From the Dinnsenchas to Proust: The Folklore of Placenames in Literature

FRANCIS LEE UTLEY

SINCE THE RENAISSANCE and the beginnings of modern critical history the eponym and the folk etymology have been in bad repute. Two centuries of scholars disputed over the manifest absurdities of the twins Romulus and Remus, their virgin birth from Mars as sire and the Vestal Rhea Sylvia, and their fostering by a she-wolf. However impressive the sculptures which made the wolf a milk-giving symbol of Rome's power and prosperity, the skeptics made Lupa into the nickname for a prostitute.[1] It was the task of critics to clear the etymological debris away and to erase the myth.

But the more we learn about both folklore science and onomastical science the more we realize that the full view includes the mythical history, the false conception, the poetry as well as the factual history and the art or science of etymology. The surer we are of the ground of our knowledge, the more secure we may be in recognizing that *Wissenschaft* demands the total view, and that the folklore, accurately recorded and rigorously interpreted, is a part of that view. Poetry may, of course, be made about bad science: Joyce's penchant for the occult and Milton's pre-Copernican universe were conscious choices, which recognized that man's imagination cannot be ignored by those who pretend to speak for his reason.

Who would forsake the countless gods and heroes whose name becomes attached to the place which honors him, even to the point of sometimes inventing the eponymous name? The Table of Nations in Genesis x is full of instances:[2] Gomer and the Cimmerians, Madai and the Medes, Canaan for the aborigines of a land still

[1] See, for instance, Dr. H. J. Erasmus, *The Origins of Rome in Historiography from Petrach [sic!] to Perizonius* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962), pp. 18ff. and *passim.*

[2] John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (New York, 1910), pp. 189ff.

fought over by an endless succession of people who claim rights to it – squatters', historical, or divine. No doubt the Semites were named after Shem rather than Shem after the Semites; yet if the ranking son of Noah comes from "name" and refers to "men of name" or the ruling class, it is hard to separate eponym from real title. Of the sons of Japhet Javan has for centuries been equated with Ionia and the Greek settlements in Asia Minor; Tarshish is Tartessus in Spain or Tarsus in Cilicia; Rhodanim is probably the Rhodians; Tiras more cautiously the Etruscans. Ham is generally identified with Egypt, and his sons fit the African locale: Kush Ethiopia, Mizraim another part of Egypt; Sheba a lost town between the Berbers and Khartoum. Shem's sons include the powerful monarchies of Elam, Asshur (Assyria), Arpachsad (Babylonia ?), Lud (doubtfully the Lydians), Aram (Syria and Mesopotamia), and so on. Over the years the identifications vary somewhat, for every new cuneiform inscription offers new candidates for equation, but the eponymous nature of the table as a whole is never questioned. And in Genesis succeeding partriarchs and heroes: Eber, Judah, Israel, have transparent names.

So in Classical times we find the eponymous twins Remus and its ablaut alternative and diminutive Romulus, or a pre-Hellenic goddess Athena who either takes her name from Athens or bestows her name upon it, or Tenes, son of Apollo, who was accused by his stepmother as Hippolytus was by Phaedra and who was cast adrift by his foster father Cycnus, only to land at Tenedos.[3] Medieval lore speaks of another victim of a woman: Treviris, son of Semiramis, who fled from her incestuous advances and found refuge at Trèves, which bears his name.[4] There is no end to such stories, and they are as interesting to the onomastician as the sound laws which once were thought to admit of no exceptions.

Janus, god of the domestic door, and thus kin to the Lares of the soil and the floor and the Penates of the storehouse or cupboard, becomes the god of beginnings, of entrances into the calendar (January) and of the roll of names of gods. Though the Janiculum is obviously his in later history, it seems to have little to do with him in origin or in cult. In the late fifteenth century the forger

[3] M. Cary et al., ed., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957), p. 884 and *passim*.

[4] A. J. Barnouw, "Semiramis in Trèves," *Germanic Review*, X (1935), 187–199.

Johannes Annius of Viterbo equated him with Noah, and out of such beginnings strung together a fantastic series of commentaries to harass his initially credulous and later skeptical students of Italian history.[5] His devastating assaults on history needed two centuries of discovery and correction, but those who indignantly attacked him failed to study his motives as a Viterbian patriot who wanted to exalt his city and to make his contribution to the rich antiquarian finds of Petrarch, Valla, Sabellicus and other humanists. He too is a man, though a much misguided one.[6]

Science is needed to correct the errors of Annius and others like him, but the poets are also needed to show us the charm of the onomastic folktale and the eponymous myth. Let us look at some of them, and begin with the Irish *Dinnsenchas*. Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* will come later.

The *Metrical Dinnsenchas* or "History of Places" is an extensive Middle Irish collection of varying contents and scope. Its most critical editor, Edward Gwynn, uses as the basis of his text the version in *The Book of Leinster*, a MS written about 1160.[7] Though composed from older sources, some, like the *Lebor Gabala*, still ex-

[5] Robert Weiss, "Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo," *Italia mediaevale e umanistica* (1962–63), 425–441; E. N. Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annius and *Graecia Mendax*," *Classical Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*, ed. Charles Henderson, Jr., 2 vols., Storia e Letteratura 94 (Roma, 1964), II, 293–310; O. A. Danielsson, "Annius von Viterbo über die Gründungsgeschichte Roms," *Acta Instituti Romani Regni Sueciae*, II (1932), 1–16. I have been working on an edition and biography of Annius, with the aid of grants from Ohio State University and the American Council of Learned Societies.

[6] Cary, p. 466.

