

Book Reviews

Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape. Edited by BARRY LOPEZ and DEBRA GWARTNEY. Pp. xxiv + 447. San Antonio: Trinity University Press. 2006. \$29.95. Cloth. ISBN: 1-59534-024-6.

Most toponymists agree on how to distinguish among feature classes, generics, and specifics. A *specific* is the unique label for a single feature, usually coupled with a *generic*, which, within a community of speakers, describes the feature. In *Mississippi River*, for example, *Mississippi* is the specific and *River* the generic. Its *feature class*, a concept which comprises all known generics sharing similar characteristics, is ‘stream.’ This class includes *river*, *creek*, *brook*, *run*, *kill*, and dozens of other generics that The Domestic Names Committee of the US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) has recorded. In this system, each generic can be assigned to one and only one of sixty-five feature classes. For a list, with brief definitions, see <http://geonames.usgs.gov/features.html>. For those who need a more comprehensive list, there are specialized dictionaries, such as the *Glossary of Geology*, published by the American Geological Society. The fourth edition, edited by Julia A. Jackson (1997), has some 37,000 entries covering both geological and geographical terminology.

A very different way of looking at geographical terms has been provided in a new book, *Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape*, edited by Barry Lopez and Debra Gwartney. Best known as a nature writer, both fiction and non-fiction, Lopez has written extensively on the landscape and fauna of the Northwest, including northern Canada and Alaska. Two of his books, *Of Wolves and Men* (1978) and *Arctic Dreams* (1986), have become modern classics. For *Home Ground*, he has solicited the services of a large group of writers to define those American geographical terms most familiar to each of them, terms from his or her own ‘home ground.’ But it is as creative writers — which includes both fiction and non-fiction — and not as geographers or toponymists that the contributors to this book approach their assignments. Of the forty-six contributors, twelve are primarily novelists, eight are poets, and twenty-one are non-fiction essayists. The result is a fascinating look at how imaginative writers view the landscape and how they understand the words used to describe that landscape.

Home Ground, arranged alphabetically, goes from ‘*a’ā* (a lava flow) to *zigzag rocks* (chevron-patterned dams in streams set out by Native Americans to trap fish). In between are some 850 separate entries of a third to a half page each in this large format book. Not just a simple definition, each entry is a mini-essay which defines the term and discusses its history and connotations. Most of these essays include a literary reference. The entry *archipelago*, for example, quotes a short passage from Herman Melville’s *Encantadas*, and *cut-off*, where a river has cut across a narrow *neck*, makes generous use of Mark Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi*. Some cut-offs are natural, Twain says; others are man-made to shorten travel time. And then he claims in his jesting way that since the distance between New Orleans and Cairo, Illinois, was shortened from 1,215 to 973 miles in the years between 1706 and 1882, in another 742 years, at that rate, ‘the Lower Mississippi will be only a mile and three-quarters long.’

Many of the entries are accompanied by pen and ink sketches or diagrams, all by Molly O’Halloran, greatly helping to visualize some of the features as well as adding to the visual attractiveness of this handsome book. The generous outside margins frequently feature quotations that make use of the word defined on that page. The margin at the entry for *glade*, to take one short example, has a passage from Frank Waters’ *The Man Who Killed the Deer*: ‘A

shadow flitted from tree to tree-top. A deer bounded into the glade. It stood an instant nose forward, the petals of its ears up; then with a flick of its white tail-piece vanished into the brush.' *Scree* is accompanied by a passage by Michael Crichton (from *Travels*): 'We are walking up, ankle-deep in scree. It is like walking on a vertical beach. You take two steps up, and slide one step back. Two steps up, one back. The destination never comes any nearer.' *Scree* is defined by Ellen Meloy as 'Rock loosened from cliff or mountain buttresses [which] falls around the base. . . . The fallen debris cones against its parent mass in a sloping bed, a process as slow as weathering and as sure as gravity: a rockfall in edgy stasis.' And, Meloy notes, the origin of the word is Norse *skriþa* [Norwegian and Swedish *skred*], meaning landslide. *Talus* seems to have pretty much the same meaning, but the entry for that term, also by Meloy does not cross reference it; nor does *scree* reference *talus*.

