Personal Names: Materials and Methods

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This issue of *Names* is concerned exclusively with the study of personal names. I shall not refuse to perform an anatomy on the very body of articles I bring before readers. Before doing so, I must confess two things. One, I had to exorcise my whimsicality which sorely tempted me to entitle this introduction "Chaucer, the Celts, the Choctaws, and Callie Mae." A cool rationalist at heart, I rejected these pulsating consonants for the staid, but nonetheless lucid, title at the top of this page. Two, the contributors must be absolved from any charges of collusion for writing about names in the South. Neither they nor I were involved in sub rosa activities to capitalize on onomastics in Dixie. Each contributor wrote *suo nomine* and *sui juris*. These admissions behind me, I shall now explore some of the common themes and shared concerns of this issue.

Each essay sheds light on the richness and variety of personal names. Although there is much appreciation of individual names, the emphasis is on what names tell us about a culture. Names reflect the distinctiveness of a culture just as accurately as fingerprints do for an individual. The contributors have excavated the written artifacts of a culture — census materials, commencement announcements, lists of family names, literary texts, tribal newspapers, and obituaries — to interpret its evolution and values. Ovid Vickers explores the totems and taboos behind Choctaw names; viewing names from a sweeping historical perspective, he documents the enculturation of this noble tribe. Grady McWhiney and Forrest McDonald use name analysis to understand the settlement history of the Old South, observing that "the further south and west from Philadelphia the more Celtic the population." As in name so in custom is their thesis. Studying the names of the quick and the dead of the New South, John Algeo and Adele Algeo record how shifts in taste and temperament are accompanied by changes in names. Their work reveals how deep mores about traditions, family, politics, and even gender surface in the selection of a name. Emerson Brown, Jr. focuses on the vital role names play in the art of a culture. When Chaucer employs the name January, he "expects imagination, learning, playfulness, and even some sense of morality from his audience."

The corpus supporting these conclusions is impressive. But perhaps of even greater usefulness to researchers are the detailed descriptions of the methods by which these names are collected, classified, and analyzed. The attention paid to process should satisfy readers' needs for what Brown calls "validation." The most provocative method in the issue is that used by McWhiney and McDonald to "assign each name a figure representing its relative Englishness and Celtishness." These historians rely on both projection and apportionment techniques and are quick and careful to point out the biases inherent in their system, since these biases increase the validity and reliability of their findings. The Algeos' methodology is exemplary of the best onomastic field work being done today. As perspicacious as the Alabama historians, the Algeos describe the time, place, and sources of their survey. Problems presented by variant spellings and duplicate or foreign names are neatly resolved. Using the traditional methods of literary research, Emerson Brown garners a wealth of data about the etymology and allusiveness of the name *January*. Reading classical myths and legends, the Church Fathers, and French fabliaux, Brown marshalls an impressive array of evidence. Ovid Vickers, too, descends into lore and legend to formulate his thesis about name changes among the Choctaws.

Ultimately, the articles in this issue will be judged by their impact on future scholarship. There is no gainsaying that these essays will enrich our response to past studies, which they validate, modify, or challenge. John Algeo and Adele Algeo return to the same onomastic field Thomas Pyles explored thirty years ago to find that "personal names in one part of the South contrast strikingly with the results of the Pyles's studies." Gone with the wind evidently are the "exotic" names that charmed readers of Pyles's work. On the wane are some commemorative names and hermaphroditic binomials. Ovid Vickers adds another chapter in the saga of the Choctaws. Using the insights of the chroniclers of the Choctaw nation, Vickers explains why some Choctaws bear such Southern names as Anita Jim or are surnamed La Pease or Romero. Taking the point in challenging some recent studies, Emerson Brown objects to an unquestioned transparency and simplicity often assigned to Chaucer's names. The supposedly uncomplicated name of January, Brown argues, subsumes various motifs in the *Merchant's Tale* that have revealing classical analogues. McWhiney and McDonald classify names to corroborate a long held view that "sectionalism [is] based upon settlement patterns." Good Celts themselves, they will certainly encounter opposition from some historians who believe that it was the English — of undiluted Anglo-Saxon blood — who were the South's most numerous and prominent citizens. I shall

follow closely the reception of the following viewpoint expressed in their article: ''Englishmen in the South [were] to become Celticized.''

As I have worked on this issue, I thought often about Thomas Pyles, now of angelic address, who first aroused and nurtured my interest in names. I dedicate this issue to him. Nullum quod tetgit non ornavit.

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