

The Function and Etymology of Proper  
Nouns within the work of J.K. Rowling  
by Robert M.J. Morris

There's a story behind this essay (well, aside from J.K. Rowling's). Way back in the summer of 2001 I had to choose my options for my third year of English. I'd really enjoyed my English Language module – although I think it finally sealed my reputation as a Class A pedant – and wanted to take this enjoyment further into the study of Stylistics. Now, this being Canterbury Christ Church University College, something crap happened.

Now, the head of English was a hugely imposing Tom Baker-alike called Terry Clifford-Amos. He was also by far the scariest lecturer I met in my first week at college: possibly the most deeply thoughtful and imposing man I have ever met in my life. My initial fears at taking his English Language course evaporated within the first lesson, however, when the entire class in almost one fell swoop discovered with rapt attention what a fascinating and hysterically funny man he was. (His anecdotes could last a full half hour, rambling in a spectacularly Izzard-like fashion from one bizarre happening to the next.) I'd like to point out that our instant adoration was assured not just because of these hours wasted in the surreal landscape of his past. His genuine love of the subject was enthralling, not least because it was lacking in any pretension and thoroughly grounded in good common sense. This was a man to whom bathos was a way of life.

So, needless to say, I wanted more of this kind of education, but as he was head of English, the college wanted their money's worth. They forbade him from running the stylistics class because it was inappropriate for the head of a department to run a course with only eight students.

I was gutted. And mistakenly took up the Post 1950s literature course, hoping that something modern would catch my interest in the way Terry had done. It failed, largely because I discovered that the first half of the course almost entirely consisted of 1950s northern life stories and that each page was like having a section sliced away from your soul. When I heard that Terry was offering the 8 disappointed would-be-stylistics students the chance to take up a dissertation on the subject instead I pounded on his door until I was in severe danger of having the police called.

Now, having resisted the Harry Potter hype for some time, I'd finally been bullied into reading the first two books by my then boyfriend. It was probably the best thing he's ever done for me. I read all four novels in the space of a week, delighted to find something to take away the bitterness of the kitchen sink dramas I'd been forced into reading for the 1950's course. When I went to see Terry he asked me what I'd been reading. Sheepishly, I told him about the Harry Potter books. "Well, then, he said. We'll certainly do something on those. Tell me about them."

And so I did. Within two meetings I had the basis for this essay. Naturally I left writing it for some time. Other students were having regular meetings every week to discuss the work they'd done. I was too lazy for that and in the end I saw him twice: once to approve the title, and once with the list of words I was going to cover. Two months later I sat down and achieved the impossible of going over the 12,000-word limit (excluding quotes) in one blissful week that can only be described as a festival of caffeine.

Three weeks later, I was called into his office and offered the chance to do a PhD. I politely declined, with a heavy heart and after serious consideration, deciding that poverty held no attraction for me anymore, and nor did Canterbury. So I upped sticks and moved to London to get a job in IT.

Still, every now and then I get the chance to be very smug and tell random strangers that my final year dissertation was on Harry Potter. And when I do I gain enormous satisfaction from seeing the look of jealous admiration in their eyes – although I am sorely aware that this feeling is tempered with the sneaking suspicion in their minds that the education system in this country is not what it was.

And who am I to disagree? But at the end of the day, this little essay – clunky in places, though it is – gave me endless amounts of pleasure, expanded my appreciation of Rowling's genius no end, and has gained me several free drinks. To which I can only say raise a glass to Terry Clifford Amos and drink a toast to the best English teacher I could have hoped for.

Thanks Terry!

# The Essay

The now legendary popularity of J.K. Rowling's series of Harry Potter novels shows no signs of abating even after four years of critical hyperbole and record-breaking sales. The four novels consistently top best-seller lists in the UK, a film version of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone is due to be released in November, and the tight control that Rowling has maintained over the Harry Potter industry has reportedly made her one of the most powerful producers in the world.

As with so many things, however, it seems that you can't win them all. Criticism that the series is responsible for a renewed interest in paganism has yet to be proved. Equally, the charge that the books are responsible for an increase in truancy amongst youngsters eager to complete the latest volume seems churlish coming from educational establishments who previously bemoaned that children weren't reading enough. It would probably be not far off the truth to suggest that Rowling has been more responsible for an increase in literacy in the 7 years upwards age group than David Blunkett's less widely praised literacy hour.

Behind the media hyperbole and publicity, however, there remains a deceptively simple and compelling series of books which have managed to capture the imaginations of both young and old alike. Part of the books' success with children undoubtedly lies with Rowling's straight-forward and uncluttered prose, a style which allows the reader easy access to the fantastical world within. At the same time, however, the complex characterisation and simple humour beguile adults and allow a far more sophisticated level of enjoyment. Equally the Harry Potter series has more than a passing similarity with many staples of children's literature from the last sixty years. From Billy Bunter to Mildred Hubble the archetype of the schoolboy or schoolgirl hero is one with a proven track record, indeed Jill Murphy's Worst Witch... series has a fair number of parallels with Rowling's creation. Additionally, the idea of the orphaned child entering a strange and magical world has echoes of Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach.

The comparisons, however, are nothing as compared to the differences. On the whole, the Potter books are darker in tone even from the first volume: Harry becomes an orphan not in some

warped freak occurrence as in Dahl's book, but as a result of a planned, calculated attack which involves betrayal by his parent's friends and should, by rights, have killed Harry too. Mandrakes are plants who, underneath the normal foliage have roots which are like small babies, and quickly start jumping into each other pots when they become adolescent. Themes such as the loss of one's soul, persecution by your own kind, and the uncontrolled thirst for power are pursued in such detail as to make Rowling's creation something far more than just another children's book.

The overall story arc is a simple one: Lord Voldemort is a powerful and malicious wizard, determined to achieve power for its own sake. In attacking the Potter family, an attack in which Harry's parents are killed, he loses his powers and becomes weakened, almost to the point of death. Harry is sent to live with his Aunt and Uncle, a situation of unbearable tyranny, until one day he discovers that his parents did not die in a car crash and he is to attend Hogwarts, the school for Witches and Wizards. Each of the seven books is set during one of Harry's years at school and, thus far, each book involves Voldemort's attempts to rejuvenate himself, revenge himself on Harry and return to power.

This paper will not dwell any further on the reasons for the success of the Harry Potter series. It shall instead focus on one aspect of Rowling's style; a stylistic device that affords some interest for those readers sophisticated enough to read the text in a specific way; the use and etymology of some of the proper nouns used in Rowling's work, with particular emphasis on those of the main human characters, in order to determine whether there is a meaning within those names which re-enforces or provides clues to the true nature of the character. The stylistic effect on the reader of the text will be considered and any subversion of the reader's expectations will also be discovered.