Some of the entries are excellent. *Angle of Repose* is an 'oxymoronic-seeming term [which] designates the maximum angle at which a slope of loose material (such as soil or sand) remains stable. It is the point at which gravity challenges friction.' Antonya Nelson, who wrote this entry, inevitably cites Wallace Stegner's famous novel by this title, suggesting that 'the fraught connection of the present to the past, one generation to the next, replicates the peculiar tension between friction and gravity, between hanging on and falling apart,' making the term an apt metaphor for life as described in the novel. *Riffle*, as defined by William deBuys, is 'the little brother of a rapid. It is a shallow section of stream where sediment has been deposited. . . . As water flows over the obstruction, the current becomes more turbulent and breaks into a succession of small waves. Riffles produce some of the happiest voices of a river, murmuring and chattering, never roaring or growling with argument.' Charles Frazier (the author of *Cold Mountain*) tackles *salt flat*, acknowledging that the term has quite different meanings in different parts of the country. In the West it is the dried-up remnant of a salt lake, as in the Bonneville Flats of Utah. In the South-east, a salt flat is a 'low-lying, grassy coastal land, sometimes flooded with salt water but not as continuously wet as a salt marsh.'

Some of the definitions are unexpected. Patricia Hampl, after logically defining *lake* as 'a considerable body of water surrounded by land,' then goes overboard to talk about an irrelevant (and etymologically unrelated) meaning of *lake*: 'a red pigment composed of a coloring agent combined . . . with metallic oxide or earth to create striking hues such as madder lake (a fierce yellow).' She then speculates for half a page on the etymology and connotations of the word *lake*. 'Lake is unobtrusively onomatopoeic,' she says, 'the *l* and *a* together forming a plangent, serene sound, combined with the kick of the *k*, like the lapping of a wave.' Others offer practical advice. 'Never travel in jammed boulder country alone,' warns Luis Alberto Urrea, in the entry for *boulder jam*, where a rock has fallen from a mountain and lodged in a narrow passage, either on land or in a stream. *Quicksand*, 'an ordinary bed of sand so saturated with water that it has become soupy and unstable,' is not the threat that B-movie adventures make it out to be. Falling into such a place 'need not be fatal,' says Emily Hiestand. 'Struggling too much can indeed cause a person to sink, but by relaxing, lying on the back, and slowly moving the arms, it is possible to float gradually to the shore and safety.'

Home Ground, which limits its coverage to the United States, has a rich collection of geographic terms, and only a few can be mentioned in one short review. A random sample of less familiar ones includes *ballena* (hump of sediment resembling a whale's back), *brazo* (arm of a river), *brûlé* (burned-over area), *desire path* (a park or campus path worn in the grass when the designated path is inconvenient), *detroit riprap* (old cars used to stabilize stream banks), *gendarme* ('lofty rock tower'), *jolla* (hollow), *krummholz* ('crooked wood' at the tree line), *kudzu* (ground cover), *lek* (area where animals gather to mate), *misfit stream* (a stream too large or too small for its valley), *muskeg* (open peatland or bog), *névé* (snow on glaciers), *palouse* (grassland), *quagmire* (unstable marshland), *root wad* (root systems of upended trees), *sassat* (an entrapment of whales), *ship rock* (ship-shaped rock), *swash* (the rushing in of an ocean wave), *vega* (meadow), *viewshed* (what can be seen of a landscape from one point of view), *wrack line* (the line of debris after a high tide), and *yazoo* (a stream paralleling a larger stream for some distance before joining it).

The brief explanations of these terms do not adequately represent their full meanings. *Vega*, for example, can mean swampland, a river bottom, or any low-lying area. This list also points out one of the oddities of *Home Ground*: the terms include not just landscape features but also events, as in *sassat* and *swash*; or specific names, as in *ship rock* and *palouse*. The only example that Arthur Sze, who wrote the entry for *ship rock*, gives is the famous Ship Rock in north-western New Mexico. And *palouse*, though a variant of French *pelouse* 'lawn' or 'grassland,' seems to be limited to one group of hills in Idaho and Washington; Pattiann Rogers gives no further examples.

