

## Reviews

**A Handbook of Scandinavian Names.** By NANCY L. COLEMAN and OLAV VEKA. Pp. 194. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 2010. ISBN: 0299248348; 9780299248345

Nancy L. Coleman began teaching English, Norwegian, and German in Norwegian secondary schools in the 1970s after she completed her PhD in Scandinavian literature at the University of Wisconsin. She currently heads the Norwegian and Foreign Language Departments at Ajer videregående skole in Hamar, Norway. She is the translator and editor of the 1998 Norwegian edition of *Password Dictionary*, a text aligned with the secondary school curriculum and organized for both mono- and bilingual users. Like Coleman, Olav Veka was an instructor in the Norwegian secondary schools from 1973 to 2006. He has co-authored several textbooks used in the secondary school curriculum, including an arts and sciences text, *Bridges*, and the *Nynorsk Dictionar*. Veka's graduate thesis was on the place names of Sand in Ryfylke, and he has continued this academic interest in the publication of *Name Book* (1991) and the *Norwegian Surnames Encyclopedia* (2000). Veka was an appellate member of the Norwegian Language Council from 2001–2005 and has served as president of the Norwegian Name Association from 2006 until the present.

*A Handbook of Scandinavian Names* is an apt title for this book because it is a multi-purpose introduction intended to interest a broad audience. The cover, with an engaging image of a baby wearing a faux Viking helmet complete with horns, would attract any couple searching for the perfect Scandinavian name for their unborn child. Indeed, the first part of the book would be quite familiar to such name seekers. Entitled “The Dictionary of Scandinavian Names,” the first section provides separate alphabetical lists for girls (550 names) and boys (1000 names). Each given name entry is followed by the country/ies of origin with pronunciation guide, the origin and meaning of the name and, when appropriate, descriptive commentary or reference. Many entries provide spelling variations and note famous bearers of the name. This portion of the book also contains details that might be of interest to linguists and scholars because it includes a detailed introduction to Old Norse spelling, as well as a sophisticated guide to the pronunciation of and differences among the vowels, diphthongs, and consonants of the major Scandinavian languages. The authors delimit the study by focusing only on the names in Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden with Indo-European roots. They exclude names with Finno-Ugric derivations and the Inuit-Aleut names of the native Sami, Inuit, and Aleut people. Prospective American parents would probably skip these details. At the back of the book there is a short but helpful list of definitions, as well as a reference section divided into “Name Books,” “Name Data,” “Other Literature,” and “Web Resources.” The index is user-friendly and gives the reader an opportunity to search for individual names — an important feature for a book that contains several thousand names.

The second section of the book, “A Guide to Scandinavian Naming,” is only tangentially related to naming babies. The eleven topical chapters in this portion of the book vary in length from the 35-page “Adapting Names in Scandinavian America” to the 2½-page chapter on “Name Laws.” One chapter offers a guide to Scandinavian naming history and traditions, one addresses the impact of North American immigration on names, and a third discusses contemporary adaptations of traditional names. Other chapters focus on topics ranging from names derived from Norse mythology and the naming practices of the royal family to the history and current celebration of name days in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

Coleman and Veka's broad historical, social, and cultural approach to Scandinavian names is evident in the content and data tables. This approach, however, is both the strength and the weakness of the book. The historical expanse stretches from the origins of the Norse legends and Vikings, through the Christian and Reformation periods, and into contemporary times. We learn many fascinating facts: a significant number of Danish Mormons contributed to the settlement of Utah; Finnish immigrants settled in Alaska during the time Russia ruled over both Alaska and Finland; and BlueTooth technology was named for King Harald Bluetooth, a proponent of communication and trade, who was memorialized on the Jelling, Denmark rune stones. The result, however, is a narrative history that does not have enough context to satisfy the historian's questions, such as what fueled the rural depopulation of Scandinavia and why did the majority resettle in the rural Midwest rather than urban areas, as many other nineteenth- and twentieth-century American immigrants did? On the other hand, snippets such as these amount to too much information for the average reader.

