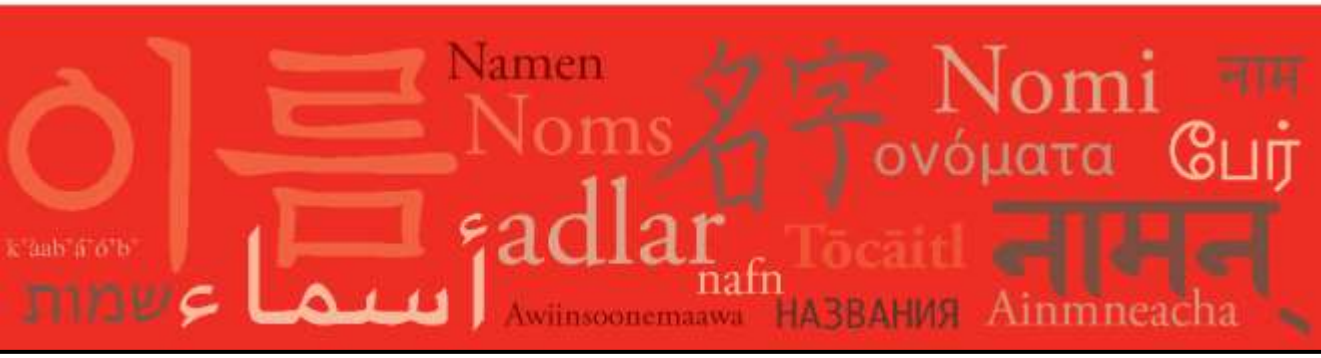
Names | A Journal of Onomastics



Book Review

Rhetorics of Names and Naming. EDITED BY STAR MEDZERIAN VANGURI. New York & London: Routledge. 2016. Pp. xi + 224. $52.95 (Paperback), ISBN: 9781138599574; $190 (Hardback), ISBN: 9781138910638; $47.65 (E-book), ISBN: 9781315693347.

With its focus on the "critical turn" in onomastics, this collection builds on extant work in areas including anthropology, postcolonial studies, and human geography, which have offered new directions for the study of names and naming over the past few decades. As exemplified by even more recent publications such as *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes* (2018), edited by Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu, and *Shifting Toponymies: (Re)shaping Places, (Re)shaping Identities* (2020), edited by Luisa Caiazzo and I. M. Nick, there is still much to be said about the politics of toponymy and toponymic practices, catalyzed in no small part by Jani Vuolteenaho and Lawrence Berg's influential collection, *Critical Toponymies* (2009). There is also considerable interest in a broader "critical onomastics," encompassing all topics in name studies open to such interpretation, such as literary onomastics, brand naming, tourism, political naming, and commemoration. This breadth of critical interest across onomastic sub-disciplines is evidenced for example by *The Postcolonial Condition of Names and Naming Practices in Southern Africa* (2016), edited by Oliver Nyambi, Tendai Mangena, and Charles Pfukwa; *Names and Naming: People, Places, Perceptions and Power* (2016), edited by Guy Puzey and Laura Kostanski; Mirko Casagranda's edited collection, *Names and Naming in the Postcolonial English-Speaking World* (2018); and *Naming, Identity and Tourism* (2020), edited by Luisa Caiazzo, Richard Coates, and Maoz Azaryahu.

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The Rhetorics of Names and Naming (2016) positions itself in relation to this critical turn in onomastics, its introduction summarizing the evolution of this approach. Furthermore, as Star Medzerian Vanguri states, "rhetorical theory has not integrated the study of names nor the process of naming into its analytical approaches" (1). Vanguri's volume therefore aims to shape and structure an understanding of a "rhetorical onomastics," which she defines as "an approach to name study that examines the social and political motives for and consequences of naming via the interaction of the namer and the named" (2). The book is divided into three sections and its chapters cover a diverse set of subjects ranging from toponymy to hashtags.