It is entirely far to say that any reading of a text involves a dynamic relationship between both author and audience. It is this existence of the interplay between these two entities which helps breathe life into the world portrayed and helps create within the text. Books without these subtle layers can appear to be "flat", and may even be accused of patronising the reader by

appearing to be too explicit. For a dynamic relationship, however, the author of a text must create an environment in which the author can imply certain attributes and characteristics of their creations. These implications are inherently coded and non-explicit, but rely on the audience's response to them in order to have the desired impact. What the author does not have control of, however, are any inferences that the reader may make in relation to the text. As Katie Wales states:

*...any sense of completeness is an illusion: there must be gaps. Novelists rely on their readers' powers of inference for a considerable amount of information and world-building.*

(Wales 300)

*It is a basic fact that no story or drama can ever tell everything; it would be far too tedious anyway.*

(Wales 201)

It can be seen from this that an author must provide their audience with gaps or figures which can be used for inference on the part of the reader. In some respects one of the most immediate methods of providing this function is to code the information into the names of the characters themselves. As Lee Binding suggests:

*The first point of contact with a character is often the name. In the hierarchical nature of the school, people are often mentioned before they are seen (for example, the names of the teachers for each year is often noted before actually arriving at Hogwarts School) and this can be a fantastic way of sampling part of the character before they actually appear. Elaborate names often invoke even more outlandish characters...*

(Binding)

which does suggest that the naming of a character can give the reader an opportunity to read that character in ways which are far subtler than a simple description of physical presence and action could achieve. Michael Legat discusses the writer's use of character naming as follows:

*It used to be possible to give the reader yet another clue to the character in the names given to the people in your story – Jasper could only be a villain, Cynthia was likely to be a catty woman, Molly was jolly, and Christopher was almost certainly a hero...*

(Legat, 81-82)

Of course, the use of a name such as Jasper to indicate a villainous character is largely a response to a widespread caricature, an archetype. This, however, is somewhat beside the point. It is the reader's own frame of reference which informs their understanding of a character with such a name, and reader-response theories would support the view that any such reading of a character is a valid one. The author, it seems, must choose their names carefully.

Realisation of character has long been served by the use of carefully chosen proper nouns. The most obvious instance of this is in Sheridan's creation of Mrs Malaprop, whose famously garbled sentences ensured her place as one of literature's greatest comic characters. That names are equally important in the world of Harry Potter is most evident when you consider the effect that simply saying the name "Lord Voldemort" has on any member of the magical fraternity who happens to be within earshot:

*'Black was a big supporter of You-Know-'Oo' he said.*

*'What, Voldemort?' said Harry, without thinking.*

*Even Stan's pimples went white; Ern jerked the steering wheel so hard that a whole farmhouse had to jump aside to avoid the bus.*

*'You outta your tree?' yelped Stan. "Choo say 'is name for?'*

(The Prisoner of Azkaban 34)

Harry himself does not fear Voldemort's name as much as some but rapidly gets used to not using it. Only the headmaster, Dumbledore, fights back against the superstition:

*'Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.'*

(The Philosopher's Stone 216)

Lord Voldemort has a considerable reputation; as Mr Ollivander, the wand shop storekeeper, notes he “did great things – terrible, yes, but great” (*The Philosopher’s Stone* 65). His rise to power is described by Hagrid, the gamekeeper, as follows:

*‘See, there was this wizard who went ... bad. As bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse. His name was...’*

*Hagrid gulped but no words came out.*

*‘Could you write it down?’ Harry suggested.*

*‘Nah - can’t spell it. All right – Voldemort.’ Hagrid shuddered. ‘Don’t make me say it again. Anyway, this – wizard, about twenty years ago now, started lookin’ fer followers... Dark days, Harry. Didn’t know who ter trust... Terrible things happened. He was takin’ over. ‘Course, some stood up to him – an’ he killed ‘em. Horribly.... No one ever lived after he decided ter kill ‘em, no one except you.’*

(*The Philosopher’s Stone* 45)

No surprise then that with Voldemort’s disappearance after attempting to kill the infant Harry, the magical community celebrates in earnest. Nor indeed that the memory of such an event provokes terror in all those who can remember it. Almost every time Voldemort’s name is mentioned, someone blanches, cowers or takes fright in some way, with the exception of Harry and the headmaster, Dumbledore.

The word *Voldemort* is a subtly constructed one, made up of parts which explicitly define the character. The component parts of the name are the morphemes *volde* and *mort*. Interestingly neither of these root words is taken from modern English, something which gives the combination name a certain exotic magnetism. The word *volde* is taken from old English, and is an obsolete version of the word *will*. The transition from old to modern English is a relatively simple one, utilising the laws of consonantal shift to soften the harsh *v* sound into a *w* and employing a vowel shift to lengthen the sound from a short *o* into an *oo*. Thus *volde* becomes *woulde* or, in a more contemporary phraseology, *would*.

*Mort*, of course, is a much simpler word to understand since it is a term which still exists in modern usage. It is not strictly an English term but its widespread usage has lead to its

inclusion in the Oxford English Dictionary. It is a word of French origin and is identified primarily with the meaning “dead”, as in the phrase “le Roi est Mort, vive le Roi” (literally. “The King is dead, long live the King”). Interestingly, for the context given by the name Voldemort, the term also has a slightly wider meaning. The full Oxford English Dictionary definition is “**mort**, sb<sup>1</sup>. +1. Death, slaughter. *Obs.* 4. ? A dead body, corpse. ? *Obs.*” (Oxford English Dictionary).

Given this slightly wider reference point of death and slaughter, the combination of *volde* and *mort* implies a definite characteristic of Voldemort himself. He is the will of death, it is his will that those who oppose him shall die. Given the terror that his name induces within the magical community it is fair to say that slaughter is not too strong a term for the actions of Voldemort himself or that of his followers. It is a characteristic which Voldemort seems to relish:

*‘We bow to each other, Harry,’ said Voldemort, bending a little, but keeping his snake-like face upturned to Harry. ‘Come, the niceties must be observed ... bow to death, Harry ...’*

(The Goblet of Fire 573)

However, there is also another interesting level of meaning to be observed. The obsolete usage of *mort* as “a dead body, corpse” re-enforces Voldemort’s state right up until the denouement of the fourth volume of the series. Not *actually* dead, but certainly as good as:

*‘He is still out there somewhere, perhaps looking for another body to share ... not being truly alive he cannot be killed.’*

(The Philosopher’s Stone 216)

*‘Some say he died. Codswallop in my opinion... Most of us reckon he’s still out there somewhere but lost his powers. Too weak to carry on.’*

(The Philosopher’s Stone 46)

The main purpose of the fourth book is to effect Voldemort’s resurrection. The ritual surrounding it uses figures and language that are redolent with suggestions of rebirth: words such as “renew”, “resurrect” and “revive” abound and the passage culminates in a simple but direct sentence: “Lord Voldemort had risen again” (The Goblet of Fire 556- 558). All of this has an overt

biblical quality, but nonetheless the implication is that Voldemort, whilst not being quite capable of physically dying – “‘Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die’” (The Philosopher’s Stone 46) – does not exist in a state much beyond that of a living corpse. It is Voldemort’s will which enables him to stay alive during the thirteen years between his defeat and his resurrection. Either way, it is certain that Voldemort’s strength of will, his corpse like state, and his almost manic love of murder are re-enforced and highlighted in his character name, a name derived from the juxtaposition of two smaller, simpler units.

