

## Literary Onomastics Studies

---

Volume 6

Article 8

---

1979

# The Toponymy of Literary Landscapes

W.F.H. Nicolaisen

*The University of Aberdeen*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los>

---

### Repository Citation

Nicolaisen, W.F.H. (1979) "The Toponymy of Literary Landscapes," *Literary Onomastics Studies*: Vol. 6 , Article 8.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/vol6/iss1/8>

This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Literary Onomastics Studies* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact [kmyers@brockport.edu](mailto:kmyers@brockport.edu).

## THE TOPONYMY OF LITERARY LANDSCAPES

W.F.H. Nicolaisen

When I accepted the gracious invitation to give this keynote address,<sup>1</sup> it occurred to me that some kind of overview of literary onomastics might be an appropriate topic. To the best of my knowledge this has not been attempted since the special issue of the journal NAMES on "Names in Literature" in December 1968, and undeniably our young discipline has grown considerably in both substance and sophistication during the last decade. We are certainly more than ready for a theory and a methodology, and it would have been a joy to provide both at this special gathering, but I realized several months ago that, despite a keen interest in the subject, I cannot even begin to hint at a set of basic concepts or general premises that might claim widespread acceptance among the many practitioners of the art, or even pretend to help them understand what they are doing.

I therefore decided to limit myself to something potentially

Nicolaisen 2

more manageable, at least from my point of view. After previous discussions of place names in traditional ballads, in Hardy's Wessex, Trollope's Barssetshire, and on desert islands,<sup>2</sup> and a recent paper on name strategies in the novels of the Canadian writer Robert Kroetsch,<sup>3</sup> the broader theme of place names as shaping forces in the literary landscape suggested itself and was duly submitted to the organizers of this conference. In spite of some extensive reading, however, even this more circumscribed approach demanded further limitation, mainly because of the comparative lack of toponymic enquiries into literature, whereas investigations of personal names abound. Consequently, the scope of my address will be even narrower although its primary direction remains the same.

While not abandoning my original interest in Hardy and Trollope, I wish to add for our consideration some of the works of at least four other nineteenth-century English novelists -- Emily and Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot -- not so much because they provide the much needed feminine touch but because they are another four eminent representatives of what has come to be known as the "regional novel." It seems self-evident that this narrative genre might require more detailed and convincing structuring of the landscape than, let us say, the psychological novel or the family saga.

The original grand scheme has, as a result, been drastically reduced in the extent of its range, but despite these more limited expectations, the narrower focus may well serve to clarify the aims of our inquiry, and the evidence of a few specific examples may allow us to come to conclusions which are more persuasive than those reached in a wider sweep of available literature. Indeed, it is my intention to scrutinize initially in considerable detail the name strategies of one of the great novels of all time which happens to fall within the bounds of the epithet "regional" -- George Eliot's Middlemarch -- and then, in comparison and contrast, to reach out to some of the other works in this category. Even in this limited form, such a survey is, to the best of my knowledge, the first of its kind, and I can only hope that it will permit us to gain new insights not only into the structure of the works concerned but also into the handling of names by individual authors.

In order to avoid the later charge of having raised false expectations, it is perhaps also necessary at this point to eliminate a couple of concerns from our list of possible questions although these have figured prominently in many studies of names in literature, sometimes to the detriment or total exclusion of all other concerns. I am thinking on the one hand of the constant pre-occupation with the etymologies of the names

employed in works of literature, whether in terms of linguistic correctness or within the framework of an author's perception, and, on the other hand, of the fascination which both local enthusiasts and scholarly editors have shown for the ferreting out of the so-called "originals" of certain literary places and their names. I have recently, in the course of Professor McMullen's Names Institute at Fairleigh Dickinson University, tried to demonstrate that there is no such thing as an onomastic synonym and that the identity of a literary name is totally confined to the work of literature in which it appears.<sup>4</sup> If this is true, then the "recognition" of literary names in the non-literary world is a mistaken assumption, and the process which attempts such recognition a futile undertaking. I am deliberately avoiding here the contrast between "fictitious" and "real," since the area of "fictitious reality," the extensive zone in which the imagined and the factual are one and the same, makes it practically impossible for us to make clear-cut distinctions between the two. Hardy's Casterbridge is not Dorchester, Trollope's Barchester is not Salisbury, George Eliot's Middlemarch is not Coventry, Mrs. Gaskell's Cranford is not Knutsford, and so on. In a way, such equations can also be viewed as attempts at etymology, only on an onomastic level. They are designed to produce "redende Namen" of a different kind from those provided

