

## Name Classification in *Fourth Wing* Trilogy: An Onomastic Study Based on John Algeo's Theory

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the classification of names in *Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros using John Algeo's Onomastic Theory. Names in literature often carry meanings that go beyond their function as identifiers; they reflect character traits, cultural values, and contribute to the construction of fictional worlds. The purpose of this study is to identify and classify the anthroponyms (character names) and toponyms (place names) found in the novel, and to analyze their functions in supporting the narrative. The findings show that the 94 names are distributed across the four categories as follows: 20 descriptive names, 18 associative names, 36 arbitrary (invented) names, and 20 transferred (etymological) names. Descriptive names highlight character traits and physical qualities, associative names link characters or places to symbolic meanings, arbitrary names emphasize creativity in world-building, and transferred names reveal etymological and cultural influences.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of English literature offers a rich and multifaceted exploration of human experience, societal values, and artistic expression. Through this study, we will engage with key texts and critical approaches to illuminate the ways in which literature reflects and shapes our understanding of the world. By delving into historical contexts, thematic concerns, and stylistic innovations, we hope to foster a deeper appreciation for the power of literature and its ability to resonate across time and space.

Literature is a broad term that encompasses various forms of written and spoken works, categorized into several genres, including poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction. Among these genres, the novel stands out as a significant form of fiction characterized by its length and complexity, which enables intricate plots and deeper character development. Novels focus on character growth and thematic exploration, tackling complex issues such as love, identity, and social justice. They employ various narrative techniques, including different perspectives and nonlinear storytelling, enhancing the reader's experience. Ultimately, the novel serves as a powerful medium for storytelling, engaging readers in profound ways and prompting reflection on both personal and societal issues.

Unlike realistic novels, fantasy novels often explore themes of heroism, good versus evil, and the supernatural, allowing readers to escape the boundaries of the real world while reflecting on universal truths and human nature. As one of the most popular and enduring genres, fantasy novels demonstrate the power of storytelling to both entertain and provoke thought through richly crafted imaginary realms.

Fantasy, as a genre, has historically relied heavily on the invention of new worlds—both geographically and culturally. From the mythic landscapes of Tolkien (1983) Middle-earth to the dynamic nations of George R.R. Martin (1996) Westeros, fantasy authors use names to construct immersive realities. These names often serve more than a referential function—they help define the values, histories, and power structures of their worlds. The genre's demand for deep world-building makes it fertile ground for onomastic study, allowing researchers to trace linguistic influences, cultural symbolism, and patterns of meaning through names alone.

Names are more than mere labels, they carry meaning, history, identity, and often subtle cultural connotations. In literature, names, whether of people or places, are chosen with intentionality, offering insight into character, setting, and theme. This field of study, known as onomastics, explores the origin, form, and use of names, and plays a significant role in the analysis of literary texts. John Algeo (1992), a prominent figure in the study of onomastics, proposed a classification of names into categories such as toponyms (place names) and anthroponyms (personal names), each serving unique linguistic and narrative functions.

Onomastics itself has grown as a scholarly discipline since the early 20th century, branching into various subfields, including literary onomastics. It has developed systematic approaches to understanding how names function across languages and texts, offering tools to decode the subtle ways names contribute to narrative structure, character identity, and thematic development. When applied to fantasy fiction, onomastics provides a deeper look into how authors strategically shape their invented worlds and the people within them. In this context, Rebecca Yarros' *Fourth Wing* emerges as a modern contribution to the genre, set in a richly imagined world where elite dragon riders train at a war college. The novel features a distinctive array of personal and place names that are integral to its immersive world-building. These names often signal a character's status, allegiance, or background, while toponyms evoke the geography and political structure of the fictional realm.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Algeo's Classification of Names*

English literature is a vast and dynamic field that encompasses a wide range of genres, styles, and historical contexts. From the early works of Beowulf and Chaucer to the modern narratives of contemporary authors, English literature reflects the evolution of language, culture, and societal values over centuries. This rich literary tradition not only serves as a repository of human experience but also provides insight into the complexities of identity, morality, and the human condition.

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Literature is a broad term that encompasses various forms of written and spoken works, categorized into several genres, including poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction. Poetry uses rhythmic and often metaphorical language to evoke emotions and convey ideas, employing devices such as imagery and symbolism to create a musical quality. Drama, encompassing plays and scripts intended for performance, combines dialogue, action, and stage directions to explore complex themes like conflict and morality, engaging audiences in a visceral way. Fiction, a broad category that includes narratives created from the imagination, allows authors to explore hypothetical scenarios and delve into themes that resonate with readers. Non-fiction, on the other hand, is based on factual information and real events, aiming to inform or persuade readers about specific topics.