[7] *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, 5 vols., Royal Irish Academy: Todd Lecture Series, VIII–XII (Dublin, 1903–1935), V, 3. We now have as well a critical edition of the major authority, *The Book of Leinster. Formerly Lebor Na Núachongbála*, ed. R. I. Best and M. A. O'Brien, 4 vols. (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies), 1954 to 1965. The *Book* contains both prose and metrical *Dinnsenchas*: III, 639–760; IV, 782–784, 842–1060. For further bibliography see Best and O'Brien, III, xi; Edward Gwynn, *Poems from the Dindsenchas*, Dublin, 1900; *The Book of Fenagh*, ed. W. M. Hennessy and D. H. Kelly (Dublin, 1875), pp. 249–275, and its *Supplementary Volume*, ed. R. A. S. Macalister (Dublin, 1939), p. 29 (Finntann on Mag Rein, speaking to St. Patrick). A few of the prose *Dinnsenchas* are excerpted in Tom Peete Cross and Clark H. Slover, ed., *Ancient Irish Tales* (New York, 1936), pp. 596–599. See Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland* (London, 1899), p. 93, for the state of knowledge at that time. The whole body of metrical and prose material has never been brought together for critical edition or study.

tant,[8] it is probably no older in its present form than the first quarter of the twelfth century. Two revisions, that found in the Bodleian and Kilbride MSS, and that called the Second Recension in thirteen MSS, come respectively from the second and the last quarters of the same century.[9] We can but sample a few of its splendid evocations of the humble process of folk etymology.

> There is, for instance, Loch Gile, now Lough Gille in County Sligo: Bright Gile, Romra's daughter, to whom every harbour was known, the broad lake bears her name to denote its outbreak of yore. The maiden went ... to bathe in the spray by the clear sand-strewn spring. While the modest maiden was washing in the unruffled water of the pool, she sees on the plain tall Omra as it were an oak, lusty and rude. Seeing her lover draw near, the noble maid was stricken with shame: she plunged her head under the spring yonder: the noble maid was drowned. Her nurse came and bent over her body and sat her down yonder in the spring: as she keened for Gile vehemently, she fell in a frenzy for the girl. As flowed the tears in sore grief for the maiden, the mighty spring rose over her, till it was a vast and stormy lake. Loch Gile is named from that encounter after Gile, daughter of Romra: there Omra got his death from stout and lusty Romra. Romra died outright of his sorrow on the fair hill- side: from him is lordly Carn Romra called, and Carn Omra from Omra, the shame-faced.[10]

This romantic tale of a maiden caught naked by a lusty and probably lustful lover, a conjunction of Acteon and Susannah, ends with her death by shame, and with the bestowal of the names of the three characters upon the lake in which she bathed and its two surrounding hills. We may be rightly skeptical of the avowed naming, since it is more likely that the topography gave rise to the story, than that the people bestowed their names on the topography.

---

[8] *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, ed. R. A. S. Macalister, Irish Texts Society, 34, 35, 39, 41, 44 (Dublin, 1938–1956).

[9] *Metrical Dinnsenchas*, V, 3, 95–99, 114.

[10] IV, 13. See also Whitley Stokes, "The Edinburgh Dinnsenchas," *Folk-Lore*, IV (1893), 477–478.

Whether here and elsewhere we have to deal with an oral legend (*sage*) or a literary creation is less clear. Some of the *Dinnsenchas*, like modern folk etymologies, must have grown out of the creative mind of the local folk and then been transmuted into literature. Others may well have been modelled on them by literary artists seeking to fill out a collection of such tales. Gwynn finished his edition too early to make proper use of the rich collections of the Irish Folklore Commission, and it would be a worthy task for some modern student to collate the Middle Irish stories with the modern folktales in a search for the solution to the question of just how much twelfth century material has lived on, and the even more central question of whether it is derived from the medieval literary texts or from their hypothetical oral sources. Certainly there is no dearth of modern naming tales in Ireland. We may cite the story of Gobain the Carpenter and his Son as one collected recently from all five Irish provinces, and possessing medieval forebears.[11]

Let us sample a few more from the *Metrical Dinnsenchas*. There is Druim Cliab, or modern Drumcliff, named from the hundred and fifty boat-frames assembled there by Caurnan in his attack on Dun Barc, which may be modern Dunnamark in Bantry Bay (IV, 9, 377). *Tuag Inber* tells of the lovely daughter of Conall of Collamair, drowned on her forced flight from Manannan Mac Lir, the Irish sea god, and who gave her name to the estuary of the river Bann, Tuag's Harbor (IV, 59, 388). Fancy was not content with one story for Ailech, identified with a castle in Londonderry now known as Greenan Ely. Instead we have three: it was named after Aelech the White when she was abducted, and is hence called Ailech Frigrenn; or it was the bright neck of land owned by Neit son of Indui and is hence called Ailech Neit; or it was there that the mighty Dagda built his son's tomb and wailed: "it was 'ail' with an 'ach'!" (IV, 93–121, 399–406.) Sliab Betha, a mountain, has as eponym Bith, a Viking-like son of Noah, who came to Ireland forty days before the Deluge and died there: "From him, high above the planets' path, is named Sliab Betha, the wild bulls' home; the body

[11] *Irische Volksmärchen*, ed. Käte Müller-Lisowski, Die Märchen der Weltliteratur (Köln: Eugen Diederichs, 1962), pp. 30, 344. There seem to be no placename stories in Sean O'Sullivan's definitive new *Folktales of Ireland* (University of Chicago Press, 1966). A good modern oral example is "The Legend of Bottle Hill," in Eileen O'Faolain, *Children of the Salmon and Other Irish Folktales* (Boston, 1965), pp. 58, 346.

of the corsair, who lived not long, lies yet under the cairn thou seest" (IV, 77, 393–394).[12]

