

## Guest Editorial

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*American Name Society*

One of the most daunting tasks facing writers of science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and horror is naming the people, creatures, places, objects, and concepts of their make-believe world. Among the world's seemingly inexhaustible supply of would-be-famous authors, the failure to find just the right balance between the soothingly foreign and the frighteningly familiar can completely spoil the final product, transforming the author's vision into laughable, utterly forgettable, private musings. By contrast, master storytellers have the uncanny ability to conjure up names powerful enough to transfix and terrify, inspire and delight generations of readers and listeners, long after their natural or unnatural demise. In this collection of articles, the onomastic prowess of five legends of science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and horror are examined.

To begin with, Dorothy Dodge Robbins of Louisiana Tech University (USA) presents her intriguing examination of Daphne du Maurier's 2006 [1938] psychological thriller. Although some readers may prefer to classify *Rebecca* as a Gothic love story, in a recent interview the son of du Maurier, Kit Browning, explained that his mother detested this classification: "She did get so irritated with people calling it a romantic novel. Because she always said it was a study in jealousy" (House, 2013). According to Browning, the storyline was a semi-autobiographical account of his mother's enduring insecurity towards her husband's first *fiancée*, *Rebecca*. As Dodge Robbins skillfully demonstrates, the disparate personalities of the main characters in this neo-gothic novel are artfully underscored by the onomastic disparity between the novel's nameless female narrator and her nemesis, the late Mrs *Rebecca de Winter*, the vainglorious first lady of the Manderley mansion, a woman so consummate in her wanton sadistic seduction that, even from the grave, the mere presence of her first initial is enough to drive the fragile second Mrs de Winter to the brink of complete psychological disintegration.

From this neo-gothic mystery, the second article in this special issue also explores the narrative power of names to underscore critical disparities — only this time the power struggle is not between members of a dysfunctional family, but between citizens of a dystopian society. The contribution by Shoshana Milgram Knapp of Virginia Tech University (USA) transports the reader to the barren futuristic universe of Ayn Rand's 1995 [1938] classic, *Anthem*. In this shapeless, reductionist, nightmarish projection of a period to come, all of the cultural rituals, familial traditions, and personal choices of the present have been stripped away. The result is a Kafkaesque existence in which the protagonists' struggle for self-identification is epitomized by their resistance to such stultifying onomastic regulations that have replaced all names with serially issued numerical codes.

Knapp's literary exploration of Rand's apocalyptic future finds a dynamic contrast in the third article featured in this special collection.

Contributed by Marinette Grimbeek of Karlstad University (Sweden), this third piece visits an entirely different, yet equally disturbing, authorial futuristic vision where, instead of being elided, society's onomastic processes have been allowed to spin out of control. Naming has ceased to be an intimate affair of personal significance and has mutated into a frenzied spectacle in a world where the pursuit of all things new and improved has effectively blinded humanity to its perpetual loss of all that once was and can never be again. The title of this societal perturbation is *Oryx and Crake* (2003); and its creator is the Canadian award-winning author, Margaret Atwood.

Moving beyond societal alienation to visit an alien society, the fourth contributor to this special issue, Kara Kennedy from the University of Canterbury (New Zealand), takes our journal readers to a distant desert universe, where an ancient dynastic prophecy and clandestine political alliances struggle for supremacy over a feudalistic society. The subject of this fourth piece of literary analysis is Frank Herbert's 1965 masterpiece *Dune*. Using Edward Said's analytical model of othering and orientalism (1978) as a methodological framework, this contribution brings into sharp relief the ways in which names and naming reify pre-existing conceptions of the West and the Middle East.

In the fifth and final article in this issue, readers are returned to the familiar planet Earth, but not to the present-day, high-tech world of Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest, but to a low-tech, white collar, white bread, white picket-fence yesteryear where super heroes always managed to save the day. In this humorous yet thought-provoking investigation of DC Comics' "The Legion of Super-Heroes," Laurel Sutton of Catchword Branding (USA) reveals that, for all their outward otherworldliness, the names assigned to these technicolor teenagers rigidly conform to the linguistic norms of mainstream America, effectively white-washing the 1960s free of the cultural revolution led by ethnoracial minorities.

