



Lexicons of Power: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Naming Symbolism in 21st Century Dystopian Fiction

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Lexicons of Power: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Naming Symbolism in 21st Century Dystopian
Fiction

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Abstract

This scholarly work delineates the introduction of an additional onomastic naming technique in literature, which I designate as the "emblematic socio-political naming technique." This technique encompasses all names within a literary work that an author selects or invents specifically to advance socio-political themes inherent in a novel. To exemplify the application of this technique, it is systematically employed in the analysis of three instances of 21st-century British and American dystopian literature, each intertwined with distinctive socio-political themes: Susan Collins' *The Hunger Games* (anti-totalitarian government), N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became* (racial and ethnic discord), and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (medical ethics). Through the introduction and meticulous application of this technique, this research asserts the imperative need for delineating a socio-political naming methodology to enhance extant analytical frameworks essential for the examination of literary names. This delineation will concurrently contribute to the broader domain of literary criticism by offering a clear methodology for literary critics to consistently identify and critique authors' naming choices, thereby enhancing the understanding of socio-political motifs inherent in novels across multiple genres.

Dedication

First and foremost, this thesis is dedicated to my spouse, Logan, whose steadfast love and encouragement have been indispensable in facilitating the fruition of this scholarly work. Secondly, heartfelt appreciation is extended to my four children, Danielle, Peyton, Lylah, and Ozzie, for their enduring patience and unwavering support throughout the duration of this academic undertaking. A distinct expression of gratitude is reserved for my grandmother, Carol, whose perennial support and encouragement have significantly contributed to my educational pursuits, rendering this thesis possible. Recognition is also extended to my siblings, Tucker and Colter, who have served as invaluable intellectual confidants, consistently broadening my comprehension of the world. Lastly, profound thanks are extended to Dr. Maria Dikcis, my mentor and advisor throughout this project, whose unwavering support, counsel, and scholarly expertise have played a pivotal role in empowering me to successfully bring this project to fruition.

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Chapter I.

Unveiling the Symbolic Tapestry: An Introductory Exploration of the Emblematic Socio-Political Naming Function

The discourse on the relationship between words and their referents has persisted since Plato's *Cratylus*, engaging philosophers and scholars over centuries. This protracted debate extended into the realm of literature in 1933 when Polish scholar Tadeusz Pawiński endeavored to establish the etymology of a literary eponymous toponym. Following Pawiński's pioneering work, numerous analytic studies utilizing literary onomastics have emerged. The field of literary onomastics has been distinctly characterized as "the study of names as linguistic signs," involving a meticulous examination of various linguistic elements. This analysis encompasses considerations such as the frequency of names' occurrence, their etymology, the presence of puns, portmanteau words, and engagement with other linguistic constructs. As elucidated by Tatyana Hramova in her article entitled "What's in Literary Onomastics," this comprehensive approach enables scholars to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of names within literary contexts, unraveling layers of meaning and contributing to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between nomenclature and literary expression (19).

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the application of the term's prescribed definition, there exists a conspicuous gap in the scholarly landscape concerning the formulation of comprehensive analytic methodologies for the examination of literary names. Despite the commendable efforts of scholars such as Grace Alvarez-Altman and Martyna Gibka to

redress this gap in scholarship, there persists an evident deficiency in the systematic exploration of this facet, particularly when considering the intricate intersection of literary names with themes of socio-politics. While scholars like Alvarez-Altman and Gibka have made commendable strides in advancing the understanding of literary onomastics, there remains an identifiable void in the systematic exploration of how names within literature intertwine with and contribute to socio-political themes. Addressing this specific aspect is crucial for a more holistic comprehension of the role played by literary names in conveying socio-political nuances within the broader narrative context.

Given the aforementioned considerations, with the present thesis, I endeavor to address this gap within the existing scholarly discourse. The primary objective of this thesis is twofold: firstly, to introduce an additional dimension to the concept of naming functions as they relate to socio-politics, and secondly, to attribute a designated term to this newly identified function. This endeavor is further substantiated through the empirical illustration of said function's utilization across three novels characterized by prominently featured socio-political themes.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it is now imperative that I name and define this proposed supplementary socio-political naming function. For the sake of terminological consistency, I have chosen to adopt the terminology established by Alvarez-Altman, as she provided the first guidelines for the analytical application of literary onomastics. As such I've labeled my proposed typology as the "emblematic socio-political naming function." This function will serve to encompass literary anthroponyms (proper names of individuals or groups) and toponyms (proper names of

locations) primarily deployed to exemplify a novel's underlying socio-political themes. Employing their formal characteristics, symbolic connotations, or socio-ethnic implications (or any combination thereof), authors employ these names as a stratified form of symbolism, employing situations, individuals, or objects to signify broader ideas or concepts and thereby substantiating a novel's socio-political motifs (symbolism).

In her study entitled “A Method for Literary Onomastics: An Analytical Guide for Studying Names in Literature,” Alvarez-Altman identifies three general focuses scholars should utilize when analyzing such names: (1) Families or classes of names, (2) The techniques used by authors in naming, and (3) Typologies or functions of names (221). Although the first two focuses are fleshed out thoroughly, the final focus is left unresolved. While she identifies three functions of literary names (the theory of *Redendenamen* [the relevance of names to their phonetic form], the relevance of names to poetic forms, and the relevance of names to ontology and cosmology), her list is far from all-encompassing.

Alvarez-Altman acknowledges the incomplete nature of her precepts, admitting, “In this study we have only scratched the surface of a suggested scientific analytical guidepost for the study of names in literature” (227). She also suggests a gap in scholarship exists surrounding the sociological and psychological functions of names in literature, stating, “the study of relevance of names to sociology and psychology is yet to be explored seriously” (227). Thus, my efforts will be directed towards expanding upon Alvarez-Altman's established analytical guideposts. This pursuit shall be undertaken through the proposition and delineation of a novel typology in the realm of literary onomastics, as articulated in the aforementioned categorizations. This proposed typology

aims to contribute to the existing discourse by offering a comprehensive framework for the analysis and interpretation of literary names, thereby advancing the scholarly understanding of the nuanced interplay between nomenclature and narrative significance.

Moreover, the incorporation of this novel onomastic function would rectify a notable void within Alvarez-Altman's analytical directives, given that the current guidelines do not encompass names employing symbolism to allude to socio-political themes and issues (e.g., civil rights, climate justice, gender inequality, etc.).

Consequently, the addition of this new typology to an established framework of literary onomastic guidelines provides a crucial analytical marker for the investigation of socio-political anthroponyms and toponyms within literature, concurrently contributing to the augmentation of onomastics as a tool for literary criticism. This expansion of the literary onomastic theory's methodology becomes imperative in light of the insights of onomastic scholar Grant W. Smith, who in his article entitled "Theoretical Foundations of Literary Onomastics," asserted, "Naming is a specific and elemental way in which humans use language, and so the function and meaning of names lie at the very heart of literature and of philosophical debates about language" (295). Thus, the development of a comprehensive and exhaustive set of guidelines for the study of such names becomes indispensable for comprehending how names significantly contribute to the meaning within literary and linguistic contexts.

Moreover, this incorporation into literary onomastic guidelines gains added significance when considering the escalating global political unrest since 2020, marked by a ten percent increase in civil unrest globally (*Global Peace Index* 4). Literature, as a reflection of the zeitgeist, is expected to mirror such societal changes. As Milton C.

Albrecht contends in his article entitled, “The Relationship of Literature and Society,” “Literature is interpreted as reflecting norms and values, as revealing the ethos of culture... and certain types of social ‘facts’” (425). Hence, any guidelines guiding the analysis of literary names must explicitly accommodate socio-political symbolism. Given the heightened socio-political unrest worldwide, it is reasonable to anticipate a corresponding surge in socio-political symbolism within emerging literary works.

Furthermore, it is plausible that some form of socio-politics is inherent in most, if not all, literature, as literature inherently mirrors the society from which it originates. With few exceptions, it is implausible to disentangle the influence of socio-politics from any facet of life, literature included. The author, whether consciously or subconsciously, emerges as a direct product of their environment, an environment inevitably shaped by socio-political factors. Therefore, socio-political elements are likely to permeate any artist's work, whether the creator is cognizant of it or not. As George Orwell aptly asserted in his book *Politics and the English Language*, “In our age there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics.’ All issues are political issues” (13). Given this reality, it becomes imperative for any literary onomastic guidelines to encompass a socio-political naming function, as guidelines failing to acknowledge the inescapable influence of humanity’s socio-political context are fundamentally deficient.

However, simply stating that this function is unaccounted for and therefore required is not enough, as one must prove the addition to be both viable and essential. Thus, to further illustrate the necessity of this additional naming function, the remainder of this thesis will be dedicated to an application of the proposed “emblematic socio-political naming function.” To accomplish this, I will analyze the characters’ names

within three 21st-century dystopian American novels and link the characters' names to the overarching socio-political themes present within each novel. I've opted to analyze Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*, and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*.

The selection of these particular novels for examination is predicated, in part, on their individual exploration of divergent and distinct socio-political concerns. *The Hunger Games* engages with an overarching anti-totalitarian imperialism motif, *The City We Became* delves into racial and ethnic unrest within New York City's expansive metropolitan melting pot, and *Never Let Me Go* tackles questions of medical ethics in an era characterized by rapidly advancing medical technology. I consider this selection pertinent as it underscores the universality of the "emblematic socio-political naming function" typology, establishing its applicability to all instances of socio-political themes across various novels.

Furthermore, each novel is authored by individuals representing distinct marginalized groups, with Suzanne Collins being a white woman, N.K. Jemisin a black woman, and Kazuo Ishiguro a Japanese-English man. The utilization of novels penned by a diverse trio of authors is crucial in substantiating the universality of the proposed "emblematic socio-political naming function." Its application to three divergent novels written by authors from varied backgrounds serves as evidence of its effectiveness as a naming function applicable across diverse genres of literature authored by a wide array of writers.

Additionally, within the overarching category of dystopian literature, it is noteworthy that each of these selected novels occupies a second distinct genre. *The*

Hunger Games is classified within the realm of young adult fiction, *The City We Became* aligns with the science fiction and urban fantasy genres, and *Never Let Me Go* is situated within the domain of psychological realism. The deliberate inclusion of works from diverse literary genres serves a twofold purpose: firstly, it acknowledges the nuanced categorization of these dystopian narratives, and secondly, it contributes to substantiating the legitimacy and broad applicability of the proposed "emblematic socio-political naming function" across a spectrum of literary backgrounds.

Similarly to the selection of these specific novels, the emphasis on American and British dystopian genres is not incidental, but deliberate, driven by two primary considerations. Firstly, all dystopian novels inherently involve socio-political commentary. Dystopian fiction, unlike analogous genres such as fantasy or science fiction, is distinguished by its exclusive focus on socio-political themes, offering unique perspectives on problematic social and political practices that may be overlooked or accepted as natural and inevitable in other literary genres (Tuerk 136). Consequently, it is reasonable to posit that the proposed "emblematic socio-political naming function" is extensively employed within the dystopian genre compared to alternative literary forms.

Secondly, all three novels are set in either America or Great Britain, a deliberate choice with specific intent. Both nations possess a rich and intricate history of socio-political unrest, particularly evident in the 21st century. These countries have grappled with significant political upheavals related to race, gender inequality, wealth disparities, and other pertinent issues. A Pew Research Center report from February 2020 indicates that dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy is notably high in both the United States, with over 59% of the population expressing discontent, and the United Kingdom,

with 69% dissatisfied. These percentages surpass those of several other developed nations, including Canada (33%), Sweden (28%), Netherlands (31%), Germany (36%), and Australia (41%) (Connaughton et al. *Pew Research Center*). Given these circumstances and the inherent socio-political critique found in dystopian literature, it is reasonable to assert that 21st-century American and British dystopian fiction provides abundant sources for socio-political commentary, making them ideal candidates for exemplifying onomastics in relation to socio-political symbolism.

Considering these factors, my aim is to substantiate the imperative nature of the "emblematic socio-political naming function" through an onomastic analysis of these novels. Furthermore, I intend to demonstrate its relevance and applicability to works spanning diverse genres, countries, and communities.

Chapter II.

Lexical Resistance: Onomastic Symbolism and the Struggle against Totalitarianism in *The Hunger Games*

Susan Collins' *The Hunger Games* features the story of Katniss Everdeen, a teenage girl chosen to compete in Panem's Hunger Games. The Hunger Games is a competition during which two children from twelve districts are selected to fight to the death within a high-tech arena. These annual games are forced upon the districts by an autocratic ruler named President Snow, who utilizes the deadly games as a punishment for a past political uprising against his totalitarian-style government. Within *The Hunger Games*, author Suzanne Collins skillfully utilizes the emblematic socio-political naming function to further the novel's anti-totalitarian themes through each name's form and symbolic connotations.

The nomenclature within the novel can be systematically classified into two distinct categories: individuals hailing from the affluent Capitol of Panem and those originating from the economically deprived districts enveloping Panem. Characters from the affluent Capitol are distinguished by names reflective of ancient Roman inspiration, as Collins herself stated in a 2011 interview:

In keeping with the classical roots, I send my tributes into an updated version of the Roman gladiator games, which entails a ruthless government forcing people to fight to the death as popular entertainment. The world of Panem, particularly the Capitol, is loaded with Roman references. Panem itself comes from the expression 'Panem et Circenses' which translates into 'Bread and Circuses'. (Collins 2011)

This stark contrast in nomenclature not only highlights the socio-economic divide within Panem but also underscores the thematic elements of power and control central to the narrative.

In contrast, those originating from the peripheral districts are characterized by utilitarian anthroponyms rooted in plant life or other natural elements. This disjuncture in naming conventions serves as an immediate indicator to the reader that Collins is engaging in a juxtaposition of the Capitol of Panem with ancient Rome, a connection reinforced by the evident parallelism between the Hunger Games and the gladiatorial contests of antiquity.

The Roman-inspired names from Panem immediately evoke allusions to Roman decadence, depravity, and imperialism, which markedly mirror the behaviors of the elitist citizens of Panem, who gorge themselves to the point of regurgitation and are entertained annually by the forced homicides of twenty-three unlucky children, all while citizens from the surrounding districts struggle to survive upon their meager scraps.

The anthroponyms influenced by Roman nomenclature in Suzanne Collins' works serve as a critique of totalitarianism and imperialistic-style governance. A notable example is the choronym "Panem," derived from the Latin expression "panem et circenses," attributed to Juvenal, a second-century CE Roman poet known for political satire. This metonymic phrase, loosely translated as "bread and circuses," has been historically employed in political contexts to imply a government's strategy of securing public approval through the provision of basic desires (bread) and distractions, such as entertainment (circuses) (Cheira 53). Collins strategically appropriates this Roman metonym in Panem to symbolize totalitarianism, evident in Panem's implementation of

"surveillance monitoring, mass-media indoctrination, police oppression, and a radical division of social classes" (Mutlari 4). These coercive measures exemplify Panem's commitment to controlling its populace.

