**Linguistic Imperialism in *Doctor Dolittle***

**Jonathan Rey Lee**

This paper explores naming and translation as forms of linguistic imperialism in Hugo Lofting’s

Doctor Dolittle series. In these children’s stories, mastery of language supports and connects

three primary hierarchical logics—colonialism, medicalization, and anthropocentrism.

The benevolent Doctor Dolittle has now captivated children for almost a century. I suggest that

Dolittle’s appeal does not come primarily from his virtue, but from his knowledge—more specifically, his mastery of language. He, therefore, exemplifies the power/knowledge relationship outlined by Michel Foucault. Dolittle’s linguistic imperialism may be more or less benevolent, but nonetheless reveals three institutions of power that held sway over Victorian thinking and still resonate today: colonialism, medicalization, and anthropocentrism.

As Dolittle voyages to Africa, he finds himself a colonial subject arbitrating between the civilized and uncivilized. Wielding his skill as a communicator, Dolittle is able to successfully navigate various dangers because of his ability to determine what others mean. In so doing, he demonstrates a colonial perspective that renders others knowable within its preexisting systems

of knowledge. This faith in the power of comprehension is strongly related to scientific discourse an era that was starting to institutionalize medicine. Naming was crucial to the classificatory project of the Victorian biological sciences and medical discourses that, as Foucault argues, interpellate sexuality within a nationalist biopolitics. Dolittle’s medical knowledge similarly serves to establish an anthropocentric perspective which measures others as more or less human. Importantly, ‘human’ is exemplified by Dolittle himself, a British, male, rational subject.

As a representation of linguistic imperialism, these stories about show how linguistic fluency can provide a foundation of power/knowledge that supports colonialism, medicalization, and anthropocentrism. As children’s literature, moreover, the circulation of these stories as aids to developing literacy is inextricable from their socializing function—the stories can themselves perform linguistic imperialism.

**Screen Names: Names and the Limits of the Human in Don DeLillo’s *The Body Artist***

**Candace Caraco**

One of the recurrent themes of Don DeLillo’s fiction is the power of language to constitute and

reconstitute the world. His 1982 novel—*The Names*—has this power as an organizing theme. His more recent novella *The Body Artist* explores this theme as part of a broader exploration of what it is to be human and the particular intersection of language, the body, and the human. Giorgio Agamben’s description of *homo sacer*, an obscure figure in ancient Roman law who was shunned from society, provides a model for understanding the relationship between and among the three main characters: Lauren Hartke, the eponymous body artist; her husband Rey Robles, a famous actor and director whose given name is Alejandro Alquezar; and the strange figure whom Lauren names Mr. Tuttle, the same name as a high school science teacher of hers. The novella’s few names are foregrounded at various junctures, and the names and the processes of naming are part of what demonstrates how DeLillo connects language to Agamben’s call for a re-envisioning of contemporary biopolitics.

In *The Body Artist*, the workplace for Lauren is, in some sense, the body itself. She performs in theatres, transforming her body so that it appears to be other bodies, but her work practice is wherever her body is. As a well-known artist, part of her workplace is arguably also the media, where she is “the body artist Lauren Hartke.” Her fading celebrity husband Rey has been trying to write an autobiography, and he has been working on this project in their rented summer home. His primary life’s work has been as an actor and director of feature films, and the novella makes clear that his private life has been played out in the media as if it were another feature. His screen name becomes the name by which he lives as well as by which he works, and in some ways he becomes trapped on screen. He seems unable to work, or to be, away from a camera.

The strange figure of Tuttle does not have a job or a workplace; he exists outside society, and it is occasionally unclear if he exists at all. He represents what Agamben refers to as “bare life” in *Homo Sacer: Bare Life and Sovereign Power*. He is both a double for and a foil to Rey (“king”), and the pair operate in a constellation around the body artist, playing out the limits of the human in a mediated world in which one’s identity is threateningly separated from one’s breath and bones. One’s name—that tie to family and history, culture and community—speaks to a call for language and identity to be more than an echo of someone else’s experience.

**Naming and the Work of Revolution: Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies***

**Christine De Vinne**

When Julia Alvarez mines historical record to recreate the Mirabal sisters, champions against the Trujillo regime of the Dominican Republic, she hails the revolutionary work of four women christened *Las Mariposas*. She narrates *In the Time of the Butterflies* retrospectively through the voice of Dedé, the only sister who survives. Now sixty-seven, Dedé has turned from the work of revolution to the domesticity of life insurance—the company’s top seller three years in a row. Meanwhile, her niece Minou, holding on to a mother she lost, frequents the fortune teller Fela, possessed by the spirits of the three dead women, her workplace a shed where a candle-lit table promises mystic reunion.

Fela’s name, rooted in *fe* ‘faith,’ which in turn anchors the verb *dar fe* ‘to testify,’ positions her, an ancillary character conjured as conjurer, central thematically to this novel of impassioned testimony. The contrast between this minor character, whom Alvarez can imagine and name, and main characters whose names are dictated by fact foregrounds the artistry of the historical novelist. Alvarez may hint at symbolic meanings behind the sisters’ actual names, Minerva, Patria, María Teresa, and Dedé, but her more effective onomastic work rests on the literal level. Her text records interrogation that proceeds by torture until “those who were captured gave out the names of other members” (323), while from the “liberties” she takes with history, glimpsed in the interplay between real and confected names, emerges a story of courage that she argues “can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by the imagination” (324).

This paper undertakes an onomastic examination of *In the Time of the Butterflies* at the intersection of fact and fiction. If fiction typically allows an author the creativity to bestow on characters names weighted with metaphoric meaning, the historical novelist is denied such freedom in the case of main characters. As Alvarez demonstrates, however, the symbolic use of names can be deftly applied to invented minor characters, while the discursive use of names remains central in the construction of meaning throughout.