through lexical etymologies, but as I see the task in hand, neither has much bearing on the phenomenon on which we are trying to shed some light: the way in which place names work in the regional novel. This does not mean that I am unaware of the infinite care with which most authors choose their names. Indeed, if it were not for that care, the discipline of literary onomastics would have very little substance to handle. My point is that the selection of names and their literary usage -- their appropriateness, if you will -- has in most instances only tangential relations with the way in which a name means lexically or with the fact that it has, or is supposed to have, a counterpart in the non-literary landscape.

"I did not know that there was really a Lowick, in a mid-land county too" says George Eliot in a letter to her publisher, John Blackwood, after a correspondent has pointed out to him that there is a Lowick 2 1/2 miles from Thrapston in Northhamptonshire. Blackwood, too, regards it as no more than "a curious coincidence." The risks in looking upon it as more than that are obvious.<sup>5</sup> Neither linguistic etymology nor onomastic pseudonymity is going to bother us very much tonight, although they are obviously worth discussing in different contexts and may even intrude upon our deliberations from time to time.

While not even the most ardent compiler of a "George Eliot

Dictionary," nor the most enthusiastic traveler through "George Eliot's Country" has ever suggested any non-literary associations of Lowick, the name is a strong literary clue which leads us right into the world of Middlemarch, for who can think of the selfish, middle aged, sombre Reverend Edward Casaubon, ambitious compiler of the "Key to all Mythologies," and his marriage to the beautiful, charitable and devoted Dorothea Brooke without locating the short years of their discrepant married life at Lowick Manor, two miles from Middlemarch. This is the way in which we share her first glimpse of it, when she visits it as the prospective bride:

On a grey but dry November morning Dorothea drove to Lowick in company with her uncle and Celia. Mr. Casaubon's home was the manor-house. Close by, visible from some parts of the garden, was the little church, with the old parsonage opposite. In the beginning of his career, Mr. Casaubon had only held the living, but the death of his brother had put him in possession of the manor also. It had a small park, with a fine old oak here and there, and an avenue of limes towards the south-west front, with a sunk fence between park and pleasure-ground, so that from the drawing-room windows the glance swept uninterruptedly along a slope of greensward till the limes ended in a level

of corn and pastures, which often seemed to melt into a lake under the setting sun. This was the happy side of the house, for the south and east looked rather melancholy even under the brightest morning. The grounds here were more confined, the flower-beds showed no careful tendance, and large clumps of trees, chiefly of sombre yews, had risen high, not ten yards from the windows. The building, of greenish stone, was in the old English style, not ugly, but small windowed and melancholy-looking: the sort of house that must have children, many flowers, open windows, and little vistas of bright things, to make it a joyous home. In this latter end of autumn, with a sparse remnant of yellow leaves falling slowly athwart the dark evergreens in a stillness without sunshine, the house too had an air of autumnal decline, and Mr. Casaubon, when he presented himself, had no bloom that could be thrown into relief by that background.<sup>6</sup>

It is, you will have noticed, the description of a prison at dusk, and whatever landscape there is, is to be looked at from inside the house whose drawing-room windows offer the most open and least interrupted view; it is not surprising that this is where we find Dorothea several times in the months to come. On this first occasion, however, in her devotion, idealism, and charitable inclination, she "found the house and grounds all



Nicolaisen 7

that she could wish" and "walked about the house with delightful emotion." Her sister Celia, on the other hand, remembering Dorothea's earlier opportunity to become Lady Chettam, a position which she herself is now to occupy very soon, has the opposite, not unbiased reaction:

"Oh dear!" Celia said to herself, "I am sure Freshitt Hall would have been pleasanter than this." She thought of the white freestone, the pillared portico, and the terrace full of flowers, Sir James smiling above them like a prince issuing from his enchantment in a rose-bush, with a handkerchief swiftly metamorphosed from the most delicately-odorous petals...."

