

## Book Reviews

**Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming.** Edited by LAWRENCE D. BERG AND JANI VUOLTEENAHO. London and New York: Routledge. 2009. Pp. 306. \$54.95 (pbk) ISBN 978-1-138-26775-6; \$54.95 (e-book) ISBN 978-1-31-525884-3.

The timing of *Critical Toponymies*, a compilation of articles that advocates linking toponymic studies to critical theory of power relations, is odd. This is certainly true of the original publication in 2009, but doubly so of the 2016 paperback release. The primary concern is that, of the twelve contributions outside of the introduction, nine are reprints of previously published articles, in whole or in part. The reprints carry varying degrees of revision, from adding citations to other contributions in the volume to significant restructuring. Furthermore, the reprinted articles could not be called recent; even in 2009, most of the reprints were initially published in the mid-to-late 1990s. This raises a question for the reader: does when a book appears affect its value? There are two separate issues here.

The first issue relates to pragmatism on the part of the potential buyer. Given that many of the contributions are fifteen to twenty years old at this point, we might reasonably expect that anyone interested in the subject already possesses copies of them. While this might well be true, there is certainly some value for the onomastic scholar in a reference volume that collects the papers in one place. Furthermore, although *Critical Toponymies* centers itself in the study of toponymy, it comes from a background of social and cultural geography and, as such, is part of a series of books linked by their titled goal of “re-materialising cultural geography.” The contributions were therefore originally published across a range of geography-oriented journals; an onomastic scholar interested in the subject may not have known where to begin in finding such resources, or that they even existed.

The second issue is one of novelty. The introduction portrays critical toponymy – taken to mean the focus on the intersection of language, power relations, and place-naming – as a new approach in contrast to the previous “atheoretical” approach to toponymy, portrayed as focusing on understanding “bygone landscapes” without consideration of power relations (1). Berg and Vuolteenaho intend this comparison of approaches to be a critique, and it is well taken. It certainly is problematic to study patterns in naming practice without considering the social dynamics underlying such patterns. Their argument, however, seems to go beyond criticism of a specific approach and instead targets toponymic studies writ large as atheoretical. Even if this critique was valid in the 1990s (and many would debate it), is it still valid today? In other words, is the approach advocated by Berg and Vuolteenaho not already taken within onomastics? Has the field not changed in the last twenty years?

A paper I found more or less at random in the *Names* archives suggests that their approach had already found a place in the field by the time of this book’s publication. Hendry’s (2006) study of names in the Riojan wine region incorporates the type of analysis that the editors call for and the contributions illustrate. Hendry’s paper predates the book, yet she cites two papers that became contributions to *Critical Toponymies*. This certainly speaks to the wisdom of including these papers in the book; however, it also suggests that the impact which the book and the contributions within it were seeking to

have on the field of toponymic studies had already been made by those same contributions. Note that this also means that onomastic scholars were able to find the contributions as they were first available. This example is not meant to suggest that the field has entirely changed; one can certainly still find studies of the type that Berg and Vuolteenaho critique. However, it seems reasonable to argue that scholars interested in their argument were indeed already influenced by their approach. While useful, then, one would be hard-pressed to call the scholarship within *Critical Toponymies* novel to present-day readers. Thus, on both the novelty and the pragmatism fronts, the book seems to have lost much of its value by virtue of timing – were it to have appeared fifteen years ago, it would have been invaluable.

While the contributions may be too old to appeal to scholars, *Critical Toponymies* does have value as a textbook, in which the contributions are offered as classic examples for the student. One expects a selection of reprints to be strongly written – and these are. There is a global range of examples, from Singapore to Tanzania to Hawaii, and that is just chapters four to six. There is likewise a good range of topics, evident both in the type of names considered (streets, numbers, website domains, etc.) and in the authors' focuses (pronunciation, commemoration, nation-building, etc.). There is additionally some overall coherency to the topic, as many of the contributions focus on postcolonial situations to some degree or another.

In the introduction, Berg and Vuolteenaho take care to define what they and the contributors mean by naming, placemaking, and power. While helpful for ensuring that the authors and the readers are on the same page, the thoroughness of the introduction at the same time makes the contribution a useful introductory text. The critique of previous approaches to toponymic studies is perhaps harsher than one might like to see in a textbook but will surely prove a good way to kickstart classroom discussion. Likewise, the contributors add helpful exposition for the student. In their chapter exploring gender and identity in New Zealand, for instance, Berg and Kearns explain their methodology in some detail, prompting a discussion of discourse analysis and how to approach it. Azaryahu's contribution on commemorative street names stands out for its clarity and use of examples to illustrate points; perhaps relatedly, it appears to be the most revised of the reprinted contributions.

