INVERLOCHY: PLACE NAMES AS RUINS

W. F. H. Nicolaisen

State University of New York at Binghamton

This somewhat anecdotal paper is the result of a missed train connection. On November 10, 1978, I was on my way from Aberdeen in the Scottish north-east to Spalding in the English Lincolnshire to give a lecture on Scottish place names, when, due to the rather rude and incompetent behavior of a ticket collector at Edinburgh's Waverley Station, I missed the train to England on which I was supposed to travel and suddenly found myself with more than two hours to spare and to while away. Still indignant about the man's incompetence and fuming about his less than courteous conduct, I decided to soothe my ruffled nerves by visiting the National Gallery of Scotland, situated only a five minutes' walk from the station beneath the dominating presence of Edinburgh Castle. I stumbled into a magnificent exhibition of paintings, drawings, and maps entitled "The Discovery of Scotland" and devoted to questions such as: "When did people begin to think that the scenery of Scotland was worth looking at, what did they look for, and where in Scotland did they find it?"[1] I not only calmed down much more quickly than I had expected but also began to see connections with my own scholarly interests, of which I had never been so consciously aware before. Although it will be difficult to convey almost two years later, in a place so very different and before an audience perhaps only vaguely familiar with the subject matter, the first excitement which I felt at having my eyes opened in an

unexpected fashion, I want to share with you briefly some of the thoughts which occurred to me on that grey November day in Scotland's capital and which I have tried to think through and to substantiate ever since, finding them by no means less exciting although they have by now taken on for me the traits of friendly familiarity.

I should perhaps also add as a matter of explanatory introduction that, at the time of the annoyingly involuntary but delightfully profitable break in my journey, I had been for several months engaged in two very pleasant activities: The scrutiny of all sorts of relevant early sources, including maps, for my Dictionary of Scottish Place Names, on the one hand, and the consecutive reading of all of Sir Walter Scott's novels for various quests in Literary Onomastics, on the other. I was therefore in a frame of mind ready to see links which were obviously there but which had eluded me so far; and that wonderful and unrepeatable exhibition served as the necessary catalyst, in this respect.

What probably set my train of thought in motion more than anything, else was the effective display, side by side, of both paintings and maps, of both drawings and plans, sometimes by the same artist/draughtsman, sometimes employing similar or identical techniques. I had seen some of the paintings and many of the maps -- mostly dating from the eighteenth-century -- separately on several occasions but had never considered them connectable or even complentary. Having the opportunity to observe them together closely on the same wall and allowing my eye repeatedly to travel from one to the other and back again, it gradually dawned on me that the function and associations of the ruined castle in the artist's

picture were almost identical to the function and associations of the
corresponding place name on the accompanying map. They were just
different ways of expressing the same notion, of allowing damaged and
distorted symbols of a cultural past to intrude upon a current landscape,
in fact of deliberately embedding these symbols romantically or factually
in that present scene both in their real modern decay and in their
potential ancient completeness. It further occurred to me that this
was not only true of ruined castles and their names but of other features
of the landscape, both natural and manmade, and of the names applied to
them. It was also clear that the state of architectural wholeness or
destruction would not always correspond directly to the linguistic state
of the name in question, and vice versa. Nevertheless the thought seemed
to be worth pursuing and expanding, especially when I noticed -- hence,
the title of this paper -- that Horatio McCulloch's (1805-1867) painting
of the ruined Inverlochy Castle[2] in the shadow of Ben Nevis made visual
the very place of which I had recently read a verbal account in the
eighteenth chapter of Scott's Legend of Montrose: "The ancient Castle
of Inverlochy, once, as it is said, a royal fortress, and still, though
somewhat dismantled, a place of some strength and consideration...."[3]
Surely, here were two artists saying the same thing, one with his brush
and the other with his pen. There was the same underlying notion of
former might and power and continuing strength and importance, despite
its ruinous state, in McCulloch's visual representation as in Scott's
verbal description. There was the same sense of oneness with the land-
scape, of an almost natural fusion of all features of the topography,

the ancient castle seemingly not much younger than the ancient Ben Nevis behind it and than the ever-lapping waters of the loch on its shore side. And then there was the name, of course, most convincing link between the word painting and the artist's picture -- Inverlochy, onomastic aspect of the same theme, itself a linguistic ruin in both its elements, the generic --inver-- and the specific --lochy--, no longer recognizable lexically by current speakers of English and only partially transparent to speakers of Gaelic as "mouth of the (river) Lochy", the river name itself being a witness to ancient Celtic river worship and long forgotten religious practices -- "the black goddess", Latinized by Adamnan as Nigra Dea. The ultimate unity of the triad -- visual, verbal, onomastic -- was too compelling to be ignored, and thus my new metaphor was born -- "place names as ruins".