Statistical charts alert us to the popularity of Scandinavian names in the US from 1880 to the early twenty-first century, the most popular names of babies born in 1980 in states with Scandinavian settlers (Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin) and the Scandinavian names given to children born in Alberta and British Columbia, Canada, between 1997 and 2009. However interesting, it is difficult to see connections or draw conclusions about the data, because the sources appear haphazard and are not cited with footnotes. For those interested in how names are introduced into a culture, the authors offer an intriguing thesis about name choice and historical period that begins to tease out the relationships among social class, occupation, political domination, and international trade. But, as they note, this is increasingly more difficult in a contemporary world where internationalization both flattens and expands the meaning and use of ethnic names. Is a child named *Tyra* a marker of Danish identity (Harald Bluetooth's mother and a tenth-century queen), a name meaning "great wisdom," a derivation of *Thor*, or a choice to emulate Tyra Banks, the African American model and television host?

Genealogists might be interested in the chapter on namesakes, which provides a detailed analysis of common naming patterns in Scandinavian families. Now largely confined to Norway, the authors identify a practice of naming first- and second-born sons after the paternal and maternal grandfathers and first- and second-born daughters after the paternal and maternal grandmothers. Using their own family as an example, they are able to construct detailed genealogical charts using the given naming practice with the custom of creating a new surname by appending *-sen* or *-dotter* to a parent's given name. Thus, Elsa Mikkelsdotter Brommeland and Ake Endresen Hanakam's son is named Endre Akesen Hanakam after his grandfather (*Brommeland* and *Hanakam* are place names tying rural families to a particular farm), while Endre's daughter, Elsa Endresdotter, is named for her grandmother. This given name pattern is similar to the naming patterns found in Sicilian families, e.g., my son, father, and great-grandfather have the same name variants of Francesco, Frank, and Francis, which are also noted by Donna Gabaccia in *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* (1984). The similarities suggest that further study of rural family structures and patriarchal naming patterns might be equally fruitful in other countries and regions.

Although *Library Journal* characterized *A Handbook of Scandinavian Names* as "a relaxed cultural study," the book is classified by the University of Wisconsin Press as a reference work. If the reader can navigate through this uneven positioning between research and a general audience, she/he will be rewarded with an engaging introduction to Scandinavian names and naming practices.

**Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature.** By ALLEEN PACE NILSEN and DON L. F. NILSEN. Pp. xvi +160. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press. 2007. ISBN: 978-0-691-13941-8

Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don Nilsen agree that names are very important when authoring a successful piece of literature, especially literature with twelve- to eighteen-year-olds as the target audience. The authors devote their entire book to a discussion of names used by prominent authors in books that are familiar reading to most young adults. The authors are clear about using not only literature written specifically for young adults but also including books “found and read” by young adults. (These are books written for a general adult audience but appropriated by youth.) The purpose of the Nilsens’ book is to encourage educational leaders to consider names and naming a worthy topic in book discussions and literature classes.

Although many readers are aware of the use of clever and unusual names in their favorite books, these same readers do not analyze the names of people or places. They often give only a passing glance to the names, concentrating more on the plot or character interaction. Nilsen and Nilsen state that young adults, however, are attracted to authors who utilize creativity in names of characters and places and provide reasons why young adults are attracted to such authors. Young adults are more attuned to names because of the importance of names of their peers. No one wants to be ridiculed because of his or her name, so having a name that is different but pleasing to the ear is important. Also, names and nicknames are important in identifying and remembering the famous, whether they are authors or entertainers. Creative names identify the character of the named, as in Fats Domino, Sid Vicious, or Charlie Hustle.