The three contributions that are new expand the approach taken by the previously published critical toponymic studies in terms of methods, theory, and data. Vuolteenaho and Ainiala's discussion of ideology in a Helsinki suburb finds an intersection with the linguistic landscape methodology. Rautio Helander introduces the concept of "toponymic silencing," used to refer to the masking of language and people in official contexts, in her discussion of Sámi place-names in Norway. In a particularly standout entry, Alderman brings toponymic studies online by using a website domain name as data. His discussion of the politics of misdirection in the use of [www.martinlutherking.org](http://www.martinlutherking.org) by Stormfront, a white supremacist hate group, to spew racist ideology holds up (perhaps depressingly) well; the website still exists and may still be found on the first page of Google results if one searches for the name of the American civil rights icon. Alderman's contribution is perhaps more important than ever in today's climate of "fake news" and rampant right-wing ethno-nationalism.

The book is organized chronologically, in order of original publication date. While this is briefly mentioned in the introduction, in the body of the work there are no sections, commentary, or anything else to signpost where the reader is in time. In the absence of such signposting, it is difficult to tell early works from later works or their age relative to one another without paying close attention to which papers are cited by each contribution. This is not a major problem, although the choice to order papers by publication date means that thematically similar papers are scattered across the book. For example,

the entries on commemorative street names comprise chapters three, four, and nine; reading the book straight through could therefore result in some tonal whiplash.

Organization aside, *Critical Toponymies* works well as a textbook. The classic papers, in addition to recent work that highlights current approaches, provides a solid resource for the student not yet familiarized with the literature. The clarity of the onomastic examples sets the book up rather well for use in a course that introduces critical theory and problematizing power relations. While these are complicated concepts to grasp, the illustration of such concepts through place-names could be a very useful tool for an educator. The book could also play a role in a course that traces the history of onomastics – as well, of course, as one explicitly about naming practices.

## Bibliography

Hendry, Barbara. 2006. “The Power of Names: Place-Making and People-Making in the Riojan Wine Region.” *Names* 54 (1): 23–54.

*Department of Linguistics, New York University, New York, USA*

DANIEL DUNCAN



**Arthurian Place Names of Wales.** By SCOTT LLOYD. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 2017. Pp. 242. US \$45.00, UK £29.99. ISBN 9781786830258. eISBN 9781786830265.

After the first of several graduate seminars I conducted on the Arthurian legend, I spent a sabbatical semester in Britain. Among other things, I located places associated with King Arthur, mostly in southwestern England, especially Cornwall: Tintagel Head, Arthur’s alleged birthplace; Cadbury Castle, a hill thought by some to be Camelot; Winchester, where hanging in the Great Hall is a round table painted with names of some of Arthur’s knights; Glastonbury, the site of graves reputed to be those of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere; and Glastonbury Tor, associated with Avalon.

But though I visited Wales, I was not aware of any sites there associated with Arthur, and guide books make little mention of any. Though not a guide book as such, Scott Lloyd’s *Arthurian Place Names of Wales* aims to correct those omissions. His book documents named sites through sources that are literary (poetry and prose), administrative (charters and public records), antiquarian and folkloric, and graphic (maps especially those produced by the Ordnance Survey since the eighteenth century). All of this has resulted in 158 named sites, with about 19 variants. Some of these names are no longer in use, appearing neither on maps nor in local usage, and some sites cannot be precisely located. When Lloyd can identify a site precisely, he uses the British National Grid, two letters plus six digits, identifying a location within a hundred-meter square. The town of Cardigan, for example, is at SN 177 459.

The title of Lloyd’s book, *Arthurian Place Names of Wales*, suggests that it might be primarily a dictionary. But it is more than that. The first 157 pages provide a detailed discussion of the texts that attest to the presence of names connected in some way to the Arthurian legend. In chapters 1–3, Lloyd summarizes the existing documents from the medieval period. Chapter one discusses examples written in Latin; chapter two, those in French; and chapter three, those in Welsh. Chapter four is titled “Humanists and