Taken together, the diversity of the issues explored in these five articles testifies to the critical need for increased scholarly recognition of and attention to names and naming in science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and horror literature. From J. R. R. Tolkien's *Precious* (1995) to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), in the hands of a master storyteller, a simple name has the power to both terrify and titillate millions of readers, from one generation to the next. The unabated importance of this literature in the popular culture is dramatically illustrated by the financial success of authors targeting lovers of fantasy, gore, terror, and suspense. Using the latest statistics released by *Forbes* magazine (2015), the following list features some of the world's top-grossing, thrill-inducing authors for 2015 along with the title or character of one of their most recent publications:

- 1) George R. R. Martin [*Game of Thrones*, 2014] (12 million)
- 2) Suzanne Collins [*The Hunger Games*, 2010], Gillian Flynn [*Gone Girl*, 2012], and Rick Riordan [*Percy Jackson*, 2014] (13 million each)
- 3) John Grisham [*Rogue Lawyer*, 2015] (14 million)
- 4) Stephen King [*Finders Keepers*, 2015] (19 million)
- 5) Janet Evanovich [*Wicked Charms*, 2015] (21 million)
- 6) James Patterson [*14th Deadly Sin*, 2015] (89 million).

The astounding (and inspiring) success of nail-biting storytelling reflects its relative size and stability in the book sales market. In Table 1, recent statistics compiled by *Publishers*

TABLE 1  
UNIT SALES (IN THOUSANDS) FOR ADULT FICTION SALES IN THE USA FROM 2013 TO 2015.

	<i>Category</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>
1	Action/Adventure	2,619	2,239	2,285
2	Classics	7,817	7,578	9,985
3	<b>Fantasy</b>	<b>8,615</b>	<b>7,526</b>	<b>6,600</b>
4	<b>Graphic Novels</b>	<b>7,659</b>	<b>8,669</b>	<b>10,591</b>
5	<b>Mystery/Detective</b>	<b>14,884</b>	<b>14,304</b>	<b>12,533</b>
6	<b>Occult/Psychological/Horror</b>	<b>4,474</b>	<b>3,329</b>	<b>2,218</b>
7	Religion	4,925	4,174	4,414
8	Romance	34,585	30,885	28,031
9	<b>Science-fiction</b>	<b>4,448</b>	<b>4,142</b>	<b>5,964</b>
10	<b>Suspense/Thrillers</b>	<b>22,161</b>	<b>20,111</b>	<b>21,783</b>
11	Western	2,088	2,232	2,186
12	General	36,314	33,524	35,101
13	Total Adult Fiction	150,590	138,712	141,690

*Weekly* on the overall unit sales for books sold in the US are provided (Milliot & Segura 2016; Milliot 2015; Milliot 2014).

An additional indication of the popularity and importance of these types of adult fiction can be found in the records kept by the American Name Society (ANS). Consistently, the journal articles which rank among the most cited and the most read investigate some aspect of names and naming in science fiction, fantasy, horror, and/or mystery. As at the time of writing this editorial, three of the most cited or most read articles included the following: Leal (2007), Lyles-Scott (2008), and Dodge Robbins (2014). Inspired by these results, in the winter of 2015, the ANS issued an official call for scholarly papers which investigated names and naming within science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and/or horror. In response to that call, the ANS received an array of submissions from across the world. These submissions were then sent to a team of scholars and published creative writers for review. The collective results of their assessments were used to put together an expert panel on science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and horror, which met at the 2016 ANS conference in Washington, DC. The qualitative and quantitative assessments were also used to select the five final articles to be featured in this special issue of *Names*. On behalf of the ANS, congratulations are extended to each of the authors for their outstanding contribution to this special issue. Many thanks as well to the blind reviewers; the ANS Vice President, Dorothy Dodge Robbins; and *Names* Editor-in-Chief, Frank Nuessel, for their combined assistance in bringing this issue together.

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