of euphemisms and avoidance terms we see used later with Sauron; by this act of naming they actually assert their power to resist Melkor by rejecting his original name. The other Valar, however, continue to use his original name, as does Sauron in his efforts to continue his master’s work.

Let us turn now to Sauron. Sauron was a Maia; one of the beings “of the same order as the Valar but of less degree” (*Silm.* 30) who were the servants and helpers of the Valar. Sauron originally served Aulë, the master of all crafts, but turned to Melkor and the Dark. After the banishment of Morgoth to the Void (260), Sauron returned to Middle-earth and began building his own power, starting by befriending the Elves of Eregion. Sauron’s greatest act of naming is an essential part of the forging of the One Ring; it is when he recites the lines in the Black Speech *naming* the ring he had just made as the “One Ring to rule them all,” the One Ring to bind all the other rings to the Darkness, that the Elves “knew that they had been betrayed” (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] II.2.248).

Shortly after the banishment of Morgoth, the Valar created the great island of Númenor for Men to live on within sight of the edge of the Blessed Lands. The men of Númenor grew in both power and arrogance until the Númenórean king Ar-Pharazôn determined to take on Sauron and demand his surrender (*Silm.* 270). Sauron in his craftiness gave himself up, and Ar-Pharazôn brought him back to Númenor as a hostage, where he proceeded to win the king over and become his closest advisor. In the same way as Melkor, Sauron gave himself grand titles in acts of self-naming—“Lord of Gifts” (287) and “Lord of the Earth” (289) “King of Kings” and “Lord of the World” (xxii). Winning Ar-Pharazôn over to the worship of the Dark, he called Melkor by the titles “Lord of All” and “Giver of Freedom” (272) that should rightly belong to Ilúvatar, saying that Ilúvatar did not exist. He was in effect trying to re-name Melkor as the all-

creator with these titles; examples not only of his lies but of flatteries vaunting his closeness to the fallen Vala.

On his advice, Ar-Pharazôn tried to sail east to the Blessed Lands and claim them for men, leading to the sinking of Númenor. In this conflagration Sauron lost his original physical form, and returned to Barad-dûr where “he wrought himself a new guise, an image of malice and hatred made visible” (*Silm.* 280-81). At the end of this Age he was defeated in battle and his Ring taken from him and lost, which leads to the story of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Though Sauron is rarely addressed or referred to other than by his name in the *Silmarillion*, in *The Lord of the Rings* there are a great many uses of avoidance words and phrases. In particular, there are many uses of two types of figures of speech which permit the avoidance of the name: *metonymy*, in which the container or larger whole stands for what it contains, and *synecdoche*, in which the part stands for the whole. Thus we find Sauron referred to as *Mordor*, *Barad-dûr*, *Lugbúrz*, or *The Dark Tower*, as a newscaster might say “the White House declared” or “the Oval Office announced” when referring to something the President of the United States said, and at the opposite end of the scale as *The Eye* or *The Black Hand*, as a columnist might refer to a particular opera singer as “The Voice” or a baseball pitcher as “The Arm.”

Among Men, there is a general tendency to avoid using the name *Sauron*. Aragorn will say the name, but more often he will use such terms as *The Dark Lord*, *The Enemy*, or *Mordor*. Aragorn does warn the hobbits against saying the names of evil things too loudly in the Midgewater Marshes, but this is a reasonably sensible precaution where the spies of the Enemy may overhear them (*LotR* I.11.180 and 182). The men of Gondor avoid the name at all times, and will seldom even name the land of Mordor (V.1.748); one of the first things we hear from Boromir is the phrase “him that we do not name” (II.2.237), and he says the name *Sauron* only in his last madness as he tries to take the Ring from Frodo (II.10.390). No other man of Gondor says *Sauron*, not even Faramir and Denethor, nor do the people of Rohan. From Boromir, at least, one gains the impression that this avoidance is at least partly a proud refusal to grant Sauron the honor of using his proper name; for other Men, it may be based more on fear, superstition, and taboo.