Carn Máil has its name from Lugaid Mal or Lugaid Mac Con, who commanded each of his warriors to bring a stone, and with them built a defensive cairn on the coast of Down or Louth (IV, 135–143, 409–412). The story incorporates a Loathly Lady who is transformed through love and courtesy from a complacent bedfellow, and who is thus thought to lie behind the Wife of Bath's Tale.[13] The interpolation is called *The Sons of Daire. Sliab Callann* tells of a mountain named after Buide's hound Callan, killed there by the Dun Bull of Cualnge: "so here on this hill lies his carcass: a rite has been held of old" (IV, 171, 421). Thus the modern Slieve Gallion, a group of low hills in the southern corner of County Derry, preserved in the Middle Ages some ritual which either reflected the story of a totemic hound or gave rise to such a story.[14] It cannot have been wholly a literary creation. Often etymologies grow wild or plentiful. Emain Macha gets its name either from Macha Redmane, who lay with five sons of Dithorba and then enslaved them by making them dig a rath or trench of circular nature which she traced with her brooch-pin (*eó-muin*); or from the pregnant Macha, daughter of Sainrith mac Inboith, who raced the two steeds of Conchobar at the Fair and beat them, but then gave birth to twins (*emon*). The infants screamed "and the sound cast the Ulaid into their sickness, till each man was no stronger than a woman in childbed." Is this an echo of some *couvade* custom? (IV, 308–311, 459.) That there were tale-tellers or shanachies in the twelfth century is attested by *Druim Suamaig I*, the story of Suamach, "a ready shanachie ... exempt from the toils of war" who "was once a fosterer of kings' sons. The place is named from him because there he saw his pupil Cormac burned in Da Choca's Hall of Judgements. One wonders for a moment why Cormac is not the eponym himself, but in *Druim Suamaig II* we are told that "Suamach son of Samguba, skilled in liberal arts" himself died there of grief for the loss

[12] On the medieval importance of placename lore see Gwynn, *Metrical Dinnsenchas*, V, 91–92.

[13] Sigmund Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder: A Source Study of The Wife of Bath's Tale* (New York, 1957), pp. 93–96.

[14] For Irish myths about dogs see *The Mythology of All Races III: Celtic*, ed. J. A. MacCulloch (Boston, 1918), pp. 143, 156, 184, 208.

of his pupil (IV, 235–239, 438–439). Was this not a better time, without the anonymity of the modern multiversity?

Dubad, now Dowth near the Boyne, reflects the story of Babel:

> Dubad, whence the name? Not hard to say. A king held sway over Erin, Bressal *bó-dibad* by name. In his time a murrain came upon the kine of Erin, until there were left in it but seven cows and a bull. All the men of Erin were gathered from every quarter to Bressal, to build them a tower after the likeness of the Tower of Nimrod, that they might go by it to Heaven. His sister came to him, and told him that she should stay the sun's course in the vault of heaven, so that they might have an endless day to accomplish their task. The maiden went apart to work her magic. Bressal followed her and had union with her: so that place is called Ferta Cuile from the incest that was committed there. Night came upon them then, for the maiden's magic was spoilt. "Let us go hence," say the men of Erin, "for we only pledged ourselves to spend one day a-making this hill, and since darkness has fallen upon our work, and night has come on the day is done, let each depart to his place." "Dubad (darkness) shall be the name of this place for ever," said the maiden. So hence are Dubad and Cnoc Dubada named (IV, 271–272, 447).

Clearly we have here not only the Tower of Babel but also Joshua's halting of the sun from Biblical models, and Biblical commentaries such as those of Peter Comestor might have supplied the further detail of the incest, since Ninus and Semiramis and the already-mentioned Treviris follow close on the heels of the Dispersion at Babel, in most such histories.

From the prose *Dinnsenchas*, whose dates are probably not remote from those of the poetic versions (they are both freely interspersed in the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster*), we may cite one or two tales which serve especially to illustrate a very common theme, the origin of a lake or spring from some human adventure. One tells of the River Boyne. Boann, wife of Nechtan son of Labraid, "went through pride to test the power" of the well "in the green of the fairy-mound of Nechtan." She "declared that it had no secret force which could shatter her form, and thrice she walked

from right to left round the well. Whereupon three waves from the well broke over her and deprived her of a thigh and one of her hands and one of her eyes. Then she, fleeing her shame, turned seaward, with the water behind her as far as Boyne-mouth, where she was drowned."[15] Thus the historic river where in 1690 the forces of the Orangeman King William III defeated the Jacobites under James II, and which thus became the shame of Ireland or of England depending upon your point of view, got its name from the shame of a proud Irish princess. Her damaged limbs sound as though they came from the fine print in a modern insurance policy.

Tonn Clidna, a "loud surge in the bay of Glandore" in County Cork, is likewise famous among the Irish. Stokes renders the tale from the Rennes *Dinnsenchas* thus: "This is the time at which the illimitable seaburst arose and spread throughout the regions of the present world. Because there were at that season Erin's three great floods, namely, Clidna's flood and Ladru's and Baile's; but not in the same hour did they arise: Ladru's flood was the middle one. The flood pressed on aloft and divided throughout the land of Erin till it caught yon boat (of Clidna, built of bronze) and the damsel asleep in it on the beach. So there she was drowned" and the recurrent wave was named after her.[16] A similar welling of legend occurs in the account of Loch n-Echach, Eochaid's lake. Eochaid is a very common heroic name. This one was the son of Mairid who was an enemy of Oengus, who killed their cattle and horses, but in a fit of apparent mercy gave them one horse to carry home their goods. He warned them that they must send it back to him before it "staled" or urinated. In Liathmuine the horse lay down "after their goods had been taken off him, and he let his urine flow till it became a well in the earth. Round this a house is built, and Eochaid takes the lordship of Ulster and dwelt in Emain for nineteen years." But then, a hundred years after the birth of Christ, the well flowed over and drowned Eochaid.[17]

[15] Cross and Slover, p. 597.