Onomastics studies proper names their structure, origins, meanings, and social functions. Within literary studies, literary onomastics examines how names encode character identity, world-building cues, and thematic signals (Hough, 2015). Core subfields include anthroponymy (personal names) and toponymy (place names), alongside specialized branches such as zoonymy, chrematonymy, mythonymy, and astrononymy (Kridalaksana, 2000; Algeo, 1992). In narrative contexts, names rarely function as neutral labels; they carry cultural memory, status markers, and symbolic associations that shape readers' interpretations (Baker, 1997). In fantasy, where authors construct secondary worlds, names perform heightened work by telegraphing histories, power structures, and mythic resonance.

Algeo (1992) classifies literary names by how they convey meaning: descriptive (direct traits/features), associative (cultural or symbolic links), arbitrary/invented (no overt semantic tie), and etymological/transferred (historical/linguistic roots). This framework enables systematic coding of names and testing genre-specific patterns for instance, whether authority figures attract etymological gravitas or whether invented forms cluster in spatial world-building.

Fantasy constructs coherent secondary worlds that invite sustained belief (Tolkien, 1939), often blending mythic motifs with narrative wonder (Attebery, 1992; Warner, 1994). Narrative modes (portal, immersive, intrusion, liminal) shape how readers encounter magic and naming systems (Mendlesohn, 2008). Within such worlds, toponyms and institutional labels (e.g., orders, trials, wards) function as scaffolding for cultural logic and plot progression.

onomastics provides valuable insight into how names function linguistically and symbolically. It allows researchers to decode the cultural, historical, and narrative meanings embedded in names. Whether applied to real-world contexts or fictional texts, onomastics reveals the powerful role naming plays in shaping identity, memory, and meaning. For a literary work such as *Fourth Wing*, which features a rich array of invented names, onomastics offers a rigorous framework for examining how names contribute to the novel's thematic depth and narrative structure. By exploring the names within such a work, one can uncover layers of meaning that transcend their surface function, offering profound insight into character development, plot progression, and thematic exploration.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive qualitative method is a research approach that focuses on providing detailed descriptions and interpretations of phenomena without necessarily seeking to explain causal relationships or make predictions. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, focusing on textual analysis of names in *Fourth Wing*. The research is non-comparative and applies Algeo's classification to categorize names based on their descriptive, associative, arbitrary, or etymological functions.

The source of data for this research is the novel *Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros. The researcher used the content of the book as the primary data for analysis, focusing on the names, language, and contextual references found throughout the text. Specific passages, dialogues, and character interactions were selected to support the objectives of the study. The data were gathered from the published edition of the novel, covering the entirety of the narrative. The researcher used direct quotations and contextual analysis from the book as evidence for the research findings.

## RESEARCH RESULT

In this research, there are 94 names identified in the novel *Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros. These names are analysed and classified based on the Name Classification Theory proposed by John Algeo, which divides names into four categories: Descriptive, Associative, invented (Arbitrary), and Transferred (Etymological). The classification results are shown in the table below:

**Table 1. Name Classification**

Type of Name Classification	Frequency
Descriptive	17
Associative	23
Invented	36
Transferred	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>

The researcher employed John Algeo's Onomastic Theory to classify and analyse the character and place names. The names are categorized into four groups: Descriptive, Associative, invented (Arbitrary), and Transferred (Etymological). Based on the data findings and theoretical framework, the following analysis is presented:

### *Descriptive*

#### **Datum 1**

##### **Violet Sorrengail**

The first name "Violet" is a colour and a flower, both of which carry strong connotations of softness, delicacy, and gentleness. In English-speaking cultures, "violet" as a flower symbolizes modesty and humility, while as a colour, it can also represent nobility and mystery. This dual symbolism is significant for Violet's character development throughout the novel. Initially underestimated because of her frail appearance and scholarly upbringing, Violet evolves into a strong, resilient protagonist. The contrast between her name and her growth forms an intentional irony: a character named after something delicate becomes a symbol of strength and endurance.