Similarly, the Hobbits also avoid saying *Sauron*—even the narrator, when reporting Frodo’s thoughts, rarely uses the name. They generally say *The Enemy*. They may have picked this up from Aragorn’s cautions in Midgewater and Gandalf’s similar warning in Rivendell: “Evil things do not come into this



valley; but all the same we should not name them" (*LotR* II.1.220).<sup>6</sup> Though Pippin jests at this warning, he only speaks the name *Sauron* once (when discussing the *palantír* with Gandalf [III.10.570]), and Merry, Frodo, and Sam never say it aloud. Gollum also avoids the name, saying only *Him* or *The Black Hand*; in his case we get the impression that his avoidance is quite specifically fear of somehow being overheard and summoning the attention of his former captor.<sup>7</sup>

Dwarves, on the other hand, or at least Gimli and Glóin, have no problem saying *Sauron*. This is perhaps representative of their long resistance to his attempts to control them through the Dwarf-rings; they deny him any satisfaction by refusing to show either fear or respect for his name. The Elves also appear to be unafraid to say Sauron's name, but all of them do use other names as well. Legolas, though a Grey Elf and not a High Elf, uses *Sauron* about as often as he uses any other term. The Ents, at least judging by Treebeard's example, also have no hesitation in saying the name *Sauron*, but Tom Bombadil only calls him *The Dark Lord*.

When Aragorn is examining the orcs' armor after the attack at Parth Galen, he comments that Sauron does not allow his servants to speak or write his name, and the circumlocutions of his orcs bear this out (*LotR* III.1.406). Gorbag and Shagrat most often use the metonym *Lugbúrz*, the orc name for Barad-dûr, while Grishnákh generally calls him *The Great Eye*. But Sauron's higher-ranking subordinates, the Ringwraiths and the Mouth of Sauron, appear to be permitted to use his name.

The wizard Gandalf makes more references to Sauron than any other character does, and he uses a very wide variety of terms—*The Black Shadow*, *The Dark Lord*, *The Eye of Barad-dûr*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Necromancer*, *The Ring-maker*, and so on. But he uses *Sauron* most frequently, and *The Enemy* second-most. His ambitious fellow-wizard Saruman uses a very revealing term to refer to Sauron, as reported by Gandalf: he refers to Sauron as *The Power*, but speaks as if this power were something that could be easily separated from Sauron and claimed by himself along with the Ring (*LotR* II.2.253). The only other major character who refers to Sauron as *The Power* is Denethor, also as reported by Gandalf (V.9.860), and he too is tempted by the idea that the Ring might be used to wrest Sauron's power from him.

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<sup>6</sup> In response to Pippin saying "Make way for Frodo, Lord of the Ring!"; this may be an attempt by Gandalf to ward off the darker side of *logizomai*, in this case the possibility of Frodo becoming evil because he is named so.

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Gollum nearly always refers to Shelob as *She*. The orcs of Minas Morgul have no problem saying *Shelob* but will also often refer to her as *Her Ladyship*. Ungoliant is treated more like Melkor—there is no apparent taboo on her name.

Saruman, like Gandalf, was one of the five Istari, Maia who gave up part of their powers and were sent to Middle-earth in the forms of Men in order to encourage resistance to Sauron (*Unfinished Tales* 388-394). His original name as a Maia is not given, but *Saruman*, one of his many names in Middle-earth, means “Man of Skill.” He was considered the chief of these wizards, but in the end he “fell from his high errand, and becoming proud and impatient and enamoured of power sought to have his own will by force, and to oust Sauron; but he was ensnared by that dark spirit, mightier than he” (390).