Similar to the decline of Rome, Panem's unbridled decadence and moral decay culminate in its downfall. In the final book of the series, *Mockingjay*, the citizens of Panem revolt against the Capitol, resulting in the dissolution of Panem. Consequently, the choronym "Panem" serves as a compelling illustration of the necessity for a recognized socio-political naming typology, given its inherent thematic focus on socio-political elements.

In contrast to the opulent nomenclature of Panem, the choronym "The Seam" alludes to District 12's distinctive geographical role as the literal seam of Panem. This district, positioned at the very edge of the nation, directly abuts District 13—a region presumed to have been obliterated by President Snow in the aftermath of a civil uprising. Consequently, The Seam serves as the final frontier before the periphery of Panem.

Moreover, the choronym "The Seam" carries a metaphorical resonance, evoking the image of a sewn seam, inherently susceptible to fraying or tearing. This symbolism finds poignant manifestation in the socio-political upheaval catalyzed by Katniss. In *Mockingjay*, the third installment of the series, Districts 12 and 13 unite in a formidable alliance, defying the prescribed boundaries and collectively rising against President Snow and the Panem government. The confluence of these socio-political forces mirrors the intrinsic vulnerability suggested by the name "The Seam," as the two districts, once divided, join forces to unravel the established order and challenge the authority of the ruling regime.

The metaphorical resonance of "The Seam" takes on heightened poignancy when contextualized within the socioeconomic dynamics of District 12. This region, inhabited by the most impoverished and disenfranchised members of the community, imbues the choronym with symbolic significance. Beyond its geographical connotations, The Seam serves as a metaphorical representation of the delicate and tenuous relations between the privileged upper class and the marginalized lower class within District 12. The fragility suggested by the name becomes a poignant commentary on the inherent disparities and vulnerabilities characterizing the socio-economic stratification within the dystopian society depicted by Suzanne Collins.

The preeminent Capitol character in Suzanne Collins' narrative landscape is arguably Panem's President, Coriolanus Snow, whose nomenclature bears notable Roman origins, consistent with the broader anthroponymic trends within the Capitol. The selection of his forename, Coriolanus, carries a deliberate allusion to the historical figure of the Roman general who earned the toponymic cognomen after triumphing in the siege of the Volscian town of Corioli in 493 BC. This historical Coriolanus distinguished himself through a ruthless, unsympathetic, and purely totalitarian approach, achieving victory by resorting to the deliberate incineration of civilian residences during the siege.

Collins's deliberate selection of the forename "Coriolanus" for President Snow establishes a thought-provoking parallel, portraying him with characteristics akin to calculated ruthlessness and brutality. As G. Alex Sinha aptly observes in his article entitled, "Lies, Gaslighting, and Propaganda," "the totalitarian government seeks to completely control the thoughts and actions of its citizens" (272). This characterization aligns with traits exhibited by both the historical figure of Coriolanus and the fictional

President Snow, thereby positioning both characters as diabolical totalitarian leaders. The choice of the name, with its historical and literary connotations, serves as a linguistic device that not only enriches the narrative texture but also underscores the thematic resonance of oppressive governance, further emphasizing the parallels between the two characters in their authoritarian pursuits.

Additionally, the surname Snow, with its climatic connotations, stands as an intriguing reversal of the historical Coriolanus' use of fire as a destructive force. This symbolic inversion adds depth to the character, underscoring the calculated and chilling demeanor of President Snow, while simultaneously playing on the thematic elements associated with his name's climatic juxtaposition.

Only two years following his victory at Corioli, the Roman General Coriolanus proved yet again to be militant in his heartlessness, as when the Roman Republic was experiencing a massive grain shortage, Coriolanus suggested that the remaining Sicilian grain not be distributed equally among the populace. Instead, he suggested that the grain only be dispersed to those who agreed to the reversal of the pro-plebeian political reforms of the time, essentially using the threat of starvation as a means of political gain. Once again, the actual Coriolanus mirrors the fictional Coriolanus, as following the outlying districts failed attempt at rebellion, he ruthlessly orders the country's food and supplies be distributed according to each district's level of allegiance to his reign, with the central districts receiving the majority of food and goods and the outlying districts receiving little to nothing, despite being the prominent producers of these goods.

The unyielding malevolence portrayed in President Snow's ascent to power finds resonance in the aftermath of a rebel uprising in Panem. In response to the revolt, Snow

ruthlessly quashes resistance, displaying a lack of empathy toward the dissenting districts. Instead, like the historical Coriolanus, he subjects them to conditions of practical starvation and institutes annual "humiliating as well as tortuous" (Collins 19) exterminations of their children. Echoing a common totalitarian tactic, Snow employs dehumanization as a central strategy against rebellion, particularly with his use of the Hunger Games as a method of control. He diminishes the children confined within the games to mere animals, thereby eradicating their humanistic empathy and compelling them to engage in lethal combat with one another for survival (Sar and Murni 7). The Hunger Games, under Snow's orchestration, function as a tool to terrorize and dehumanize the citizens of Panem. This approach bears similarities to the historical figure Coriolanus in ancient Rome, who utilized violence and dehumanization against his own people as a means of political control. However, while the Roman Coriolanus deployed fire to obliterate his adversaries, Coriolanus Snow relies on a calculated and cold malevolence to subjugate his subjects, a coldness which is reflected in the metaphoric qualities of his surname.

Furthermore, President Snow's cold and morally reprehensible disposition is conspicuously conveyed throughout the narrative through consistent comparisons to a serpent. The biblical association of serpents with the calculating and malevolent serpent in the Book of Genesis has persisted since antiquity. Through this serpentine metaphor, Snow is metaphorically aligned with Satan. Illustratively, during the crowning ceremony where Katniss is declared the victor of the Hunger Games, she remarks, "He's smiling when he settles the [crown] on my head, but his eyes, just inches from mine, are as unforgiving as a snake's" (311). Moreover, in a subsequent encounter with President

Snow in her home, Katniss equates the experience to discovering a venomous snake, likening it to "taking the lid off a pot and finding a fanged viper instead of stew" (637). These recurrent serpentine allusions, coupled with President Snow's surname, are deftly employed by Collins to metaphorically underscore Snow's cold and malevolent character.

The embodiment of President Snow's ruthless demeanor is discerned prominently in the conclusive volume of *The Hunger Games* series, *Mockingjay*. This pivotal manifestation occurs when the series protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, becomes cognizant of President Snow's strategic deployment of the Capitol's children as a human barricade. President Snow, in an endeavor to safeguard himself from potential attacks, orchestrates the positioning of the Capitol's children as a protective barrier, a calculated maneuver articulated through Katniss's observation: "This is for Snow's protection. The children form his human shield" (941). This narrative juncture underscores Snow's unscrupulous exploitation of innocent lives for his own self-preservation, thereby accentuating the intricacies of his Machiavellian tactics and the moral quandaries inherent in the pursuit of power within the diegesis of the series.

The portrayal of President Snow's ruthless and bloodthirsty disposition is notably underscored through recurrent metaphoric comparisons of his breath to blood. A salient instance of this thematic representation transpires during a menacing encounter between Katniss and President Snow, where she articulates, "The smell of blood... it was on his breath" (348). This metaphorical articulation serves as a symbolic manifestation of President Snow's malevolence and insatiable appetite for violence, establishing a thematic link between his character and the cold and unforgiving connotations associated with his familial name. The recurring imagery of blood in conjunction with Snow's breath

serves as a literary device that not only characterizes him as a malevolent force but also conveys the inherent cruelty and ruthlessness that define his persona within the narrative framework.

Moreover, Collins strategically employs the surname "Snow" to symbolize the pervasive and chilling nature of President Snow's brand of totalitarianism. The narrative unfolds a pertinent correlation as the decision by President Snow to compel Katniss back into the Hunger Games during *Catching Fire* coincides with District 12 experiencing an intense snowstorm, exacerbating the plight of an already oppressed district. This climatic event serves as a prelude to the metaphorical hailstorm President Snow intends to unleash upon all dissidents challenging his authority. The synchronicity between the snowstorm and Katniss's subsequent reentry into the Hunger Games arena underscores the calculated nature of Snow's oppressive tactics. It is noteworthy that Katniss, identified as the "girl on fire" and an inadvertent symbol of rebellion, is positioned as the antithesis of Snow's authoritarian rule. President Snow himself acknowledges Katniss's role in fomenting dissent, stating, "Katniss Everdeen, the girl who was on fire, you have provided a spark, that left unattended, may grow into an inferno that destroys Panem" (655). Subsequently, in a poignant retort, Katniss warns Snow, "Fire is catching...And if we burn, you burn with us!" (736). Throughout the series, Katniss emerges as the catalyst that sparks a revolution, ultimately melting President Snow's totalitarian grip on Panem.

As it is eventually revealed, the actual murderer of the innocent children and civilians during the battle at the Capitol turns out to be District 13 President Alma Coin. This proves to be a foreseeable turn of events when considering Alma Coin's anthroponym, as unlike the rebels of genuine heart, who all possess names of the earth,

Alma's name aligns more closely with those of the capital, as it too is of Latin decent, translating to "nourishing." The forename becomes all the more ominous when combined with the surname Coin, as Alma's true intentions of "nourishing coin" are onomastically alluded to.

Similar to the other denizens of the Capitol, President Coin emerges as an unabashed narcissist, orchestrating the demise of numerous innocent children and civilians to advance her political ascendancy and personal enrichment. The onomastic linkage between President Coin and President Snow is not only linguistic but also thematic, as underscored by Katniss's initial characterization of Coin, wherein the latter is juxtaposed against Katniss's fiery temperament. Katniss notes, "Her eyes were gray, but not like those of people from the Seam. They're very pale, as if almost all the color has been sucked out of them. The color of slush that you wish would melt away" (701). Aligning with her nomenclature, this depiction serves as a rhetorical device employed by Collins to delineate Coin from the resilient inhabitants of District 12 and align her with the cold and malevolent essence personified by President Snow. The use of the term "slush" in this context establishes an associative link between the two presidents.

Analogously to President Snow, Collins intimates that President Coin, too, must succumb to the transformative impact of the revolutionary spark embodied by Katniss Everdeen.

The anthroponym Effie Trinket stands as another discerning instance illustrating Collins' adept interweaving of capital citizens with Roman imperialistic motifs, as the forename Effie alludes to the Christian martyr Euphemia. In the 4th century AD, the governor of Chalcedon decreed that all citizens must make sacrifices to Aries. However, being a Christian, Euphemia refused and was arrested. Because of her refusal to sacrifice,

Euphemia was tortured for days before being killed in the gladiatorial arena by a bear. Similarly, through her relationship with Katniss, Effie grows discontented with Panem's government and the Capitol's way of life. Eventually, she is arrested as a co-conspirator in Katniss' escape from the arena within *Catching Fire*. Like Euphemia, Effie is ostensibly tortured for her misconstrued allegiance to Katniss. However, unlike Euphemia, Effie ultimately survives her torment. As Venia explains in *Mockingjay*, "They say Plutarch and Haymitch had a hard time keeping her alive...She was imprisoned after your escape" (958). Although Effie was not physically martyred, Collins makes it evident that she was perhaps psychologically martyred, as following her imprisonment, Katniss describes Effie as "Remarkably unchanged except for the vacant look in her eyes" (957). This intricate portrayal of Effie Trinket underscores Collins' nuanced exploration of the interplay between characters and Roman historical allusions, highlighting themes of sacrifice and survival.

Collins also utilizes the symbolic connotations of Effie's surname, Trinket, to link Effie to the rampant narcissistic avarice that plagues the Capitol. A trinket is defined as "a small ornament of little value" and was utilized by Collins as an ode to the Capitol's obsession with capitalistic gains and self-indulgent consumerism. There is also a further duality to Effie's forename. The forename "Effie" loosely translates to "pleasant speech" in Greek, an ode to Effie's career in elocution as a Hunger Games escort. It also is no coincidence that the forename "Effie" is of Greek origin, as Collins utilizes the name's origins to foreshadow Effie's eventual shift to a rebel ally, as the Greeks and Romans were historical adversaries.

Furthermore, Collins employs the phonetic structure of the forename "Effie" to symbolically reference her character's role as a metaphorical effigy throughout the narrative. An effigy, as defined by the Oxford Languages Dictionary, denotes "a roughly made model of a particular person, made in order to be damaged or destroyed as a protest or expression of anger." Throughout the novel, Effie epitomizes the perceived flaws not only within the ostentatious culture of the Capitol but also within the governance of Panem as a whole. Illustrated in the third chapter of *The Hunger Games*, Effie callously characterizes District Twelve's previous tributes, remarking, "The pair last year ate everything with their hands like a couple of savages. It completely upset my digestion" (42). This portrayal encapsulates the disdainful and self-centered cultural perspective prevalent among Capitol residents.

However, like an effigy, Effie's pervasive egocentrism is methodically torn apart as she grows to love and care for Katniss and Peeta. By the series' second book, Effie's shallow self-centeredness is replaced by genuine care and concern for Katniss and Peeta when, during the second Reaping, she's described as "lack[ing] her usual verve" (307). Her empathetic growth is also evident when, upon parting for the second Hunger Games, Katniss insists that Haymitch send Effie their love and thanks, stating, "You'll give her our thanks. More than that. Really make it special. It's Effie, after all... Tell her how appreciative we are and how she was the best escort ever and tell her... tell her we send our love" (537). Through Effie's progressive empathy and compassion, she becomes the emblematic embodiment of the dismantling of the capitol's extravagant and superficial culture. The symbolic destruction of her "effigy" exemplifies the destruction of Panem's totalitarian government through the uprising of its marginalized citizens.

An additional compelling illustration of Suzanne Collins' adept utilization of socio-political naming function is evident in the introduction of Cinna, Katniss Everdeen's stylist and eventual co-conspirator. The nomenclature "Cinna" serves as an intentional allusion to the character Cinna from William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, who ultimately betrays the Roman dictator, resulting in a dramatic murder on the steps of the Curia of Pompey. Analogously, Collins' Cinna shares parallels with his Shakespearean namesake by orchestrating a deceptive narrative, akin to the dissemination of counterfeit letters by Shakespeare's Cinna to garner support against Caesar.

In Collins' narrative, Cinna engages in the fabrication of a false love story between Katniss and Peeta, a stratagem not only employed to rally support for District 12 but also as a calculated move in an orchestrated rebellion against the autocratic rule of President Snow. Although explicit discussions of this rebellion do not transpire overtly between Cinna and Katniss, their alliance is implicitly understood. During the initial chapters of *The Hunger Games*, Cinna subtly discloses his allegiance to Katniss by expressing, "I'm not allowed to bet, but if I could, my money would be on you" (126). This declaration serves as a tacit acknowledgment of their shared understanding and collaboration in a covert resistance against the oppressive regime of President Snow.

Cinna's inclination towards rebellion is further conveyed through his physical demeanor. In Katniss' initial depiction of him, she remarks, "I'm taken aback by how normal he looks. Most of the stylists they interview on television are so dyed, stenciled, and surgically altered they're grotesque. But Cinna's close-cropped hair appears to be its natural shade of brown. He's in a simple black shirt and pants" (57). This detailed observation of Cinna's unadorned appearance serves as a visual manifestation of his

defiance against the ostentatious culture prevalent in the Capitol. Despite being a Capitol citizen, Cinna consciously eschews the exaggerated and flamboyant styles embraced by others in his milieu. His deliberate choice of a modest and unaltered aesthetic signifies a conscious dissociation from the opulent Capitol lifestyle. In contrast to those easily swayed by the allure of superficial gratifications, Cinna remains steadfast and unswerving in his rejection of the Capitol's excesses.

