

BOOK REVIEWS

The City In Slang: New York Life And Popular Speech. By Irving Lewis Allen. New York: Oxford University Press 1992. Pp. 307. \$25.00

Irving Lewis Allen (Sociology, University of Connecticut) has linked unconventional language and conventional social science before in such well-received studies as *The Language of Ethnic Conflict* (1983) and *Unkind Words* (1990). In *The City in Slang* he writes a captivating cultural history of *The Big Apple* in terms of its slang. All linguists and especially onomasticians will be fascinated by the words and names of the city's slang (poetry with its sleeves rolled up) and popular speech. This is *The Big Town, Noisyville-on-the-Subway, Fun City*, the urban site where immigrants brought in such vivid coinages as *buttinsky, schmuck, mulligan stew* and where the mind of the masses is reflected in such American creations as *hot dog, rubberneck, yuppies*; in such hash-house lingo as *Adam and Eve on a raft* (poached eggs on toast), *eggs in the dark* (fried "over"), *burn the British* (toast an English muffin); in such expressions as *all dolled up like Mrs. Astor's pet horse* and *don't get ritzy with me and it's a jungle out there*.

New Yorkers created a number of placenames it would be hard to find on any map. Can you identify: *African Broadway, Big Alley/Artery/time, Artful Alley, The Avenue, Baloney Boulevard, El Barrio, Beer Gulch, the Black Belt, Bone Alley, Bottle Alley, Coffee Pot Canyon, Coney, Coontown, Darktown, Dead End, Dream Street, East Village, French Town, Gashouse, Gay Gulch, Germantown, Gotham, Hardened Artery, Hell's Kitchen, The Inferno, The Jungle, Ladies' Mile, Levity Lane, Main Drag, Minnesota Strip, Nigger Row, Oatmeal Flats, Orange Juice Gulch, Panic Beach, Peacock Alley, Poverty Hill, Queer Street, The Rialto, Satan's Circus, Shinbone Alley, The Street, Tin Pan Alley, Tungsten Territory, The Valley, Wop Town*, etc.? Allen misses a number of informal New

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York placenames (such as *Alphabet City*, *Loisada* formerly *The Lower East Side*, *The Docks*) but as the abbreviated list above amply indicates, he has carefully researched the history of the city that has placenames so famous (such as *Wall Street* and *Broadway*) that they stand for whole spheres of activity, the city that "never sleeps," the city that is so great "they had to name it twice," *New York, New York*. This is the place where *Coney Island red hot* and *Madison Avenue* (as equivalent to the advertising game) and *Bronx cheer* originated. This is where people used to say *Don't act as if you were born on The Bowery* and *Meet me under the clock* (at The Biltmore) and think up name stories such as the one that soberly suggested that the department store *E. J. Korvettes* was started by "eight Jewish Korean veterans." It's in New York that we have the biggest *Chinatown*, the most vibrant *Little Italy*, the most fashionable *East Side*. It's in New York that we have *The Village* and signs (in the Brooklyn subway) saying, "To *The City*." Even the numbered grid system has produced famous street names: think of *Fifth Avenue* and *42nd Street*.

Allen's book is more than a lexicon. It introduces us to *Champagne Charlie* and *Café Society* and *Hobohemia*, to *Howling Swells* and *bag ladies* and *Shit Street* and *Fifth Avenoodles*, to *pavement princesses*, *puller-ins*, *Shanty Irish*, *Strivers' Row residents*, *Bowery bums*, *the Four Hundred*, and more. It writes the hectic history of the Establishment and the minorities in one of the world's most lively cities and brilliantly and entertainingly gives us the "social meaning" of city streets, the bright lights, the back alleys, the *upper crust* and the *underclass*, the *city slickers* who have gravitated ever since Dutch days to "where it's at."

This involves political and theatrical history, the story of big-time business and popular culture, the *skyscrapers* – he misses nicknames of these such as *Black Rock* – and the mean streets of the *ghettoes*. Some of the colorful language he has dug up is now obsolete. Who now knows of *mashers*, *spielers*, or even *the beautiful people*? However, the nineteenth-century life of New York remains interesting. And nineteenth-century coinages such as *rush hour* remain part of everyday speech.