From my own 'home grounds' I note a couple of errors. Carolina bays do not occur in Appalachia, as Lopez says in his introduction (xviii), but on the Coastal Plain. The entry for *Carolina Bay*, by Conger Beasley Jr, locates them accurately. And the Badlands of South Dakota, from a practical perspective, are bad in any language. The French called them *les mauvaises terres* (possibly adding *à traverser* 'to cross'); the Lakota Sioux called them *Mako Sica*, but the name does not mean, as Beasley asserts, 'eroded land,' but, more logically, 'bad land.' *Sica* (pronounced SEE-cha) means 'bad' in most senses.

These are minor errors. My main concerns about the book are its failure to distinguish among the three categories of toponymics that I mentioned at the beginning: feature class, generic, and specific; and the inclusion of what I have called 'events.' But as its subtitle implies, *Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape* does not try to be a comprehensive dictionary useful for the study of place-names; it is, rather, a group of essays with a common theme, essays written by an impressive group of mostly young and very talented writers. And in that it succeeds very well. Finally, unlike many alphabetically arranged books, this one is a pleasure to read from cover to cover, and it has much to teach us about both the landscape and the wonderful variety of language used to talk about the world in our home ground.

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Place Names of the Isle of Man. By GEORGE BRODERICK. 7 vols. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1994–2005. Vol. I: 'Sheading of Glenfaba' (1994); Vol. II 'Sheading of Michael' (1995); Vol. III: 'Sheading of Ayre' (1997); Vol. IV: 'Sheading of Garff' (1999); Vol. V: 'Sheading of Middle' (2000); Vol. VI: 'Sheading of Rushen' (2002); Vol. VII: 'Douglas and Appendices' (2005). ISBN (for the complete set): 3 484 40138 9.

Ever since 1994, I have kept an adequate but gradually diminishing space, on my shelf for books awaiting review, for the anticipated seven volumes of George Broderick's *Place Names of the Isle of Man*, the final volume of which was published in 2005. As Vol. VII was intended to contain important background information concerning the whole enterprise, any assessment of this remarkable work could not be realistically attempted until it had appeared. Any potential reviewer or reader will not likely be disappointed, however, for that volume, published eleven years after the initial one, provides a number of appendices which are designed to act as keys to all individual volumes while at the same time tying them all together. They are: an overview of 'Place-Names and the Physical and Human Geography of the Isle of Man,' by Peter J. Davey (325–36); an account of 'Pre-Scandinavian Place-Names of the Isle of Man,' by George Broderick (337–56); a survey of 'The Scandinavian Element in the Place-Names of the Isle of Man,' by Gillian Fellows-Jensen (357–70); an annotated list of 'Common Elements in Manx Place-Names,' by George Broderick (371–83); an 'Index of Place-Name Elements' arranged by language (385–462); an 'Index of Place-Names' (463–631); an 'Index of Field-Names' (632–96); an 'Index of Personal Names' (697–729); and a group of 'Parish Maps' (731–50). Included are also some place-name and field-name addenda (236–54 and 255–332, respectively) filling gaps left in the previous volumes.

A major purpose of the final volume is the rounding off of the geographical coverage of the island, by an account of the place names of the 'Town of Douglas,' including the capital

Douglas, which inherited that status from Castletown in 1869. The other volumes are each devoted to one of the six major administrative units, the *sheadings* (from Old Norse *settungr* ‘sixth part’; spelling influenced by Middle English *sheading* ‘division’). Each sheading incorporates three *parishes*, each parish is divided into a varying number of *treens* (possibly from Gaelic *tír uinge* ‘ounce land’), and the treen contains an average of four quarterlands. Within each volume, the place names are arranged alphabetically by parishes; field names are listed under the name of the place with which they are associated. Researching a work of over 3,000 pages, containing over 10,000 place names and more than 4,000 field-names, requires physical stamina and intellectual dedication, as well as linguistic expertise and local knowledge, especially since much of the information has been collected in fieldwork from oral tradition.