Edward Clodd, in his classic *Magic in Names and Other Things*, says that “[a]voidance and veneration superstitions gather force with the ascending rank of individuals” (109), and this is obviously the case with Saruman. Despite his vaunting ambition and his attacks on the people of Rohan, he was yet a far lesser evil than Sauron. Very rarely, in the parts of the book before the fall of Isengard, is he called anything but simply *Saruman*—sometimes *Saruman the White* or *Saruman the Wise*, but the only thing close to an avoidance term is *The White Hand*, which is used several times by the orc Uglúk. But Uglúk also calls him *Saruman the Wise*; there does not seem to be any prohibition against his own orcs using his name, as there is with Sauron, and indeed Aragorn is able to distinguish his orcs from those of Mordor by the fact that they have the S-rune on their helmets (*LotR* III.1.406). There are also some scattered examples of metonymy, when Saruman is referred to as *Isengard* or *Orthanc*, but this is rare compared to similar usage patterns for Sauron.

Saruman, though, is well aware of the power of words and naming, and in particular tries to harness the power of re-naming. He attempts to re-name and re-fashion himself as “Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!”, only to be scoffed at by Gandalf, who says “I liked white better” (*LotR* II.2.252). And no character ever does name him by his new-chosen title, rejecting this act of hubris. One of the most intriguing moments in the Gandalf/Saruman power relationship is when Gandalf, clothed in white after his resurrection, says “Indeed I *am* Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been” (III.5.484).

Saruman also attempts to prove his mastery and power over others by renaming and belittling them, sneering at Gandalf’s title “Gandalf the Grey” and calling the wizard Radagast “Radagast the Bird-tamer! Radagast the Simple!” (*LotR* II.2.252). And similarly when he is called forth to parley with the forces that have taken Isengard and defeated his army at Helm’s Deep, he first flatters, then insults, the King of Rohan, calling him “mightiest king of the western lands” (III.10.565) then “Dotard!” and bragging king of drunken “brigands” (III.10.567); then he tries the same trick with Gandalf, calling him first noble and wise, then robber and fool (III.10.567, 569). But in the aftermath of his fall, even his skill with names betrays him; he is unaware that the nick-name *Sharkey*, used by many of

his followers, is not the “sign of affection” he thinks it is, but merely Orkish for “Old Man” (VI.8.994-5), and his shortening of Wormtongue’s already unflattering nick-name to *Worm* could well have been one of the last straws of indignity that sent his faithful slave over the edge to murder him.

### Rowling

Tolkien’s approach to the magic of names is subtle; he dips into the Cauldron of Story for concepts of magic and taboo in names, but there is no specific and clearly articulated statement about the reasons for name-saying versus name-avoidance in *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>8</sup>

Rowling’s approach to naming evil is far more obvious, as befits a story aimed at a younger and less experienced audience. Her modern setting lends itself to the introduction of a more scientific attitude towards naming, exemplified in Dumbledore’s insistence that one should “Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself” (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* [Stone] 298). In this scientific approach, to name a thing precisely and accurately is to classify, contain, and control it; to assert dominance over its interpretation; to know what to do with it, like a doctor diagnosing a disease. There is a relief in being able to name one’s fears; it is the first step to conquering them, as demonstrated in Professor Lupin’s lesson on defeating Boggarts by first discovering and *naming* the student’s deepest anxieties (*Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* [Azkaban] 134). We can see this preference for a scientific approach to magic in the courses taught at Hogwarts—the precise recipes used in the “subtle science and exact art” of Potions (Stone 136), the importance of proper pronunciation and correct wand-work in Transfigurations and Charms, the esoteric mathematical formulae in Hermione’s favorite subject Arithmancy, the careful observation and map-labeling of Astronomy, all contrasted with the untrustworthy fuzziness of Divination. And yet—in spite of this imprecision, Professor Trelawney does make two accurate and vitally important predictions. Similarly, Rowling balances Dumbledore’s partiality for the purely scientific approach to naming with a warning not to discount mysticism and superstition entirely; in the wizarding world, words DO possess magic and history, hidden meanings and dangers, and it can be perilous to deny the importance of this dimension.