The street language of New York inevitably got into print in journalism, in the dialogue of realistic fiction, in the gossip

columns popular even before Robin Leach attached himself to the *lives of the rich and famous*. Slang was joyfully taken up by the smart set, by vaudeville comedians, by radio personalities, by playwrights and screenwriters and others who made the hardboiled New Yorkers and the "poypetraytuhs" of "the Brooklyn accent" and the New York Jew and other stereotypes nationally known. Slang from *Tin Pan Alley* songs was on everyone's lips. Indeed, the picture of urban life in America may be said to have been drawn in large part in slang terms and to New York specifications, Chicago being only *The Second City* and Los Angeles and San Francisco and New Orleans, etc., being regarded as too distinctive (and a little too provincial) to be the models of American big-city life. To a large extent it was New York that was held up in contrast to *the boonies, the sticks, Nowheresville*, and it was New York that was contrasted with the suburbs and the exurbs and the life that was quieter (because way out on *Lawn Guyland* or way off in Connecticut or the wilds of New Jersey, the hick towns of the *Tri-State area*) but duller because not in NYC.

Sapir tells us language is culture. In the informal language of New York City, Allen portrays the great American metropolis in all its glory and in all its sordidness. He presents the picture in a book that is a joy to read. It is a book chock full of delights and surprises and a wealth of learning worn lightly but none the less impressive for all that.

The City in Slang you should get in a *New York minute*. It tells you a lot about what Harry Leon Wilson (*The Spenders*) describes as "a little strip of an island with a row of well-fed folks up and down the middle, and a lot of hungry folks on each side."

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Names in Modern German Literature. Essays on Character- and Place-Name Selection by Twentieth Century German Authors. By Russell E. Brown. Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik Nr. 247. Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, Akademischer Verlag, Steiermarker Strasse 132, D-7000 Stuttgart, Germany, 1991. Pp. 105. Paper, price not given.

Russell E. Brown's excellent name study collection comprises nine independent essays on Anna Seghers, Peter Handke, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Jurek Becker, Heinrich Böll, and Hans Henny Jahn. In addition it includes a very informative essay on "Pen Names in German Literature 1900-1933" as well as a resourceful study on "*Jacob and Joseph as Character Names in Modern Literature.*"

Four of the essays have never been published; five were originally presented at scholarly conferences and published in revised form in *Literary Onomastics Studies, Names, and Onomastica Canadiana*. Each essay includes an independent bibliography; thus, if needed, it repeats secondary sources of works consulted. A useful index of authors and works mentioned concludes this collection of essays.

The study on Anna Seghers correctly assumes that the choice of place and character names reveals as well as denies a locale in Brittany. Among others the topographical identification of Margaret Island is questioned but left unresolved. However, it is known that Anna Seghers married a Hungarian in 1925 and her name had become Radványi and that she was familiar with the landmarks of Budapest. (Hence, Budapest's famous Margaret Island, abundantly publicized by the very popular writer Ferenc Molnár whose works were instantaneously published in German in the 1910s and 1920s – might have been the source of this puzzling toponym. Molnár's famous novel about Margaret Island was later translated into English and was published also under the title *The Captain of St. Margaret's*.)

The two essays on Peter Handke correctly stress the influence Kafka had on the author. It emphasizes that Handke modelled his onomasticon on Kafka's practice. The analysis on denotative names in *The Visit* by Dürrenmatt appropriately focuses on the post World War II period of unparalleled prosperity in Germany and Switzerland which demonstratively demotes humanitarian values. Just to illustrate Brown's correct point of view the two most important names are mentioned here. The central core of the drama revolves around Claire Zachanassian, whose name, according to Dürrenmatt, is a combined variation of *Zacharoff*, *Onassis*, and *Gulbenkian*, men of great wealth. But so does *Güllen*, the main toponym, have a very negative connotation, meaning "liquid manure."

Becker's onomastic pattern reflects Nazi persecution, ghetto life, and the Holocaust. The onomastic analysis has had to be confined to internal evidence since Jurek Becker has not responded to Brown's inquiry. The study on Böll tries to differentiate between meaningful and meaningless names of a highly-charged political climate in the former West Germany. The onomastic essay on Jahn correctly reflects the writer's philosophy as an outsider of German literature.

The study on pen names properly assumes the rejection of an existing inferiority name due to social prejudice, hiding a personal history, etc. Furthermore, it demonstrates – with excellent examples – the positive qualities of chosen names in German literature during the first thirty years of our vulnerable century. The tracing, for instance, of B. Traven's name shows the power of a pseudonym on a literary career. Here again, I am tempted to add the name of Ferenc Molnár, who in 1896 rejected Neumann, his family name, to assert officially that he does not want to write under a German name! The last essay traces *Jacob* and *Joseph* as character names in modern German literature from the Old Testament to the Holocaust. Literary onomasticians will enjoy this first-rate collection of well researched and documented essays. Strongly recommended for college and university libraries.