Paying further homage to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the historical context of the Roman Empire, Suzanne Collins assigns the appellation "Caesar Flickman" to the prominent figurehead of the Hunger Games. Much like the titular Julius Caesar, renowned as the emblem of unbridled imperialism and the perils of excess, Caesar Flickman assumes a comparable role as the prominent face of the Hunger Games. The surname "Flickman" serves as an overt homage to his profession as a television luminary, a celebrity status achieved at the expense of those he has contributed to subjugate, drawing a parallel with the exploitative nature of Julius Caesar's rule.

Caesar Flickman's ostentatious attire, Teflon smile, and profound shallowness serve as a comprehensive embodiment of the inherent flaws within the Capitol's decadent culture and the corrupt totalitarian regime governing Panem. This thematic association becomes palpable when Katniss Everdeen first encounters Caesar Flickman, describing him as "a little scary because his appearance has been virtually unchanged for more than forty years... Same face under pure white makeup. Same hairstyle that he dyes a different color for each Hunger Games. Same ceremonial suit, midnight blue dotted with a thousand tiny electric bulbs that twinkle like stars... This year, Caesar's hair is powder blue and his eyelids and lips are coated in the same hue. He looks freakish" (108-09).

This description underscores the artificiality and stagnancy of Flickman's image, mirroring the superficial distractions employed in Panem, reminiscent of the Latin concept of "panem et circenses." Caesar's flamboyant appearance serves as a deliberate diversion, deflecting attention from the moral injustices perpetrated against the marginalized populations of Panem, a tactic to which much of the Capitol regrettably succumbs.

Meanwhile, in complete opposition to the Roman-inspired names of the Capitol, the earthiness of the depleted districts' anthroponyms allude to the salt-of-the-earth assiduousness of the marginalized populace in Panem. Perhaps the most significant name throughout *The Hunger Games* series is that of the book's heroine, Katniss Everdeen. The anthroponym Katniss is most recognizable for its ties to the plant of the same name. Interestingly, the katniss plant is also commonly known as arrowheads as its leaves are shaped like arrows, an obvious allusion to Katniss' archery prowess.

Furthermore, the katniss plant is known to be both ornamental and edible, a duality reflected in the dualism of Katniss' role throughout the series. Katniss' blatant resourcefulness is mirrored in the edible nature of her namesake, as the plant's tubers have been heavily utilized for generations as a form of sustenance. However, Katniss is often also viewed as ornamental due to her femineity and utilization as a figurehead for the eventual insurgence. Within *Catching Fire*, she states, "It's an awful lot to take in, this elaborate plan in which I was a piece, just as I was meant to be a piece in the Hunger Games. Used without consent, without knowledge" (642). Through this narrative element, Collins solidifies the onomastic symbolism inherent in Katniss's given name. At this juncture, Katniss becomes cognizant of her instrumentalization as an ornament, not

solely by the Capitol but also by the rebels upon whom she had depended to diverge from the coercive dominion of President Snow's regime.

Nevertheless, despite the manipulation perpetrated by others, Katniss demonstrates her efficacy upon entering the Hunger Games, evolving into the symbolic focal point of the revolution. By adeptly outsmarting the game makers and orchestrating a joint suicide attempt with Peeta, Katniss strategically circumvents the government's capacity to instill fear and control the populace through intimidation, thereby assuaging Panem's dependence on and acceptance of the Hunger Games. Katniss assumes a role emblematic of sustenance, providing the necessary nourishment to empower Panem's marginalized citizens for the impending revolution. She fuels their sentiments of indignation and disquietude, igniting the spark that culminates in their eventual rebellion.

These onomastic connections further interlace Katniss with the symbolic attributes encapsulated in her name. Analogous to the plant, Katniss, the individual, mirrors the "small bluish tubers" which, while unassuming in appearance, attain notable significance when boiled and baked. Much like the plant she references in the narrative, Katniss is frequently underestimated, yet when thrust into the crucible of conflict, she emerges resilient, akin to being "as good as any potato" (47), serving as the essential sustenance required by Panem to fuel the flames of rebellion.

Conversely, the choice of Katniss's surname, "Everdeen," by Collins is a deliberate selection imbued with distinct significance. The anthroponym "Everdeen" was purposefully chosen to invite readers to draw parallels between Katniss and another literary heroine, Bathsheba Everdene, prominently featured in Thomas Hardy's novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*. While acknowledging substantial differences between the two

characters, Collins explicates, "The two are very different, but both struggle to know their hearts" (Jordan "Suzanne Collins on the Books She Loves"). This thematic correspondence resonates notably in the early chapters of *The Hunger Games*, wherein Katniss, contemplating her father's words, recollects, "It's the plant I was named for. And I heard my father's voice joking, 'As long as you can find yourself, you'll never starve'" (52). This symbolic association between "hunger" and "starvation" extends beyond their literal implications, evolving into metaphors for the existential challenges of maintaining one's identity and moral integrity.

Furthermore, within *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene encounters a romantic dilemma involving two men, one characterized by gentleness and the other prone to violence. A parallel can be drawn in *The Hunger Games* series, where the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, grapples with a similar predicament between Peeta, characterized by gentleness and naivety, and Gale, possessing worldly wisdom but also a temperamental nature. A common narrative thread emerges as both Bathsheba and Katniss face the abandonment of the more worldly suitor, ultimately leading to their marriages with the kinder and gentler counterpart (Frankel 15).

Throughout the narrative arc of the series, Katniss undergoes a multifaceted decision-making process, wherein she intricately weighs her affections for Peeta and Gale. Simultaneously, she grapples with the burden of assuming the role thrust upon her as the figurehead of the rebellion—a position she deems herself unworthy of. This intricate character development and maturation of Katniss transpires against a backdrop of existential uncertainties, a process that ultimately validates her father's prescient insights into her namesake.

As elucidated by Alexandra Cheira in “‘Big Brother is Watching You’: *The Hunger Games* Trilogy as a Post-Apocalyptic Tale on the Destructiveness of All Forms of Totalitarianism,” Collins' resilient female protagonist exhibits the capacity to catalyze the implosion of the totalitarian regime that envelops her existence. Katniss achieves this transformative feat by assuming the symbolic role that unifies the districts against their common oppressor, all while steadfastly preserving her fundamental integrity and retaining a sense of self (51). The analysis by Cheira underscores the pivotal role played by Katniss as a transformative force within the narrative, illustrating her agency in dismantling the oppressive regime. This phenomenon represents a departure from the concept depicted in the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, wherein the king is portrayed as a god-like figure, deriving both divinity and authority from his incorporation within the body of his people. Throughout history, we observe the recurrent motif of political leaders legitimizing their rule by equating it with divine providence, often resulting in the totalitarian assimilation of the collective populace. Katniss, however, distinguishes herself by subverting this paradigm, effectively destabilizing the totalitarian regime from within. By steadfastly maintaining her individual identity and resisting assimilation into the oppressive regime, Katniss embodies a form of resistance that undermines the regime's cohesive power structure.

Katniss's reliance on introspection and an unwavering commitment to her moral compass emerges as a guiding principle throughout her journey. This steadfast adherence to ethical considerations enables her to surmount the myriad of doubts and uncertainties inherent in her tumultuous environment. The exploration of Katniss's internal struggles

and her ethical grounding serves as a lens through which the narrative underscores the resilience of individual integrity against the backdrop of societal turmoil.

A further example of a nature-inspired anthroponym utilized by Collins to represent a Panem political adversary, lies in Haymitch Abernathy. The forename Haymitch can be broken down into two parts. The prefix “hay-” alludes to the sturdy herbaceous plant of the same name. Farmers primarily utilize hay to sustain livestock. Hay is used by ranchers and farmers alike when there is not enough pasture for grazing. Traditionally, hay is an undervalued crop, as it is cheap to purchase, and it often requires little care, as it is unnecessary to reseed each year. This alludes to Haymitch’s role within the Hunger Games, as, at first, due to his alcoholism, he is undervalued as a tribute mentor. However, he soon proves himself a worthy adversary and revolutionist, as he aptly guides Katniss and Peeta to victory, not once but twice. Like the plant, Haymitch is essentially an impetus to end the starvation the marginalized districts face, as he is a vital component of the revolution when he acts as an intermediary between Katniss and District 13.

The suffix inherent in his surname, “-mitch,” constitutes the diminutive form of the name “Mitchel,” a designation of British origin signifying “of Saint Michael.” The etymological origin of this name becomes particularly intriguing when juxtaposed with the Romanesque names characteristic of the Capitol’s denizens. In the historical context, the Romans annexed Britain, transforming it into a Roman territory from 43 to 84 AD, a parallel that draws comparison to the subjugation experienced by Haymitch for a substantial portion of his life under the dominion of Panem.

The hagionym Michael alludes to the archangel by the same name, mentioned throughout many religious texts across several religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Within the 3rd-2nd BC, Jewish works often associate the archangel Michael with the apocalypse, much as Haymitch is associated with the apocalyptic-style revolution within *Mockingjay*. As Michael battles beside God to expel Satan, Haymitch fights alongside Katniss to expel totalitarianism from Panem.

Additionally, Michael is a critical component in casting Satan from heaven in the New Testament. The Book of Revelation 12:7-8 states, "Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." Like the archangel Michael, Haymitch fights along the side of moral superiority as he and the rebels fight to end nearly a century of oppression and oust totalitarian ideals from Panem.

Similar to the unwavering loyalty of the archangel Michael to God, Haymitch manifests a profound and unwavering dedication to Katniss, who epitomizes righteousness within *The Hunger Games* narrative. Functioning as her stalwart ally, he plays a pivotal role in expelling malevolence from Panem, achieving this not once but twice through the demise of Alma Coin and the removal of President Snow from power. The culmination of Haymitch's embodiment of the archangel Michael becomes conspicuous in the concluding chapters of *Mockingjay*, particularly during a crucial moment when he and Katniss are compelled to cast their votes on the continuation of the Hunger Games as a retaliatory measure against the Capitol's citizens.

Katniss, uncertain of Haymitch's stance in the wake of Peeta's divergence, queries whether he will align himself with her in the voting process, articulating, "This is the moment, then. When we find out exactly just how alike we are, and how much he truly understands me" (378). Haymitch's response, "I'm with the Mockingjay" (378), encapsulates a pivotal juncture wherein his steadfast allegiance to Katniss and commitment to moral and political rectitude mirror the archetype of the archangel Michael, known for his unswerving dedication to righteousness. This instance underscores Haymitch's enduring loyalty to the principles represented by Katniss and accentuates the moral resonance embedded in his character, drawing a poignant parallel with the celestial figure he figuratively embodies.

Haymitch's surname, Abernathy, also plays a socio-political role, paying homage to the American civil rights activist Ralph Abernathy. Abernathy assisted in the creation of the Poor People's Campaign in 1968 and, in 1971, organized a deal between the FBI and the American Indian Movement. Like Abernathy, Haymitch was pivotal in brokering agreements between Katniss and other political leaders throughout *The Hunger Games*. Also, like Abernathy, Haymitch is crucial in eradicating classism and financial disparity between the districts, as he is central to developing a democratic government within Panem. In embodying the spirit of Ralph Abernathy's advocacy for social change and equality, Haymitch Abernathy emerges as a central figure in the narrative, instrumental in the progression towards a more just and equitable society within the dystopian world of Panem.

In following the earthen theme surrounding her protagonist's names, Collins also utilizes the emblematic socio-political naming function in conjunction with earthen

metaphor in her naming of Peeta Mellark. The forename, Peeta, is an apparent reference to pita bread, which not only alludes to Peeta's childhood as a baker but also is another reference to Collins' overarching theme of bread. Pita bread is the oldest form of bread, as it has existed for over four thousand years. It was initially invented by the Greeks and was known to be the bread of the people. This is of note, as once again, Collins utilizes allusion to connect her protagonist characters to the Greeks, who were known to be historical adversaries of Rome.

Additionally, akin to pita bread, Peeta serves as a symbol of solidarity with the populace. Throughout the novel, he embodies the principles of morality and justice, as well as the best interests of the people of Panem. Furthermore, he provides sustenance for Katniss both literally and figuratively. When Katniss faces starvation, he compassionately provides her with bread. Beyond physical nourishment, Peeta offers Katniss emotional support throughout their experiences in and outside the Hunger Games. He consistently uplifts her spirits and even sleeps beside her to alleviate her PTSD-related night terrors. For instance, at the conclusion of the series, during the vote on whether to continue the Hunger Games using Capitol citizens as a form of retribution, Peeta votes in opposition to Katniss, asserting that continuing the games would be morally unjust. This act serves as a testament to Peeta's dedication to the people of Panem and his steadfast moral compass, demonstrating that he does not allow anything, even his love for Katniss, to compromise his principles.

Furthermore, the phonetic resonance between the names "Peeta" and "Peter" cannot be overlooked, serving once again as a subtle nod to biblical references by Collins. In the New Testament, Peter becomes a prominent disciple of Jesus from the

early stages of his ministry until his crucifixion, mirroring Peeta's steadfast companionship alongside Katniss throughout the series. Additionally, akin to Peter's moments of doubt and questioning in the biblical narrative, Peeta emerges as a character who challenges Katniss and confronts her decisions throughout their shared journey. This parallel is exemplified when Katniss reflects on their relationship, asserting, "For there to be betrayal, there would have to be trust first. Between Peeta and me. And trust has not been part of the agreement" (100), underscoring the undercurrent of mistrust inherent in their dynamic.

Moreover, following Peeta's harrowing ordeal at the hands of the Capitol, he raises probing questions about Katniss' dedication to both him and the revolutionary cause, remarking, "Well, you're a piece of work, aren't you?" In response, Katniss reflects on the transformation in Peeta's perception, acknowledging, "All those months of taking it for granted that Peeta thought I was wonderful are over. Finally, he can see me for who I really am. Violent. Distrustful. Manipulative. Deadly" (846). Despite this critical scrutiny, Peeta exhibits unwavering loyalty to Katniss, akin to Peter's loyalty to Jesus in the biblical narrative.

Cheira astutely observes Peeta as the articulate conveyer of fundamental truths that resonate with Katniss, truths that she herself may struggle to articulate explicitly (52). This loyalty is prominently evident in *Mockingjay* when Katniss openly confesses her love for Peeta, emphasizing their mutual commitment to protecting each other (904). Notably, both of Katniss's staunchest allies, Haymitch and Peeta, share names with biblical connotations. Through these onomastic connections to the Bible, Collins

accentuates the moral ascendancy of these characters, positioning them as central figures in the struggle against the totalitarian "dragon."

The strategic use of biblical names serves as a narrative device, drawing parallels between the characters' moral fortitude and the biblical figures they are named after. In this symbolic framework, just as Jesus built his church upon the rock that is Peter (NIV Matthew 16:18), Katniss metaphorically constructs a political revolution upon the steadfast foundations represented by Peeta and Haymitch. This intertwining of biblical allusions with character nomenclature underscores Collins' deliberate emphasis on moral integrity as an essential element in the pursuit of societal transformation and the dismantling of oppressive regimes.