I have presented this scene in so much detail because to my mind it is quite illuminating regarding the various ways in which place names are used to structure this particular novel, and, one suspects, others as well. Naturally, it is their first purpose to create a topography, to supply geographical space, and to provide a sense of landscape -- one drives the 5 miles to Lowick from Tipton, for example, where Dorothea and Celia have so far lived with their uncle, Mr. Arthur Brooke.<sup>6</sup> A little surprisingly, perhaps, this function, though essential, is not the major one, however, not even in a prime example of a "regional" novel. Much more important is that as habitation names they convey the notion of habitat, of space adapted to the needs of human beings and utilized by them. These names signify inhabited

space, locate people, indicate human constellations. They have no contents without symbolizing social and personal relationships. Just as individual names they have no onomastic meaning apart from the characters who inhabit the place they designate -- Lowick without Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon, Freshitt without Celia and Sir James Chettam, Tipton without Mr. Brooke -- so as a cluster they express as much, if not more, a pattern of social locations, although ostensibly topographical. As onomastic metaphors they stand for more than their surface meaning. They become almost iconic, and the drive from Tipton to Lowick is so much more than the movement through geographical space; the outward distance covered, the measurable five miles, foreground an inner distance much less measurable, a loss of innocence, a deliberate motion from sensitive shelter to emotional rawness superficially covered by societally acceptable courtesy. Tipton is where Dorothea lived as Mr. Brooke's niece -- Lowick is where she lives as Mr. Casaubon's wife. The place names are so intricately knit into the web of human affairs that it could be argued that they would not exist without them.

Similarly, Stone Court has no contents without its role as the residence first of old Peter Featherstone and then of Young Fred Vincy and Mary Garth. Lowick Gate contains "the handsome house" in which Dr. Lydgate and his wife Rosamond reside,

Nicolaisen 9

and "The Shrubs" as a house name represents Banker Bulstrode and his endeavors of influencing Middlemarch society. The Chalky Flats are inhabited by Mr. Featherstone's greedy and poor relatives.

No name occurs that does not have its significance as lingering symbol of events reported in the narrative. There is no name to spare in the sense in which hundreds of names exist round about us in the non-literary landscape of which we know only by hearsay and without personal involvement. Houndsley is created so that Fred Vincy might be cheated out of a horse, Freeman's End allows the brief encounter between Mr. Brooke, the landlord, and Mr. Dagley, the small farmer, to take place in which Mr. Brooke has the novel experience of being insulted for the first time on his own lands and at the end of which George Eliot makes one of her rare comments on the possible origins of a name by saying that Freeman's End was "so called apparently by way of sarcasm, to imply that a man was free to quit it if he chose, but that there was no earthly 'beyond' open to him."<sup>7</sup> Frick, "a hamlet ... where a water-mill and some stone pits made a little centre of slow, heavy-shouldered industry,"<sup>8</sup> makes a brief appearance as a place where the building of the railway is actively resisted. Quallingham, in the north of England, is the place where Lydgate's rich relatives live

Nicolaisen 10

and where he and Rosamond go for their honeymoon; it is a name closely associated with the "outsider" in Middlemarch society. The Yew-Tree Walk witnesses Mr. Casaubon's death.

Crabsley receives a singular mention as the home of Webbe whom Lydgate regards "as good a country practitioner as any of them." Riverston seems to lie mainly at the other end of the "Riverston coach" and to be a place where well-to-do Middlemarchers build superior residences. Loamford is once referred to as a military station. Ilsely, 10 miles from Middlemarch, is conveniently distant so that Mr. Bulstrode can offer to conduct the menacing, blackmailing Raffles to it "either to take a railway or await a coach." The same Raffles, after his death, is also discovered to have stayed at an inn at Bilkley, the same place where Mr. Bambridge, the horse-dealer, intends to select a grey for Frank Hawley; of Melspring we only learn that "Lady Chettam ... remembered that Mrs. Truberry's mother was a Miss Walsingham of Melspring."