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The Baby Namer! Daniel A. Richman, Program Developer. StudyWare Corporation, P.O. Box 80728, Lincoln, NE 68501. 1991. Four 3½" discs for IBM PC, XT, AT, PS2, Compatibles (5¼" disks available with swap card). With manual, \$39.95.

Here is a software package which is certain to provide parents-to-be with hours of enjoyment while they search from among 14,000 choices for just the right name. For that purpose I can recommend *The Baby Namer!* to those who are in the process of considering names for a new baby. It is not an exhaustive list, nor is it a scholarly compilation (although parts of the "References and Bibliography" section read like the membership list for the American Name Society), but it does offer a new and different way to look at choosing names. Because it allows for dynamic interaction in a way no book can ever provide, it enables people to have fun while considering the thousands of name possibilities.

The software installs fairly quickly on a hard disk if there is at least 512k free. Once installed, the package is very easy to use since it is menu driven and is largely self-explanatory. The main menu allows one to choose from among several activities – "Choose Names," "General Info," "Look Up" or "Scrambler."

"Choose Names," which will probably be the most frequently accessed of the activities, allows the user to specify up to eight characteristics associated with the "ideal" baby name. One may limit the search by selecting:

- 1) *Gender* – Feminine, Masculine, Unisex, or Any (i.e., unspecified). The "Gender" category also contains the personal observations of some who have written about the relationships of gender to names, (e.g., "Women who bear and use their masculine names are no more masculine or poorly adjusted than their feminine-named counterparts.") and cites various studies and research in this area.

- 2) *First Letter* – A through Z or Any (i.e., unspecified). This category is accompanied by various opinions concerning initial

letters, (e.g., "N – '[S]ounded from within, and therefore [has] a notion of inwardness' – Socrates.")

3) *Language/Ethnicity* – The searcher may select from among sixty-four possibilities, from Acadian to Yiddish. However, a word of caution here – spot checks of the material indicate that some languages or ethnicity areas are better represented than others. The compilers of this package relied on various "experts" in language or ethnic areas and, according to the bibliography, at least some of the groupings from which one can choose contain the research and opinions of only one person. While this may be fine in many cases, there are at least some areas which are problematic. I was especially bothered by the "Native American" category which has quite a long list of names from which to choose. However, each name is simply identified as "Native American" with a very brief etymology, but with no indication from which of the many Native American languages it arose. It goes without saying that there is no *one* Native American language and to merely accumulate these names under one heading is misleading at best. It also makes one wonder as to the validity of the etymologies. Other categories are lacking in other ways. For example, Korean appears to have a total of nine names – 5 male and 4 female. This obviously does not even approach a comprehensive list. However, it is better than Phoenician, which has only one male name and no female name, or Sanskrit, which again, is represented by only one name – Zudora – which, I suspect, was only included in order to increase the listings under the letter "Z."

4) *Meaning* – As the directions in this category state: "[it] organizes the meanings of names into groups and lets you select one meaning each time you choose names." Frankly, I am not so sure how one would use this category since the selections are so general (e.g., "Animals," "Birth and Family," "The Heavens," and "Nature's Places") but, with time and patience, it may well lead to some interesting searches.

5) *Popularity* – "[R]eflects how often a name has been given to newborns in the U.S. and Canada during the most recent year for which information was available." As they point out – "It does NOT reflect popularity in other countries, or within specific ethnic groups or communities in those two countries." It is worth noting

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here that the entire software package is designed for the U.S. and Canada and is therefore limited. It is also worth observing that the "Popularity" category is probably the one category which will be most affected by the passage of time.

6) *Activities of Namesakes* – This category allows one to choose a name "by the field – for example, law, fiction, or TV – or others of note who have had that name." Here again, it is hard to imagine how one would use this category except, perhaps, as an interesting ancillary to one's search. Once again, though, remember that it is largely limited to the U.S. as well as to figures of this century.

7) *Number of Syllables* – Here one may choose the number of syllables to have in a given name. The description contends that this will help to "determine whether a name is euphonic... – a very subjective matter." While remaining objective on these matters, the accompanying notes offer the opinions of various authors on the length of given names. For example, "some think" that if "the family name is short, the first name should be long... and vice versa." After providing several examples they diplomatically suggest that "Obviously, what ultimately 'sounds best' is what sounds best to you."

8) *Number of Nicknames* – Here one may ponder the positive and negative aspects of some of the nicknames associated with the chosen name.