Nevertheless, while Peeta and Haymitch may be regarded as the foundation upon which the revolution is constructed, Rue assumes the role of a crevice within President Snow's tyrannical grasp on Panem. The forename "Rue" once more underscores the innate benevolence inherent in all marginalized characters within *The Hunger Games*, drawing an evocative parallel with the plant bearing the same name. Renowned for its therapeutic attributes, the rue plant becomes a poignant metaphor, and it is not happenstance that during the initial Hunger Games, Rue not only aids Katniss in securing victory but also tends to her injuries following an attack by trackerjackers. Furthermore, Rue's untimely demise within the games, coupled with Katniss's poignant botanical homage, extends beyond the narrative realm, serving as a catalyst for the healing of the peripheral districts of Panem. This symbolic act ignites the flames of rebellion, motivating the outlying districts to stand against their corrupt government and President Snow.

Beyond its botanical symbolism, the forename "Rue" also evokes the verb "rue," defined by the Oxford Language Dictionary as "to bitterly regret something one has done or allowed to happen." This serves as a conspicuous allusion to Katniss's profound remorse over Rue's demise, reflecting her belief that she could and should have taken greater action to prevent it. This remorse is articulated when, in *Catching Fire*, Katniss expresses, "But I feel as if I did know Rue, and she'll always be with me. Everything beautiful brings her to mind. I see her in the yellow flowers that grow in the meadow by my house. I see her in the mockingjays that sing in the trees. But most of all, I see her in my sister, Prim" (374). Rue's death recurs persistently in Katniss's thoughts throughout the series. It is the injustice surrounding Rue's demise that frequently propels Katniss to rebel against Snow's totalitarian regime. Hence, Rue's demise emerges as a pivotal catalyst for the uprising against the Capitol, her name additionally serving as a poignant symbol of President Snow's remorse over her untimely demise, ultimately leading to her posthumous martyrdom, which ultimately leads to his own demise as dictator of Panem.

However, a critical examination reveals a noteworthy flaw in Collins' choices regarding the naming of Rue and the construction of her character. It appears that Collins may have overlooked the racial dimension when conceptualizing Rue's character, as she does not adequately connect Rue's identity as a black female, described with "dark brown skin and eyes" (42), to the potential disproportionate oppression faced by her and other black characters within the dystopian world of Panem. As noted by Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Emily D. Ryalls in their article on the 2012 film adaptation, entitled "*The Hunger Games: Performing Not-Performing to Authenticate Femininity and Whiteness*," a post-racial ethos permeates the film, treating race as irrelevant and centering whiteness

simultaneously. This oversight is problematic given that issues of inequity and inequality are central to the story's themes, and Collins neglects to acknowledge the historical hierarchy of prejudice in the U.S (400). Moreover, Collins, through her portrayal of Rue, the sole prominent black character in the novel, as an innocent sacrifice empowering Katniss to win the games, inadvertently perpetuates the "white savior" stereotype. Rue's final words to Katniss solely revolve around Katniss and her success in the games, stating, "you have to win" (Collins 200), thereby reframing Katniss's killing of fellow tributes as virtuous and reducing Rue's primary role to facilitating the centralization of the white hero in the narrative (401).

Notwithstanding the aforementioned oversight in Collins's conceptualization of Rue's character, she adeptly employs the emblematic socio-political naming function alongside grand historical allusions to underscore the underlying socio-political themes throughout the series. Through these discerning onomastic choices and elaborate references, Collins effectively draws parallels between America's proclivity for unbridled consumption, extravagant decadence, and pervasive self-absorption, and the narcissistic imperialism reminiscent of ancient Rome. The synthesis of onomastics and socio-politics establishes an expansive and comprehensive symbolic framework that, once constructed, evolves into a trenchant commentary on the perils inherent in totalitarian imperialism. Collins, through her juxtaposition of nomenclature and socio-political symbolism, issues a cautionary note, suggesting that the envisioned totalitarian society in her novel bears unsettling resemblance to the trajectory of contemporary America. She urges readers to remain vigilant against succumbing to their own government's *panem et circenses*,

emphasizing the latent dangers posed by unchecked governance and the seductive allure of distraction.

Chapter III.

Nominal Signifiers: Unpacking Ethnic Unrest through Naming Symbolism in *The City We Became*

Within *The City We Became*, author N.K. Jemisin weaves a magical dystopian tale in which five strangers are chosen to embody the five boroughs of New York City against an H.P. Lovecraft-style interdimensional space alien who attempts to destroy their city through the exploitation of incendiary race relations. Jemisin incorporates allusions to H.P. Lovecraft's short story, "The Call of Cthulhu," throughout her novel. This is achieved through the recurrent invocation of non-Euclidean geometry within the cityscape, the antagonist's persistent likening to a cephalopodic, marine entity, and the revelation of the antagonist's nomenclature at the narrative's end, which corresponds to the malevolent sea creature delineated in Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu."

Remarkably, in contrast to Lovecraft's antagonistic portrayal, Jemisin's antagonist assumes the persona of a middle-aged white woman. This characterization is delineated through distinctive features such as her white hair and the conspicuous adornment of exclusively white attire. Described by one character as possessing a "whole more-Aryan-than-thou aesthetic" (233), the woman's conspicuous whiteness prompts the other characters to predominantly identify her as "the Woman in White." This epithet, consciously employed by Jemisin, transcends mere happenstance, serving as an instance of the emblematic socio-political naming function. It not only references the woman's

physical appearance but also encapsulates her role as the embodiment of white colonial oppression.

The deliberate choice of the interdimensional space alien to assume the form of a white woman rather than a man is not arbitrary; rather, it serves as a nuanced commentary by Jemisin on the covert and insidious role that white women often play in advancing white supremacist ideals. As Raegan Gawronski elucidates in her article titled "White Women and White Supremacy: How and Why White Women Contribute to White Supremacy," white women's contributions are pivotal to the success of the white supremacist movement in the United States. Their influence is manifested through their key role in perpetuating racism in their children's socialization, upholding hegemonic white femininity, and prioritizing racial identity over gender (6). Notably, Gawronski highlights that white women frequently contribute to these factors in covertly racist manners, rendering it challenging to confront them for their involvement (1).

This analysis gains resonance when applied to *The City We Became*, where the Woman in White consistently employs covertly racist tactics to undermine the city. A notable instance occurs on Manny's arrival in Manhattan, where the Woman in White inhabits a white woman who subsequently contacts the police, reporting Manny and his roommate merely for existing within Inwood Park. Through this intermediary, the Woman in White endeavors to leverage "white women tears" in an attempt to incite the arrest of the two men of color. When Manny approaches the woman to address the accusations of "being perverts in public" (60), the Woman in White vehemently protests, asserting, "Don't touch me! Don't touch me! If you lay a finger on me, I'll scream and the cops will shoot you! You druggies! Druggie perverts!" (60). Given that the two men

were innocuously walking through the park without engaging in any illicit activities, it becomes evident that the Woman in White, through this orchestrated incident, exploits the concept of white female victimhood to discriminate against the two men solely based on their identity as queer men of color.

Moreover, this surreptitious manifestation of racism is further reflected in the tentacles employed by the Woman in White to exert influence on those in her proximity. Manny elucidates, "If they touch a person, that person is then compromised in some fundamental, metaphysical, infectious way" (63). It is revealed that these tentacles serve as a conduit for the Woman in White to disseminate prejudice akin to a virulent contagion. As Bronca later articulates, the Woman in White's "super-special power" is identified as "magic xenophobia" (415). Jemisin's choice to metaphorically equate the propagation of prejudiced ideologies to the contagion of disease takes on heightened significance, given that her novel was coincidentally released amid the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (GradyVox). The enchanting xenophobic tentacles described by Jemisin constitute yet another dimension through which the Woman in White employs her white female privilege to clandestinely contribute to the dissemination of white supremacy and colonialism. Her ultimate objective is succinctly encapsulated in her aspiration "to connect herself to us. Bring her city here—right on top of New York" (Jemisin 418).

The revelation of the Woman in White's true name at the conclusion of the narrative, where she confesses, "My name is R'lyeh" (391), adds an intriguing layer of analysis. Through this anthroponym, N.K. Jemisin once again strategically employs the emblematic socio-political naming function to establish symbolic connections between

the Woman in White and H.P. Lovecraft's seminal work, "The Call of Cthulhu." In Lovecraft's narrative, R'lyeh is the fictional appellation assigned to a submerged city, described as "the tangible substance of earth's supreme terror" and "loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours." This juxtaposition allows Jemisin to deftly utilize the Woman in White's given name to not only reference her inter-dimensional nature but also to signify her embodiment as a repugnant and supremely terror-inducing entity. Given that the Woman in White metaphorically represents white supremacy and colonialism, Jemisin's choice of the forename R'lyeh serves as an allusion to her conviction that the true "supreme terror" on Earth is the insidious and pervasive nature of prejudice.

Moreover, Jemisin's deliberate reference to H.P. Lovecraft, a white cisgender male known for his notorious racism and xenophobia, constitutes a significant act of reclamation wherein she reasserts authority over Lovecraft's tentacled terror monsters while concurrently affirming her identity as a Black woman. As highlighted by Ceasar Guarde Paz, in his article "Race and War in the Lovecraft Mythos: A Philosophical Reflection," "Lovecraft's writings are steeped in a profound fear of miscegenation, stemming from his conviction that racial mixing represents a 'process of tempering' that would inevitably lead to the 'eradication of the purity of the white race'" (21). Moreover, as Debra Shaw points out within "*The City We Became*: N. K. Jemisin and Posthuman Urbanism," Lovecraft's narratives are replete with overt prejudice, exemplified in "The Call of Cthulhu." Consequently, where individuals of mixed race, artists, and those who dare to envision a world deviating from strict rational principles are depicted as particularly susceptible to the monstrous 'call' (162).

Despite Lovecraft's explicit racism, he persists as a pioneering figure in science fiction (Shaw 164). Therefore, Jemisin's allusion to Lovecraft in her work serves as a strategic effort to reclaim the genre. Her protagonists weaponize history and popular culture as they confront Lovecraftian-style monsters, creatures that not only embody the physicality of Lovecraft's creations but also encapsulate his perverse hatred and prejudiced ideologies. In this manner, Jemisin engages in a profound act of subversion, utilizing Lovecraft's own narrative elements to challenge and counteract the discriminatory aspects of the genre, thereby contributing to the ongoing evolution and diversification of science fiction.

In an intricate allusion to *The Woman in White*'s ultimate identity as the Lovecraftian R'lyeh, the narrative unfolds a significant episode when the Woman in White, assuming the guise of a representative from the "Better New York Foundation," visits Bronca's gallery with the intent to induce her to display a painting titled "Dangerous Mental Machines." Bronca provides a vivid description of the painting, recounting:

Chinatown... The figures are barely more than ink-swirls... Bronca frowns. There's something about them. They are dirty, these figures—clad in drab non-fashion, with sleeves rolled up to show blackened hands and shoes smeared with grime and aprons stained with blood and less identifiable body fluids. They loom, these creatures, for whom the word people is a laughable misnomer. (145)

As noted by Shaw, this painting serves as an overt homage to Lovecraft, specifically referencing a letter he wrote to Frank Belknap Long in 1926 (163-64).

In this letter, Lovecraft expresses extreme prejudicial sentiments towards Chinatown, stating:

There is a grave and mighty problem beside which the negro problem is a jest—for in this case we have to deal not with childlike half-gorillas, but

with yellow, soulless enemies whose repulsive carcasses house dangerous mental machines warped culturelessly in the single direction of material gain at any cost. (St. Armand 131)

Jemisin demonstrates a keen utilization of the emblematic socio-political naming function by intricately interweaving the title of the *Woman in White*'s painting with Lovecraft's derogatory remarks in the aforementioned letter. This intentional association effectively re-establishes a thematic alignment between the *Woman in White* and Lovecraft, thereby providing Jemisin with a strategic avenue to subvert and confront Lovecraft's prejudiced ideologies. The nuanced interplay unfolds through the narrative framework of queer protagonists of color who rise against and ultimately overcome the *Woman in White*, symbolizing the repudiation of the bigoted ideals propagated by Lovecraft. In this manner, Jemisin employs the symbolic and thematic layers within her storytelling to challenge discriminatory paradigms, fostering a narrative space where marginalized voices not only resist but triumph over oppressive narratives rooted in prejudicial foundations.

Similar to the dual nomenclatural strategy employed for the *Woman in White*, Jemisin extends this thematic device to her other characters, thereby advancing the overarching socio-political motif centered on systemic and interpersonal prejudice within her novel. With the exception of Brooklyn, all of the novel's main characters possess two distinct names: a given name and the name of the New York City borough they are chosen to embody. Despite each character's onomastic duality, both names work in tandem to further cleave the character to their respective boroughs and, by extension, the histories and longstanding stereotypes associated with each borough. By no coincidence, all of these "defender" characters are persons of color and/or of various genders and sexual orientations, with the exception of Staten Island. Therefore, they are all victims of

systemic and interpersonal prejudice and are, consequently, by way of generational reproduction and lived experience, victims of white-male privilege and colonialism.

One of the first defenders we meet is Manhattan, who, unlike his peers, forgets his given name "somewhere in the tunnel to Penn Station" (Jemisin 23) as he relocates to Manhattan. Manhattan's transitory abstraction is purposeful on Jemisin's part, as Manhattan's lack of a given name works to adhere him further to the borough he embodies. Because Manhattan, or Manny as he is later referred to, is a recent Manhattan transplant, he symbolizes the fifty-eight percent of Manhattanites who are non-native New Yorkers. It is by no coincidence that the only "defender" character who originally hales from outside of New York and sheds their previous identity represents the borough of Manhattan, as out of all of New York City's boroughs, Manhattan possesses the lowest amount of native New Yorkers at only forty-two percent (*NYU Furman Center* "State of the City: City Wide Data"). Additionally, as Manny's past is forgotten and he is racially ambiguous (he describes himself as a "generic all-American boy [nonwhite version]" [Jemisin 31]), he also represents the thirty-six percent of Manhattanites who are foreign-born (*NYU Furman Center*, "State of the City 2022: City Wide Data").

Moreover, Manhattan's lack of a given name symbolizes the shedding of one's old life as one steps into one's new life as a New Yorker. As Jemisin explains, "Something about the old him is incompatible with the new identity that the city wants him to have... That's why most people leave their old lives and come to the big city, right? New start. New self" (199). Dually, this also symbolizes Manhattanites' propensity for accepting new residents into the proverbial New Yorker fold. Jemisin alludes to this phenomenon while Manny instigates his first battle against the Woman in White. She writes:

He opens his mouth to shout with them, his cry is delight and the ecstasy of knowing that he isn't an interloper. The city needs newcomers! He belongs here as much as anyone born and bred to its streets, because anyone who wants to be of New York can be! He is no tourist, exploiting and gawking and giving nothing but money back. He lives here now. That makes all the difference in the world. (47)

Despite only being in the city for a matter of minutes, Manny accepts his place among the 8.5 million residents of New York, and in return, the city receives him as one of its own, declaring him worthy of defending its storied history alongside its four other boroughs. Therefore, Manny serves a definitively anti-xenophobic function and through Jemisin's installation of Manny as a modern American hero, Jemisin situates the acceptance of "outsiders" as fundamentally American.