[16] Cross and Slover, p. 598; from Whitley Stokes, "The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas," *Revue Celtique*, XV (1894), 272–336, 418–484; XVI (1895), 31–83, 135–167, 269–283. *Tonn Clidna* is found in XV, 438, XVI, 310. For the poetic version see *Metrical Dindsenchas*, III, 451–459, 560–561 (Loch Ri), and for another version Whitley Stokes, "The Bodleian Dinnsenchas," *Folk-Lore*, III (1892), 478–479.

[17] Stokes, *Revue Celtique*, XVI, 152–153; *Folk-Lore*, IV (1893), 474–476.

Though the Irish expansion of such placename stories shows a Celtic exuberance and multiplication which is typical there and unusual elsewhere, there is a similar body of legend in China, clustering like those just cited around the sorcery of the "*source*" or the origin of springs. We all remember how Moses's rod could evoke water from dry rock. China, like Sinai, was troubled then as well as now. General Leang Houei (the spellings are from the French translation) was besieged on Mount Fou-han by the Kiangs under the leadership of his grandfather, Han Leang Ki. Since there was no water, Houei planted in the soil his whip of elm-wood, prayed, and sacrificed a gray sheep. A spring welled forth, and the elm-whip became a forest.[18] There were many rods or devices which performed such water magic: swords, wands, boatman's poles, back-scratchers, men's feet, horse's hooves, and even a hairpin. A sword called Long-ts'iuan (Dragon's Spring) was found in a jade coffin along with another called T'ai-ngo, of unknown meaning, and the two swords were separated. One disappeared, and the second was given to a man who crossed a ford with it in his hand. It leapt from him and fell into the water. Divers sent to retrieve it found two shining dragons beneath the waves.[19] One recalls those two subterranean dragons whose battles beneath the earth troubled the reign of Vortigern, until the youthful Merlin Ambrosius discovered and exorcised them, and thus exalted himself above all the king's wizards.[20] Teou-lou Tsi's horse struck his hoof into the soil and created the "Source de Liquide de Jade."[21] "The Spring of the Handclap" serves for two water sources, one at the Taoist temple at Hang-tcheou, and the other at Kiang-sou on Mount Mao, named some time before the present proprietor. The first of these boiled forth when Ts'ien Leao clapped his hands together to call two dancing cranes.[22] In a highly sophisticated tale from Southeastern Asia, King Vasudev calls on angels to be his judges. "If I," he says, "have upheld the Law to the best of my ability and am worthy of raising my war cry, then the rock against which I stand shall turn into water." He and his men hurled their

[18] Michel Soymie, *Sources et Sourciers en Chine* (Tokyo and Paris, 1961), p. 9. See my review in *Literature East and West*, VI (1962), 52–53.

[19] Soymie, p. 13.

[20] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain* (London, 1928), pp. 114–115 (vi. 19). [21] Soymie, p. 39. [22] Soymie, pp. 44–45.

spears at the rock and "the ground was cleft and from the fissure at once burst forth a fountain which soon changed to a waterspout... The thirst of the army was quenched."[23] No name is assigned to the spring, but it takes place in the Thar Desert, known significantly as "The Curse of God."

In the Middle Ages the eponym was not confined to local legends, themselves universal enough as a genre, as these Far Eastern examples show. We all know how the heroes of Troy named the West to which they fled: Francus France, Brutus Britain, Corineus Cornwall. According to Tacitus (*Germania* 2) the Germans sprung from Mannus, which makes it easier to claim for them a universal progeny and the language of the Garden of Eden. Mannus's father Tuisto has been connected with the Teutons, and the Marsi, Gambrivii, Suevi, and Vandali are all eponymous (by a sixteenth century confusion of the *u* and the *n* Gambrivius became Gabrinus, now best known as a patron of beer). The Huns had their Hunor and Mag(y)or. The Irish account for the Gaels and the Scots by a romance between Scota, daughter of Pharaoh, and Mil son of Bile, ancestor of the Milesians. This widespread tale appears in the *Bansenchas* ("History of Women"), a counterpart of its model not much later in origin (perhaps the last quarter of the twelfth century).[24] Geoffrey of Monmouth is full of such stories. Brutus called the town he founded on the Thames New Troy, which was corrupted to Trinovantium, and later named Kaerlud for Lud, brother of Cassibelaunus, foe of Julius Caesar. Hence, ultimately, London. Ignoge or Imogen, wife of Brutus, bore three sons, Locrine, Albanact and Camber, whence the three kingdoms of Loegria or England (Arthurian romances call it Logres regularly), Albany or Scotland, and Cambria or Wales. They were attacked by the King of the Huns, Humber, at the river now known by his name. Locrine's wife Sabrina is a romantic eponym of the Severn, Ebraucus leads to York, Loth to Lothian, and Edinburgh is the Castle of Maidens in Arthurian circles.[25]

[23] Sudhin N. Ghose, *Folk Tales and Fairy Stories from Farther India* (South Brunswick and New York: A. S. Barnes Co., 1966), pp. 61–63.

[24] Margaret C. Dobbs, "The Ban-Senchas," *Revue Celtique*, XLVII (1930), 283 to 339, XLVIII (1931), 163–234; XLIX (1932), 437–489. For Scota see XLVII, 316. A much fuller account will be found in the probable source, *Lebor Gabála*, II, 1–50.

[25] Geoffrey of Monmouth, pp. 22–27 (i. 17, ii. 1–10). See J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (University of California Press, 1950), pp. 7–21.