In the "Choosing Names" category of the main menu, then, users are allowed to *limit* their list of names by selecting various criteria or qualifiers. They are then presented with a list from which to choose the ideal name. Having selected a name to further scrutinize, the user may turn to the "Look Up" section of the software to discover relevant information and an etymology. Generally speaking, these etymologies are short and, in some cases, misleading, but they probably give those with a casual interest in names more than enough information upon which to make an informed decision on their baby's name.

The last major section of the main menu, "Scrambler," provides the various arrangements of a chosen name. It also allows one to avoid a name which would result in an unfortunate set of initials. For example, *Francesca Adrienne Thomas* is noted

as a possible problem because it results in the initials FAT which, like all possibly problematic initials, are flagged with !@#%.

Before concluding this review, I am compelled to comment on an annoying aspect of the software which inconvenienced me more than once and is likely to irritate most purchasers of this program as well. In order to make the use of the product difficult by those who would pirate a copy of it, an "Ownership Verification" stage requires users to refer to a particular page in the manual *every time* they attempt to use the software. It works like this: the computer prompts:

"Like this program, rock-and-roll artists are prolific 'baby-namers' – nearly 100 hit songs over the past 40 years have the word 'baby' in their titles. Using the *Baby Namer!* manual, enter the year that this song made the 'Top 40':

'It's Love, Baby'
by Ruth Brown
Song #62
...."

The user must then turn to the manual, read down the list, find "Song #62" and type in the year – which in this case is "1955." The software is only then enabled. All of this sounds simple enough and it does ostensibly protect the Cliff StudyWare Corporation from piracy, but for the legitimate user, it can seriously impact one's plans. This review would have been finished sooner, for example, if I had not left the manual in my office over the weekend that the Northeast U.S. was "snowed-in" by the great blizzard of 1993. I was simply unable to use *Baby Namer!* during the time I had set aside to study it. Easily remedied by photocopying that page of the manual, you might offer? No, they thought of that too! The "code page" is printed on a very dark, almost maroon stock with a very dark ink. It does not reproduce. If those codes are lost, your purchase is worthless. All of this, at most, is an inconvenience to the serious software pirate who will need to retype the page in order to make the theft complete, but I was offended that, as a legitimate user, I was

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required to find the manual every time I wanted to use *Baby Namer!*

In summary, even though *Baby Namer!* has its limitations and certainly is not a scholarly publication, it is an interesting concept which has been fairly well realized. I believe that it merits the attention of those who are considering names for a new addition to their family.

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Streetwise Baltimore: The Stories Behind Baltimore Street Names.
By Carleton Jones. Bonus Books, 160 East Illinois St., Chicago, IL 60611. 1990. Pp. vi + 224. Paper, \$14.95.

Baltimore was laid out in 1730, after being authorized by the Maryland general assembly in 1729, the stipulation being that it be a new port at the headwaters of the Patapsco River. The newly platted swampy area was named for the Lords Baltimore, the hereditary title of the Calvert family, proprietors of the colony of Maryland, whose seat was the barony of Baltimore in Ireland.

The Calverts – who are hardly mentioned except in a street name – and Maryland are coterminous elements in the history of the state. The first was George Calvert, 1st Baron of Baltimore (1580-1632), who somehow managed to obtain a charter from Charles I (before the beheading, obviously) for a colony named Maryland for Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I and daughter of Henry IV of France and his wife, Marie de Medici. George Calvert, for whom Calvert County is named, died before he actually received the charter, which passed to his son Cecilius (1605-1675), 2nd Baron of Baltimore, first proprietor of the colony, which

he never visited. Cecil and his wife Anne Arundell are remembered in counties named for them.

Charles Calvert (1637-1715), 3rd Baron Baltimore, also is honored with Charles County, and he was also active in the affairs of the colony, as was Frederick Calvert (1731-1771), 6th Baron Baltimore, the last proprietor of the colony. Both Frederick County and Frederick, the county seat, are named for him; Harford County is named for Frederick's illegitimate son.

Such historical background should have appeared in the introduction to *Streetwise*, but did not. The overall view of Baltimore since 1730 dwells more on the cultural conditions than on the actual history of the city and the naming characteristics. Still, although not onomastically sound, the volume has much information that has value and also entertainment worth, for it is written in a breezy style, journalistic, with many such, well, crude metaphors and images as "the community squealed in horror," "with airy aplomb," "the estates come in bunches," "Grandpa [George W. Shoenhals] also named a road Bareva [for daughters Barbara and Eva]," "Hotels have hovered along this route almost since its beginning," "Baltimore's 'kind of guy,'" and dozens more. This breeziness, however, has an appeal to many persons and, I suppose, can be called a commercial style that sells.