Additionally, Manny's forgotten given name, in conjunction with his racially ambiguous look, serves to symbolize the forgotten names of the thousands of non-white Native Americans, immigrants, and enslaved people who helped make Manhattan the borough it is today. As Maria Sulimma points out, in her article entitled "Scripting Urbanity Through Intertextuality and Consumerism in N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*," "It is through Manny that readers are reminded of the violent history of racialized exploitation and extortion of New York City" (580). Historically, individuals of color were given very little, if any, public recognition for their contributions to the city, and millions of minority names have since been lost to history. Queens refers to New York's history of white supremacy upon first meeting Manhattan, stating, "What Manhattan is now, white people run so much of it, but it's literally built on the bones of Black people. And Native Americans and Chinese and Latinos and whole waves of European immigrants and...everybody. That must be why you look so...everything" (191). With this statement, Jemisin alludes to the African Burial Ground National

Monument located in the Civic Center section of Lower Manhattan. The site is home to the largest colonial-era Black cemetery, where an estimated ten thousand free and enslaved Africans were discarded and tossed into unmarked graves. The discovery of this mass grave site served to highlight the forgotten history and horrendous injustice experienced by 17th and 18th-century Black, enslaved people, who were quite literally integral to the city's structural development and yet remain forever nameless.

Moreover, the etymology of the term "Manhattan" adds a layer of historical significance to the narrative. The word itself originated from the Lenape language, where "manah-" translates to "gather," "aht-" translates to "bow," and "-aan" serves as an abstract element used to form verb stems. Consequently, it has been posited that "Manhattan" initially conveyed the meaning "place for gathering bows." Despite Manhattan's rich Native American history, a stark reality surfaces in the 2020 demographic data from the United States Census Bureau, revealing that Native Americans constitute less than one percent of Manhattan's population. This demographic shift is a consequence of the extensive displacement and mortality endured by Native Americans following the arrival of European settlers in the 16th century.

In her poem titled "Manhattan is a Lenape Word," poet Natalie Diaz addresses this historical displacement, stating, "Manhattan is a Lenape word. Even a watch must be wound. How can a century or a heart turn if nobody asks, Where have all the natives gone?" This sentiment resonates with the narrative in *The City We Became*. Bronca, the singular Native American character in the novel, further underscores the impact of Manhattan's gentrification and displacement of people of color by decrying, "It's gentrifier logic. Settler logic. They want the city without the 'gritty' people who made it

what it is!" (240). This critique highlights the ongoing erasure and marginalization of indigenous and marginalized communities in urban spaces.

Through the exploration of "Manhattan's" etymology and Manny's lack of a specific forename, Jemisin effectively emphasizes the historical neglect and abuse suffered by millions of minorities during the European invasion driven by white colonialism. The perpetual namelessness of the borough's residents of color, mirrored in Manhattan's forgotten name and obscured past, intricately ties him to the borough's unsavory racial history.

Additionally, throughout *The City We Became*, N.K. Jemisin masterfully navigates and subverts stereotypes to craft a narrative that challenges traditional tropes and assumptions. Jemisin engages with stereotypes as a deliberate narrative tool, deconstructing and redefining them within the context of her fantastical urban setting. By imbuing her characters with diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences, she disrupts conventional expectations associated with ethnicity, gender, and cultural background. This subversion of stereotypes with *The City We Became* was acknowledged by Jemisin, when she stated:

I have talked in other venues and on my blog about how stereotypes can be problematic. In this case, because what I am basing the energy and the life of the boroughs on is public perception, the general audience or attitude toward these places by outsiders who don't really know them, I felt it was a good idea to start with the stereotype and then complicate that, and then make them real people beyond that. (Grady Vox)

Through this strategic manipulation of stereotypes, Jemisin not only adds depth to her characters but also prompts readers to critically examine their own preconceptions. In doing so, she facilitates a broader discourse on the impact of stereotypes, emphasizing the

importance of breaking away from limiting narratives and embracing the complexity of individual identities within the rich tapestry of her speculative world.

Hence, it is unsurprising that the nomenclature "Manhattan" functions as a means of associating Manny with the stereotypical essence attributed to residents of Manhattan. Throughout the storied history of film, television, and literature, those who hail from Manhattan are frequently depicted as gritty yet gruff and avaricious, all qualities Manny exemplifies. Jemisin highlights these stereotypes when, upon meeting Manny for the first time, Brooklyn states, "Dudes like you—smart, charming, well, dressed, and cold enough to strangle you in an alley if we had alleys? ...Dime a dozen on Wall Street and at City Hall. Figured you'd be meaner, actually. The kind of dude who didn't stop at just threats" (79). Manhattan's gritty and violent nature is undeniable throughout the entirety of the story, as he is frequently the character spurning the other boroughs onward in their quest against the Woman in White and the racist ideologies she represents.

Additionally, throughout their quest, he's frequently the most violent of all the boroughs. For example, in the book's final chapters, despite his "sheer and absolute terror" (400), Manhattan battles a giant subway monster in defense of the city he loves. Upon seeing the wreckage, the Bronx's avatar, Bronca, refers to Manhattan as "an incomprehensively powerful force" (421), whose grit and brutality ultimately protect New York against white colonialism during the other borough's absence.

However, Jemisin makes it apparent that Manhattan's brutality is not intrinsically iniquitous but, rather, is a necessary evil that should be weaponized to fight injustice and protect the beautifully diverse melting pot New York City represents. According to research conducted on riotous-violent protest, Jemisin's stance on weaponizing violence

for political gain is based in some semblance of fact, as evidence suggests that “violent protests can lead to positive shifts in local policy support, and that riots have an overall mobilizing effect on nonviolent protest” (Onursal et al. 1). Jemisin’s stance on riotous-violent protest is made apparent when Jemisin states that Manhattan is “not some monster, lashing out wildly,” but rather, his “violence is a tool to be controlled and directed, and used only for worthy purpose” (348). With this, Jemisin implies that violence begets violence, and often, some level of retaliatory violence is necessary in the battle for racial equality.

Furthermore, through Manhattan's name and its connection to the stereotypical qualities of Manhattanites, Jemisin alludes to capitalism's role within white supremacy, as Manny is the only character who utilizes capital to defend against the Woman in White. As he and his roommate battle the Woman in White within Inwood Hill Park, Manhattan discovers that throwing money and credit cards at the Woman in White's tentacles successfully deflects them. He realizes that capital is a valid defense against the Woman in White, and therefore, white colonialism as a whole, because “land has value” (Jemisin 70). However, he soon discovers that stealing his roommate's money strengthens its value as a weapon, as “Manhattan was built not only on land valuation, but stolen value” (Jemisin 71). Through this concept of utilizing stolen land value as a weapon, Jemisin alludes to the historical beginnings of Manhattan, when Peter Minuit, a Dutchman working for the Dutch East India Company, effectively swindled the native Lenape into selling the island of Manhattan for only sixty guilders. This began a precedent of utilizing white land ownership as a means of racial oppression within Manhattan. This issue still persists today, as Manhattan is the only borough (outside of Staten Island) where white

home ownership is markedly higher than any other race (*NYU Furman Center*, “State of the City 2022: City Wide Data”). Incredibly, Columbia University, a colonial era university named after America’s most infamous white colonizer, Christopher Columbus, is the largest private landowner in New York City, owning over five thousand apartments across one hundred and fifty residential buildings. And perhaps even more incredible, is the fact that the university pays nearly nothing in property tax due to an exemption written into the state’s constitution over two hundred years ago (Chang, “When New York’s Biggest Private Landlords”).

Jemisin makes an implicit reference to the concept of capitalistic inequality when she asserts, "Manhattan real estate is horrifically expensive, and they don't have enough cash to buy their own lives" (72). In this context, the pronoun "they" specifically denotes Manny and his roommate, Bel, both of whom identify as queer men of color. Jemisin's statement thus serves as a pointed commentary on the disparity in property ownership within Manhattan, drawing attention to the economic inequity between its white residents and minority communities. Through this observation, Jemisin underscores the enduring impact of centuries of generational economic oppression, highlighting how individuals from marginalized backgrounds, such as Manny and Bel, face formidable barriers to homeownership and are compelled to prioritize the financial challenges associated with sustaining their own lives over the prospect of property acquisition in the exorbitantly priced Manhattan real estate market.

Moreover, Jemisin deftly weaves symbolic meaning into Manhattan's hypocoristic name, “Manny,” as well. Manny is an Americanized form of the largely popular Latin American name Manuel or Emmanuel. Although Manny's roots and race are largely

ambiguous, Jemisin does allude to the fact that some portion of Manny's genetic makeup is Latin American, as when he first arrives in Manhattan, he is mistaken for Puerto Rican. Jemisin states, "It's clear why the dude figured him for Puerto Rican: his skin is yellowy brown, his hair kinky but loose-coiled enough that if he let it grow out, it might dangle" (30). Given this, Jemisin utilizes the nickname Manny to clue readers into Manhattan's Hispanic background while simultaneously adhering him to his newfound American identity as a New Yorker. Through Manny's depiction as a conscientious savior, Jemisin subverts the ongoing xenophobic narrative that Latinx immigrants are somehow "less than" their European counterparts, as it is his natural ethical inclination and his unfailing love for New York that ultimately saves the city against white invaders.

Finally, Jemisin utilizes Manhattan's nickname as an allusion to the righteousness of the battle against prejudice and the rectitude of championing equality across all races, ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations. Manny is the diminutive form of Emmanuel, which originates from the biblical Hebrew name "עִמָּנוּאֵל," which translates to "God is with us." Throughout the novel, the Woman in White is described as serpentine in nature. Within the first chapter, Jemisin describes her as "squamous eldritch bullshit" (18), and she is frequently referred to as "The Enemy." Within the Book of Genesis, Satan infamously takes the form of a serpent to tempt Eve into wickedness, and "The Enemy" is a commonly used Christian euphemism for Satan. Therefore, through these comparisons, Jemisin insinuates a metaphorical correlation between the Woman in White and Satan. Thus, as the Woman in White metaphorically represents white supremacy, Jemisin is symbolically representing white supremacy and colonialism as inherently diabolic and nefarious. Accordingly, as the forename "Manny" translates to "God is with

us," Jemisin's utilization of the name alludes to his, and by extension, the other borough's, alignment with righteousness and virtue. In employing the moniker "Manny," Jemisin insinuates a divine alignment with those who resist the prevailing currents of white, cis-gender oppression that pervade both America and the broader global context.

Like the other boroughs, the Bronx's avatar also possesses two names, The Bronx and Bronca Siwanoy, both aptly layered with Jemisin's symbolism. Akin to Manhattan, Jemisin utilizes the choronym, "The Bronx," as an anthroponym to connect Bronca to the stereotypical spirit of Bronxites. Like Manhattan, those who hail from the Bronx are also thought to exhibit certain personality traits unique to the area. Bronxites, although physically diverse, are considered uniformly boisterous, unflinching, and formidable, with a propensity for vulgar language. But more than anything, Bronxites are known to be fiercely proud of their home borough. Analogous to Manhattan, Bronca embodies all of these Bronxite clichés.

Throughout the novel, Bronca is a no-nonsense rebel with an extensively vulgar vocabulary who is quick to speak her mind and isn't afraid to square up to anyone who gets in her way, especially the Woman in White. When we first meet Bronca, she aggressively confronts one of her colleagues in a public restroom. Her co-worker immediately tenses up, fearing a physical altercation, but Bronca reassures her, stating, "Relax, I'm not here to kick your ass that way. We're gonna do this civilized. I'll use my words to tell you to fuck off, and you're going to find somewhere to fuck off to, at least for a few days. I don't want to look at your stupid face for a while" (115). Throughout the novel, Bronca emerges as a bold rebel unafraid to express herself with colorful language and a confrontational demeanor. This becomes particularly evident in her assertive

interactions with the Woman in White, which exemplify her no-nonsense attitude and uncompromising nature.

However, despite how aggressive Bronca, and by association, her borough initially appears, Jemisin is quick to suggest that their aggression is not so much anger as it is righteous indignation at the systemic prejudice that plagues their borough, making it not only the borough with the highest number of minorities but also the borough with the highest poverty rate (Bhat and Johnson “Manhattan Got Less Wealthy While The Bronx Got Less Poor in First Year of Pandemic”). As such, the Bronx represents a microcosm of the larger, widespread issue of racism and its effect on economic and financial inequality. Like Manny, Bronca's aggression is not gratuitous, but as a lesbian woman of Lenape heritage, it is instead justifiable. This justifiable anger becomes apparent when Bronca states, "Sulking is petulant, pointless anger. Mine is righteous" (117) and again when Jemisin writes that Bronca “had a gentle soul wrapped in razor wire, but the sharp edges are not her fault. The world trained her to violence, to ferocity, because it hates so much of what she is” (257). Like the borough she represents, Bronca has been forced to endure an enormous amount of systemic and interpersonal prejudice throughout her life. It's understandable, then, that she, and by extension, the borough she represents, would evolve a formidable outer shell that enables them to aggressively confront those who mean them prejudicial harm.

Consequently, her given name, Bronca, serves as a metaphorical suit of armor, symbolizing the resilient defense and righteous indignation that she, along with the entire borough, has cultivated. In Spanish slang, "Bronca" conveys sentiments of anger, frustration, or concern, encapsulating the protective shield Bronxites don against the

systemic prejudices that plague their cherished borough. Notably, "Bronca" also emerges as a feminized iteration of "bronco," defined by the Oxford Language Dictionary as "a wild or half-tamed horse of the western US." This designation holds significance, portraying Bronca as both untamed and, like the bronco, intricately tied to the American landscape. As a Lenape, an indigenous Native American, Bronca embodies a connection between her anthroponym and the resilient exterior of the Bronx's inhabitants. Jemisin elucidates this association when she remarks, "Bronca herself is the Bronx, and the Bronx don't trust nobody but the Bronx, so maybe her distaste for everyone else is just as inexorable as Manhattan's charm" (292). In this light, Bronca emerges as a potent emblem of the borough's identity and resistance against external forces.

Jemisin also alludes to this righteous anger when describing Bronca's violent attack on a corrupt policeman who was known to target women of color and attempted to sexually assault her as a teen, stating, "She felt bigger. Beyond fear or anger. She'd gone to the doorway, of course. Then she grabbed the sides to brace herself, and kicked in his knee" (125). This requisite violence is again alluded to when Bronca proudly recalls her participation in the Stonewall Riots, stating, "Bronca had done the same thing to a police informant at Stonewall—another time she'd been a part of something bigger (125). Through Bronca's position as the avatar of the Bronx, which is signified by her secondary name, Jemisin once again alludes to the concept that violence is necessary to enact social change. This is made all the more apparent when considering that Bronca only feels "bigger" when violence is enacted against agents of systemic prejudice, such as corrupt police officers, police informants, or the Woman in White, who represents prejudicial oppression as a whole.