To give further credence to the importance of names within the series, it later transpires that Voldemort is an assumed name. It would be interesting if further books were to reveal precisely why the name Voldemort was chosen – especially if it were for the reasons given above – but one can state with some assurance the reason why he should assume a name with feudal connotations. A lord has power, and power is something which Voldemort wants very much.

But the character’s real name is one which also raises particular questions. The phrase “I am Lord Voldemort” is an anagram of “Tom Marvolo Riddle”, his real name.

*‘Very few people know that Lord Voldemort was once called Tom Riddle... He disappeared after leaving the school... travelled far and wide... sank so deeply into the Dark Arts, consorted with the very worst of our kin, underwent so many dangerous, magical transformations, that when he resurfaced as Lord Voldemort, he was barely recognisable...’*

(The Chamber of Secrets 242)

The word *riddle* carries with it a sense of mystery, the idea of a puzzle waiting to be solved, something which permeates the course of the book as Harry and his friends attempt to discover who is attacking people around Hogwarts. Even Riddle’s future incarnation as Voldemort is a mystery, as indeed are Voldemort’s whereabouts. The name is extremely apt, and is in itself a clue to unlocking the mystery. With the earlier discovery of Riddle’s diary Rowling is able to give the reader the key to the story without them becoming aware of it until it is necessary. It

particularly subtle signal and a good example of the embedding of character function within a proper noun.

It is not, however, Lord Voldemort alone whose name carries embedded references to character traits and functions. Whilst he is in fact the overall villain of the piece, the series requires a more immediate nemesis to be provided for Harry within the school environment. The Hogwarts-based villains provide a personal face for the battles between the Gryffindor and Slytherin houses which mirror the overall battle brewing outside the school walls. In the house battles the books are provided with their own school-based battle between essentially, light and dark. And if Harry Potter is the hero of Gryffindor, then his opposite number is certainly Draco Malfoy.

In their own right, the Malfoy family is significant within the series due to the involvement of Draco's father Lucius to whom we shall attend shortly. However, it is Draco who is the initial point of contact for Harry with the Malfoy family and indeed is the first other Hogwarts pupil Harry meets while being fitted for his robes in Diagon Alley.

*'He's the gamekeeper,' said Harry. He was liking the boy less and less every second.*

*'Yes exactly. I heard he's a sort of savage...'*

*'I think he's brilliant,' said Harry coldly.*

*'Do you?' said the boy with a slight sneer. 'Why is he with you? Where are your parents?'*

*'They're dead,' said Harry shortly...*

*'Oh, sorry,' said the other, not sounding sorry at all.*

*(The Philosopher's Stone 60)*

Interestingly, in this case Draco is not properly named until later in the book when Harry is travelling on the Hogwarts express. Draco is as insulting and cruel here as ever:

*'Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as your parents. They didn't know what was good for them either. You hang around with riff-raff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid and it'll rub off on you.'*

(The Philosopher's Stone 81)

With a name like Draco it is almost inevitable that the reader's opinion of him will now be set in stone. There is a definite suggestion of lizard-ness; Draco being a Latin term for Dragon - even being used in the Hogwarts motto "Draco Dormiens Nunquam Titillandus" (Never Tickle Sleeping Dragons). For any human being this is an inherently unpleasant comparison. However, there is a historical basis for the name also: Draco was the name of an archon at Athens in 621 B.C. and his particular style of leadership has led to the adjectives *draconic* and *draconian* which are still in modern use. Draco's style is perfectly described by the Oxford English Dictionary's definition: "**Draconic**, **a.** 1. Of, pertaining to, or characteristic of Draco... or the severe code of laws said to have been established by him; rigorous, harsh, severe, cruel" (Oxford English Dictionary).

Harshness and cruelty are particular traits which can be used to describe Draco Malfoy quite easily, and he is certainly rigorous in spreading his own beliefs around – even though it is almost certain that those beliefs are inherited from his father. From the moment Harry decides he would rather not associate with the Slytherin crowd, Draco never misses an opportunity to get him into trouble either directly or indirectly. He even goes as far as to challenge Harry to a wizards duel, but instead of turning up he tells the caretaker, Filch, that Harry and his friend Ron are out of bed after hours.

*'Malfoy tricked you,' Hermione said to Harry. 'You realise that, don't you? He was never going to meet you – Filch knew someone was going to be in the trophy room, Malfoy must have tipped him off.'*

(The Philosopher's Stone 118)

and again, Malfoy attempts to get Harry into trouble for being in possession of a broomstick, although he is not aware that uniquely for first years Harry has been picked for the Gryffindor Quidditch team:

*'That's a broomstick,' [Malfoy] said, throwing it back to Harry with a mixture of jealousy and spite on his face. 'You'll be for it this time Potter, first years aren't allowed them.'*

*... Professor Flitwick appeared at Malfoy's elbow...*

*'Potter's been sent a broomstick, Professor,' said Malfoy quickly.*

*(The Philosopher's Stone 122)*

But Harry is not the only object of Malfoy's anger and vindictiveness. In a theme which becomes more apparent as the series progresses, the issue of pure-blooded wizards versus those of non-magical parentage, or "Mudbloods", comes ever more to the fore. Malfoy, as the latest in a long line of Slytherin purebloods, is obviously happy with the idea of racial cleansing; the seeds are planted in the very first meeting with Potter:

*'They [Harry's parents] were our kind weren't they?'*

*'They were a witch and wizard, if that's what you mean.'*

*'I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you? They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways.'*

*(The Philosopher's Stone 60-61)*

but it is not until The Chamber of Secrets that the issue really starts to dominate:

*'At least no-one on the Gryffindor team had to buy their way in,' said Hermione sharply.*

*'They got in on pure talent.'*

*The smug look on Malfoy's face flickered.*

*'No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood,' he spat.*

*(The Chamber of Secrets 86)*

*'Last time the Chamber of Secrets was opened, a Mudblood died. So it's only a matter of time before one of them's killed this time... I hope it's Granger.'*

*(The Chamber of Secrets 167)*

Ultimately Draco lives up the harsh and cruel nature of his namesake, and his placement in Slytherin house re-enforces his untrustworthy, serpentine image which is so unpleasant and yet so in line with his sadistic nature. What is important to note, however, is that far from defining

the character as the first point of contact, as Binding suggests, it is his behaviour during the initial meeting with Potter in The Philosopher's Stone which provides the reader with the clearest summation of his character traits. The later discovery of his name in this case re-enforces the opinion the reader will already have formulated on their own.