Section one examines naming as a means of "Performing Identity" through names for places, political nicknaming, naming and race, and the authorial power to name or not to name. In "Composing Place, Composing Las Vegas" (13–32), Cydney Alexis, Scot Barnett, and Eric Leake discuss the commemorative and commercial applications of names in the city, invoking the rhetorical concept of the *chora*, which "captures an uncertainty or indeterminacy in our conception of place wherein the city and what lies beyond the boundary of the city are united in the form of a singular name or idea" (13). Jason Thompson examines the nicknames employed by the former US president to create rhetorical effects—both successfully and unsuccessfully—in "From 'Big Time' to 'Turd Blossom': George W. Bush and the Rhetoric of the Political Sobriquet" (33-48). In the third chapter, "Nominal Blackness" (69-85), Lisa Woolfork builds on the work of Michelle T. Johnson, which calls for a reworking of rhetoric and composition studies that acknowledges and engages with constructions of race. She discusses several recent examples of racism directed towards the names of black people, and of black women in particular, concluding that black names "merit serious consideration as a site for discursive racist practices" (63). In "'Mononymous' Dickens: The Named and Unnamed in *Household Words*", Christine De Vinne explains that while Charles Dickens was editor of this highly popular Victorian weekly serial (1850–1859), its articles were written by a diverse team of contributors. She argues that his insistence on being the only named "creator" of the publication, despite its inherent hubris, was a powerful act of rhetoric which worked to his advantage, reinforcing the commercial status of the "Dickens" brand.

Section two, "Reinforcing Hegemony," considers names and power relationships in the context of immigrant names, technology, gender politics, and rhetorical imperialism. In chapter five, "Understanding the Life Narratives of Immigrants Through Naming Practices" (89–101), Angela Clarke-Oates, Duane Roen, and Sherry Rankins-Robinson consider the naming practices of newcomers to the United States of America and their varied experiences of naming their children, themselves, and of being named. There are gradations of "influence" over and pressure upon immigrants to change their names, from the enslaved, who had no choice in the matter, to economic refugees or opportunists, who may have been able to "choose" their name, albeit under extreme pressure to mask their identities where they did not already have names that conformed to the perceived norms of their new homeland. Moving to a completely different topic, the following chapter, "'Don't say Drone': Hits and Misses in a Rhetorical Project of Naming" (102–117) by Robin Shoaps and Sarah Stanley, considers the contested names for the "flying objects that humans control from a distance" (102). Different groups with an interest in the technology, including some members of the US military, we are told, are unhappy with the current uses of the word, a key rhetorical problem being that "the term 'drone' raises two issues of control: that of human agency as well as institutional control over the technology itself" (105). Despite the Victorian allusions in its title, "The Female Frankenstein: Naming Practices Constructing What It Means to Be a 'Woman'" (118-131), by Jessica Rose Corey, focuses on some very current issues in gender politics. Looking at contested practices such as female name-changes resulting from marriage, in cultures where that has been a traditional (hetero-)normative expectation, she argues that "discussions of choice and identity [...] eliminate any sense of consequence in the choice to pursue particular identities," when it is impossible to choose to conform to or reject a social expectation without encountering judgemental responses (123). In the final chapter in this section, "Crimean Tartar: Resisting A Deportation of Identity" (132–149), Christian Berry examines the uses of Russian naming as a means of legitimizing Russian hegemonies in the former Soviet Union. Observing that "[n]aming practices make possible narratives that marginalize and resist," he argues that a reclamation of Crimean naming practices will help to protect Crimean sovereignty (144).

Section three, "Creating Public Memory," considers names used in campaigns for social justice, names used historically for medicines, names in science and technology, and names generated via social media for events. In the first chapter in this section, Tim Jensen discusses "Social Movement Names and Global Frames" (153–169). Focusing on the Anti-Globalization Movement, he argues that the name of the movement "interposes a host of ideological assumptions that greatly limit activist agendas," and that those limitations present several difficulties, given "the challenge of rhetorical unification on a *global* scale" (166). Taking her lead from work in branding and in anthropology, Elizabeth Lowry's "Eponymous Elixirs: Mrs. Pinkham, Nineteenth-Century Patent Medicines, and the Rhetoric of Naming" (170–181) discusses the significance of a female brand name at that time in the United States, noting that "the Pinkham name came to represent an ideology that helped to build a significant model of empowerment for women" (177). Until a "Civil War" was mentioned, it was not clear where in the world we were, which serves as an additional reminder of the