Middlemarch is therefore not without its surrounding countryside, although the number of places mentioned is small --- barely a dozen --- and the criteria for selection are never unconnected with more or less significant human events that contribute to the plot. What about the name Middlemarch itself which, appearing so prominently as the sole title of the novel, is the obvious toponymic focus of the story? The answer is not

as easy as it might seem at first glance, for the author is clearly content with the sketchiest of presentations and has no intention of providing us with much contents. We learn of some desirable and some not so desirable streets like Lowick Gate, Slaughter Lane, Parley Street, Churchyard Lane, London Road, Near Close, Bride Street, and Blindman's Court, and are informed of a hierarchy of public houses -- the White Hart, the Green Dragon, the Blue Bull, and the Tankard -- of at least two churches -- St. Peter's and St. Botolph's -- and a Top Market. This paucity of urban place names is paralleled in the representation of several occupations and trades by individuals -- Mr. Mawmsey, a grocer; Mr. Limp, a shoemaker; Mr. Crabbe, a glazier; Mr. Dill, a barber -- giving the reader the impression of a complex and richly varied society behind them. Only medical men are named in great numbers, since their skills and rivalries are obviously important in one of the major sub-plots concerning Lydgate. The parading of urban names, though sporadic, is therefore by no means haphazard and complements the naming of the surrounding countryside. Both appear to be well populated despite the lack of actual evidence.

Since George Eliot chooses to avoid descriptive detail regarding Middlemarch, which on one occasion is called "provincial," and on another "a country town," we have to exploit

a toponymic usage which is quite common in the novel -- the employment of the town name as an attributive epithet. Thus we encounter the Middlemarch manufacturer, the real M. family, the M. young men, M. charms, M. trade, the M. surgeon, the good M. doctor, good M. society, M. admirers, M. business, M. institutions, expensive M. habits, M. gentry, M. Orlandos, M. neighbors, the M. library, a M. mercer, M. gossip, M. newspapers, M. elections, Mr. Brooke's M. projects, M. politics, M. discrimination of ranks, M. mortality, M. families, M. circles, esteemed M. medicine, M. perception, M. lodgings, M. people, a M. voter, M. goods, M. hearers, the M. level, M. ladies, M. tribes, a M. light, M. girls, M. company, and a M. banker -- in that order. Although in some instances such qualification indicates no more than the particular Middlemarch variety of a phenomenon also found elsewhere, other examples clearly point to particular Middlemarch attitudes, practices and perceptions, and the implied presence of a homogeneous society bound together by certain unifying principles derived from the fact that this is Middlemarch and not some other place. This frequent usage of the toponymic attribute manages to evoke an astonishing sense of local color and makes a persuasive distinction, however impressionistically, between Middlemarch and the world beyond.

Nicolaisen 13

In this respect, it is worth noting that the notion of "non-Middlemarch" has found in the novel its own metaphorical toponymic expression in the name Brassing. When I first read, more than two thirds into the novel, that Jonah Featherstone (Peter's brother) had "a calling ... which did not require his presence at Brassing...", I simply noted this as the occurrence of an additional but somewhat minor place name in the vicinity of Middlemarch, an initial impression which was not changed by the appearance of another two elderly men, cousins, from Brassing. Then a Brassing solicitor, Clemmens, sends a letter concerning old Peter's will, as a result of which brother Jonah exclaims that if he had known, "a waggon and six horses shouldn't have drawn [him] from Brassing." More significantly, Dr. Lydgate himself, "happening ... to accompany a patient to Brassing, ... saw a dinner-service there which struck him as so exactly the right thing that he bought it at once," a transaction which made him go back "into Vibble's establishment in Brassing to buy forks and spoons." The rogue Raffles, too, is carried by the stage-coach to Brassing, and Lydgate promises that "Protheroe [obviously] an eminent medical man" will come from Brassing "to be a visitor at the new Fever Hospital." The new editor of the "Pioneer" has an ambitious dream to make his paper "celebrated as far as Brassing," At election time, "a political personage from Brassing, who came to tell Middlemarch its duty --- spoke

Nicolaisen 14

so fully, that it was alarming to think what the candidate could find to say after him." He is later observed "writing busily, as if he were brewing new devices." The anti-railway group at Frick is encouraged to learn that "in some parts against Brassing ... the folks fell on 'em when they were spying, and broke their peep-holes as they carry, and drove 'em away..." Lydgate gets into financial difficulties over bills from "two furnishing tradesmen in Brassing." Mr. Bulstrode, the banker, returns "from a journey to Brassing on business." Lydgate, trying his hand at gambling, has "visions...of going the next day to Brassing, where there was gambling on a grand scale to be had," and on another occasion actually goes there on some unspecified medical business.