I did not have the good fortune to encounter other examples of direct correspondence between any of the paintings exhibited and any other of Sir Walter's verbal depictions, in spite of his strong influence on the themes chosen by contemporary and later painters, but at least James Ward's (1769-1859) painting of Melrose Abbey in the Scottish Borders provided a parallel since the fictitious abbey, which is the scene of so much of the action in Scott's The Monastery and its sequel The Abbot, is supposed to have been modeled on Melrose: "I selected for my residence the village of Kennaquhair, in the south of Scotland, celebrated for the ruins of its magnificent monastery..." (The Monastery, Introductory Epistle). Whereas Scott is silent, however, on the "real" name Inverlochy he comments at some length on the invented name

Kennaquhair: "The village described in the Benedictine's manuscript
by the name of Kennaquhair, bears the same Celtic termination which
occurs in Traquahir, Caquhair, and other compounds. The learned
Chalmers derives this word Quhair; from the winding course of the stream,
a definition which coincides, in a remarkable degree, with the serpen-
tine turns of the river Tweed near the village of which we speak" (The
Monastery, Ch. I). Etymological allusions to what was in Scott's time
acceptable scholarship are here utilized to give unwarranted authenticity
to the fictitious name, or at least to one of its parts, but beyond such
immediate concern the strategies of etymology are used to restore, at
least partially, the name, now a lexical ruin, to its former linguistic
accessability and meaningful completeness. Etymology when so employed --
and such employment is, of course, by no means restricted to Scott or any
literary environment, since it is the routine pursuit of many a name
scholar -- becomes a means of bringing the lexical past of a name to life.
Onomastically, of course, there is no such thing as a name in ruins --
Inverlochy is not any more ruinous than Kennaquhair or Melrose -- but
from a lexical point of view the destructive forces of phonological
adaptation and of resulting semantic opacity operate with ruinous con-
sequences, and the etymologizing onomastician can therefore be said to
be something like an architectural historian or, better still, like some
expert or owner who painstakingly rebuilds a dilapidated structure
because he is not satisfied with its incomplete, apparently non-
functional state.

And yet, the deliberate creation of a literary place name with

doubtful or unknown lexical antecedents is perhaps more like the
building of toponymic folly, of an intentional ruin, once so popular
architecturally among wealthy landowners with strong classical leanings.
To take matters one step further by examining such a folly as if it had
been a complete structure at an earlier date is, I suppose a prime
example in onomastic irony. Scott applies this tongue-in-cheek approach
several times in The Antiquary, a novel in which he makes subtle fun of
his own antiquarian interests. Here is a lengthy but telling instance
of it:

> 'The subject, my lord, is the hill-fort of Quickens-
> bog, with the site of which your lordship is doubtless
> familiar: It is upon your store-farm of Mantanner, in
> the barony of Clochnaben.'

> 'I think I have heard the names of these places,'
> said the Earl, in answer to the Antiquary's appeal.

> 'Heard the name? and the farm brings him six hundred
> a-year—O Lord!'

> Such was the scarce subdued ejaculation of the
> Antiquary. But his hospitality got the better of his
> surprise, and he proceeded to read his essay with an
> audible voice, in great glee at having secured a patient,
> and, as he fondly hoped, an interested hearer.