After these excursions to Broceliande and Cathay we can afford to bring ourselves out of culture shock with a little folk-etymologizing from America. We may begin by deploring such an onomastician as George H. Shirk, who prosaically denies us any Oklahoma stories in his preface, which makes all too brief allusion to the trapper of Cimarron whose evening meal was allowed to "simmer on" and to Waukomis, which is commonly explained by a story of certain trainwrecked railroad officials with the punch-line "Walk home us."[26] Let us spare him the inevitable pun on his own name and say he has labored hard, though not hard enough. The obviously Indian etymon is not provided. More deplorably, he has a distinguished predecessor, Robert L. Ramsay, who greets "pretty pieces of fiction of this particular sort . . . with a smile" and "passes on." But he does seem to realize that folk etymology is itself a part of the linguistic process we Americans have justly such a guilt feeling about, and thus puts its study into some corner of scientific respectability.[27]

Ohio has its share of placename folklore.[28] Chagrin Falls, perhaps from an Indian word meaning "clear water," gives rise to a tale that Moses Cleaveland, who lost a vowel to become the eponym of Ohio's largest city, landed at the mouth of the Chagrin River and was "chagrinned" to find that it was not the Cuyahoga. Ohio's Charleston was first settled by Charles Curtiss about 1809; it is said to have received his name "because the gave a barrel of whiskey to the Congregational church-raising celebration." An account surely not impossible, but one suspects a sense of paradox on the part of David Lindsey, its reporter, or his informant. Churchill likewise is said to be Church Hill because there are five churches there. Again a possibility, but one grows restless in the presence of these established English and American names, anthroponymic and toponymic, each with their neat local legend. Irville was named for John Irvine, and that we may believe, but the story that the village

[26] *Oklahoma Place Names* (Norman, 1965), pp. xiv, 218.

[27] Robert L. Ramsay, *The Place Names of Boone County, Missouri*, Publications of the American Dialect Society, No. 18 (1952), pp. 23, 29–30.

[28] The Ohio group is from the alphabetical entries in William D. Overman's *Ohio Town Names* (Akron, 1958), a book for which we are amply grateful, though it is only a beginning for the onomastic study of one of the country's richest, largest and most "settled" states, which requires a course in Ohio history in its public schools.

was founded because his wooden leg kept him at home and he wanted company is as sociable as he was. If Killbuck was really named so because "an Indian once killed a deer there" we should expect to have as many Killbucks as Lover's Leaps. In 1952, at the centenary of North Star, ninety-year-old Elick Alexander said the name came from Jim Goslee, who tacked up a sign on his store "using a wooden side of a Star tobacco case bearing a huge star emblem. The town became North Star because this was as far as you could get in Darke county without running into the swamp." Despite his age, Alexander came to the town in 1868, so he was not present at the naming. He may, of course, be an excellent active tradition-bearer for a folktale. Put-in-Bay is a natural for folk creators, and the most popular account is that Commodore Perry, when asked in the War of 1812 where to put the ships, said "Put them in the Bay." The only trouble is that we find the name on maps as early as 1791. No doubt it was a good bay to put into. Sandusky, which looks like a Polish name, appears to come from the Wyandot *sandesti*, "water, river," an etymon which fits the features in Erie county – a river, a bay, a county, and two cities. There is a family in Franklin county which goes by the same name. The local explanation is that they are named from the region rather than vice versa; an ancestor is supposed to have been an Indian captive as a child and to have "emerged" in that vicinity. The story needs further check.

So much for Ohio. Wisconsin has a similar group of tales. Frederic Cassidy believes he "was once present at the creation of a folk-etymology: an old informant of foreign extraction, when asked the meaning of *Eagle Point*, took the first word to be 'equal' (had he heard the dialectical 'ekal'?) and suggested that perhaps the point was an *equal* distance from Milwaukee and Portage!"[29] This type of naming is real enough: Franklin County in Ohio has a Linworth which is halfway between Dub*lin* and *Worth*ington. Halunkenburg is a Wisconsin nickname for Springfield Corners; it means "Lout's-town" and thus is *blason populaire* for that hard-drinking and hard-fighting community. (One remembers the German Schildburg and the Yiddish Schelm.) Another tough neighborhood in Dane county,

[29] The names in this paragraph are from Cassidy's *The Place-Names of Dane County, Wisconsin*, Publications of the American Dialect Society, no. 7 (1947), p. 33, and alphabetically *passim*.

Wisconsin, is Hoboken Beach or Hoboken Club. Its origin is surely some form of nostalgia for the town in New Jersey, itself a combination of the Indian Hopoakan-hacking, "at the place of the tobacco pipe," with the Flemish Hoboken, a suburb of Antwerp.[30] Perhaps it is the doubt that anyone can be nostalgic for Hoboken that led to the wondrous derivation from "hobo," a case of *ignotus per ignotum*, since both the *Dictionary of Americanisms* and Partridge give up on the history of that indispensable American word, the earliest citation of which is from 1889.[31] Pompey or Pompey's Hill, Cassidy thinks, comes from the fashionable naming in New York State from classical sources. Governor Taylor, who owned the land, came from Onandaga county in that state. The local legend is that an Indian chief named Pompey is buried on the hill, but no linguist is willing to take responsibility for so unlikely an Indian name, unless the chief was an escaped southern slave and a comic one who had been on the minstrel stage at that. Whiskey Creek does provide a good yarn. Hank Lawrence was returning home with a jug of whiskey and a skinful, and his horse, refusing to cross the footbridge on to which his master was steering him, shied and made the jug fall into the stream. "The cork came out, and as the whiskey gurgled away it seemed to say, 'Good-good-good-good-.' 'Yes,' replied Lawrence, 'I know you're good, but I can't get you!'"