Another reason why young adults are attracted to young adult literature is its contemporary flavor. Current trends attract youth and this applies to naming. Nilsen and Nilsen provide statistics to indicate that names for boys and girls change with the times and creative naming is popular among many parents. Parents today use only 20 per cent of the most common names when naming their baby girls. Instead, they apply creativity and follow contemporary trends when making naming choices. Many authors, too, use creative naming when creating book characters, as in *Ella Enchanted*, with the name *Ella* as a play on *Cinderella*.

*Names and Naming in Adult Literature* is divided into eight chapters, each one delineating a specific category of naming as well as the author or authors featured in that chapter. For example, “Names to Establish Time Periods, Karen Cushman and Historical Fiction” is a detailed look at three books by Cushman. Two of the books are set during the Middle Ages and the third is set during the Gold Rush in the 1800s. At the beginning of the chapter, brief but comprehensive background is established about naming in the European tradition and then this is contrasted with non-European names.

The plots of *Catherine, Called Birdy*, and *The Midwife’s Apprentice* are summarized to illustrate various naming devices used by Cushman in her books. People’s surnames and given names were based on places, characteristics, or habits. The character John Over-Bridge is seemingly over the hill in the book, and thus his name. Alyce is called Dung or Dung Beetle, because she often sleeps in a dung heap and smells accordingly. Ann Baker works in the kitchen. Will Russet has red hair. These may seem to be obvious name choices but Nilsen and Nilsen make the point that Cushman utilized naming devices that were common during the Middle Ages, the period in which her two books are set.

*The Ballad of Lucy Whipple*, the third book by Cushman, takes place during the Gold Rush in California. The book is replete with examples of naming devices. Nilsen and Nilsen cite the characters’ names as indicative of places in the West. Mrs Whipple named her daughter California Morning Whipple and California’s siblings, Butte and Prairie. The dog’s name is Rocky Flat. Much is made in the book of the reason that California Morning changed her name to Lucy. Nilsen and Nilsen cite Cushman’s colorful and creative names throughout the book. Place names in California such as Skunk Creek and Bedbug Flat are amusing. Names of California herbs are names for Lucy’s female puppies. When Lucy gathers apples she recalls the names Foxwhelp, Rusticoat, and Rubystripes.

Chapter 8 is effective because Nilsen and Nilsen provide detailed support for their premise that authors of young adult literature must be knowledgeable about the historical periods in which they write if they are to have reader appeal. The characters become real, in part, because of the names.

*Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature* is a pleasure to read for several reasons. First, each chapter is formatted in a similar way to the one described above, and this provides consistency throughout the book. Five chapters are built on the works of two or three authors. The other three chapters concentrate on one author: Karen Cushman (chapter 3), Daniel Hadler (chapter 7), and J. K. Rowling (chapter 8).

Next, most of the authors are familiar to most readers of young adult literature. This is important when authoring a book of this nature. Readers who are familiar with books by Gary Soto or Karen Cushman take an interest in revisiting the books and finding something new in them, especially if that something new is the use of naming devices. Conversely, if one or two of the authors are unfamiliar, this text acts as a recommendation. If a certain author of young adult literature is not a favorite of a reader of *Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature*, this book encourages critically reading a book to focus on the names and naming.

Something else that makes this book valuable is the use of various text features. The bibliography at the end provides a listing of works by all of the authors cited, thereby giving the reader a useful guide. The chapter titles that include the names of the authors featured in the chapter help to insure focus. The bolded divisions within each chapter provide clarity.

This book would be useful for anyone who is a fan of young adult or children's literature and anyone who teaches young adult or children's literature. Note that many of the authors and their books included by Nilsen and Nilsen are familiar and read by those younger than twelve- to eighteen-year-olds labeled here as young adults. Children who are ten and eleven read some of the books discussed, including *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, and certainly the entire Harry Potter series. Thus, the books cited in these eight chapters have a broad range. There is much to commend this book as a reference and as a pleasurable read.

*Notre Dame of Maryland University*

BETTY H. KANSLER