There are, altogether, twenty-one references to Brassing in the novel, too many to be ignored in view of the fact that none of the protagonists live there or have any significant dealings there. Nobody is ever said to be in Brassing. Middlemarch people are either on the way to Brassing or on the journey back from it. Letters and bills come from Brassing, coaches go to Brassing, there are rumors about Brassing, and the inclusion of Brassing in the circulation of a Middlemarch newspaper is considered a publishing success. Brassing seems to be larger than Middlemarch, seems to have more prestige, has a railway link, can influence Middlemarch elections or individuals



Nicolaisen 15

through promises or threats. It is, it seems, "the other place," the non-Middlemarch par excellence, and is, in addition, a handy device for the author to remove a doctor or a banker from his house or from the Middlemarch scene when unwelcome visitors are coming or a clandestine plot is to be hatched. "He was away on business in Brassing!" --- From a structural point of view Brassing is the toponymic counterweight to Middlemarch, introduced in a most haphazard and scattered fashion as affecting several characters in what seems to be an unconnected way --- Jonah Featherstone and his cousins, Mr. Brooke, Dr. Lydgate and Rosamond, Will Ladislaw, Mr. Bulstrode, Raffles, the railroad protesters --- but when all the evidence is accumulated, Brassing assumes an importance far beyond anything one might expect on the basis of the widely scattered and very briefly noted individual instances. It is difficult to imagine that anything but a thorough and systematic study of the place nomenclature of the novel could have led to the discovery of what I should like to call the "Brassing factor."

If, then, we were to draw a place-name map of the literary landscape of Middlemarch, it would contain 15 names within the town, another 15 (with derivatives) in an orbit of 10-15 miles, all situated within the county of Loamshire. Beyond the county boundary, there would be a sprinkling of English place names including Doncaster, Hereford, London, Exeter, Leeds, Manchester,

Finsbury, Highbury, Cheltenham, and Yorkshire, and outside England, Edinburgh, Lausanne, Freiberg, Rome, Paris, as well as Norfolk Island and Botany Bay. Nobody could call this a world-open map; the term "regional" seems to be fully justified in view of this evidence, especially since all the names drawn from the non-literary landscape, except London and Rome, are usually only mentioned once in conjunction with past or fringe events. We are therefore never really given the opportunity to bring to those names our own private contents, leaving the novelist in full control over her nomenclature. It is also worth noting that apart from Halsell Common which Will Ladislaw crosses on his way back into town from Lowick Manor, and Halsell Wood where Rosamond Lydgate had a riding accident as the result of which she lost her baby, no name of a natural feature is included in this list, skewing it even further, and exposing our map as depicting a cultural and social rather than a geographical landscape, pinpointing events and human configurations rather than topographic evidence.

A quick glimpse at another novel of George Eliot's, Silas Marner, confirms, I think, these conclusions. Being a much shorter work, it contains proportionately fewer names, indicative on the one hand of the disposition of the people in the village of Raveloe -- "The Orchards" where the Osgoods live, Squire Cass's "Red House," Silas Marner's Stone-pits, and the Greek

Nicolaisen 17

chorus at The Rainbow, the only public house - and of the weaver's past and present, on the other, i.e., the Lantern Yard with Prison Street and Shoe Lane vs. Raveloe! The Lantern-Yard is the Quallingham of this novel, so to speak, as it applies to the place of origin of the outsider in the community. Names like Tarley, Bramcote, Batherley, Flitton, Whitbridge round off the neighborhood scene, beyond which only the Royston Baths (wherever they may be), London, and America are mentioned, the last as being far beyond the knowable part of the globe. If we want to identify the "Brassing factor" in this novel, we would probably have to distribute it evenly among Tarley, Batherley, and Flitton, all of which show some of the influences, effects, and elements of rivalries which Brassing has in Middlemarch. In addition to Raveloe's Rainbow, the Red Lion at Batherley and the Three Crowns at Whitbridge serve as congenial gathering places, in which not only ale is drunk, but gossip is exchanged and opinions are formed. No natural feature of the landscape has a name, although some of them play important roles in the development of the story. The toponymy of Silas Marner is therefore again a nomenclature that, in addition to providing a sense of locality, records and serves as reminder of events and literally puts people in their places.