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challenges of global communication. In "The Genome, the Meme, and the Teme Go off the Map: Observing Naming, Metaphor, and Circulation in Three Contested Terms" (182–195), David Bedsole considers the semantic evolution of terms which began life in popular science and took on new meanings, particularly as they proliferated across social media. His description of words such as *meme* as *names* is however problematic, as it does not accord with the basic premise in linguistics that *names* do not denote categories and are always definite, unlike *nouns*, which do denote categories and may be definite or indefinite (see for example Anderson, 2007). This reader also chooses to confess that the definition for *teme* initially proffered, "a more recent manifestation of the genetic metaphor" (183), was puzzling and unsatisfactory, but upon scurrying back from the internet where Susan Blackmore's article had come to the rescue, *temes* being "technological memes" in the form of "digital information stored, copied, varied and selected by machines" (2010), it transpired that more was to follow from Bedsole on the history and development of *teme*, the meaning of which is contested (189–190). In the final paper, "#Jan25: The Naming of an Event" (196–212), Katherine Bridgman considers the significance of the social media name for the protest movement against Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, which derived from the date of the key rally in Cairo on January 25, 2011. She notes both the power of the name, as a Twitter hashtag, to garner international support and galvanize the movement (209), and the fluidity of names, reliant as they are on an agreed social construction to facilitate unambiguous communication (210).

There is something here for everyone interested in onomastics and rhetoric, and it seems likely that this work will be a feature on reading lists across both discipline areas for some time to come. The structure of the three sections could arguably have been rearranged in a more intuitive configuration. The discussion of names and racism in Woolfork's chapter, for example, could be viewed as an illustration of "Reinforcing Hegemony" (the title of Section two) rather than "Performing Identity" (the title of Section one, where the chapter is located). There is considerable cross-over on gender politics between Woolfork's chapter and Corey's chapter, suggesting that an anthroponymy section could have emerged in its own right. Similarly, the chapter on names in Las Vegas by Alexis, Barnett, and Leake, located in Section one, could equally be viewed as an example of "Creating Public Memory" (the title of Section three). The organization of the papers may signal a rejection of categorization by onomastic sub-disciplines; it certainly emphasizes the volume's objective of integrating "rhetorical" approaches within onomastics, and it is probably inevitable that the elements binding each section also cross over into the others.

The volume is generally well presented, although there are a few continuity errors and typos that may cause brief speed-bumps; for example, the introduction discusses Berry's chapter as chapter seven, followed by Corey's, when Corey is seventh, followed by Berry. As is all too often the case in current publications, and therefore a somewhat unfair criticism here, the index is disappointingly brief and rather haphazard. It omits, for example, a quotation by J. R. R. Tolkien (141), while pointing us towards one by H. L. Mencken (92), and provides no mention of the points about Ireland (92), the Swedish (96), or Seattle (165). Rather unusually, the bibliography for each individual chapter appears after the notes to that chapter, and there is no single combined list that consolidates all of the sources together.

Some mention of a volume's weaknesses is expected in any review, but those above are very minor, compared to the significance of the book as a whole. This is a timely and thought-provoking collection which demonstrates the very wide application of rhetorical approaches to names and naming. Bedsole's identification of nouns such as *meme* as *names*, as noted above, shows that there is more work to be done to create a meeting of minds and theories across onomastics and rhetoric, but this is an important step towards meaningful interaction between these approaches. The book makes an important contribution to the growing body of critical work that views names through new lenses, no less because of the significance of the topics to the present moment in which so many questions are being asked of established power structures and norms that are no longer accepted. Each of the chapters looks at questions of naming and (re)presentation, with many of the authors linking concepts from rhetoric with their subjects of study, and in doing so helping the volume as a whole achieve its stated aim of bringing rhetoric and onomastics together. It will be very interesting to see what this cross-pollination of discipline areas encourages; there are myriad points of intersection among naming, persuasive language, and perception that need our attention.

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