Moreover, by incorporating Bronca's surname, Siwanoy, Jemisin adeptly employs the emblematic socio-political naming function to evoke the history of prejudicial violence embedded within the Bronx. The utilization of the Siwanoy surname establishes a poignant connection between the Bronx and the Native American tribe of the same name that once inhabited its coastal regions. Similar to the Lenape tribe of Manhattan, the Siwanoy tribe fell victim to the ravages of white colonialism in 1644 when Dutch mercenaries launched a devastating attack, resulting in the massacre of nearly 700 indigenous individuals. A decade later, in 1654, the Siwanoy tribes were coerced into signing a treaty with English settlers, relinquishing 160 acres of land, including the area now recognized as the Bronx. Jemisin explicitly references this historical invasion, stating, "The flesh that fills the gaps is the soil where a thousand generations of Bronca's mothers grew and thrived, which has been invaded and poisoned and built over again and again—but it survives still. Survives strong" (259). In her depiction, Jemisin intimates that the Bronx persists resiliently, a testament to the indomitable spirit of its minority inhabitants. Bronca's assertion of having "faced down armed police alongside her brothers and sisters in AIM" and having done so "with her fists clenched and a grin on her lips" (125) also aligns her with the female indigenous resistance movement that emerged in the 1960s, advocating for land rights. This connection, as argued by scholar Carolann North, positions Bronca as a symbol of enduring resistance against white nationalist power in America (North, "The Ethics of Quantum Colonialism': Navigating American Racial Anxiety in N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*").

Jemisin further connects this violent history to the fortitude of the Bronx when she states:

The rest is fury. These people. They have come into her borough, her territory, and ripped down good art. They've tried to force her to accept their disgusting mediocre bullshit instead. And here is this white woman, who is not a white woman at all but who has tried to manipulate mechanisms of power against Bronca just like the worst of them, demanding that Bronca capitulate. Like fuck she will. (258)

In this passage, Jemisin subtly references the exploitative agreement struck between the Siwanos and the English, underscoring the enduring impact of systemic prejudice against minorities in the United States. Through this historical lens, she illuminates the pervasive legacy of white colonialism and its ongoing repercussions for people of color throughout the nation. Nevertheless, with the emphatic declaration, "Like fuck she will," Jemisin conveys the resilience of American minorities, particularly Bronxites, who, despite enduring years of discriminatory practices, stand prepared to instigate transformative societal change through any means necessary. This resilient stance implies a refusal to be passive victims of historical injustices and a commitment to challenging and dismantling the oppressive structures that persist.

In contrast to her fellow avatars, Aislyn Houlihan stands as the singular character embodying both heterosexuality and whiteness within the narrative framework. However, Jemisin utilizes the Irish roots of the forename "Aislyn" and the surname "Houlihan" to allude to one of several white ethnic groups (Jews, Eastern Europeans, Italians, etc.) in modern history who've been victims of white colonialism and historically experienced a prominent level of systemic and interpersonal prejudice within the United States. As Shaw points out, "Aislyn is the only white-skinned avatar but is nevertheless Irish and thus equally representative of a minority ethnicity" (160). Beginning in the late 19th century, millions of Irish immigrants fled to America in the wake of Ireland's potato blight. Like many countries of color, the Irish were forcibly placed under the thumb of

English rule in the 16th century and were systemically stripped of their voting rights, land, and culture. To make matters worse, after hundreds of years of totalitarian oppression, the Irish were left to starve during the Great Hunger, as what was left of their precious crop was forcibly stolen from them by British armed guards and shipped off to England.

However, upon the Irish immigrants' arrival on American shores in the late 19th century, their circumstances did not significantly improve from the challenges faced in their home country. The discrimination against the Irish in America was overt and explicit, prominently featured in newspapers with bold headlines stating, "No Irish Need Apply." Analogous to the treatment of African Americans, political cartoons of the era blatantly depicted the Irish as Celtic apes, characterized by large sloping foreheads and grotesque features. Through the onomastic adaptation of the Americanized spelling of the ancient Irish forename "Aisling" and the old Gaelic surname "O' hUallacháin," Jemisin establishes a symbolic connection between the character Aislyn and a historical narrative of Irish prejudice inflicted by white supremacy and colonialism.

Despite Aislyn's outward appearance of whiteness, akin to the other New York City avatars, her ancestors were victims of white settler exploitation and internal colonialism. However, as Noel Ignatiev highlighted in his work *How the Irish Became White*, rather than aligning with their oppressed counterparts of color, the Irish, at various points in the 19th century, displayed heightened aggression towards the black community in their pursuit of acceptance within white society. Regrettably, this hostility garnered them greater acceptance among other white Americans, as any black resistance incited heightened white hostility. Unlike the other avatars, Aislyn, as a white female, benefits

from white privilege. While the other avatars cannot conceal their ethnicities, Aislyn can effectively mask her Irish heritage behind a veneer of whiteness. Consequently, influenced by years of racist indoctrination from her father, Aislyn grapples with relinquishing this privilege, despite an underlying recognition of the ethical injustice perpetuated by the Woman in White and, by extension, all forms of white colonialism.

Aislyn's fear of those she doesn't understand and her reluctance to surrender her privilege in the face of ethical morality is made apparent by Jemisin through Aislyn's interactions with the Woman in White. Unlike Aislyn's counterparts, who frequently describe the Woman in White as "something out of a horror movie" (121), "a contaminant" (46), or "deeply troubling" (150), Aislyn describes her as "comforting to look at" (91) and almost immediately feels as if "they've been friends for years" (100). Moreover, due to Aislyn being the result of prolonged racial alienation and racist indoctrination instigated by her father, she, in contrast to her fellow avatars, is more susceptible to falling prey to the Woman in White's stratagems. As Sulimma suggests, through the character of Aislyn, Jemisin "pulls off a disturbingly relatable portrait of a white woman whose racism is deeply ingrained, the result of her isolationist upbringing, and constantly enacted in small judgements and behaviors (580). Jemisin elucidates that three factors impede Aislyn from actively resisting white colonialism alongside the other boroughs:

The first and most atavistic is that everything in her life has programmed her to associate evil with specific, easily definable things. Dark skin. Ugly people with scars or eye patches or wheelchairs. Men. The Woman in White is the visual opposite of everything Aislyn has been taught to fear, and so...even though intellectually Aislyn now has proof that what she's been seeing is just a guise, and the Woman in White's true form could be anyone or anything...Aislyn also thinks, well she looks all right." (334)

The Woman in White, emblematic of white colonialism, engages in interactions that, in conjunction with the association of Aislyn's given name with Ireland, lead Jemisin to propose that, across time, the American Irish have sought to disassociate themselves from their historical legacy of systemic and interpersonal oppression. This disassociation is achieved through persistent acts of violence and racism directed towards other minority groups, as suggested by Jemisin's through Aislyn's perpetual prejudicial acts. However, Jemisin also suggests that due to their identity as former victims of white colonialism and having intimate familiarity with prejudicial oppression, the American Irish bear a responsibility to actively join forces with American minority groups in the battle against oppression.

However, historical evidence indicates that their history of oppression had a contrasting impact, as "Irish immigrants began attacking their African American counterparts as a way to show others as well as themselves that they were becoming Americanized" (Bozich 17). Much like the oppressed Irish who became oppressors, Aislyn follows suit, maintaining a connection with the Woman in White despite the entreaties of her fellow avatars. Aislyn's allegiance to the Woman in White, and by extension to white supremacy, portends the inevitable demise of her city. This becomes apparent when Aislyn defends the Woman in White to her fellow avatars, asserting, "Sometimes people do bad things because they have to. That's just life" (404). With this statement, Jemisin alludes to the tendency of white individuals, Irish or otherwise, to rationalize the oppression of others to preserve their privileged position out of fear of losing it.

Furthermore, similarly to the other avatars, Jemisin connects the character of Aislyn to the stereotypical qualities of her borough's residents through the emblematic socio-political naming function. In addition to also adopting the name of "Staten Island" throughout the novel, the forename "Aislyn" has a phonetic connection to the word "island," an association Jemisin makes apparent when the Lady in White refers to Aislyn as "Staten Aislyn" (102). Unlike the other four New York City boroughs, there is a significantly higher proportion of Caucasians, as nearly seventy-six percent of its population is white. This disparity in ethnicity is due in large part to prejudicial redlining, which began following the Great Depression. The federal government established the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) to assist homeowners with refinancing mortgages at better rates. To verify which loans they would guarantee, HOLC agents were sent to appraise and catalog U.S. cities and neighborhoods to determine which areas were most desirable. Documents show that these agents, backed by the U.S. government, utilized these appraisals to oppress minorities systemically, as they labeled specific neighborhoods as undesirable based on racist factors such as "infiltration of Negroes" and "mixed races" ("A Brief History of Redlining"). The government then utilized these HOLC classifications to determine the guarantee of loans, meaning that residents of color were rarely granted mortgages. These redlining practices resulted in the racializing of poverty in New York City and throughout the United States.

As a result of redlining, Staten Island has remained almost exclusively white and consequently has the lowest poverty rate of the other boroughs. In 2021, Staten Island's poverty rate was determined to be only eleven and a half percent (*NYU Furman Center*, "State of the City 2022: City Wide Data"), as compared to the Bronx, where the poverty

rate is twenty-four percent, and the white population is at its lowest at only eight and a half percent. Additionally, Staten Island is the only New York City borough where the majority of its residents identify as Republicans, a political party which, according to the Pew Research Center, statistically ignores the ongoing problem of prejudicial oppression within the United States, as seventy-seven percent of Republicans feel a little to nothing at all needs to be done to ensure equal rights for all Americans. Conversely, Democrats generally agree that a lot more needs to be done to resolve racial inequality, with seventy-four percent of Democrats interviewed affirming this (*Pew Research Center*, "How People around the World See Democracy in 8 Charts").

These demographic patterns are reflected in the characterization of Staten Island, who steadfastly refrains from actively engaging in the collective struggle of her fellow boroughs against white colonialism embodied by the Lady in White. This becomes evident when the other boroughs seek Staten Island's assistance, only to be met with astonishment as Aislyn aligns herself with the Woman in White, expelling them from her island and declaring the Woman in White as "[her] friend" (404). Jemisin elucidates Aislyn's inclination and, by extension, Staten Island's inclination to contribute to white supremacy through systemic racism. This aspect is also underscored by Brooklyn's perspective on Staten Island, who remarks, "Staten Island is the sore thumb of this city. The rest of New York votes blue, the island goes red. The rest of us want better subways; the island just wants more cars. You know why the Verrazano Bridge toll is so high? They wanted that. To keep the 'riffraff' from Brooklyn out!" (321). Through this commentary, Jemisin suggests that Staten Island's sizable Republican population

perpetuates systemic subjugation of minorities through political conservatism and structural racism.

Additionally, Jemisin utilizes the direct translations of Aislyn's first and last names to highlight further the systemic and interpersonal racism that pervades Staten Island. "Aislyn" derives from the old Irish word "aisling," which translates to "dream" or "vision." Using the forename "Aislyn," Jemisin alludes to Aislyn's dream of escaping her oppressive father and moving out of Staten Island. She dreams of evolving from one who utilizes covert racism and microaggression to perpetuate prejudicial injustice to one who sheds her fear of otherness, and the security that white privilege has given her to transmogrify into an enlightened and worldly woman who furthers the implementation of a more progressive and anti-prejudicial society. However, as her surname, which translates to "proud," suggests, Aislyn allows her pride to derail her dreams.

This longing for an ethical transformation and its thwarting as a result of pride is made apparent by Jemisin when following Aislyn's own victimization by sexist sexual aggression, she "can wish for better" (282). However, despite her dreams of bettering herself, Aislyn again falls prey to her pride and fear of otherness. She is visited by São Paulo, a man of color whose only intention is to help Aislyn. Yet, due to her deep-seated fear of men of color and her recent sexual assault, Aislyn is unable to overcome her racial discomfort and attacks São Paulo. During this attack, Aislyn harms her island by temporarily destroying its only subway line. Of the damage, Jemisin states:

Repairs will be simple enough—fill the holes with rebar and cement, replace the broken tracks—though they will take several days. In that time, many of the island's poorest people will struggle to get to and from work, or to visit their sick parents, or to pick up their kids from school. A city's commuter conduits are its lifeblood.

And shallow wounds fester.

Aislyn sleeps.” (290)

In this passage, and with the deployment of the given name "Aislyn," Jemisin signifies that Aislyn's aspirations for a more equitable future are insufficient. Effecting real change requires one to resist the allure of pride and contentment. Mere thoughts and prayers prove inadequate in the face of entrenched systemic biases. Genuine progress against prejudice demands consistent, proactive efforts and an unwavering commitment on the part of the oppressor to dismantle discriminatory structures. Regrettably, Aislyn succumbs to her own complacency, perpetuating the subjugation of her island's minority population as she, shielded by her white privilege, sleeps soundly.

In conclusion, throughout *The City We Became*, Jemisin expertly weaves multiplicity of meaning through her onomastic connections. Jemisin's masterful use of the emblematic socio-political naming function transcends mere linguistic significance, serving as a potent narrative tool that enriches the novel's thematic depth. Through the exploration of the intrinsic connection between identity, power, and the very essence of a city, Jemisin invites readers to contemplate the profound impact of names on the collective consciousness. As the characters grapple with the weight and responsibility embedded in their names, the narrative unfolds into a compelling exploration of white supremacy, cultural heritage, urban identity, and the dynamic interplay between individuals and the cities they inhabit. Jemisin's deft incorporation of name symbolism not only reinforces the novel's fantastical elements but also prompts readers to reflect on the symbolic resonance of names in our own world, underscoring the enduring power of language in shaping our understanding of self and society. *The City We Became* stands as a testament to Jemisin's narrative prowess, using names as a gateway to a deeper

exploration of the multifaceted nature of racial and ethnic identity and the transformative potential inherent in the act of naming.

Chapter IV.

Semantics of Subjugation: A Deconstruction of Naming Symbolism in *Never Let Me Go* and the Cautionary Tale of Technological Progress

Within his acclaimed 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go*, Japanese-English author, Kazuo Ishiguro weaves a dystopian tale centered around Kathy H, one of many clones genetically engineered by the British government for the purpose of organ harvesting. Having no parents, these child clones are raised in boarding houses under the care of “guardians” who act as parental figures and educators. As Kathy and her friends grow, the horrifying truth of what they must endure in the name of scientific advancement grows more and more evident to them, ultimately culminating in their deaths.

In his novel, Ishiguro expertly weaves symbolism and allusion throughout his onomastic choices, further solidifying the story’s overarching socio-political question: What are the moral and ethical limitations of technological advancement?