Out of the several thousand road and street names in Baltimore and its environs, only a selection has been published here, since many, according to the compiler, are bland and repetitive: "Baltimore county appears to have been a bit sloppy in eliminating duplicates as the years of development and tract housing rolled past." (33). The names selected have had some connection with the history of the area or have commemorative interest (if the honoree is from elsewhere), or have some colorful incidental background.

The entries have a descriptive tint, coloring over the onomastic content, which occurs almost as an afterthought, if at all. Still, the important names appear, beginning with *Abbotson Street*, for Horace Abbott, ironmaster, whose "Canton iron works rolled plates for the Union ironclad boats during the Civil War, including, by legend, plates for the *Monitor*." (38). *Abell Avenue* honors

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Arunah S. Abell, founder of the *Baltimore Sun*. *The Alameda* has no onomastic factoid at all, but it has a long gloss of description.

Aliceanna Street is named for Aliceanna Webster Bond, a Quaker midwife "who herself had ten children." Jones notes that "hundreds of Baltimore streets are named for spouses and sweethearts." This is one; *Bareva* has been noted before, but has no entry in the glossary; and *Anellen Road* is named for Anne and Ellen Placht by their grandfather George W. Shoenhals, also the creator of *Bareya*. *Anneslie Road* derives from a mansion named for Anne Harrison. *Doris* and *Audrey Avenues* were named for the daughters of Clinton Mewshaw; he also named *Franklin Avenue* for his father and *Townsend Avenue* for his secretary. *Ethelbert Avenue* is a blend of the names of Charles H. Green's daughters, Sarah Ethel and Alberta May. *Vesta Avenue*, for Vesta Bloecher, was so named by her father to cheer her up when she was ill. *Sabine Avenue* was named for the daughter-in-law of Carl L. Mattfeldt, for whom *Mattfeldt Avenue* is named.

The names generally follow traditional naming patterns, including commemoratives for notables on the national and international level: (*Ashland Avenue*, for Henry Clay's Kentucky home; *Bayard Avenue*, for James A. Bayard, negotiator at the Treaty of Ghent that ended the War of 1812; *Beethoven Terrace*, for the composer; *Bessemer Avenue*, for Henry Bessemer, the English metals inventor; *Calvert Street*, for the Calvert family; *Caroline Street*, for the sister of Frederick Calvert; *Carroll Street*, for Charles Carroll, signer of the Declaration of Independence; *Charles Street*, described but origin not given; *Clay Street*, for Henry Clay; *Cleveland Avenue*, for Grover Cleveland; *Coolidge Avenue*, for Calvin Coolidge; *Custer Road*, for "George Armstrong Custer, the Civil War hero and Indian campaign flunkout;" and *Fillmore Street*, for Millard Fillmore.

Many other achievers are honored, such as Franklin, Gladstone, Fremont, Greene, Hamilton, Harding, Hanson (first president of the United States under the Articles of Confederation of 1783), *John, Edgar, and Howard Streets* (for John Edgar Howard, "hero of the Revolutionary brawl at Cowpens, South Carolina"), *Ibsen Avenue* (for the playwright), Jackson, Jefferson, Kipling, Lawrence, Lee (Richard Henry Lee), Madison, Monroe, Perry,

Queen Anne, Earhart, Rickenbacker, Scott, Shakespeare, Tyler, and Washington.

The many honored local heroes, politicians, commercial men, and real estate developers need not be noted here, although all have had some connection with the history of Baltimore and deserve their selection by Jones. Some of the exotic names include *Whiskey Bottom Road* (origin missing), *Timonium Road* (origin missing), *Reisterstown Road* (origin missing), *Pothouse Alley* (origin missing), *Nunnery Lane* (access road to a convent school), *Hutschenreuter Lane* (for the H. kilns), *Auchentoroly Terrace* ("The name's as Scotch as Haig & Haig pinch, though it sounds like some sort of battlefield in British India"), and *Kavon Street* (for Frank Novak, building industrialist).

The text is illuminated by many beautiful illustrations and photographs. A coffee-table book for Baltimoreans, it will also serve as another street name study in the *Street Name Project* initiated and edited by Robert I. Alotta. In addition, it is filled with esoteric and exotic lore, spaced between entries. In all, the book has its good features, lacking only some good research and some toning down of the style.

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