*Voldemort* is the name Tom Riddle takes for himself when he turns fully and publicly to the dark side. Tom is the child of the witch Merope Gaunt, last

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<sup>8</sup> Name-changing and self-naming, however, are major motifs that crop up throughout his works, but a study of these concepts is outside the scope of this paper. The long section on naming in “Laws and Customs Among the Eldar” in *Morgoth’s Ring* is particularly revealing.

descendent of Salazar Slytherin, and Tom Riddle, only son of a rich Muggle family. She gives him a love potion and thus tricks him into marrying her, but several months into her pregnancy she stops giving him the potion in hopes that he has come to love her naturally and will stay for the child's sake. But furious at her deception, he abandons her. Rowling has stated that the fact that Tom is the product of coerced and loveless union is symbolic of his inability to love (J.K. Rowling Web Chat). Left destitute and alone in London, Merope has the child in an orphanage and dies shortly after. She insists the child be named Tom Marvolo Riddle, after his father and Marvolo Gaunt, her own father. On his eleventh birthday, Tom is approached by Albus Dumbledore, who tells him he is a wizard and offers him a place at Hogwarts. Dumbledore hopes the atmosphere of Hogwarts, and the attention of his teachers, will eliminate some disturbing tendencies towards evil in the young boy, but this is not the case; in spite of his outward charm and intellectual brilliance, Tom remains sadistic and ambitious at heart and starts gathering the core of what would later become the Death Eaters. His hatred of his own given name dates from the period at Hogwarts where he tries to find out about his father and is forced to conclude that the Riddles were not an important wizarding family, as he had hoped, but in fact pure Muggle. Dumbledore surmises that this is when he dropped the name *Riddle*, and its reminder of his half-blood status, entirely (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* [Prince] 362). In the summer of his sixteenth year he turns his attention to his mother's line, finds out the truth from his surviving uncle, and uses him to kill both his father and his father's parents (366-67).

Tom Riddle's story is an excellent example of what critic Michael Ragussis calls "the family plot" of naming. Specifically, Riddle fits the pattern of the male gender-plot of inheritance, or finding one's name. He spends his youth trying to find first his father's family, then his mother's, only to reject both and rename himself. As Ragussis describes the male gender plot, "he escapes naming insofar as he is able to escape the family plot" (235); in Voldemort's case, he does not escape his family and past as far as he would like to think he has. Voldemort may believe in the maxim that "human beings are divided between those who rule by naming and those who are ruled by being named" (13)—by rejecting the birth-name his mother gave him and substituting *Voldemort*, he believes he is ruling his own destiny—yet because he simply rearranges the letters of his name, the original name is still there like a palimpsest, never truly eradicated.

Voldemort is extremely sensitive to the nuances of name power. His essential act of self-naming is a defining point in his life, dividing it into Before—when he was simply Tom Marvolo Riddle, the poor but brilliant orphaned half-blood—and After, when through the magic act of rearranging the letters of his name, he declares "I AM LORD VOLDEMORT" (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* [Chamber] 314). As Frazer says, "When the name is held to be a vital part

of the person, it is natural to suppose that the mightier the person the more potent must be his name" (3:384).<sup>9</sup> Thus Riddle ambitiously promotes himself to a rank that declares his intentions to reorder the democratic wizarding world under his dominion, and proclaims his evil intent with a name which could be taken to mean, variously, flight from death, ruler of death, or will to death, encompassing both his desire for immortality and his intention to rule through fear. What clearer example of identification of the name and the essence could there be? Such magic would be ineffective if he had not identified himself so closely with his own name, and desired so strongly to change it to reflect what he wanted to be. His habit of referring to himself in the third person—"Lord Voldemort is not sure that he will forgive this time" (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* [*Hallows*] 174), to quote just one instance—reinforces this idea that the name itself is his essence.

And having changed his name, he claims a position of power in relation to the rest of the world. This is reflected in the various naming strategies of the wizarding population, which is divided into those who remain willing say his name (a very small number), and those who will not or cannot—a group further divided into those who are his followers, and those who are not. Who belongs to each of these groups, and what are their reasons for saying or not saying the name?

