

NOTE

2015 Name of the Year Award

CLEVELAND EVANS

Bellevue University, USA

The eleventh annual Name of the Year vote was held at the American Name Society meeting in Washington, DC, on January 8, 2016. For 2015 we had 31 total nominees, beating the previous record of 30 from 2011. Twenty-two nominations were made by email before the meeting, and 10 were nominated from the floor.

There were 10 nominations for Trade Name of the Year. Two were not commercial names, but names of entities in the news which did not fit well into other categories. The non-commercial nomination made by email was *Tardigrada*, the scientific name for tardigrades. The term means “slow stepper” in Latin. Tardigrades are microscopic animals that are among the hardiest living things. They could survive unprotected in outer space for up to a decade. In *Cosmos*, Neil deGrasse Tyson called Earth “the planet of the tardigrades.” Commercial names sent in by email included Jaunt, a new company which makes cinematic “virtual reality” technology; Kickstarter, the crowdfunding company; Alphabet, Google’s new holding company; Tesla, the innovation company led by Elon Musk; and Serial, the title of a popular nonfiction podcast. Airbnb, the online lodging service whose name is often now used as a verb (as in “Mike Airbnb’d his apartment to make extra cash”), and Charlie Hebdo, the name of the French satirical magazine whose Paris offices were attacked by terrorists in January 2015, rounded out the early nominations. Nominated from the floor at the meeting was #jesuischarlie, a hash tag created after the attack on Charlie Hebdo as a protest against terrorism. In the first round of voting, *Tardigrada* received one vote; Serial, two votes; Kickstarter, four votes; #jesuischarlie, six votes; Airbnb, eight votes; and Charlie Hebdo, 10 votes. Since no nominee got over 50 % on the first round of voting, a runoff between Airbnb and Charlie Hebdo was held. There were 11 votes for Airbnb to 20 for Charlie Hebdo, making the latter the winner.

There were three nominees for Place Name of the Year received by email. The first was Lifta, the name of a Palestinian town outside of Jerusalem abandoned in 1948, which has become a symbol of loss and resilience as the only such place to have neither been resettled nor completely razed. San Bernardino, the name of the city in southern California where 14 were killed in a terrorist attack on December 2, 2015, and Molenbeek, a suburb of Brussels, Belgium, where several of the perpetrators of the November 13, 2015 terrorist attack on Paris lived, were also nominated. Three place names were nominated from the floor at the meeting. Paris was nominated because of the November attacks as well as the Charlie Hebdo incident. Syria, the name of the Middle Eastern country once again in the news because of its civil war and the activities there of the Islamic State radical group, also received a nod. The last nominee was Denali. This Alaskan peak, the tallest in North

America, has a name derived from the native Athabascan word for “tall.” It was named “Mount McKinley” in 1896 after Ohio governor William McKinley, who was elected President later that year. In 1975, the Alaska state Board of Geographic Names changed this back to Denali, asking the federal government to follow suit. Political pressure from Ohio blocked the change at a national level for 40 years, until it was finally approved by Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell on August 28, 2015. Denali received 25 votes, to one each for San Bernardino and Syria, to win as Place Name of the Year.

Six nominations for Personal Name of the Year were received by email. These included Mr Dumsor, a nickname for the President of Ghana. This comes from “dumsor,” a popular term for “electric power outage” in Ghana, which literally means “on-off” in Twi. The government’s inability to deal with frequent interruptions in electrical service led to the nickname. Also nominated was Ta-Nehisi Coates, the name of the writer and journalist whose given name is an ancient term for Nubia, and whose surname is from the English word for “simple dwelling.” The nominator wrote “the combination of a nation and a single home, of nobility and humility, Nubia and England, could be a broader metaphor for writing and research.” Cecil, the name of the African lion killed in July 2015 near Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe, was nominated for the worldwide publicity his death gained. Hunters kill lions every year, but Cecil had a name known to many tourists and safari guides, which personalized him and helped to fuel the outrage over his death. Caitlyn Jenner, the new name of the celebrity formerly called Bruce whose gender transformation was documented on reality television; Adele, the singer known by one name whose album “25” broke many sales records; and Angela Merkel, the German chancellor noted for her generous reaction to Europe’s refugee crisis, rounded out the email nominations. Trump, the surname of Donald Trump, the American real-estate mogul and Presidential candidate, and Terry Pratchett, the British fantasy author who died in 2015 and whose tales of Discworld are among the best-selling fantasies in the world, were nominated from the floor. Trump and Terry Pratchett garnered one vote each, Cecil received six, and Caitlyn Jenner became Personal Name of the Year with 18 votes.

Five nominees for Fictional Name were received by email before the meeting. Rey, Finn, and BB-8, the names of three characters from the film *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, were nominated by the same person. Rey, the young heroine of the film, has a formerly masculine name which means “king” in Spanish. The character Finn had the impersonal designation “FN-2187” as a stormtrooper. After he joins the rebellion, the character Poe Dameron renames him Finn. BB-8 is a robot droid character, given the name by its creator because it is shaped like the numeral “8,” or like two “Bs” back to back. Also nominated by email were Hamilton, the title of the extremely popular Broadway musical where characters based on America’s “Founding Fathers” sing rap, and Atticus Finch, the hero of Harper Lee’s novel “To Kill a Mockingbird.” When Lee’s novel “Go Set a Watchman,” written before “Mockingbird,” was finally published in 2015, it caused controversy because its portrait of Atticus was less heroic and more prejudiced than expected. Nominated from the floor were Jean Louise Finch, the full name of the adult viewpoint character of both “Watchman” and “Mockingbird,” best remembered by her nickname “Scout,” and Furiosa, the woman soldier with a mechanical left arm who is the protagonist of the dystopian film *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Discussion among the assembled voters resulted in Poe, the first name of the *Stars Wars: The Force Awakens* character Poe Dameron, a fighter pilot for the Resistance, being nominated. Poe was then combined

with Rey and Finn as a single nomination, as new *Star Wars* names likely to have a cultural impact. The joint nomination of Rey, Finn, and Poe won Fictional Name of the Year, receiving 19 votes to two for Hamilton and one each for Atticus Finch and Furiosa.

The four winners in the overall categories automatically became nominees for overall Name of the Year. This year there were no other nominations from the floor. Discussion before the vote revealed that many saw Caitlyn Jenner as being a good choice for overall Name of the Year as an example of the modern right to create one's own identity and rename oneself in the process. Caitlyn Jenner won as overall Name of the Year with 15 votes. There were six votes for Denali and one each for Charlie Hebdo and the trio of Rey, Finn, and Poe.

For 2016, the American Name Society will again vote on Names of the Year in the four categories of Fictional Names, Place Names, Personal Names, and Trade Names before choosing an overall winner. Nominations should be sent to Dr Cleveland Evans, either by email at cevans@bellevue.edu, or by postal mail to him at Psychology Department, Bellevue University, 1000 Galvin Road South, Bellevue, NE 68005-3098, USA. Please include a rationale for your nomination, which will be included on the list of nominees presented at our annual meeting during January 2017.