2020 Award for Best Article in NAMES: A Journal of Onomastics

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For more than a decade, the American Name Society has singled out an outstanding article to be given the Best Article of the Year Award. To select the publication to receive this prestigious honor, each of the members of the Editorial Board independently reviewed all of the articles that had been published in 2020. As per ANS tradition, obituaries, notes, and book reviews were excluded from consideration. To make their decision, Board Members were asked to select the publications which they felt possessed the highest degree of creativity; had the greatest potential to make a substantive contribution to onomastics; and demonstrated the best writing style. Then, in a secret ballot, the Board members cast their votes.

The results were tallied and four publications received the highest number of votes. In alphabetical order by primary author, the following publications were selected as the top four articles for 2020: (1) "'Harry, You Must Stop Living in the Past:' Names as Acts of Recall in John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom" by Peter Backhaus (Waseda University, Tokyo, JAPAN) which appeared in NAMES 68, no. 4: 210–221; (2); "Women's Marital Surname Change by Bride's Age and Jurisdiction of Residence: A Replication" by Melanie MacEacheron (Nova Southeastern University, Florida, USA) from NAMES 68, no. 4: 193–209; (3) "Corpus-Linguistic Onomastics: A Plea for a Corpus-Based Investigation of Names" by Heiko Motschenbacher (Western Norway University, Bergen, NORWAY) in NAMES 68, no. 2: 66–103; and (4) "Simplex Generic Toponyms in Four English-speaking Jurisdictions" by Jan Tent (MacQuarie University, Canberra, Australia) in NAMES 68, no. 1: 17–31. What is particularly striking when one examines this list is not only the outstanding caliber of the scientific research demonstrated by these contributions, but also the remarkable diversity of the topics, name types, and analytic methods utilized by these scholars. In addition, in line with NAMES' commitment to helping to expand the geographic and cultural diversity of published onomastic research, this year's top candidates come from a wonderful kaleidoscope of different countries. From Europe to Asia, North America and Australia, these authors are a powerful reflection of the today's global onomastic community.

In a second round of voting, the members of the Editorial Board faced the arduous task of selecting one publication to receive this year's award. On October 9, 2021, the ballots of the Editorial Board were tallied once again. The results were unusually close, with just a few votes separating the top two candidates. The publication that received the second highest number of votes was Peter Backhaus's "'Harry, You Must Stop Living in the Past:' Names as Acts of Recall in John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom". Across the board, this publication was adjudged to exemplify modern literary onomastics. As one Board Member noted, "This is an unusual and fascinating article, which explores the function of names as a stylistic device across John Updike's 'Rabbit Angstrom' – a single volume which constitutes four novels previously released individually". Backhaus's ability to interweave his insightful character analyses with Updike's legendary humor made this contribution a truly enjoyable read.

However, it was not only the superior writing style of this piece that marked its excellence. As one Board Member summarized, aside from the outstanding character analysis, this contribution helped to shed new light on a famous US American writer, while spotlighting the power of using onomastics as a literary tool. A similar assessment was offered by another Board Member who wrote that "this engaging paper has the potential to impact the field of onomastics", not only within literary studies. It also has the potential to inspire researchers to explore "name usage across the lifespan" to determine how names function "as a mechanism of memory imprint". The potential to stimulate new avenues of onomastic research was also a key factor in the final selection process. Below are just a few of the many accolades Board Members gave this year's winning article:

> This author's analysis reached a dimension that extended well beyond that of an isolated data sample. This 'exemplary in-depth study' provided a 'grounded vision' that points to 'new directions in onomastics'.

> This work offers 'an excellent meta-analysis of how corpus linguistics can enhance onomastic research'.

> 'The writing style and organization of the article make it accessible for onomasticians without experience in corpus linguistics, opening up the approach to a wider audience'. This work presents 'an excellent meta-analysis of how corpus linguistics can enhance onomastic research'.

> The article gives an 'excellent analysis-cum-synthesis of contemporary developments in onomastics. [...] Accounting for both historical and contemporary development, it includes theory, grammar, and corpus-based study [...] [;] its contribution to names studies directly serves to advance the field'.

> 'Aside from being exceedingly well-written and pristinely organized, this publication has already had a palpable impact on onomastic research to date. The author's plaidoyer for the increased use of corpus linguistics approaches for the investigation of onomastic data is convincing without being disrespectful or dismissive of other approaches that have either come before it or are used alongside it. This publication will no doubt become an international classic and promises to have a powerful and positive impact on the next generation of onomastic scholars.'

The article which garnered the above praise and emerged as the winner of the ANS 2020 Award for Best Article of the Year is "Corpus-Linguistic Onomastics: A Plea for a Corpus-Based Investigation of Names" by Heiko Motschenbacher of Western Norway University. Dr. Motschenbacher will be sent a commemorative plaque and will be invited to give a lecture about his work in the upcoming annual conference of the American Name Society. In addition, announcements about this accomplishment will appear on the official websites of the ANS and NAMES. An official press release about Dr. Motschenbacher and the other finalists will also be issued to inform the larger scientific community and the general public.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of NAMES, the worldwide community of NAMES readers, and the members of the American Name Society, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Motschenbacher for this impressive achievement. I would also like to thank the members of the Editorial Board for their participation in the deliberation process and their year-long commitment to giving a public platform for cutting-edge onomastic research. It is through their continued professional and personal dedication that NAMES has continued to be one the foremost scholarly publications in onomastic research for nearly three-quarters of a century.