The old saying goes “like father like son” and with regards to Draco and his father this would certainly seem to be the case. Lucius Malfoy is a figure who, despite not making a physical appearance in The Philosopher's Stone, certainly is well known in the wizarding world:

*‘I’ve heard of his family,’ said Ron darkly. ‘They were some of the first to come back to our side after You-Know-Who disappeared. Said they’d been bewitched. My dad doesn’t believe it. He says Malfoy’s father doesn’t need an excuse to go over to the Dark Side.’*

(The Philosopher's Stone 82)

Lucius’ first appearance is in The Chamber of Secrets, and it is he who is responsible for an attempt to keep Harry out of Hogwarts during his second year of school. As it happens this is so he will be out of the way when the eponymous chamber is opened. The suggestion from The Philosopher's Stone that he was a fervent supporter of Lord Voldemort given further credence when Harry overhears him talking to Draco in Mr Borgin’s shop in Knockturn Alley:

*‘...I would remind you that it is not - prudent - to appear less than fond of Harry Potter, not when most of our kind regard him as the hero who made the Dark Lord disappear...’*

(The Chamber of Secrets 43)

The use of the term “Dark Lord” implies that Lucius, and by extension his entire family, feel that Lord Voldemort has a genuine right to lead, and there are further implications that Lucius’ loyalty still remains fixed to the dark wizard who has not been seen alive for some time:

*‘I have a few items - ah - items at home that might embarrass me, if the ministry were to call... the Ministry [of magic] grows ever more meddlesome. There are rumours about a new Muggle protection act - no doubt that flea bitten, Muggle-loving fool Arthur Weasley is behind it.... - and as you see, certain of these poisons might make it appear...’*

([The Chamber of Secrets](#) 43)

and

*'Father's got some very valuable Dark Arts stuff. But luckily, we've got our own secret chamber under the drawing room floor -'*

([The Chamber of Secrets](#) 166)

which when taken along Lord Voldemort's comments in [The Goblet of Fire](#), marks Lucius out as another villain for the series:

*'Lucius, my slippery friend,' [Voldemort] whispered, halting before him. 'I am told that you have not renounced the old ways, though to the world you present a respectable face. You are still ready to take the lead in a spot of Muggle Torture, I believe?'*

([The Goblet of Fire](#) 564)

Lucius Malfoy's connection to Lord Voldemort is stressed far more than that of any other character, even though there were several members of Lord Voldemort's inner circle, otherwise known as the Death Eaters. Whilst this may simply be due to his relation to Draco, who is in almost daily contact with Harry after all, it gives a certain emphasis to his own involvement in Lord Voldemort's affairs. Indeed, as seen above, when Voldemort is revived and the Death Eaters truly reassembled, it is to Lucius that he first speaks, and even goes as far as to call him "friend" ([The Goblet of Fire](#) 564).

*Lucius*, according to the [Oxford Dictionary of First Names](#), is an old Roman given name – which automatically bestows upon it a certain stature – and the name is a derivative of *lux*, the Latin for "light". At first glance, therefore, the etymology of this particular name would appear to be an inappropriate one since Lucius' allegiance is most definitely on the side of dark. However, there is another comparison to be made, one far more satisfying if you happen to be a villainous character:

**Lucifer...** *The rebel archangel whose fall from heaven was supposed to be referred to in Isaiah xiv. 12; Satan, the devil. Now rare in serious use. +b. allusively. One who commits the sin of Lucifer, ...*

(Oxford English Dictionary)

Whilst at first this may seem to be stretching the point, somewhat, *lucifer* itself has a very similar etymology, since it also derives from the root *lux*, or more properly its inflection *luc*. Indeed, theological and semantic precedent does offer the literal translation of *Lucifer* as “the light bearer”, following the suffix *fer*’s own literal translation (Oxford Dictionary of Etymology). It is a meaning which is carried over, in a subtly different form into the story of Lucifer’s fall from Heaven:

*How did you come to fall from the heavens,  
Daystar, son of Dawn?*

(Isaiah xiv:12)

Given that the figures of witches and wizards use a form of magic which historically derives from paganistic rituals, the idea of Lucius, a member of a pure-blood Wizarding family, as the “pagan tyrant” mentioned above, seems particularly accurate. The passage also re-enforces a common link between the two names, not least because any comparison with a star implies an object capable of illumination, but in any case the shared initial morpheme could be enough to suggest a link in the minds of the audience.

Interestingly, Shakespeare’s character Lucio, from *Measure for Measure*, also fits the pattern, although he sports an Italianate version of the name for the purposes of setting. He in particular does exhibit the attributes of Lucifer, in particular that of rebelling against authority in the form of the Duke, and he himself suffers a major fall at the culmination of the play. In the case of Lucius Malfoy the rebellion aspect of aligning himself with the dark side are obvious. However, he was not exactly cast out, having been exonerated after claiming he aligned himself with

Voldemort due to being bewitched. Thus it is, through his own cunning, that “‘The name Malfoy still commands a certain amount of respect.’” (The Chamber of Secrets 43).

However, the full fate of Lucifer is most closely paralleled by Lord Voldemort himself. Prior to the actual time-frame of the series, he has rebelled and become a kind of “Prince of Darkness”, and suffered a catastrophic fall. It may seem odd that Rowling would therefore choose Lucius as the forename of one of the supporters of Voldemort, rather than for the figure of the fallen angel himself, but it is forgivable given that Voldemort is a hugely descriptive name in its own right. Ascribing the name Lucius to Draco’s father in effect alludes to Malfoy’s own close ties with Voldemort, placing him on the same level of extreme villainy and making him a character of whom to be wary.

At the risk of moving along a slight tangent, any comparison of the Harry Potter series with the story of Lucifer would be remiss if it were not to point out the parallel between Lord Voldemort’s return and the following passage from The Book of Revelations:

*... Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive all the nations in the four quarters of the earth... and mobilise them for war. His armies will be as many as the sands of the sea... But fire will come down on them from heaven and consume them. Then the devil, who misled them, will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and false prophet are, and their torture will not stop, day or night, for ever and ever.*

(Revelations xx: 7-10)

something which Lucius Malfoy would do well to bear in mind. Especially since, in Voldemort’s absence, he is effectively cast in the role of the beast who inherits Satan’s powers in his absence (Revelation xiii). An indicator, perhaps, that the wizarding community should perhaps pay some attention to what is contained within Muggle religious texts.