Historically, the linguistic stratification of the island includes Early Celtic (only a handful of names), Gaelic, Scandinavian, and English. Although most of the place-names in Man are either Scandinavian or post-Scandinavian, Broderick draws attention to some names which are now considered pre-Scandinavian. In the first place, there is the name of the island itself, which has been on record since Roman times, in a variety of spellings — *Monapia* AD 23–79, *Monaoeda* AD c. 150, *Mevania* fifth century AD — its original form being something like **Menaua* ‘mountainous island’ or ‘high island,’ cognate with Welsh *mynydd* ‘mountain.’ The name *Douglas* is derived from a river name, **duboglassio* ‘black water’ (*dufglas* 1257, *Duglas* 1317), that is common in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and England, with both Brittonic and Goidelic antecedents. Other names in this early stratum are Rushen, Hentre, and Airds. Gaelic elements with apparently pre-Scandinavian roots are *sliabh* (Manx *sliEAU* ‘mountain’), *carraig* ‘rock,’ *cill* (Manx *keeill* ‘church, churchyard’), *baile* (Manx *balley* ‘permanent settlement’), *magher*, originally ‘open field’ but having undergone a semantic change to ‘enclosed field,’ similar to Scottish Gaelic *achadh*. All these elements remained productive for some considerable time; there are, for instance, a few late *sliEAU* names which contain Scandinavian or even post-Scandinavian personal or place names, like *SliEAU Earystane* ‘Steinn’s shieling.’ Otherwise there seems to be a small but sufficient amount of evidence that the language spoken in Man before the arrival of the Scandinavians was a Celtic one, possibly Brittonic first and then Gaelic.

The maximum period of Norse linguist derivation can probably be placed between the arrival of the Scandinavians at the end of the ninth century and the transference of Manx to Scottish sovereignty in 1266, but it is likely that the Norse element in the Manx population had been gaelicized before that date. Among the names of Scandinavian origin are quite a few designations of topographic features: *Cornaa* < **kvern-á* ‘mill river’; *Sandwick* < *sand-vík* ‘sand bay’; *Beary* < *berg* ‘mountain’; *Greeba* < **gnípa* ‘projecting rock or hill’; *Rigg* < **bryggr* ‘ridge’; *Tynwald* < **þingvöllr* ‘assembly place’; and (*N*)*ormode* < **ár-mót* ‘confluence of rivers.’ The initial arrival of the Norse in Man is probably to be dated to the tenth or early eleventh century, but it is not clear how many of them came directly from Norway and how many from Orkney, Shetland, or the Western Isles of Scotland. Broderick lists two dozen Norse terms among the most common elements in Manx place names, whereas his list contains more than eighty Gaelic ones; the total of either category is, of course, much larger and exceeds the number of English elements by far, as English influence did not emerge until the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Considering this multi-layered linguistic background, combined with the readers’ expectations and needs, what kind of information is the prospective user of this compendium likely to find in the presentation of the actual evidence? The following examples, selected from three different volumes, i.e., *sheadings*, are representative of the contents and layout of individual entries.

Vol. II (1995, 84–85): Lhergyvreck, a quarterland in the treen of Dromrewagh (Pronunciation): [lɔgiˈvrɛk] or [lɛgiˈvrɛk] (84–85). Eighteen early references with sources and dates in chronological order as, for instance, *Largeybreck* LC [Libri Cancellarii] 1680-92/14, *Largybrack* LC 1693/53, *Largybracke*, *Largybrecke* OD [Old Deeds in the Manx Museum] 1698. The Ordnance Survey Object