As far as the other five novelists are concerned, I refrain

from offering again a detailed account of the naming techniques in Hardy's Wessex novels and in Trollope's Barsetshire set. For the former it suffices to remember that the "subtle blend ... of fictitious and semi-fictitious settlement names with the real names of natural features -- rivers, valleys, hills -- creates an onomastic cohesion which, in its turn, becomes the conceptual framework which ultimately convinces the reader of the acceptable reality of Wessex. The use of real settlement names outside Wessex not only establishes its borders, it also makes the region part of the larger world to which it belongs..."<sup>9</sup> Hardy's toponymic dichotomy between literary and non-literary items is consequently responsible for both contrasting separation and binding connection. This double function is not worked out as clearly by other writers, nor do any of them share his deliberate inclusion of named natural features in a much fuller display of nestling or threatening landscape.

Trollope, like Hardy, has a knack for choosing "the dialectually right English generic, as in Barchester, Chaldicotes, Greshamsbury, Allington, Guestwick, Hamersham, Framley, Silberbridge,"<sup>10</sup> and makes suitable reference to a socially superior Norman French adstratum, as in Courcy Castle and the Grange. The six Barsetshire novels are, however, neither quantitatively nor qualitatively, an impressive hunting ground for the name scholar. Their thirty-six place names, of which fourteen are parish names and other

Nicolaisen 19

names with ecclesiastical connections and twelve refer to castles, manors, lodges and the like, primarily define the toponymic Diocese of Barchester; the presence of the County of Basset in its names is less real and largely restricted to toponyms associated with the aristocratic or "quality" layer of society. Apart from three hill names and one reference to Gashall Springs, natural features are not named at all; rivers, streams and lakes in particular do not seem to exist. Outside the county, there are always London and Oxford to go to, but Trollope is very clear in his own mind why he elected to use a fictitious name for his cathedral town: "Were we to name Wells or Salisbury, Exeter, Hereford, or Gloucester," he says, "it might be presumed that something personal was intended."<sup>11</sup> As a skilled and prolific craftsman, he undoubtedly has in mind not so much the possibility of libel or misunderstanding, as the loss of control over the contents of his names to which I referred earlier. Barchester is brimful of semantic meaning made available by Trollope, even if it is modeled somewhat on Salisbury, and no reader has the right or the opportunity to indulge in second-guessing him in that respect. Remember, there are no onomastic pseudonyms!

Mrs. Gaskell's Cranford, the place "in possession of the Amazons" because "all the holders of houses above a certain rent are women,"<sup>12</sup> naturally has its High Street like any small English town. In addition, it has a Shire Lane, and a Darkness

Lane, and the Headingley Causeway connects it with the outside world. Public houses and inns, like the Angel Hotel, the Coach and Horses, the George, and the Rising Sun, dispense Cranford hospitality and the Assembly Rooms give its inhabitants the opportunity to gather on festive occasions. There are mere hints of places nearby: Woodley, the house of Thomas Holbrook, Esq., standing among the fields, lies half way between Cranford and Misselton, the next market town, or seven miles from the latter. Arley Hall, residence of Sir Peter Arley, provides a touch of aristocracy, as do the Bigges of Bigelow Hall. Over Place is a suburb, and Combehurst, somewhere in the vicinity, can be reached by a lane. Despite this scarcity of named places, Cranford has its Brassing, here masquerading under the name of Drumble "the great neighboring commercial town ..., distant only twenty miles on a railroad."<sup>13</sup> Cranfordian gentlemen can go to Drumble on business all week, the narrator can remove himself to it for a lengthy period during which news of events in Cranford reaches her only second hand by correspondence, her father goes to live there, the Drumble shops do not offer "anything very genteel," the Town and Country Bank holds its shareholders' meetings there, and it is implied that certain business relations that perhaps "would not have done in Drumble ... answered very well" in Cranford.<sup>14</sup> What would writers do without their Brassings and Drumbles? How could Middlemarch and

Nicolaisen 21

Cranford sustain their identity without them? Small as it may be, however, Cranford truly reaches out into the world and visits and receives its visitors and goods not only from other counties like Cumberland and Warwickshire, from places such as Newcastle-on-Tyne, Shrewsbury, Cambridge, Liverpool, Cheltenham, Portsmouth and London, but from exotic countries such as Scotland, France, Spain, India, Tibet, and even China and Peru. Its circumscribed isolation turns out to be more apparent than real, for it thrives both on its seclusion and its world-openness.