At the base of many such stories seems to be the move from the generic to the particular. One suspects that Quilby Creek, from Choctaw *koi-ai-albi*, "panther-there-killed," was a place where one killed panthers, that is, where one found panthers to kill. In George Stewart's reconstruction it is "the stream where the panther was killed," which suggests a specific event for the etymology, even when that is proper etymology and not folk etymology. Similarly with his Horse Meadow, where some captives returning from Canada are said to have shot a horse and ate it and named the place after the event.[32] One would imagine that you could call a place Horse Meadow without so catastrophic an event; I suppose there are meadows for sheep, and for cows, and for horses, though not being a farm-boy, I may be wrong. Charles Russell's account of Louse

[30] George R. Stewart, *Names on the Land* (New York, 1945), p. 70.

[31] See H. L. Mencken, *Supplement II: The American Language* (New York, 1948), p. 679 for a group of unlikely guesses for the etymology of "hobo."

[32] Stewart, pp. 6, 139.

Creek represents the same phenomenon, with a fullblown story of a particular cowpuncher's delousing.[33]

We may move to New England. Moose Hillock, New Hampshire, is properly Moosilauke, and refers to a brook and a mountain, with at least three Abnaki Indian explanations: "at the place of the ferns," "good moose place" along the brook, or "at the smooth place" on the mountain summit.[34] At Purgatory, near Newport, Rhode Island, is a chasm and suckhole in the rocks, where it is said the devil killed a squaw and threw her into purgatory.[35] The traveller Kendall doubts the story, and the folklorist, mindful of the ballad "The Devil and the Farmer's Wife," doubts it too. Hard-scrabble, a good rousing word for which the earliest citation in the *Dictionary of Americanisms* is 1804, in the records of the Lewis and Clark expedition, was bound to lead to a facetious story when it became the name of a Rhode Island town, and the story of how one John had a hard scrabble there is found in Hazard's *Jonny-Cake Papers* (1915).[36] Local "linguists" have ascribed Bash-Bish in Berkshire county, Massachusetts, to Swiss patois for "waterfall." If so we have a transatlantic coincidence bound to attract the students of the monogenesis of language, for it also corresponds to Mahican "it bursts forth" or to Illini "a waterfall" (Natick *pashpisheau*).[37] Hockamock Head in Maine is said to reflect a Scotsman's cry when he ran from a savage Indian,[38] but there is no need to run from an Indian etymon, for in Bristol county, Massachusetts, we find a Hockamock Swamp, which in Narragansett Indian means "hook-shaped place," and might well refer to the "gray and craggy headland in Maine."[39] I haven't been there, though. To turn for neatness back to old England, the oldest folk legend of a place there seems to be that about a now lost *Thunerhleaw* in Thanet. Presumably this was a mound or hill associated originally with the cult of Thunor or Thor.[40] In Christian times an

[33] B. A. Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York, 1944), pp. 325–326.

[34] B. A. Botkin, *A Treasury of New England Folklore* (New York, 1947), p. 444; John C. Huden, *Indian Place Names of New England* (New York, 1962), p. 124.

[35] Botkin, *New England*, p. 447.

[36] Botkin, *New England*, p. 448.

[37] Botkin, *New England*, p. 454. Huden, p. 39.

[38] Botkin, *New England*, p. 458.

[39] Huden, pp. 70–71.

[40] P. H. Reaney, *The Origin of English Place Names* (London, 1961), p. 119.

aura of unholiness clung around the place, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 640 says two Kentish princes were murdered there by one Thunor, now euhemerized. In a later source King Egbert of Kent assigned the wergild or penance of returning to the boys' sister Domneva as much land as her pet doe could encompass in a single run.[41] Thunor, seeing the fleet doe encompass his own lands, rushed forward on his horse to head off the doe; the earth opened, and Thunor went to join Dathan and Abiram in hell (Numbers xvi. 24–34). The king placed there a cairn of stones and called it Thunerhleaw. Was it really Thor's cairn, brought into a Christian context?

From the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to Marcel Proust is a great leap, but it will serve to underline the universality of the charm of placenames, and the poetic reality of knowledge which the narrow scientist and narrow litterateur sometimes conspire to ignore. To tell the full story of Proust's absorption in onomastics is a separate project in itself, but here we may say enough to send students of the field to its greatest literary exponent.

In the first two parts of *Remembrance of Things Past, Swann's Way* and *Within a Budding Grove* (we should not forget the beauty of its French title *A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*), Proust devotes two huge sections to *Place-Names: The Name* and *Place-Names: The Place.*[42] Like the madeleine and the cup of tea the magic of names weaves its intrusive web within the memory of his loves and his sorrows. On the way to summer joys at Balbec his train passes a frieze of sea-scapes and a host of towns with superb names like Bayeux, Coutances, Vitré, Questambert, Pontorson, Lannion, Lamballe, Benodet, Pont-Aven, Quimperlé. Dominant in the group is Balbec itself, with it "church in the Persian manner" (*SW* 498–499). A name, or a color, or a mere atmospheric variation serves in his questing to recall the past. "For often we find a day, in one, that has strayed from another season, and makes us live in that other, summons at once into our presence and makes

[41] Motif K 185. *Deceptive land purchase (Dido)*; cf. especially K 185.6. *Bounds fixed by a race* and K 185.7. *As much land as can be surrounded in a certain time.*

[42] For the first two I have used the Modern Library edition: *SW* = *Swann's Way* (New York, 1928), and *WBG* = *Within a Budding Grove*, 2 vols. in 1 (New York, 1924). *CP* = *Cities of the Plain*, 2 vols. in 1, (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1930). *TR* = *Time Regained* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949).

us long for its peculiar pleasures, and interrupts the dreams that we were in process of weaving, by inserting, out of its turn, too early or too late, this leaf, torn from another chapter, in the interpolated calendar of Happiness." To make his dreams appear Marcel "need only ... pronounce the names: Balbec, Venice, Florence, within whose syllables had gradually accumulated all the longing inspired in me by the places for which they stood. Even in spring, to come in a book upon the name of Balbec sufficed to awaken in me the desire for storms at sea and for the Norman gothic; even on a stormy day the name of Florence or of Venice would awaken the desire for sunshine, for lilies, for the Palace of the Doges and for Santa Maria del Fiore" (*SW* 500; cp. *WBG* I, 311).