A passing mention should be made at this point of Draco’s mother, Narcissa Malfoy. In passing only, simply because her first and only appearance to date has been a mere few sentences long, beginning as follows:

*A pale boy with a pointed face and white-blond hair, Draco greatly resembled his father. His mother was blonde, too; tall and slim, she would have been nice-looking if she hadn't been wearing a look which suggested there was a nasty smell under her nose.*

(The Goblet of Fire 91-92)

Whilst it is difficult from this brief passage to gauge how closely Narcissa lives up to her name, it is easy to tell the impact that it has on the reader. The name Narcissus, after all, has particular connotations:

*narcissus... 2. (With capital initial.) The name of a youth in classical mythology who died of self love after seeing his reflection in water and was turned into the flower, used chiefly attrib. And Comb. allusively for: one who admires himself exclusively, one who resembles Narcissus in handsomeness.*

(Oxford English Dictionary)

The connection with Greek mythology – narcissus is a Latin form of the Greek name *Narkissos* (Oxford Dictionary of First Names) – has very little impact on how we perceive the character of Narcissa. The implication is that anyone called Narcissa – a feminine inflection possibly formed via the French term *Narcisse* – is a person self-absorbed and interested in their own beauty, which is hardly a flattering one. The reader's instincts will automatically be led to dislike her as a person. Sadly in this instance the reader is afforded very little chance to see whether that first impression is justified or not since Narcissa is very definitely a background part – never even given a chance to speak. However, if her character name does inform her actual character, then she has attributes which have almost certainly been passed onto Draco himself in the way he is so full of his own importance and authority.

There is, however, another element to be considered in the case of the Malfoys. That of their surname. The first morpheme alone seems to be a particularly apt choice since, as previously discussed, the unit mal- implies an element of “bad” or “ill-formed”. The Oxford English Dictionary has this to say on the use of the prefix in compound structures:

*mal-, prefix... chiefly represents the F mal adv --. male ill, badly; rarely, as in maltalent, it represents the OF. mal adj.: -- malus bad. In its advb. use the prefix occurs in many adaptations from Fr... In imitations of these adopted words, mal- has from the 16th c. been prefixed to many Eng. words to convey the sense 'ill', 'wrong', 'improper(ly)'.*

(Oxford English Dictionary)

The use of the prefix in words such as *maltreat*, *malice*, *malpractice* and so on means that, whether a reader is aware of the exact terminology or not makes very little difference. The unit's usage in so many words of a critical or unpleasant nature ensures that prefixing any word with the morpheme *mal* has an inherently corrosive property on any subsequent units which follow, and indeed that any word commencing *mal* will lead to unfavourable interpretation - which should perhaps provoke some thought in those who argue European languages have a distinctly patriarchal bias.

Equally, the suffix *foy* has an interesting, not to say perplexing array of meanings, one of which has a definite propriety: "Foy \Foy\, n. [F. foi, old spelling foy, faith. See Faith.] 1. Faith; allegiance; fealty. [Obs.] --Spenser." ([Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com)).

Interestingly, given that Rowling has adopted Scotland as her home, there is a localised semantic variation of *foy*. It is one which has no particularly obvious connection to the term described above, but which may have familiarised her with the term whilst developing the Harry Potter series: "foy (foi) n. Scots A farewell feast, drink, or gift, as at a wedding." ([Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com)). It could, however, be argued that such feasts, especially those at weddings or wakes, are in themselves expressions of allegiance, but it is specifically the use of the term in the context of fealty which most interests us here. When prefixed with *mal* a feeling is created of an allegiance which is somehow wrong, bad or improper. In many respects, it is the surname Malfoy which truly describes the dominant characteristics of those born into it. It is through Lucius particularly, as the patriarch of the family, that this feeling of an improper fealty is truly exposed: "'Malfoy ... as good as told us his dad was one of those nutters in masks! And we all know the Malfoy's were right in with You-Know-Who!'" ([The Goblet of Fire](#) 126).

There is, of course, another suggestion that maybe Malfoy's allegiance is not just alongside something improper but is also improper in its own right. It is an interesting point of conjecture whether Lucius Malfoy's own allegiance is merely a "fair-weather fealty", a result of a desire for power which will later cause him to betray Voldemort for his own ends, or a true and indefatigable loyalty.

It has long been a cliché, prevalent largely amongst members of the acting profession, that villains are by far the most satisfying and interesting roles to play. The evidence in Rowling's books suggests the same could also be said for their names. Lord Voldemort and the Malfoys aside, Harry has yet another adversary with whom he is expected to do battle, although for the most part during the course of the books, he is largely powerless against him. Severus Snape, the Potions Master and head of Slytherin house, recognises Harry on his first day and Harry instantly gets the idea that Snape particularly dislikes him:

*Professor Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin.*

*It happened very suddenly. The hook-nosed teacher looked past Quirrell's turban straight into Harry's eyes – and a sharp hot pain shot across the scar on Harry's forehead...*

*The pain had gone as quickly as it had come. Harder to shake off was the feeling Harry had got from the teacher's look – a feeling that he didn't like Harry at all.*

(The Philosopher's Stone 94)

This is Professor Snape, a man who knows much in connection with the Dark Arts and, it is well known, is desperately after the position of Professor of Dark Arts. It equally transpires that Harry is slightly wrong in his assessment of Snape. "By the end of the first Potions lesson, he knew he'd been wrong. Snape didn't dislike Harry – he *hated* him." (The Philosopher's Stone 101).

The term *Snape* is an almost obsolete one, but is still possessed of a bewildering array of meanings. Most important amongst these, certainly for the purposes of defining this character, is the following: "Snape v. Now *dial.* 1. *trans* To be hard upon; to harm, damage, or injure in some way" (Oxford English Dictionary).

Snape's harshness and pleasure in rebuking Harry are evident from the first lesson. It is Harry who is subjected to a barrage of questions regarding potions that he cannot hope to answer and blames Harry when another student melts his cauldron and floods the room with a particularly potent substance:

*'You – Potter – why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got it wrong, did you? That's another point you've lost for Gryffindor.'*

(The Philosopher's Stone 104)

That Snape clearly has it in for him leads Harry and his friends to suspect the potions master when Harry is put under a spell during his first game of Quidditch. The effect is to make him lose control of his broomstick and it is Hermione who notices that Snape is up to something during the match:

*'I knew it, Hermione gasped, 'Snape – look.'*

*Ron grabbed the binoculars. Snape was in the idle of the stands opposite them. He had his eyes fixed on Harry and was muttering non-stop under his breath.*

*'He's doing something – jinxing the broom,' said Hermione.*

(The Philosopher's Stone 140)

It is later discovered that it was Professor Quirrell who was jinxing the broom, and Snape was in fact trying to counteract the curse. In order to prevent Quirrell making another attempt on Harry's life Snape offers to referee the next match, but this only serves to make Snape seem even more desperate to hurt him in some way – something entirely in keeping with the semantic implication of his surname.

The reader will later discover the reason that Snape dislikes Harry: it is again a simple case of "like father, like son". Professor Snape and James Potter were at school together and at the conclusion of The Philosopher's stone Dumbledore finally tells Harry why Snape disliked James so much:

*‘... They did rather detest each other. Not unlike yourself and Mr Malfoy. And then your father did something Snape could never forgive.’*

*‘What?’*

*‘He saved his life.’*

*‘What?’*

*‘Yes ...’ said Dumbledore dreamily, ‘Funny, the way people’s minds work, isn’t it? Professor Snape couldn’t bear being in your father’s debt ... I do believe he worked so hard to protect you this year because he felt that would make him and your father quits. Then he could go back to hating your father’s memory in peace...’*

*(The Philosopher’s Stone 217)*

Naturally, Snape doesn’t entirely subscribe to this view; instead he blames James Potter for putting his life at risk. Again, his view is slightly different to that of others of the time, as will be discussed shortly. However, what is clear is that the word *Snape*, used in conjunction with the character resonates with meaning, re-enforcing the characterisation that is portrayed by Rowling in the books.