In my scrutiny of the place nomenclature employed by the three Brontë sisters, I have concentrated on Emily's Wuthering Heights and Anne's Agnes Grey, since Charlotte's Jane Eyre usually receives the lion's share of attention. The number of named places mentioned in both novels is extremely small, especially in the former, but the precision of Emily's topography has already been noticed by Charles Percy Sanger: "On going from Thrushcross Grange to the village of Gimmerton a highway branches off on the moor to the left. There is a stone pillar there. Thrushcross Grange lies to the south-west, Gimmerton to the east, and Wuthering Heights to the north. The distance from Thrushcross Grange to Wuthering Heights is four miles, and Penistone Crags lies a mile and a half farther on. It was half an hour from Gimmerton to Thrushcross Grange."<sup>15</sup> This precise spatial relationship and setting is, however, only the visible outward expression of a

hidden, inner pattern. Four measurable miles may seem but a little distance but when they separate Wuthering Heights from Thrushcross Grange they spell out the chasm between Heathcliff and the Earnshaws at one end and the Lintons at the other, between a brutal, gloomy place where "no conventional morality prevails,"<sup>16</sup> and a place that is altogether more human and secure, less invaded by primitive passion. For once the lexical meaning of the two names chimes in with the atmosphere of the places they designate. Thrushcross is gentle, inviting, agreeable, while Wuthering Heights is tumultuous, bare, elemental.<sup>17</sup> Our toponymic symbols are a perfect fit, appropriate labels both for the localities and for the people who live there. And in the background the Penistone Crags looms as natural manifestations of local tradition and threatening lore, and Gimmerton Kirk decays. What does it really matter that somewhere, exactly sixty miles away, to be precise, is Liverpool, gateway to the great, wide world? In our story it takes on a reverse significance, in so far as it becomes the entrance, the crack through which destructiveness in the shape of Heathcliff enters from the outside. Otherwise our four names spell it all out, are symbol enough for a severely focussed existential juxtaposition, and Heathcliff can only disappear into, and return from, the unknown, the unknowable during his temporary absence.<sup>18</sup>



Agnes Grey's world has greater breadth, a breadth of her own seeking, but the toponymic tactics employed by Anne Brontë seem more like disguises necessary to prevent recognition than attempted identities: "...shielded by my own obscurity, and by the lapse of years, and a few fictitious names (emphasis mine, W.N.), I do not fear to venture, and will candidly lay before you the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend,"<sup>19</sup> says her first person narrator. Candor clearly requires onomastic precautions, actually exemplified by exactly four names: Wellwood House where Agnes spends an unhappy time as governess to the Bloomfield children; Horton Lodge which witnesses her second, more mature venture at the Marrays'; Ashby Park, the residence of Rosalie Murray after she has married Sir Thomas Ashby; and Moss-lane in the vicinity of Horton, place of secret assignations and of private hopes and intrigues. Onomastic disguises, however, are even more effective and more tantalizing when they consist of nothing but an initial, especially when even the initial is false. There is O --, for example, "a large town and not a manufacturing district" near which Horton Lodge is situated and through which one has to pass on the way to the Murrays'. Then there are A --, "the fashionable watering place" where Agnes's mother opens her school after her husband's death, and F --, "a village about two miles distant from A--," where the Rev. Edward Weston is vicar. The clues we receive for any of these

would not allow any identification, and the masquerade of initials is never endangered. Even if we were to attempt any conjectures on the basis of the information that 0 -- is about seventy miles from Agnes Grey's village, frustration would soon reign, since the third onomastic disguise is the anonym, and the name of the village, of the parsonage and of the "rugged hills" that surround them are visibly only represented by a dash, audibly by a blank. This is the ultimate in obscurity, and yet it would be unreasonable to deny that anonymity is not also a form of name, negative maybe but still functioning in the same fashion. Naturally both acronyms<sup>20</sup> and anonyms by definition exclude etymology. The fact that it is seventy miles from "blank" to 0 --, and ten miles from Horton Lodge to Ashby Park again foregrounds inner distances, the first the distance between homely shelter and loving protection and the harsh world of the young working woman, the second the distance between Rosalie Murray and Rosalie Ashby, between maidenhood and another loss of innocence. Once Rome is mentioned as a place visited by Rosalie on her honeymoon, and once Port Nelson in New Zealand is conjured up as the diapodic symbol of extreme distance, but otherwise this is the world of Agnes Grey, as mapped out by its toponyms, acronyms, and anonyms, a world in which the nameless is suspected to be dominant.