Name Books (ONB) spelling as on the six-inch map of 1957, and the additional information that the name applies to three farms, with grid reference. The meaning of the name ‘speckled hill-slope,’ its spelling in standard Manx *liargeevreck* and its Scottish Gaelic cognate *leargaidh + bbreac*. This is followed by a large number of associated field names, with early spellings if available. For the relevant treen name *Dromrewagh*, the following details are provided under its entry in Vol. II (1995, 67): *Dromrewagh* LA [Libri Assedationis] 1650–1702, etc. ‘The area referred to is centered around Ballakinnag and Upper Glen Wyllin.’ The first element is Manx *druym*, Gaelic *druim* ‘ridge, back.’ Second element obscure, possibly derived from Gaelic *riabhach* ‘brindled.’ *Dromrewagh* is in the parish of Kirk Michael, first recorded as Kirk Michael in 1422 and as Parochia Scti Michaelis in LA 1515 and 1526. Its Manx form is *Skylley Mayl*. This entry has a full discussion of the development of *Michael* = *Mayl*. The Sheading of Michael, in which the parish is situated, derives its name from the parish, which is dedicated to St. Michael, the Archangel.

Vol. IV (1999, 221–23): Baldhoon, a quarterland in the treen of Alia Colby. [bal’du:n] and variants. Balladoyne LC 1654/1, Baldoyne 1682/35, Baldwin LA 1703, Balldoon LA 1750, numerous other spelling variations. Earlier forms suggest the personal name O’ Doyne, Gaelic Ó Dubháin ‘Doyne’s or O’ Doyne’s farm’; Gaelic *baile Uí Dhubháin*. ONB has references for the farmhouse and small district.

Vol. IV (1999, 218): The relevant treen name Alia Colby; Alia Colby LA 1507, and variations. ‘Other Colby.’

Vol. IV (1999, 274–75): Colby, a quarterland in the treen of Colby, on record since LC 1631–35. ‘Koll’s farm,’ from Old Norse *Koll-bør*. A few associated field names.

Vol. IV (1999, 216–17): Baldhoon, etc. are located in the parish of Kirk Lonan: Poche Sct Lonan LA 1507, Kirke Lonan LA 1593. The Manx Gaelic name is *Skyll Lonan*, Gaelic *sgíre* and *Adbomhnáin* ‘Adomnan’s Church.’

Vol. IV (1999, 20): The Sheading of Garff takes its name probably from an oblique case of Gaelic *garbh* ‘rough,’ ‘rough area of ground,’ or from Old Norse *gröf*, genitive *grafar* ‘a dug hole.’

Vol. VI (2002, 99): Cronk Renny (pt. Abbeyland – Quarterland Ballakew), the Cronk Renny DO [Deed of Sale] 1794 (59). [krɔŋk’rɛni] ‘hill of fern or bracken.’ Manx *Cronk rhennee*, Gaelic *raineach*, *-ich* ‘fern, ferny.’

Vol. VI (1999, 46): Ballakew, Abbey Quarterland ACB [Abbey Composition Book] 1616 ‘McKewe’s farm,’ Manx *balley y Kew*. Two associated names.

Vol. VI (1999, 165): Rushen Abbeyland Treen. Rushen LA 1540 ‘little promontory, wood, copse, etc.’ Manx Gaelic *roisean*, diminutive of *ros*, or Welsh *rhos*.

Vol. VI (1999, 166): Rushen Abbey abbatie sancte marie de russin CM [Chronicle of Man] 1257. S.A. 1176.

Vol. VI (1999, 25): The name of the Sheading of Rushen is probably derived from the area around Knock Rushen, particularly from the association and influence of Rushen Abbey.

In order to avoid the alphabet as a basic sorting principle, I have rearranged the three sets of associated names according to their usage in the administrative hierarchy in Manx land management, starting with the least important (quarterland), followed by the others in increasing order of importance: treen, parish, sheading. This may give a better insight into the place-nomenclature of the island. It is, of course, understood that many or even most prospective readers may want to consult the seven volumes for the meaning of individual names, and the various indices and other apparatus in the final volume are well equipped to assist readers in such quest. Broderick’s multi-volume *Place Names of the Isle of Man* is a very satisfactory, modern replacement of J.J. Kneen’s *The Place-Names of the Isle of Man with Their Origin and History* (1925–28) which has been our main guide to Manx place names for so many years now. The compiler/editor is certainly to be congratulated on his achievement.

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