Balbec, the Norman resort city of his life and his imagination, is of course the key-word, and the intrusive "church in the Persian manner" is the clue to its associations (*SW* 499, *WBG* I, 330). It recalls the mysteries of the East, the sins of Sodom and Gomorrha, the Baal-bek or Heliopolis where the Semitic sun-god impelled his worshippers to unimaginable orgies. Orgies themselves imagined, for this simple seashore city, which corresponds to the real Cabourg of Marcel's youth, has masking characteristics from Dieppe, Évian, Dives with its Church, and Trouville, and is in reality like any sleepy city away from the metropolis, with its Grand Hotel and billiard-parlor and café.[43] Not all of the nearby Norman names are beautiful:

> Every few minutes the little train brought us to a standstill in one of the stations which came before Balbec-Plage, stations the mere names of which, (Incarville, Marcouville, Doville, Pont-à-Couleuvre, Arambouville, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux, Hermonville, Maineville) seemed to me outlandish, ... so it was that nothing could have reminded me less than those dreary names, made up of sand, of space too airy and of salt, out of which the termination "ville" always escaped, as the "fly" seems to spring out from the end of the word "butterfly" – nothing could have reminded me less of those

[43] See George D. Painter's invaluable *Marcel Proust: A Biography*, 2 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), II, 84–87, 421 (index), and the useful endmaps. For the many references to names and their associative meaning see also P. A. Spalding, *A Reader's Handbook to Proust* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952, pp. 230–232.

> other names, Roussainville or Martinville, which because I had heard them pronounced so often by my great-aunt at table, in the dining-room, had acquired a certain sombre charm in which were blended the smell of the fire of logs and of the pages of one of Bergotte's books (*WBG* I, 335).

Such names thus war with the layers of association between them and present consciousness.

This theme of names is at the very center of Proust's magnificent modernization of the Platonic antinomy of permanence and change. In *Time Regained* (TR 321), the keystone of the arch of books, the name becomes a symbol of permanency: "Succession to a name is sad like all successions and seems like an usurpation; and the uninterrupted stream of new Princesses de Guermantes would flow until the millenium, the name held from age to age by different women would always be that of one living Princesse de Guermantes, a name that ignored death, that was indifferent to change and heartaches and which would close over those who had worn it like the sea in its serene and immemorial placidity." Like the English and other aristocratic nations the French have a sense of permanency which we crave in our rushing technological world, the world of Bergson or Bergotte's flux. Perhaps, were we to understand this sense and its ceremonies, we might understand better what Charles de Gaulle is trying to do. "The King is dead, Long live the King!"

It was to gain something like this permanency that Archibald MacLeish, himself a returned expatriate from the Parisian twenties, sought in his various poems to make something of the names of American cities. In his *Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City* (1933),[44] a suite of poems aroused by the brutal destruction of Diego Rivera's commissioned murals, which contained certain alien symbols like hammers and sickles and Lenins and strong right arms, MacLeish alternates between poetic splendor and too-transparent public speech. His theme was that there were plenty of things to honor in America, and that we did not need imported Marxist symbols. What Rivera, a Mexican fresh from his own country's revolution, or what the never-to-be-released proletariat may have needed, MacLeish did not perhaps fully consider. His most objectionable taste was revealed when he made communist orators speak in

[44] Archibald MacLeish, *Collected Poems, 1917–1952* (Boston, 1952), pp. 67–77.

broken English, and made a stereotype of the "agitator" which ignored the fact that the immigrant is just as likely to be a super-patriot as a sinister subversive, and that many immigrants are neither, but just men like you and me. His successes are where he praises the true "empire builders": the Lewises and Clarks; the Niggers, Portuguese, Magyars, Polacks, boss Irishmen, Scots, English, Chinese, Squareheads and Austrians who built the railroads with sweat and pain and not with stocks and bonds; the Crazy Horse who was the true Indian hero of Custer's Last Stand, and so on. His plump Mr. Pl'f, an aesthete who stands at Pau in the *place* and washes "his hands of America," is another stereotype, a rejection of his own past which Marcel would have known better than to attempt. Yet MacLeish knows something of the poetry of names:

> The Cinquecento is nothing at all like Nome
> Or Natchez or Wounded Knee or the Shenandoah.
>
> Your vulgarity, Tennessee: your violence, Texas:
> The rocks under your fields Ohio, Connecticut:
>
> Your clay Missouri your clay: you have driven him out.
> You have shadowed his life Appalachians, purple mountains.
>
> There is much too much of your flowing, Mississippi;
> He prefers a tidier stream with a terrace for trippers and
>
> Cypresses mentioned in Horace or Henry James...
>
> There is more shade for an artist under a fig
> Than under the whole rock range (he finds) of the Big Horns.

In this he was like Stephen Vincent Benet, or like the medieval Theodulf, Bishop of Orleans and Abbot of Fleury, who sang of the rivers which watered the lands of Charlemagne:

> Rura Mosella Liger Vulturnus Matrona Ledus
> Hister Atak Gabarus Olitis Albis Arar.