What, then, is the toponymy of the literary landscape, at least as we find it in the nineteenth-century English regional novel? It is a place nomenclature that records and locates. It responds to the habitat in truly human fashion, making habitation out of wilderness through human experience. It is never -- not even in Hardy -- mere background symbolism, designed to create an atmosphere, nor does it give us a well structured landscape. Rather it relates to plot and theme and to the characters caught up in both. It clarifies social and human relationships, it provides inner spaces through the outward patterning of localities. Mostly its landscape is social rather than topographical. It allows outlets and otherness -- "the Brassing factor"; it accounts for the origins of the stranger (Quallingham, the Lantern Yard, Liverpool); it juxtaposes and compares, it contrasts and parallels, it forms structured constellations, supplies discernible texture. Above all, it permits the author to use it iconically, to fill it with his or her own contents, to be generous or miserly in the provision for knowability.

While being fully aware of both the possibilities and the limitations of the onomastic analysis of literature, it is my conviction that the study of these names -- individually and in their relationship to each other -- is bound to lay bare the web of a literary work more plausibly and more visibly than

Nicolaisen 26

most other approaches to a text. That is why the whole business of literary onomastics is so fascinating and so rewarding.

W.F.H. Nicolaisen

The University of Aberdeen

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This paper was first read as the Keynote Address at the banquet of the Sixth Annual Conference on Literary Onomastics in Rochester, New York, on June 5, 1978. I have deliberately preserved the format of that address.

<sup>2</sup>See Literary Onomastic Studies I (1974), pp. 84-102; 2 (1975), pp. 58-82; 3 (1976), pp. 1-21; and 5 (1978), pp. 110-151, respectively.

<sup>3</sup>Essays on Canadian Writing **11**, (Summer, 1978), pp. 55-65.

<sup>4</sup>W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "Recognition and Identity: Place Names as Keys and Disguises in the Regional Novel," Onomastica 53, (June, 1978), pp. 1-9.

<sup>5</sup>George Eliot, Middlemarch, Book I, Chapter IX.

<sup>6</sup>In her "Quarry for 'Middlemarch'," George Eliot has a little drawing illustrating the geographical relationship of Lowick, Middlemarch, Tipton, and Freshitt to each other, and indicating the distances between them. This is reproduced in the Norton Critical Edition of Middlemarch, edited by Bert G. Hornback (New York, W.W. Norton, 1977), p. 625.

<sup>7</sup>Middlemarch, Book IV, Chapter XXXIX.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Chapter VI, Chapter LVI.

<sup>9</sup>W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "The Place-Names of Wessex," Literary Onomastics Studies 2 (1975), pp. 76-77.

<sup>10</sup>W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "The Place Names of Barsetshire," Literary Onomastic Studies 3 (1970), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>Anthony Trollope, The Warden. The writings of Anthony Trollope, Vol. I (Philadelphia, Gebbie and Co., 1900), p. 1

<sup>12</sup>Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford. Novels and Tales by Mrs. Gaskell, Vol. IV (London, Smith, Elder and Co., 1879), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>15</sup>Charles Percy Sanger, "The Structure of Wuthering Heights," In: Thomas A. Vogler (ed.), Twentieth Century Interpretations of Wuthering Heights (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 21.

<sup>16</sup>Ruth M. Adams, "Wuthering Heights; the Land East of Eden," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 13 (1958-59), p. 58.

<sup>17</sup>Some of these contrasts are alluded to by Derek Traversi, "The Brontë sisters and Wuthering Heights" In: Vogler, p. 56 (see note 15 above ).

<sup>18</sup>This makes Jeffrey Caine's recent novel Heathcliff (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1978) an attempt at narrating the

unnarratable. As an adventure story it is enjoyable and very well told, but Heathcliff cannot be the hero's name.

<sup>19</sup>The Shakespeare Head Brontë. Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1931), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>Here used as meaning "a name represented by nothing but an initial."