The surname “Sorregail” is an invented name, but its complex structure with a double 'r', soft vowels, and an aristocratic cadence – suggests high status and legacy. The name has a lyrical quality, evoking a long-standing noble family, which aligns with Violet's background as the daughter of a high-ranking general. The name implies prestige, political power, and a burden of expectation. Together, "Violet Sorregail" reflects the tension between personal identity and social inheritance a theme central to Violet's struggle between familial duty and self-determination. Her journey from a reluctant candidate at Basgiath to one of the most powerful riders demonstrates how her name subverts assumptions and contributes to the theme of personal transformation.

## **Datum 2**

### **Aimsir**

Aimsir is another dragon name, meaning “weather” or “season” in Irish. The choice of this word emphasizes the dragon's command over natural forces and aligns it with the elemental worldbuilding of the series. The name is abstract yet distinctly environmental, creating a direct link between identity and domain. This descriptive naming strategy underscores the idea that dragons are not just creatures but embodiments of nature's primal energy. It reflects the fusion of identity with power a common motif in the novel. The name contributes to the elemental theme of the series weather isn't just background scenery but a force wielded by magical beings. Dragons are tied to the world's physical and magical equilibrium. The use of natural descriptors positions dragons not only as weapons but as embodiments of the world's primal essence.

### ***Associative***

## **Datum 3**

### **Xaden Riorson**

The name “Xaden” is not directly descriptive but carries strong associative value. The sharp consonant ‘X’, ‘D’, and ‘N’ suggest a sense of danger, rebellion, and power. While invented, the phonetic choices evoke a dark, commanding aura that aligns with Xaden's nature. The surname “Riorson,” constructed in a Norse-inspired patronymic format (meaning "son of Rior"), immediately places Xaden within a legacy. The association with his father who led a failed rebellion haunts his identity throughout the series. In the context of world-building, Xaden's name bridges personal trauma with political legacy. It highlights how names carry weight in Navarre's militarized society and how individuals are often defined by familial affiliations. As a marked child of rebellion and a powerful rider bonded to the most feared dragon, Xaden's name subtly aligns with his dangerous aura. The name fits the dark, militarized world of Basgiath, where names often reflect unspoken reputations and social weight.

#### **Datum 4**

##### **Sgaeyl**

Sgaeyl is a dragon name that appears linguistically ancient and phonetically dense. Though the name is invented, its unusual structure starting with “Sg-” and ending with a soft “-eyl” associates it with mythical or Celtic linguistic roots. The visual and auditory complexity of the name evokes the feeling of age, intelligence, and elemental grandeur. This dragon is bonded to Xaden and is known for her power and elegance, reinforcing the name’s royal and legendary resonance. Within the world of Basgiath, dragons are more than companions they are symbols of status and strength. Sgaeyl reinforces the ancient bond between humans and dragons, which is foundational to the Empyrean world. As a dragon bonded with Xaden, Sgaeyl’s name associates her with majesty and mystery. The name’s harshness adds to the world’s portrayal of dragons as proud, ancient, and dangerous beings that define the rider’s strength and social standing.

#### ***Invented (Arbitrary)***

#### **Datum 5**

##### **Tairn**

This dragon name contains a single syllable and strong consonants, projecting power, dominance, and authority. The hard 'T' and 'N' sounds add an auditory sharpness, evoking strength and ancient majesty. Its brevity makes it easy to remember and pronounce, which is significant for the commanding presence the dragon holds. The lack of a real-world etymology reinforces the mystique of dragonkind in the novel, suggesting that Tairn is not just a beast but a creature deeply embedded in the cultural and magical systems of the fantasy world. The name’s uniqueness avoids dilution by real-world meanings, allowing it to carry through the story. In terms of world-building, the name contributes to the mythos surrounding dragons in the *Empyrean* universe. Each dragon name is treated with reverence and authority, and Tairn’s name, while invented, is delivered with a gravitas that marks him as a force of ancient power. The distinctiveness of the name underscores the autonomy and status of dragons within the narrative’s magical hierarchy.

#### **Datum 6**

##### **Sgaeyl**

Sgaeyl” is another fully invented dragon name, notable for its complex and unfamiliar spelling. The initial “Sg-” consonant cluster is rare in English and lends the name an exotic, possibly Celtic or elvish quality, though it has no real etymological root. The ending “-eyl” softens the name slightly, suggesting elegance beneath the power. As Xaden’s bonded dragon, Sgaeyl is formidable and regal, and her name mirrors these attributes. In the context of world-building, “Sgaeyl” deepens the lore of dragon culture. The creative orthography implies that dragons possess their own linguistic traditions, reinforcing the idea that they are sentient beings with ancient histories separate from human society. The uniqueness of the name contributes to the fantasy immersion.