From the very first line of the novel, “My name is Kathy H” (3), it is evident that the clones possess only a single initial surname. Through the omission of a familial surname, Ishiguro alludes to the clones’ lack of parentage as well as their lack of progeny, as each clone has been genetically engineered to remain infertile. The absence of an ancestral surname among the clones serves the dual purpose of both distinguishing them from the broader English society and accentuating the prevalent perception of these clones as soulless and inhuman. Miss Emily’s casual remark encapsulates this perspective, stating, “As you would say, why would anyone doubt you had a soul? It wasn’t something commonly held when we first set out all those years ago. And though we’ve come a long way since then, it’s still not a notion universally held, even today”

(260). Consequently, assigning surnames to clones is deemed futile, given their lack of familial ties and the absence of any prospects for progeny. In Ishiguro's constructed world, society perceives clones more as scientific tools than as human beings, rendering the notion of providing them with a surname as inconceivable as bestowing one upon a medical device like a gurney or ventilator. Ishiguro strategically employs the clones' surname deficiency to underscore their dehumanization within the broader human society.

As Kelly Rich suggests in her article, “Look in the Gutter: Infrastructural Interiority in *Never Let Me Go*,” “Through Kathy, the novel challenges us to expand our definition of infrastructure, presenting a situation where humans have become utilities (indeed, part of England’s National Health Service)” (633). Through this juxtaposition, Ishiguro contends that empathetic sentiments should extend beyond conventional humanistic qualifications, advocating for an "entangled empathy" (Gruen 2015), as he challenges the notion of humanity as a secure foundation for empathetic connection (Baker 2021). By emphasizing the clones' absence of a complete surname, Ishiguro underscores their dehumanization, prompting a reconsideration of the criteria guiding empathetic responses.

Ishiguro furthers this onomastic symbolism through the forenames of his main characters. Through the use of the emblematic socio-political naming function, Ishiguro juxtaposes each clone character with biblical figures. The association of clones with biblical texts is undertaken with the intent of symbolically positing the clones as possessing moral and ethical superiority over the humans who purport to be predominant in every way.

Kathy is, of course, a diminutive form of Katherine, which stems from the Greek word “katharos.” “Katharos” is used throughout the Bible to literally and figuratively refer to people and objects as pure, clear, or clean. Kathy embodies these qualities in a dualistic manner. Firstly, she remains consistently wholesome and virtuous throughout the story, as she is frequently humble, empathetic, and trustworthy, even in the face of adversity and the prospect of self-gain. For instance, throughout the story, Kathy conceals a deep-seated love for Tommy. Despite this, she repeatedly and selflessly agrees to intercede in Tommy’s relationship with Ruth, putting their perceived happiness before her own. Ruth recognizes Kathy’s benignity when she states, “Kathy, I knew we could depend on you...Tommy’s right. You’re just the person to have when you’re in a corner” (105). In essence, Kathy epitomizes the purity and integrity associated with her name, embodying a steadfast commitment to selflessness and compassion, even amidst personal sacrifices, thereby emerging as a reliable anchor for those around her.

Furthermore, Kathy goes on to care for clone donors for years despite the emotional turmoil it produces. When Tommy asks why she continues as a carer, she responds, “I have to keep going. Even if you don’t want me around, there are others who do” (282). This exchange again implies Kathy’s moral purity, as she is placing the good of the whole above her own self-interest.

As author Cynthia F. Wong points out, “The novel enacts a shared vulnerability with Kathy and her friends that contradicts the ontology of personhood or biological individuation, which the ‘humans’ in the novel resort to in an effort to justify the subjugation of the clones” (102). Wong’s analysis highlights a central thematic element, namely the shared vulnerability experienced by the protagonist Kathy and her

companions. Wong contends that this shared vulnerability challenges established notions of personhood and biological individuation, concepts exploited by the 'humans' within the narrative to rationalize the subjugation of the clones. Ishiguro, as observed by Wong, strategically utilizes the naivety and vulnerability of the clones as a narrative device. In doing so, he effectively undermines the ethical justifications employed by the human characters in the novel, presenting the clones as possessing a heightened moral sensibility. This thematic exploration encourages readers to critically reassess the conventional dichotomies between the 'humans' and clones, shedding light on the intricacies of morality and identity within the context of advanced scientific and ethical dilemmas.

Secondly, while her name serves to highlight her inherent purity and naivety, it also serves to underscore the moral and ethical purity of the clones at large, who've done nothing to earn their horrifying fate but continue to provide organs to those who, by their very utilization of this technology, are far less ethically deserving of them. This polarity of moral equity is made more evident by Ishiguro through the human characters' often flippant attitude towards the clones, as they are frequently described as acting "disgustedly" (116) or "cold[ly]" (248) towards the students, despite the sacrifices they are making for humanity's medical benefit.

Finally, throughout the novel, Ishiguro adeptly integrates his selection of clone characters' names with Christian symbolism, effectively enhancing his critique of the dangers associated with unbridled technological progress. By virtue of the Christian pertinence inherent in Kathy's given name, Ishiguro suggests a potential martyrization of the clones, as the nomenclature "Katherine" serves as an allusion to Saint Catherine of

Genoa. Saint Catherine, like Kathy, gave her life for the care of the sick and impoverished despite the heavy toll it took upon her physically and spiritually. Much like Ishiguro's Kathy, Saint Catherine died slowly and suffered greatly as holy visions racked her body and mind. According to historical writings, she wavered between life and death for many days. Saint Catherine's death greatly resembles the fate of the cloned donors, which Kathy describes, stating:

You'll have heard that same talk. How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you've technically completed, you're still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recovery centers, no carers, no friends; how there's nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It's horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don't want to think about it. (279)

Much like Saint Catherine of Genoa, Kathy, and the other clones are martyred for the perceived betterment of mankind, not only through their excruciating death but through living with the unbearable knowledge of the horrors that await them. However, unlike Saint Catherine, canonization doesn't await Kathy and the other clones following their agonizing deaths. Conversely, they are unrecognized and forgotten by all but the few cloned friends they leave behind, all of whom are ultimately destined for the same forgotten fate. Thus, through the symbolism behind Kathy's name and her pure, moralistic nature, Ishiguro emblematically places two questions before the reader: Is the elongation of our own lives worth the pain and suffering of others? And if so, are these medical advancements considered ethical when they're at the expense of beings who, in many ways, are morally superior to ourselves?

Like Kathy, Tommy also possesses a diminutive name form, this time of the forename "Thomas." As it stands, Kathy and Tommy are the only main characters to possess a diminutive name form. This is done purposefully on the part of Ishiguro for two

reasons. Firstly, it serves to connect the two, as both are patently in love with one another throughout the novel. Secondly, it denotes a correlation between the two's naive and virtuous natures. Like Kathy, Tommy too is frequently described as possessing a child-like graciousness, which, like Kathy, often hampers his advancement, making it easy for others to exploit his altruism for their gain. As Kathy explains, "As I say, there would come a time when I'd think this was sweet; but that summer all I could see was that it advertised what a child he still was, and how easily you could take advantage of him" (106). Through the deliberate use of diminutive name forms for Kathy and Tommy, Ishiguro establishes a poignant connection between the characters, underscoring their mutual innocence and vulnerability in the face of exploitation, ultimately deepening the thematic exploration of love, naivety, and the complexities of human relationships.

Moreover, Ishiguro utilizes the etymology behind the forename Tommy to symbolically further the novel's socio-political thematic function. The appellation, "Thomas," finds its roots within the New Testament of the Bible, and through the use of the nickname "Tommy," Ishiguro links his character to the biblical character of the same name. Within the Gospel of John, the disciple Thomas is often described as faithful yet doubtful. Perhaps one of the most infamous quotes attributed to Thomas comes from John 20:25, when following Jesus' resurrection, John states, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Because of this notorious enumeration, the apostle Thomas earned himself the nickname "doubting Thomas," which eventually became a well-used idiom. Despite Tommy's perceived naivety, like the disciple Thomas, Tommy frequently doubts that he and his fellow clones are being provided adequate information by their superiors.

Throughout the novel, he habitually initiates talks with Kathy to determine the underlying meaning of their guardians' various words and actions. Early on he confides in Kathy about something strange one of their teachers has told him, stating, "Something else she said I can't quite figure out. I was going to ask you about it" (29). Kathy later admits that Tommy's doubting nature became infectious, producing questions within her as well, expressing,

That talk with Tommy beside the pond: I think of it now as a kind of marker between the two eras. Not that anything significant started to happen immediately afterwards; but for me at least, that conversation was a turning point. I definitely started to look at everything differently. Where before I'd have backed away from awkward stuff, I began instead, more and more, to ask questions, if not out loud, at least within myself." (77)

This quotation underscores the influence of Tommy's skeptical disposition on Kathy, suggesting that, in the absence of Tommy's questioning nature, Kathy's inherently naive and benevolent character might have impeded her from critically examining her existential circumstances. Tommy's propensity for doubt serves as a catalyst, prompting Kathy to venture beyond the confines of her accustomed perceptions. The implication is that Tommy's influence plays a pivotal role in awakening Kathy to the need for introspection and inquiry, challenging her to reconsider the veracity of the world they inhabit. This interplay between characters not only contributes to the development of individual personas but also shapes the collective intellectual and emotional trajectory of the narrative, revealing the nuanced dynamics within Ishiguro's exploration of identity, awareness, and the shared experiences of the characters.

Moreover, Tommy's inclination toward skepticism imparts to him an almost prescient comprehension of the clones' genuine circumstances, a perceptiveness conspicuously absent in his counterparts. This discernment becomes particularly apparent

during an incident at Hailsham when, in a callous jest, fellow students mock Tommy regarding the concept of "unzipping." Convinced that a wound on his elbow might result in his skin unraveling and internal organs spilling out, Tommy envisions a grotesque scenario akin to the disconcerting visual of a glove in *My Fair Lady* (86). As Kelly Rich aptly observes, this seemingly fanciful notion progressively metamorphoses into a symbolic representation of the clones' impending reality – a future characterized by organ donations. Rich notes how this idea, originating from Tommy's initial doubts, crystallizes into a conceptual framework where the act of unzipping symbolizes the extraction and submission of vital organs when the time for donations arrives (636). Thus, Tommy's inherent skepticism not only serves as a distinctive facet of his character but also becomes a catalyst for the broader clone community to confront and question the enigmatic fate that awaits them beyond the confines of Hailsham.

Tommy's pivotal role as a skeptic, serving as the catalyst for awakening his fellow clones to the harsh realities of their existence, is further underscored by his profound and distinct anger during childhood, an emotion that appears uniquely characteristic of him. Rich suggests that Tommy's anger may be an outward manifestation of his skeptical nature, postulating that his heightened awareness of the clones' circumstances might be the root cause of his profound discontent. Rich posits that, in contrast to the majority of Hailsham students who devise compensatory mechanisms such as engaging in play, jokes, and fantasies to cope with their infrastructural status, individuals like Tommy express their dissatisfaction through rebellion and moments of unbridled rage (636). This anger, therefore, becomes a tangible reflection of Tommy's acute awareness and the cognitive dissonance inherent in comprehending their predetermined destinies. Tommy's

unique emotional response serves as a poignant testament to the diverse coping mechanisms adopted by the clones as they grapple with the implications of their existence, shedding light on the intricate interplay between individual psychology and the broader sociopolitical context within Ishiguro's narrative.

Consolidating Tommy's predisposition as a skeptic, the culmination of the novel unveils a shared realization between Tommy and Kathy that he harbored an innate awareness of a more intricate reality surrounding their circumstances than what had been explicitly conveyed. This discernment, in turn, elucidates the recurrent skepticism exhibited by Tommy towards the authentic intentions of their guardians. Upon unraveling the veracity of their predicament, Kathy articulates to Tommy, "I was thinking maybe the reason you used to get like that was because at some level you always knew." Tommy acknowledges this, responding, "Maybe I did know, somewhere deep down. Something the rest of you didn't" (275). Their exchange underscores the profound implications of Tommy's intuition and its significance in shaping their understanding of their past experiences.

Additionally, the utilization of diminutive names for both Kathy and Tommy, coupled with their shared propensity for recollection and dissection, serves as a profound literary device that intricately bonds these characters. The act of recalling and dissecting memories becomes a unifying force, intensifying the connection between Kathy and Tommy, as Ji Eun Lee argues in "Norfolk and the Sense of Loss: The Bildungsroman and Colonial Subjectivity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" (279). The deliberate choice of diminutive names fosters an intimacy that transcends the conventional boundaries of nomenclature. As they engage in the collective act of remembering, a symbiotic

relationship emerges, evolving beyond the mere recounting of personal histories. Ishiguro masterfully transforms the act of reminiscing into a mechanism for creating a shared sense of community between Kathy and Tommy. This communal dimension of memory not only solidifies their interpersonal bond but also underscores the novel's exploration of the complexities inherent in human relationships and the construction of identity within the context of shared experiences.

Furthermore, like the disciple Thomas, who, according to Syrian Christian tradition, was martyred by a spear at St. Thomas Mount, Tommy is also martyred at the novel's close. Despite his and Kathy's altruistic and virtuous temperaments and their request for a deferment of their fate, Tommy is essentially put to death for the benefit of a society that has continuously and deplorably treated he and his fellow clones inhumanely. Like Kathy's impending death, through Tommy's actual death, Ishiguro adeptly presents the reader with another emblematic question: What price are we as a society willing to pay for the technological advancement of our race?

Like his characters Kathy and Tommy before her, through Ruth, Ishiguro also skillfully weaves together his onomastic choices with Christian symbolism to further his commentary on the perils of unchecked technological advancement. The forename "Ruth" stems from the Hebrew word "re'ut," meaning "friend." Within the biblical book of Ruth, Ruth proves to be a devoutly loyal and steadfast friend to her mother-in-law, Naomi, despite their many hardships. Perhaps Ruth's most infamous quote can be found in Ruth 1:16-17:

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I

will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”

Much like the Ruth of the Bible, Ishiguro’s Ruth, while fallible, proves to be a devoted and resolute friend to both Kathy and Tommy. Although selfishly, she’d kept the two apart for years, towards the end of her short life, she admits her shortcomings and finally draws the two together again, caring more for their wellbeing than her own. She tells

Kathy:

“That was the worst thing I did,” she said again. “I’m not even asking you to forgive me about that...It should have been you two. I’m not pretending I didn’t always see that. Of course I did, as far back as I can remember. but I kept you apart. I’m not asking you to forgive me for that. That’s not what I’m after just now. What I want is for you to put it right. Put right what I messed up for you.” (232)

Although Ruth and Kathy’s relationship had been problematic in the past, Ruth’s dying wish is to ensure that her two dearest friends have a few extra years to share with one another. Her last act of friendship before her death was, in fact, so self-effacing that she even manages to secure Madame’s home address, a task she admits was arduous, stating, “It wasn’t easy. It took me a long time, and I ran a few risks. But I got it in the end, and I got it for you two. Now it’s up to you to find her and try” (233). Ruth’s final act of friendship affixes her to the Ruth of Ruth 1:16-17. Although she admits it would have been much simpler to turn her back on her two friends, she opts to carry on alongside them, and ultimately, they share the same tragic fate and death.