M. R. James renders these "Roer, Moselle, Loire, Volturno, Marne, Lès near Montpellier, Danube, Aude, Gave, Lot, Elbe, Saone." Theodulf even incorporates Bagdad in his poetry as Proust had Baal-bek: "Si veniat Bagatat, Agarenis rebus onusta."[45]

(Footnote 45, see page 291)

The acknowledged master of this kind of geographical poetry is Milton.[46] Satan, encompassing the Earth before he descends to tempt Eve, passes Tigris at the foot of Paradise and then sinks with it into the ground:

> Sea he had searched and land
> From Eden over Pontus, and the Pool
> Maeotis, up beyond the river Ob;
> Downward as far antarctic; and, in length,
> West from Orontes to the ocean barred
> At Darien, thence to the land where flows
> Ganges and Indus (p. 195, *Paradise Lost* ix. 71–82).

In Book Eleven Adam, fallen from initial grace, is shown the beauty of the earth under the tutelage of the Archangel Michael, in a prefiguration of a later Temptation in the Wilderness and view of the world's kingdoms which Satan will bring to the Second Adam (pp. 229–230, 381, xi. 377–411):

> His eye might there command wherever stood
> City of old or modern fame, from the destined walls
> Of Cambala, seat of Cathaian Can,
> And Samarchand by Oxus, Temir's throne,
> To Paquin, of Sinaean kings, and thence
> To Agra and Lahor of Great Mogul,
> Down to the golden Chersones, or where
> The Persian in Ecbatan sat, or since
> In Hispahan, or where the Russian Ksar
> In Mosco, or the Sultan in Bizance,
> Turchestan-born . . .
>
> In spirit perhaps he also saw
> Rich Mexico, the seat of Montezume,
> And Cusco in Peru, the richer seat
> Of Atabalipa, and yet unspoiled
> Guiana, whose great city Geryon's sons
> Call El Dorado.

[45] *The Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. J. B. Bury et al., III (New York, 1924), p. 519.

[46] *Paradise Lost* is from *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. William Vaughan Moody (Boston, 1924), pp. 101–245.

Milton not only prefigures Christ's Temptation, he prefigures his fellow-poets: Proust with his oriental and Western Baal-bek, MacLeish with his *Conquistador*, Rivera with his despoiled Latin America.

Milton could not have studied Eden and its loss as long as he did without knowing that there was a worm within the apple. Like Max Beerbohm in his essay "On the Naming of Streets" he knows that a magic word like *gondola* has *scrofula* in its circle of associations. In the Parliament of Hell Moloch evokes an ugly poetry:

> Him the Ammonite
> Worshipped in Rabba and her watery plain,
> In Argob and in Bason, to the stream
> Of utmost Arnon...

Beside him is the god Chemos,

> the obscene dread of Moab's sons,
> From Aroar to Nebo and the wild
> Of southmost Abarim; in Hesebon
> And Horonaim, Seon's realm, beyond
> The flowery vale of Sibma clad with vines,
> And Elealè to the Asphaltick Pool:
> Peor his other name, when he enticed
> Israel in Sittim, on their march from Nile,
> To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe
>
> (pp. 107–108, i. 391–422)

To Proust it was not Old Testament devils who violated the beauty of his Balbec, but the pendants who made of names a conversational tedium. His character Brichot, modelled among others on Joseph Reinach,[47] is a constant visitor to the Verdurins (*CP* II, 114–116). "I asked Brichot if he knew that the word Balbec meant. 'Balbec is probably a corruption of Dalbec,' he told me. 'One would have to consult the charters of the Kings of England, Overlords of Normandy, for Balbec was held of the Barony of Dover, for which reason it was often styled Balbec d'Outre-Mer, Balbec-en-Terre. But the Barony of Dover was itself held of the Bishopric of Bayeux, and, notwithstanding the rights that were

[47] Painter, II, 224, 421.

temporarily enjoyed in the abbey by the Templars..." and so on interminably. "Bec, in Norman," he continues, "is a stream; there is the Abbey of Bec, Mobec, the stream from the march (Mor or Mer meant a marsh, as in Morville, or in Bricquemar, Alvimare, Cambremer), Bricquebec the stream from the high ground coming from Briga, a fortified place, as in Bricqueville, Bricquebose, le Bric, Briand, or indeed Brice, bridge, which is the same as *bruck* in German (Innsbruck), and as the English *bridge*..." It is delightful to find this pedant in error. Talking to a Norwegian who hung on his vegetable etymologies more than he did on Madame Verdurin's food, Brichot says "One of the Forty ... is named Houssaye, or a place planted with hollies." To Dauzat the place is rather in the earliest cartularies Ulcetum (1090) and Ulciacus.[48] It is still vegetable enough to distract the Norwegian, for its is connected with *ulex*, "*ajonc*, furze, gorse, whin" but emphatically not with holly. Against the pedant, who is probably more often right than wrong in his etymologies, is set Verdurin himself, who cannot deal with the aristocratic name of Cambremer, but makes it Camembert (*CP* II, 5). His army messmates had made it Cancan, implying not an obscene dance but "a flow of chatter, which" Cambremer "in no way merited." Cambremer is a bit of a Lord Haw Haw, who has no conversation at all, pedantic or otherwise, and who can say of a fish or an entree only "I say, that looks a fine animal."

Marcel Proust knows the poetry of names and their humor, their ugliness and their splendor. His view of society includes the scientific philologist, and he would have appreciated Milton and the Irish *Dinnsenchas* as well. One can only regret that he could not have known America as he did Normandy and England, for we then might have seen him share our enthusiasm for the Big Horns and the Shenandoah and the folk onomastics which critics have too quickly scorned. It would not have brought him any closer to us in reality – he is close indeed without the visit.

The Ohio State University

[48] Albert Dauzat, *La Toponymie Française* (Paris, 1946), p. 63.