First among those willing to say *Voldemort* is Albus Dumbledore. In the very first scene in which he appears, he makes his policy quite clear:

"My dear Professor [McGonagall], surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name? All this 'You-Know-Who' nonsense – for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name: *Voldemort*. [...] It all gets so confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who.' I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name." (*Stone* 11)

Harry Potter, of course, is the second major example. He first uses the name through ignorance—"I'm not trying to be *brave* or anything [...] I just never knew you shouldn't," he tells Ron (*Stone* 100)—but Dumbledore's advice not to be afraid of names reinforces his initial instinct. As he firmly tells Hagrid at the end of the first book, "I've met him and I'm calling him by his name" (*Stone* 303).

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<sup>9</sup> Frazer gives the example of an Australian tribe's attitude towards a mythical pool-dwelling snake: "When they speak of it amongst themselves they designate it by another name, because they say that, were they to call the snake too often by its real name, they would lose control over the creature, and it would come out of the water and eat them all up" (3:384).

After some hesitation, Hermione is able to follow Harry's example. Ron resists the longest, but does manage to use the name twice (with no fanfare) while in the safety of the Order of the Phoenix's headquarters at 12 Grimmauld Place; but as soon as he is wounded in their escape, he insists on going back to saying You-Know-Who, appalling Harry by insisting they should "show [him] some respect" (*Hallows* 273). Some members of the Order are brave enough to follow Dumbledore's example, in particular Remus Lupin and Sirius Black, but most cannot. In the end, Voldemort turns their determination not to be intimidated against them by placing a jinx on his own name so that anyone saying it will instantly alert his Snatchers to their location (*Hallows* 390).

This jinx is particularly clever as the Death Eaters consider it a mark of disrespect to call Voldemort by his name and rarely or never say it themselves (*Hallows* 449). Instead they generally call him *The Dark Lord*, or *Master* or *My Lord* in person. The term *Dark Lord* is also used by Sybill Trelawney when prophesying, and by characters like Ginny Weasley during or after being possessed by Voldemort, but very rarely by anyone else. Voldemort's follower Bellatrix Lestrange in particular becomes incensed upon hearing Harry Potter say his name: "You dare speak his name with your unworthy lips, you dare besmirch it with your half-blood's tongue, you dare—" she rages (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* [*Phoenix*] 784).

The vast majority of the wizarding population uses avoidance terms for Voldemort's name, generally either *You-Know-Who* or the more formal *He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named*. For the most part this seems to be a case of fear of attracting his attention, borne out by the use of the taboo in the final book. But some also seem to use these terms out of a lack of full commitment to the anti-Voldemort cause, in fear of retaliation if he should win. The general population does not seem to refuse to say *Voldemort* out of any idea of forcefully rejecting his self-chosen name.

What is particularly interesting about two of Dumbledore's most important encounters with Voldemort—the time he comes to Hogwarts, ostensibly in search of a job but really planning to create another Horcrux, and the momentous battle in the Ministry of Magic at the end of *Order of the Phoenix*—is that Dumbledore insists on addressing him by his hated birth-name, *Tom Riddle*. When Voldemort tries to correct Dumbledore's use of the name *Tom* during the first of these encounters, he says "[T]o me [...] you will always be Tom Riddle. [...] I am afraid that [old teachers] never quite forget their charges' youthful beginnings" (*Prince* 442). Harry, observing this meeting in the Pensieve, correctly observes that "Dumbledore's refusal to use Voldemort's chosen name was a refusal to allow Voldemort to dictate the terms of the meeting, and Harry could tell that Voldemort took it as such" (442). It is also perhaps the offering of a chance to return to his earlier, pre-Voldemort life, an offer Dumbledore feels

must be made in order to give Voldemort an opportunity to feel remorse. Again during the battle at the Ministry, Dumbledore uses only the name *Tom*, infuriating Voldemort further (*Phoenix* 813-14). Harry himself takes a page from Dumbledore's book in the climactic final battle at Hogwarts, insisting on calling Voldemort *Riddle* (*Hallows* 738, 740-42), and specifically coupling the name with the advice to "try for some remorse" (741). And as Voldemort dies, the narrator also quite deliberately uses his birth-name:

Voldemort fell backward, arms splayed, the slit pupils of the scarlet eyes rolling upward. *Tom Riddle* hit the floor with a mundane finality, [...] the snakelike face vacant and unknowing. Voldemort was dead, killed by his own rebounding curse [...]. (*Hallows* 744, emphasis added)

In effect, Voldemort finally kills off Tom Riddle, completing the process he began by changing his name. What Rowling is implying here is that if the name is the essence, equivalent to the person, it cannot truly be changed—that original essence will still be there, in spite of any attempt to destroy it. And in a case like Voldemort's, an attempt to overwrite, deny, and eradicate that original essence, like his attempt to block Trelawney's prophecy by killing the infant Harry Potter, is doomed to backfire.

### Conclusion

With this brief look at evil characters, I have barely scratched the surface of the importance of names and naming in these authors. This is a particularly rich area to explore; consider for example Tolkien's story of Túrin Turambar, an extreme case of serial self-re-naming in an attempt to forge his own destiny, or Aragorn, earning an ever-growing list of names, aliases, and titles in multiple languages. And J.K. Rowling's work is full of nicknaming and name-calling, as well as punning and word play.

Fantastic literature in general pays close attention to names and is a fertile field for onomastic studies. Tolkien and Rowling are just two examples of fantasy authors who draw on variations of the folkloric motif of name-magic in relation to evil characters. They both have groups of characters who use avoidance-names, for various reasons. There are also characters in both worlds who are able to, or insist upon, using the evil being's true name, again for various reasons. Both also show followers of their evil beings using avoidance names for purposes of flattery or to boast of their close relationship. In both authors we also see the use of self-naming as an attempt to change destiny, and its nearly inevitable failure.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, neither author uses much in the way of nick-naming in mockery of evil – the only instance in Rowling is the ghost Peeves, after Voldemort's death, calling him *Voldy*

We even see in both authors some similarities in the syllables of the names they chose; the element *-mor-*, evoking death, in both *Voldemort* and *Morgoth*, and elements like *-sau-* and *-sly-*, calling forth imagery of snakes and cold-bloodedness, in *Sauron*, *Saruman*, and *Slytherin*. As John Algeo observes, “the independent use of common symbolism will account for the resemblances” (251); indeed, to the delight of readers everywhere, both authors are as skilled at dipping into the brimming Cauldron of Story for names and their magical uses as they are for other elements of their stories.

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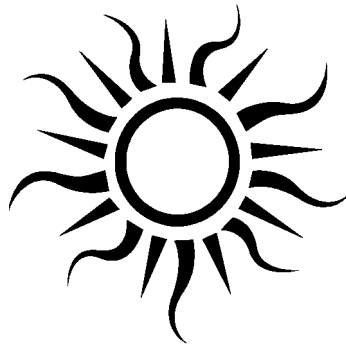
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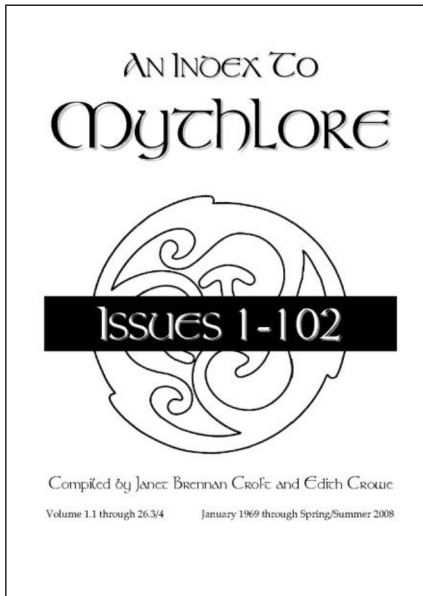
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in a comic rhyme (*Hallows* 746). Tolkien does not use this strategy at all in *The Lord of the Rings*, except when applied to some far lesser villains like orcs and trolls. About the closest we come to this in Tolkien’s work is in some of the interactions of Farmer Giles with the dragon Chrysophylax, or Bilbo with the spiders in Mirkwood. Intriguingly, one runs across name-mocking more in fanfic and other fan art.



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