The deliberate linkage of Ishiguro's principal characters to Christian symbolism through their given names is not fortuitous. This intentional association with Christian imagery serves to imply an inherent moral superiority attributed to these characters in contrast to the broader human populace. This moral superiority is made more apparent when considering the amoral behavior of Ishiguro’s humanity, who actively and

wantonly participate in the clones' continued oppression through their illimitable utilization of organ harvesting. Moreover, employing onomastic Christian symbolism, Ishiguro accentuates the inherent malevolence in humans assuming god-like roles. As T. Tsao points out in his article, "The Tyranny of Purpose: Religion and Biotechnology in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*," the characters in the novel deploy scientific advancements to transcend the divine role by creating life in their own image and achieving immortality through the sacrifice of clones, thereby overcoming mortality (220). This becomes all the more obvious when considering that none of Ishiguro's human characters possess any names linked to Christian figures or ideals, insinuating that these characters lack the inherent virtuousness the clones dexterously possess.

In lieu of employing Christian symbolism in the nomenclature of the guardian characters, Ishiguro employs a perspectivistic naming technique. This approach involves the utilization of literal translations of the names, establishing a thematic connection between each character and diverse perspectives related to their temperament or functional role within the novel. For instance, Miss Lucy's forename, "Lucy," is derived from the Latin word "lux," meaning "light." This is appropriate, considering that Lucy is the lone guardian who believes the children should be enlightened to their role at Hailsham and within English society at large. As such, she is the only guardian who consistently hints about what lies ahead of the students. As Kathy recalled, "I watched her carefully whenever I could, not just from curiosity, but because I now saw her as the most likely source of important clues" (78). Eventually, dutifully fulfilling her role as enlightener, Miss Lucy directly confronts the children about what they will face after leaving Hailsham, stating:

“If no one else will talk to you,’ she continued, “then I will. The problem, as I see it, is that you’ve been told and not told. You’ve been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way. But I’m not. If you’re going to have decent lives, then you’ve got to know and know properly...you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you.” (81)

While all of the other guardians fight to keep the children ignorant of their circumstances, Miss Lucy is the only guardian who recognizes the iniquitousness of their continued ignorance, as it engenders resignation rather than confrontation and invigorates the systemic oppression they face.

Contrary to Miss Lucy, who seeks to enlighten the clones about their plight, Madame (as the children initially refer to her) aims to restrict their knowledge of the outside world. However, like Miss Lucy, Ishiguro utilizes the emblematic socio-political naming function to confine Madame to both her symbolic function within the novel as well as her usual disposition. While “madame” can simply be utilized as a form of address, typically for a French-speaking woman, of which Madame is one, it is also a widely used term for women who procure sex workers. Ishiguro adeptly utilizes the duality of this term to symbolize not only Madame’s French heritage but also her role in procuring clones.

Not unlike a brothel’s madame, Ishiguro’s Madame exploits the cloned children of Hailsham as a means to her own ends, assisting in the raising of the children before handing them up for slaughter. The duality of the term “madame” reflects the duality of Madame’s character, as while she is outwardly respectable, and is always seemingly put together in her “smart grey suit” (Ishiguro 243), inwardly she hides a darker, seedier side, as she is repulsed by the very children she claims to help. As Kathy explains, “There are people out there, like Madame, who don’t hate you or wish you any harm, but who

nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you—of how you were brought into the world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs” (36). The inherent duality observed within Madame is indicative of the ambivalence inherent in individuals within society who, while acknowledging instances of injustice, permit insularity to engender a state of ambivalence.

Nevertheless, the duality inherent in Madame's nomenclature extends beyond its initial manifestation. In contrast to the other characters featured in the novel, Madame uniquely possesses two distinct names: Madame and Marie-Claude, the latter adopted at a later juncture. This additional layer of duality serves to signify an additional polarity within Madame's character. Through the emblematic socio-political naming function, Ishiguro establishes a linkage between the initial segment of her given name, Marie, and how Marie-Claude perceives herself, while the subsequent component, Claude, mirrors the perspective from which we, as readers, perceive her.

There has been some argument among linguistic scholars regarding the exact etymology of the forename “Marie.” However, many etymologists agree that “Marie” originated from the Hebrew name “Miryam.” It has been argued that “Miryam” translates to either “rebellious,” “bitterness,” or “sea of bitterness,” all of which apply to Marie-Claude’s self-concept. Because Marie-Claude “virtually attempt[ed] to square the circle” (263) by giving the cloned children “better lives than [they] would have had otherwise” (265), Marie-Claude believes herself to be a rebel fighting against the established political order. Nevertheless, after the closing of Hailsham due to lack of political support, Marie-Claude, rather than continuing the fight, fell into a bitter complacency, as “the way it all ended [had] left her feeling somewhat disillusioned” (256).

Notwithstanding Marie-Claude's assertions of rebellion in the pursuit of equity, a discerning reader apprehends the inherent inadequacy of such proclamations. It becomes evident upon closer examination that Marie-Claude made minimal efforts to substantively ameliorate the lamentable conditions in which clones were reared. Furthermore, her endeavors did not extend to addressing the overarching predicament of organ harvesting from clones, signifying a failure to address the more substantial issue at hand. As Lee suggests:

Tommy brings to Madame his paintings in order to claim that he has his own inner self, however, she explains that it no longer matters whether they have inner souls or not, because it does not make any difference in their status as clones—the presumably inferior group designed for the benefit of human beings. (283)

Marie Claude's contemptible ambivalence is made all the more explicit when, following her meeting with Tommy and Kathy, she states, "Poor creatures. I wish I could help you. But now you're by yourselves" (272). Hence, it is by no mistake that the latter segment of Marie-Claude's given name, specifically "Claude," is derived from the Latin term "claudus," signifying "lame."

Compellingly, the adjective "lame" manifests two distinct yet pertinent definitions. According to the Oxford Language Dictionary, lameness is delineated as "the inability to walk without difficulty as the result of an injury or illness affecting the leg or foot." The intrigue deepens when contextualizing this definition in light of Madame's perspective, wherein she perceives clones as a debilitated manifestation of humanity, consequently deeming them undeserving of the same opportunities extended to non-clones. As articulated by Kathy with acumen, "Madame never liked us. She's always been afraid of us. In the way people are afraid of spiders and things" (268). This utterance reveals Madame's overt aversion, thereby implying her covert sentiments of superiority

over the clones whom she ostensibly champions. Moreover, this practice underscores Madame's proclivity for dehumanizing the clones, placing them, as scholar Djoymi Baker proports, "at the very bottom of the species hierarchy alongside abject arachnids" (99).

Furthermore, despite Madame's perception of the clones as debilitated, it is evident that she is metaphorically impaired by her feeble endeavors to "rescue" them. In the denouement of the narrative, Madame manifests vacillation and uncertainty, expressing remorse for the trajectory of the clones' lives yet exhibiting reluctance to substantively aid Tommy and Kathy. This wavering stance becomes evident when, upon encountering Tommy and Kathy in their adulthood, she articulates, "Poor creatures. What did we do to you? With all our schemes and plans" (254). However, notwithstanding her apparent acknowledgment of complicity in their subjugation, Madame concurrently evades accountability by subsequently deflecting responsibility onto Miss Emily, instructing her to "speak to them" while simultaneously "washing her hands of everything" (255).

Moreover, the adjective "lame" conveys an additional definition, signifying "uninspiring or dull." This interpretation is relevant, given the discernible lack of substance in Marie-Claude's purported revolutionary leadership. At its essence, her endeavors toward revolution are revealed as nothing more than a manifestation of a subconscious savior complex, strategically employed to conceal her ambivalence toward a community she both fears and, consequently, abhors.

Similar to Marie-Claude, Ishiguro employs the perspectivistic naming technique in conjunction with the emblematic socio-political naming function to establish a linkage between the character of Miss Emily and her allusive role within the novel. However,

unlike Marie-Claude, Ishiguro employs a much more straightforward symbolism between the etymology of the forename “Emily” and her emblematic function within the story. The appellation “Emily” has been thought to derive from either the Latin term “aemulus,” meaning “rival” or the Greek term “aimylos” meaning “wiley.” Regardless of the exact origins of the name, it is clear that both the name’s Greek and Latin origins certainly apply to the character of Miss Emily.

Upon the initial introduction of Miss Emily to the reader, conspicuous indications emerge, suggesting a certain astuteness and disingenuous demeanor in her approach to managing the children of Hailsham. Kathy first describes Miss Emily as follows: “She wore her silvery hair tied back, but strands were always coming loose and floating around her. They would have driven me mad, but Miss Emily always ignored them, like they were beneath her contempt” (39). The discerning reader promptly ascertains that Miss Emily perceives the cloned children of Hailsham in a manner analogous to her regard for stray strands of hair, deeming them to be beneath her contempt.

While at first Miss Emily deceives the children into thinking that she is a kind and conscientious guardian, within the last chapters of the book her true nature is revealed. When Tommy and Kathy heartbreakingly approach Miss Emily and Marie-Claude in search of a deferment of their organ donations, Miss Emily proves to be both disingenuous and compassionless. While she outwardly states “For students like you, I do feel regret. It gives me no pleasure at all to disappoint you” (258), her actions tell a different and much more sinister story, as she “seemed to enjoy herself, though, and a gentle smile settled around her eyes” (262). In the final chapters of the book, Miss Emily’s facade of kindness crumbles, revealing her true lack of compassion and

deceitfulness, as evidenced by her duplicitous words and evident pleasure in denying Tommy and Kathy's plea for a deferment of their organ donations.

Furthermore, she eventually goes on to flippantly admit to her deception, telling Kathy and Tommy, "Very well, sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. Yes, in many ways we fooled you. I suppose you could even call it that" (268). However, despite her devastating deceptions, she feels no remorse, as directly after this confession, her attention turns to the handling of her antique cabinet and she "then left with George, not looking back at [them]" (269). By employing the forenames of both Miss Emily and Marie-Claude, Ishiguro strategically employs the emblematic socio-political naming technique to underscore the latent ambivalence inherent in segments of society that acknowledge the injustices endured by specific communities yet exhibit minimal or no proactive measures towards effecting meaningful change.

The absence of empathy and compassion demonstrated by the guardians within Kazuo Ishiguro's narrative is a phenomenon intricately tied to the symbolic nomenclature of the educational institution they oversee: Hailsham. Ishiguro employs a nuanced emblematic socio-political naming function, strategically imbuing the institution's name with layers of meaning. As elucidated by Lee, "The clones' emulation of human-like individual dreams and cultivation in Hail-sham was to *hail sham*: to 'salute or greet,' or 'welcome' the colonizer's culture, which pretends to be something good" (285). The term "colonizers" in this context refers to the guardians, who symbolize the broader human populace, while the clones represent the colonized, their bodies exploited for the benefit of the colonizer. Ishiguro deftly exploits the power of nomenclature to underscore the complex socio-political dynamics at play within the narrative, providing a lens through

which the reader can critically examine the exploitative nature of relationships and power structures within the dystopian world he constructs.

The illusory nature of Hailsham becomes glaringly evident as the students transition from the confines of the institution to the subsequent phases of their truncated lives. Rich aptly underscores this revelation, asserting that the departure from Hailsham portends a bleak future, characterized by a dearth of acculturating resources and a stark reduction in infrastructural support (Rich 633). The ostensibly nurturing environment of Hailsham, with its emphasis on art and collections, is, in fact, a guise that veils the grim reality awaiting the clones. Upon their relocation to dilapidated cottages post-Hailsham, the institution's façade crumbles, laying bare its true nature. Hailsham, rather than fostering genuine individuality, is exposed as a deceptive construct, designed to deceive the clones into a false sense of self. In truth, the clones are destined to lead lives dedicated to the collective rather than the cultivation of true individuality, thereby underscoring the deceptive quality of the purportedly nurturing institution.

Overall, Kazuo Ishiguro's exploration of name symbolism in *Never Let Me Go* transcends the conventional literary device, becoming a poignant and integral element in the fabric of the narrative. The nuanced interplay of names, from the deceptively mundane to the deeply symbolic, serves as a vehicle for Ishiguro to unravel profound questions about identity, agency, and the ethical ramifications of scientific advancements. Through his utilization of the emblematic socio-political naming function, Kazuo invites readers into a contemplative space where the power of naming becomes a mirror reflecting the characters' struggles and the broader ethical quandaries of a society that commodifies humanity. Through the lens of name symbolism, Ishiguro crafts a haunting

meditation on what it means to be human and the ethical responsibilities entwined with advancing technology. *Never Let Me Go* stands as a literary achievement, using names as a symbolic thread that weaves together the novel's intricate tapestry of emotions, ethics, and the indelible mark of mortality on the human experience.

Chapter V.

Culmination of Connotations: Unraveling the Socio-Linguistic Threads in 21st Century

Dystopian Fiction

In conclusion, this thesis has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the emblematic socio-political naming function within literary works, revealing the nuanced ways in which authors employ names as powerful instruments to convey deeper layers of meaning and commentary. Across the diverse texts examined, from Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* to N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became* and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, a common thread emerges - the recognition of names as potent vehicles for socio-political exploration.

The exploration of socio-political symbolism through character names in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*, and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* reveals a nuanced tapestry of literary craftsmanship that transcends mere linguistic expression. Throughout these varied narratives, the names assigned to characters emerge as powerful tools employed by the authors to communicate profound socio-political commentary. Ishiguro, through the subtle naming of his characters, delves into the dehumanizing consequences of a society that commodifies life. Jemisin's intricate use of names becomes a vehicle for exploring the complex intersections of identity, culture, and power within an urban landscape. In Collins' dystopian world, names serve as both a tool of oppression and a catalyst for resistance, reflecting the stratified nature of society and the resilience of the human spirit. Collectively, these works underscore the enduring relevance of names as symbolic markers that reflect and shape the socio-political landscapes within their respective narratives. As readers

navigate the intricacies of these fictional worlds, they are invited to engage with the deeper layers of meaning embedded in the characters' names, prompting contemplation on the socio-political implications that resonate with our own reality. The symbolic weight of names in these novels underscores the authors' commitment to fostering critical reflection on the complex interplay between language, power, and society, challenging readers to reconsider the role of names as potent instruments in shaping our understanding of the socio-political dynamics that shape our world.

The study has illuminated the multifaceted nature of naming within literature, transcending the boundaries of mere linguistic expression. Authors strategically wield names to encapsulate societal structures, power dynamics, cultural norms, and ideological undercurrents. From the dystopian realms of *The Hunger Games* to the fantastical urban landscapes of *The City We Became* and the haunting reflections of humanity in *Never Let Me Go*, the chosen names serve as mirrors reflecting the socio-political realities inherent in each narrative.

This thesis has not only analyzed the techniques employed by authors but also delved into the broader implications for readers. The act of naming is not confined to the realms of fiction; it serves as a thought-provoking lens through which readers can engage with and reflect upon their own societies. The utilization of the socio-political naming function within these literary works compel readers to question, challenge, and reconsider their perspectives on power, identity, and societal structures.

As we conclude this exploration, it becomes evident that the study of the emblematic socio-political naming function offers a rich avenue for understanding the interplay between language, literature, and society. The careful analysis of names within

literary works allows for a deeper appreciation of the layers of meaning embedded in each syllable, inviting readers to recognize the profound socio-political commentary that extends beyond the pages of fiction. In essence, this thesis underscores the enduring significance of names as dynamic tools for authors and readers alike, shaping and reflecting the socio-political landscapes within the intricate tapestry of literature and the broader canvas of human experience.

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