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PERSONAL NAMES AS IDENTITY MARKERS IN CHRISTIE GOLDEN'S *SYLVANAS* (WORLD OF WARCRAFT)

Korobova Kateryna
Senior Lecturer at the Department of Linguistics and Translation
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Kyiv, Ukraine
E-mail: k.korobova@kubg.edu.ua
ORCID: 0009-0005-8266-0276

Keywords: fantasy tie-in fiction, onomastics, personal names, titles, Sylvanas, sound patterns, word structure.

Introduction. Fantasy tie-in fiction is not often studied in linguistics, but it often uses invented proper names to create a realistic secondary world. Christie Golden's book *Sylvanas* is part of the Warcraft universe and tells the story of its main character, Sylvanas, as she goes through various parts of her life. She begins as a high elf, then becomes a Ranger-General, transforms into a banshee, and finally becomes the Warchief of the Horde. Throughout the story, the text uses many personal names, family names, and honorific titles to show who Sylvanas is at each stage of her journey. These details also show her cultural background as a Quel'Thalas elf and set her apart from other groups in the novel, such as humans, orcs, and the undead Forsaken. Onomastics is very useful here because names in fantasy stories are more than just simple labels. They usually show a character's background, social standing, and how they change throughout the story.

Aim. This study explores how Christie Golden uses personal names and epithets/titles in *Sylvanas* to show her ethnic background and how the main character changes from an elf to the leader of the undead and the Horde. Another question is whether the phonological shape of names (sound patterns, endings, and syllable structure) differs between groups of characters, such as elves, humans, and the Forsaken.

Methods and Materials. The primary material is the full text of Golden's *Sylvanas* (2020). All proper names, family names, and titles were taken from the text and grouped into three categories: 1) personal and family names, 2) place names, and 3) epithets/titles. To find the most common names, we counted how often each name appeared. Then they were examined for shared phonological features (e.g., repeated endings, consonant clusters, and syllable patterns). The study is based on qualitative and descriptive methods, using standard onomastic categories such as anthroponyms (personal names) and toponyms (place names). It follows the general approach used in literary onomastics.

Results and Discussion. In the novel, the elf characters have a special family name. Sylvanas is part of the Windrunner family, along with her brothers and sisters Alleria, Lirath, and Vereesa, and her mother Lireesa. The repeated use of the root *-reesa/-eesa* in both the mother and daughter's names (Lireesa, Vereesa) shows a purposeful family sound pattern, much like how real names often reflect a parent's name in a child's. In the book, elven names are usually multisyllabic and include liquid consonants such as l, r, and n. For example, the elven king is named Anasterian, and another character is called Rellian. This style makes elf names sound smooth and gives an “elegant” phonetic quality, unlike human names like Arthas or Varian, which are shorter and harder-sounding.

Place names follow a similar pattern. Quel'Thalas and Silvermoon use compound or apostrophe-marked structures, which is typical of the invented "Thalassian" naming style used in the series. While locations associated with humans, such as Stormwind and Lordaeron, usually have plain compound names. This split, in terms of geography, also shows the same difference between elves and humans that you can see in the personal names.

The most noticeable name pattern, however, is seen in Sylvanas's own titles. Throughout the novel, she is called by several names: Ranger-General, Lady Sylvanas, the Dark Lady, the Banshee Queen, and finally the Warchief. These are not just simple synonyms. Each title shows a different stage of her identity and how others, including the narrator, see her. "Ranger-General" belongs to her living, military elf identity. "Dark Lady" and "Banshee Queen" depict her as a dead, semi-supernatural being. "Warchief" shows her political ascension within the orc-led Horde. The accumulation of titles works almost like a naming ceremony throughout the whole book. Each new title is earned through a narrative event (her death, her leading the Forsaken, or her becoming Warchief), so the order of titles can be seen as a kind of onomastic biography.

This pattern fits what is described in literary onomastics as the symbolic, or "speaking," function of names, in which a name change signals character development rather than simple reference [2]. It also follows common practices in fantasy stories overall, where invented naming systems are used to create a feeling of shared culture and identity among different groups [3]. Golden's use of names in *Sylvanas* follows the same naming style seen in World of Warcraft. This means the book is not creating a new system for names but instead continues and uses an existing one to maintain internal consistency.

Conclusions. In short, names in *Sylvanas* serve two purposes at the same time. First, they group characters by their cultural background using similar sounds and structures. Second, they show how one character changes over time through a series of different titles. This makes the novel a useful, self-contained case study for literary onomastics in contemporary fantasy tie-in fiction.

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