Snape’s Christian name, *Severus*, also re-enforces the point. The word is clearly a modification of the term *severe*, i.e. to be harsh or cruel, suffixing it with the morpheme *-us* to give the same formation as Latinate given names, such as *Lucius* above. Equally, and possibly more likely, it could also derive from the word *sever*, a word which has interesting implications when the fourth book of the series is taken into account: “**Sever**... To put apart, set asunder.; to part or separate. c. To disjoin, dissociate, disunite. f. (In Biblical language.) To set apart or segregate for a special purpose” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

From his eagerness to reward students from his own house, and deduct points from students from other houses, the sense that *Severus* implies is that he is keen to divide people as much as possible. He almost relishes the divisions that exist between the houses and is happy to strengthen them wherever possible, even if it is for the most unlikely of reasons: “‘That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger,’ said Snape coolly. ‘Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all.’” (*The Prisoner of Azkaban* 129).

There is, however, a more interesting sense that *sever* embodies. As shown above, the biblical use of the term is one where an object or person is set aside for a special purpose, and in The Goblet of Fire, Snape's history and future are given unforeseen depths. It has already been revealed that Slytherin produced more of Lord Voldemort's followers than any other house, and Snape, it turns out, was also one of Voldemort's Death Eaters. Harry discovers the truth by accident after viewing events from thirteen years ago in Dumbledore's Pensieve:

*'Snape has been cleared by this council,' said Crouch coldly. 'He has been vouched for by Albus Dumbledore.'*

*'No!' shouted Karkaroff, straining at the chains which bound him to the chair. 'I assure you! Severus Snape is a Death Eater!'*

*Dumbledore had got to his feet. 'I have given evidence already on this matter,' he said calmly' he said calmly. 'Severus Snape was indeed a Death Eater. However, he rejoined our side before Lord Voldemort's downfall and turned spy for us, at great personal risk...'*

(The Goblet of Fire 513)

and once Lord Voldemort has been resurrected, Dumbledore has specific plans:

*'Severus,' said Dumbledore, turning to Snape, 'you know what I must ask you to do. If you are ready ... if you are prepared ...'*

*'I am,' said Snape.*

*He looked slightly paler than usual, and his cold, black eyes glittered strangely.*

(The Goblet of Fire 619)

Exactly what it is that Snape is required to do is not yet made clear in the series, but Harry does have some time to speculate:

*Had he made contact with the Death Eaters, perhaps? Pretended that he had never really gone over to Dumbledore, that he had been, like Voldemort himself, biding his time?*

(The Goblet of Fire 625)

It is clear from this that, although there are less complex and semantically diverse meanings to be derived from the name of Severus Snape they re-enforce the character traits apparent in the novels thus far, and even encode suggestions of where this character is headed.

Harry's world, however, is not entirely populated by villains with interesting names. Some of the good guys have them too. Three of the most notable, and also important to the back-story and future arc, are Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Albus Dumbledore.

Sirius Black first appears at the very beginning of The Philosopher's Stone, and it is he who lends his motorcycle to Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, in order to transport the newly orphaned Harry to his Muggle parents. He is also the prisoner in The Prisoner of Azkaban, having been arrested for betraying Harry's parents to Voldemort and murdering a street full of Muggles after Voldemort's downfall. At the start of that book he has escaped from the prison – something never known to have occurred before – and is hunting Harry down, ostensibly to kill him.

It takes little imagination to stretch to the implications that the name *Black* can have in relation to a character; it is at first glance more than a little Cluedo-esque. The word evokes images of darkness or evil and this is entirely in keeping with the view of Black that permeates the novel. His madness and obsession with getting to Harry are marked very early in the book:

*'...Fudge went to Azkaban the night Black escaped. The guards told Fudge that Black's been talking in his sleep for a while now. Always the same words: "He's at Hogwarts ... he's at Hogwarts" Black is deranged, Molly, and he wants Harry dead... Black lost everything the night Harry stopped You-Know-Who, and he's had twelve years alone in Azkaban to brood on that..'*

(The Prisoner of Azkaban 54)

He attempts to infiltrate Hogwarts and Harry is placed under close observation by the teaching staff. However, like the Wizarding world, the reader is deceived by what is known of Black. He is innocent of both the Muggle murders and the betrayal of James and Lily Potter, having been framed by another wizard. His interest at getting to Hogwarts lies in the fact that this other wizard is also there, living as Ron's rat, Scabbers.

The ability of some wizards to transform into animals is first brought to the fore in The Prisoner of Azkaban, and those capable of the feat are given a specific name: Animagi. Sirius, we later discover, is also an Animagus, but the clue to this ability was there all along. Sirius is on the run for the entire book, and Harry starts seeing a large black dog from very early on too:

*‘Lumos,’ Harry muttered, and a light appeared at the end of his wand, almost dazzling him. He held it high over his head and ... saw quite distinctly the hulking outline of something very big, with wide, gleaming eyes.*

...

*‘There was a big black thing,’ said Harry, pointing uncertainly into the gap. ‘Like a dog ... but massive ...’*

(The Prisoner of Azkaban 30 – 31)

In this particular case, Rowling encodes the secret of Black’s evasion into the character’s first name. *Sirius* is the name often ascribed to the brightest star in the constellation *Canis Major*, often known as “the Dog Star”. The correlation between his name and his singular ability to transform into a dog is simple and once again is a clue which an informed reader would be able to find at their leisure. There is, however, an equally plausible reading of the name, considering that it has its root in the word *sire*, literally “a person of some note or importance;... A father; a male parent;...” (Oxford English Dictionary), and the Latinate name-forming suffix *ius* as seen in *Lucius*, above. If we consider that the name *Sirius* therefore implies a male father figure then Black’s importance to the future story of the orphaned Harry becomes clear:

*‘Well, your parents appointed me your guardian,’ said Sirius stiffly. ‘If anything happened to them ...’*

...

*‘I’ll understand, of course, if you want to stay with your aunt and uncle,’ but ... well ... think about it. Once my name’s cleared .. if you wanted a ... a different home ...’*

(The Prisoner of Azkaban 277)

and there is nothing that Harry would like better than leave the house at Little Whinging. This much is a given truth since the very first novel: “When he had been younger, Harry had dreamed

and dreamed of some unknown relation coming to take him away, but it had never happened;” (The Philosopher’s Stone 27).

Thus we can see from Rowling’s use of the noun *Sirius* that two clues are given to the reader relating to Black’s importance, one in terms of the mystery contained within the novel, and the other in relation to the continuing Harry Potter series. That Rowling also uses his surname to give emphasis to an initial misreading of the character is interesting, but also important, being, as it is, vital to the mystery that Rowling is relating to her audience during The Prisoner of Azkaban.