### ***Transferred (Etymological)***

#### **Datum 7**

##### **Liam Mairi**

The first name *Liam* is a common Irish name, derived from *Uilliam*, meaning "resolute protector." This etymology mirrors Liam's role as Violet's loyal protector and friend throughout *Fourth Wing*. His quiet strength, dependability, and ultimate sacrifice solidify his identity as a figure of unwavering guardianship. The surname *Mairi* is less commonly used as a surname but is derived from the Gaelic form of *Mary*, a name associated with purity and grief. This dual connotation strength and sacrifice reflects the emotional weight Liam carries. Together, *Liam Mairi* functions as a transferred name with deep cultural and emotional resonance. His name grounds the character in real-world familiarity, enhancing reader empathy, while subtly reinforcing the theme of protection, loyalty, and the cost of war.

#### **Datum 8**

##### **Jack Barlowe**

*Jack* is a familiar, strong Anglo-Saxon name, often used for everyman or bold characters. It conveys simplicity, bluntness, and action—a perfect fit for Jack's aggressive and arrogant personality. The name carries cultural connotations of stubborn masculinity and competitiveness, often associated with "bad boys" or antagonists. *Barlowe* is a real English surname of Old English origin, meaning "barley hill" or "bare hill." Its earthy, rustic origin contrasts with Jack's violent behavior, possibly suggesting a loss of nobility. Overall, *Jack Barlowe* as a transferred name signals a recognizable archetype: a brash, antagonistic figure whose confidence borders on cruelty. The name's realism situates him as a foil to more complex characters, adding moral tension to the story's social environment.

### **DISCUSSION**

The analysis of 94 names in *Fourth Wing* reveals that Invented names are the most frequent (38%), followed by Associative (24%), Transferred (19%), and Descriptive (18%). This pattern shows that Yarros primarily relies on imaginative naming while also drawing on symbolic and real-world linguistic sources. The high proportion of Invented names supports Algeo's (1992) observation that fictional works, especially fantasy, often develop unique nomenclatures to establish a distinct cultural and linguistic identity. Similar results were found in Barlow's (2018) study on *Harry Potter*, where invented names dominated but were supported by associative symbolism. In *Fourth Wing*, names such as "Sorrengeil" and "Sgaeyl" combine novel creation with phonological hints from real-world languages, lending authenticity to the fantasy world.

Associative names like "Wrath" and "Andarna" carry metaphorical weight, linking identity to narrative themes such as power, rarity, and rebellion. This is consistent with Algeo's idea that associative names evoke connotations that deepen characterization. Descriptive names, especially those with Gaelic roots such as "Teine" and "Deigh," reinforce the elemental magic system, a technique also noted in Susanti's (2020) study on Tolkien's work.

Transferred names in *Fourth Wing* draw from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including historical (“Navarre”) and multicultural sources (“Kaori”). This reflects a contemporary fantasy trend toward onomastic inclusivity, broadening worldbuilding beyond Eurocentric traditions. These findings confirm the applicability of Algeo’s theory while suggesting a refinement: modern fantasy often employs hybrid naming, where invented forms imitate descriptive or transferred structures to enhance symbolic resonance. The balance of creative invention and real-world reference in *Fourth Wing* illustrates how naming serves not only as a linguistic device but also as a tool for thematic development, cultural authenticity, and reader immersion.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of 94 names in *Fourth Wing* trilogy reveals that the majority of the names, totaling 77 items (81.9%), are anthroponyms, which include personal names, surnames, titles, and mythological or fantastical beings. Meanwhile, 17 items (18.1%) are toponyms, consisting of geographical locations, institutions, political entities, and other place-related terms. Invented names are the most frequent (38%), followed by Associative (24%), Transferred (19%), and Descriptive (18%). This pattern shows that Yarros primarily relies on imaginative naming while also drawing on symbolic and real-world linguistic sources. The high proportion of Invented names supports Algeo’s (1992) observation that fictional works, especially fantasy, often develop unique nomenclatures to establish a distinct cultural and linguistic identity.

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## ADVANCED RESEARCH

This research focuses on a trilogy, *Fourth Wing*, *Iron Flame*, and *Onyx Storm*. The study applies solely John Algeo's classification, leaving other possible approaches unexplored. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the analysis involves a level of subjectivity that could influence interpretation. Future research could analyze a wider range of novels in various genres to compare patterns of onomastics uses. Combining this framework with other linguistic or semiotic theories could also provide a more comprehensive view of the role sound effects play in enhancing visual narratives.

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