A similar effect is also used with regards to the character of Remus Lupin. Lupin is the third Professor of Dark Arts to appear in the books – ““Dear me, we do seem to run through them, don’t we?”” (The Chamber of Secrets 246) – and, like Sirius Black, also makes his first appearance in The Prisoner of Azkaban. There are signs early on that not everything is well with Professor Lupin since he is frequently ill – at the times when the moon is full – requiring him to take a potion brewed by Professor Snape. Also the Boggart, a creature which will take on the appearance of your greatest fear, transforms itself into “a silvery white orb hanging in the air” when faced with him (The Prisoner of Azkaban 105).

It is Snape’s hatred of anyone who holds the Dark Arts position that leads him to set an essay on the recognition of werewolves when Lupin is ill and cannot teach his students. As Snape intends, another instance of him trying to brew discontent, Hermione quickly discovers the truth:

*‘Did you check the lunar chart and realise that I was always ill at the full moon? Or did you realise that the Boggart changed into the moon when it saw me?’*

*‘Both,’ Hermione said quietly.*

(The Prisoner of Azkaban 253)

Even these clues, however, are nothing compared to Rowling’s use of character names to encode a meaning for later retrieval. The word *Lupin*, whilst also being the name of a flower, is a contraction of the word *Lupine*, an adjective which literally means “Having the nature of qualities of a wolf” (Oxford English Dictionary). It also evokes images of the term loopy, from lunatic, which

itself derives from the superstition that the full moon could induce madness, all of which come from the Latin word *luna*. Not entirely coincidental is that fact that *luna* is also the alchemical term for “silver” which is of course, the only known substance capable of killing werewolves. Clearly, the whole werewolf – and possibly even gardening – tradition and terminology owes much to this simple Latin root.

The name Remus, also carries with it certain interesting connotations. Romulus and Remus are, according to ancient Roman tradition, the two founders of Rome who were orphaned and raised by a she-wolf. Through this alone Lupin’s wolfish connection becomes even more marked, but the name Remus is also used by Joel Chandler Harris as the name of the narrator in his book Legends of the Old Plantation. The stories of Uncle Remus have an interesting implication for the character of Lupin since, aside from the comforting, familial nature of the association, there is an anarchic nature to Harris’ stories:

*Readers ... might be tempted to assume ... that the author had some kind of secret racial egalitarian agenda. Many of the stories he relates through Remus are clearly subversive of American apartheid's hierarchies.*

(Remus Tales: Selected Text)

The issues of racism that operates on one level through Harris’ work are interesting since Lupin also suffers from prejudice on account of his wolfish nature – despite it being a curse for which he had no particular desire:

*‘This time tomorrow, the owls will start arriving from parents – they will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry.’*

(The Prisoner of Azkaban 309)

*‘Professor Lupin is currently deep in the Forest, unable to tell anyone anything. By the time he is human again it will be too late, Sirius will be worse than dead. I might add that werewolves are so mistrusted by most of our kind that his support will count for very little...’*

(The Prisoner of Azkaban 287)

Humorously, Rowling also makes a small nod to this in one of the two Harry Potter tie-in books published in aid of Comic Relief. In Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, Rowling's nom-de-plume, Newt Scamander, classifies a werewolf as being extremely dangerous and then clarifies the situation in the following footnote:

*This classification refers, of course, to the werewolf in its transformed state. When there is no full moon, the werewolf is as harmless as any other human. For a heart rending account of one wizard's battle with lycanthropy, see the classic Hairy Snout, Human Heart by an anonymous author (Whizz Hard Books, 1975).*

(Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them 41)

and it is rewarding to assume that Lupin is the anonymous author to whom Scamander is referring. Whether this is the case or not, the question of racial tolerance is once again raised by Rowling and in this instance her choice of character name both directly references texts concerned with racial equality and implicitly encodes clues to the nature of the secret that Lupin is hiding.

But now we come to the figure who presents the single biggest threat to Lord Voldemort's supremacy, other than Harry himself. The figure of Albus Dumbledore is an interesting one: as headmaster of Hogwarts he has a high position and is the one person in the world who Voldemort was actually afraid of when his reign of terror began:

*'Sorry to disappoint you, and all that, but the greatest wizard in the world is Albus Dumbledore. Everyone says so. Even when you were strong, you didn't dare try and take over at Hogwarts.'*

(The Chamber of Secrets 232)

although Dumbledore doesn't make a hugely imposing figure: "He wore half moon glasses, had a long crooked nose and flowing silver hair, beard and moustache." (The Philosopher's Stone 77) but even with his somewhat clichéd appearance, he is definitely an unusual wizard:

*‘Welcome!’ [Dumbledore] said. ‘Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!’*

(The Philosopher’s Stone 92)

As with Black, there is a simplistic device in use for part of Dumbledore’s name. *Albus* literally means “white” in Latin, and, whilst it requires a little more detailed knowledge than in the case of *Black*, those in the know can quickly glean that Dumbledore is by implication an essentially good character. It is, however, *Dumbledore* that provides us with the most interesting insight into the character. As Rowling herself explained: “In fact ‘dumbledore’ is the old English word for bumblebee. I chose it because my image is of this benign wizard, always on the move, humming to himself...” (Telling Tales 33). The explanation, backed up by the Oxford English Dictionary, is a pleasing one, certainly fulfilling the image of a gently scatty wizard perfectly, although the component *dum* could be taken to imply stupidity or silence this is certainly far from the case, but again Rowling has an interesting contribution to make:

*‘In the Italian translation, Professor Dumbledore has been translated as Professor Silencio. The translator has taken the ‘dumb’ from the name and based the translation on that... For me ‘Silencio’ is a complete contradiction.’*

(Telling Tales 33)

Laying bumblebees carefully to one side for a moment, there is one other component part of Dumbledore’s name which leads to an interesting semantic conclusion. The word *dor* which, defined as an obscure form of the word *dare* (Oxford English Dictionary), does tie in with Dumbledore’s reaction to events in The Goblet of Fire:

*At that moment, Harry fully understood for the first time why people said Dumbledore was the only real wizard Voldemort had ever feared. The look upon Dumbledore’s face as he stared down at the unconscious form of Mad-Eye Moody was more terrible than Harry could ever have imagined. There was no benign smile upon Dumbledore’s face, no twinkle in the eyes behind the spectacles. There was cold fury in every line of the ancient face; a sense of power radiated from Dumbledore, as though he was giving off burning heat.*

## (The Goblet of Fire 589 – 590)

With the return of Voldemort, Dumbledore is transformed from a kindly, benign old man into a dynamic and incisive individual. He assesses what must be done to prepare for any future attack Voldemort may plan, and does it, even though it means turning his back on the Ministry of Magic:

*‘The Ministry of Magic,’ Dumbledore continued, ‘does not wish me to tell you [that Voldemort has returned]. It is possible that some of your parents will be horrified that I have done so – either because they will not believe that Lord Voldemort has returned, or because they think I should not tell you so, young as you are. It is my belief, however, that the truth is generally preferable to lies, and that any attempt to pretend that Cedric died as the result of an accident, or some sort of blunder of his own, is an insult to his memory.’*

## (The Goblet of Fire 626)

The minister of magic, Cornelius Fudge, is an ineffectual figure in many respects, incapable of making a firm decision, or facing unpleasant facts – something which his very name suggests, when taken in the sense “to evade (a problem, issue etc); dodge, avoid” (Collins Softback English Dictionary) and can be seen clearly in many of his appearances in the series:

*It seemed Fudge could think of no answer... He rocked backwards and forwards on his small feet for a moment, and spun his bowler hat in his hands.*

*Finally he said, with a hint of plea in his voice, ‘He can’t be back, Dumbledore, he just can’t be ...’*

## (The Goblet of Fire 615 – 616)

and when Sirius first escapes from Azkaban, it Fudge who is determined not to tell Harry that his life may be in danger:

*‘... makes no sense not to tell him,’ Mr Weasley was saying heatedly. ‘Harry’s got a right to know. I’ve tried to tell Fudge but he insists on treating Harry like a child...’*

## (The Prisoner of Azkaban 53)

*'Last year, I got an official warning just because a house-elf smashed a pudding in my uncle's house!' said Harry, frowning. 'The Ministry of Magic said I'd be expelled from Hogwarts if there was any more magic there!'*

*Unless Harry's eyes were deceiving him, Fudge was suddenly looking awkward.*

*'Circumstances change, Harry ... we have to take into account ... in the present climate ... surely you don't want to be expelled?'*

*...*

*There was something extremely odd going on... And now Harry came to think about it, surely it wasn't usual for the Minister for Magic himself to get involved in matters of underage magic?*

*(The Prisoner of Azkaban 39)*

Harry is not being punished for performing underage magic outside Hogwarts since, following Black's escape, everyone is far too concerned for his physical safety, but Cornelius is fudging the issue. It is this attitude which sets Dumbledore apart from Fudge; whilst both could both be seen as kindly, well meaning figures, Fudge believes in avoiding issues and Dumbledore has the necessary courage to confront them. It is this attitude which finally leads him to send Fudge packing once Dumbledore has returned:

*'If your determination to shut your eyes will carry you as far as this, Cornelius,' said Dumbledore, 'we have reached a parting of the ways. You must act as you see fit. And I – I shall act as I see fit'*

*(The Goblet of Fire 615)*

Given the kindly and bumbling nature of Dumbledore, underlined by Rowling ascribing that particular surname, the change in his character and his behaviour is one of the key elements of The Goblet of Fire, leaving the series on a major cliff-hanger until Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix is published later this year. Once again, Rowling appears to use the subtle meanings that can be read into character names to manipulate the reader's capacity for anticipation, ostensibly suggesting one thing whilst at the same time subtly encoding further meanings for the informed members of her audience.

The use of such character names as Harry, Hermione and Ron, to name but a few, has not, so far been discussed in this paper. The reasoning for this is simple: since they are essentially standardised forenames and frequently found within current usage, their derivations are somewhat less interesting to submit to analysis and exploration. They are in many ways, “too normal”. However, to simply discard them as being of no stylistic value in relation to the audience’s reaction to character is short-sighted since it is in many respects their very normality that makes them suitable for names of heroes. For a fantastic world to be truly convincing to the reader, some anchor must be found in normality, preferably some character with whom they can sympathise and view the unfolding events. By ascribing the lead characters less outlandish proper nouns, Rowling breaks down one of the inevitable barriers which are automatically created when fantastic environments and stories must be told.

This is not to say that there are no depths to the names which have been assigned, *Harry*, for example, is popular derivative of *Henry* which has been in use since it was coined in Tudor times. The insinuation is of a warrior king, a hero in a traditional mould; Hermione, however, is a derivative feminine inflection of the name *Hermes*, the messenger from Greek mythology. Whilst it is not as common as Harry, the name is well chosen. Hermione’s knowledge and studies frequently lead her to bring answers to the group when they are stuck for ideas. It is, one suspects, for the common association with precocious middle-class schoolgirls that the name is most effective. In essence, as with Ron, a common familiarisation of the proper name Ronald, it is cultural stereotyping which is most at play where these names are concerned, rather than a subtle encoding through the use of various language units. It is a perfect example of Legat’s assertion that names do have “some kind of identification in people’s minds” (Legat, 81-82).

From what has been discussed so far, we can see that the specific use of proper nouns with etymological precedents can be used as a stylistic device to achieve one of three ends: firstly to foreshadow character traits or personalities prior to their proper “physical” introduction, as with Voldemort, Sirius, Lupin and Snape; secondly to re-enforce a view of a character from the

information already given, as with the Malfoys; and thirdly, in a device which also relies quite heavily on the previous two, as part of a mechanism to provide the reader with red-herrings through misinformation. In the examples we have discussed so far, some of these elements have interacted, either as separate units of forename and surname, or even, as with *Dumbledore*, within the actual word itself.

Some of the names so far analysed have truly encapsulated, and possibly even defined the nature of the characters themselves, as in the case of Voldemort, Snape, Draco, Malfoy and Lupin but it would be foolhardy to suggest that it is the name which is of primary importance. As Binding posits:

*On the whole, the names signpost some of the characters and thus become important to the reader, but not to the narrative - these people would continue in their tasks regardless of nomenclature.*

(Binding)

which is to say that the overall narrative thrust of the texts are not actually served by the names themselves, each one, however, “acts as narrative ‘icing on the cake’” (Binding), technically unimportant, but ultimately rewarding. Rowling has herself admitted that “the characters came first, and then I had to find names to fit them” (*Telling Tales* 21). Whether these names were created specifically to fit the characters semantically or simply because they sounded good may never be determined, but there is no doubt that in many cases there is an undeniable complicity between the elements of noun and character.

It is possible, indeed likely, that many readers of the Harry Potter novels will not be receptive to the subtleties of meaning conveyed by the use of proper nouns in Rowling’s work, but then since they are a stylistic device rather than a narrative one this is not a major problem in appreciating the text. Many readers will simply enjoy the story, the characterisation, the settings and the concepts, and these are equally valid responses to the series, and Rowling, to judge by the acclaim heaped on the books, is certainly to be credited for her considerable ability in each

of these areas. However, the coding present in these names does present another level of enjoyment to those readers ‘in the know’ and the power of this additional level is that it can reinforce or suggest different elements to this section of the audience without causing other sections any apparent difficulty and “the inclusion of such a trick is welcome in these wonderfully addictive books” (Binding).

A matter of style, then, but one which doesn’t overwhelm the substance. Clearly the names that J.K. Rowling uses are worth paying some attention to if you can spare the time. One suspects that any time spent in the company of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix would also be well served with a good dictionary by the reader’s side.

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