> 'Quickens-bog may at first seem to derive its
> name from the plant Quicken, by which, Scottice, we
> understand couch-grass, dog-grass, or the Triticum repens

of Linnaeus; and the common English monosyllable <u>Bog</u>, by which
we mean, in popular language, a marsh or morass; in Latin,
<u>Palus</u>. But it may confound the rash adopters of the
more obvious etymological derivations, to learn, that the
couch-grass or dog-grass, or, to speak scientifically, the
<u>triticum repens</u> of Linnaeus, does not grow within a
quarter of a mile of this castrum or hill-fort, whose
ramparts are uniformly clothed with short verdant turf;
and that we must seek a bog or <u>palus</u> at a still greater
distance, the nearest being that of Gird-the-mear, a full
half-mile distant. The last syllable, <u>bog</u>, is obviously,
therefore, a mere corruption of the Saxon <u>Burgh</u>, which we
find in the various transmutations of <u>Burgh</u>, <u>Burrow</u>, <u>Brough</u>,
<u>Bruff</u>, <u>Buff</u>, and <u>Boff</u>, which last approaches very near the
sound in question--since, supposing the word to have been
originally <u>borgh</u>, which is the genuine Saxon spelling, a
slight change, such as modern organs too often make upon
ancient sounds, will produce first <u>Bogh</u>, and then, <u>elisa H</u>,
or compromising and sinking the guttural, agreeable to the
common vernacular practice, you have either <u>Boff</u> or <u>Bog</u> as
it happens. The word <u>Quickens</u> requires in like manner to
be altered,--decomposed, as it were,--and reduced to its
original and genuine sound, ere we can discern its real
meaning. By the ordinary exchange of the <u>Qu</u> into <u>Wh</u>,
familiar to the rudest <u>tyro</u> who has opened a book of old

Scottish poetry, we gain either Whilkens, or Whichensborgh ---
put, we may suppose by way of question, as if those who
imposed the name, struck with the extreme antiquity of the
place, had expressed in it an interrogation, "To whom did
this fortress belong?"--Or, it might be Whackens-burgh, from
the Saxon Whacken, to strike with the hand, as ·doubtless the
skirmishes near a plane of such apparent consequence must
have legitimated such a derivation,' etc. etc. etc.

I will be more merciful to my readers than Old-buck
was to his guest; for, considering his opportunities of
gaining patient attention from a person of such consequence
as Lord Glenallan were not many, he used, or rather abused,
the present to the uttermost (The Antiquary, Ch. XXXV).

Just in case you feel the same about my own presentation I will
try not to tease your patience much longer. It is, however, necessary
to return briefly to the initial point of our argument. In keeping with
John Ruskin's observation that, in the nineteenth-century appreciation
of mountains, "The charm of romantic association can only be felt by
the modern European child...it depends for its force on the existence
of ruins /italics mine/ and traditions, on the remains of architecture,
the traces of battlefields, and the precursorship of eventful history,"[4]
early Scottish landscape painting is full of such remains. One only has
to look at the pictures of Alexander and John Runciman, John Clark,
David Allan, Robert Paul, Charles Cordiner, Archibald Rutherford,
William Tomkins, Joseph Farington, Alexander Nasmyth, John Sanger,

Paul Sandby, Robert and James Norie, John Thomson, Jacob More, Robert
Adam, as well as Horatio McCulloch and James Ward, many of whose
lifespans overlap that of Scott's or coincide with it.[5] Robert Norie's
"Landscape with a waterfall and ruins", Paul Sandby's views of Bothwell
Castle, Robert Adams' "A castle in the moorland", Jacob More's "Roslin
Castle" and John Thomson's "Roslin Chapel and Castle" are interesting
cases in point.

Compare with this Sir Walter's verbal painting of Avenel Castle,
keep of the dreaded Julian Avenèl:

> The situation of this ancient fortress was remarkable.
> It occupied a small rocky islet in a mountain lake, or tarn,
> as such a piece of water is called in Westmoreland. The lake
> might be about a mile in circumference, surrounded by hills
> of considerable height, which, except where old trees and
> brushwood occupied the ravines that divided them from each
> other, were bare and heathy. The surprise of the spectator
> was chiefly excited by finding a piece of water situated in
> that high and mountainous region, and the landscape around
> had features which might rather be termed wild, than either
> romantic or sublime; yet the scene was not without its charms.
> Under the burning sun of summer, the clear azure of the deep
> unruffled lake refreshed the eye, and impressed the mind
> with a pleasing feeling of deep solitude. In winter, when
> the snow lay on the mountains around, these dazzling masses
> appeared to ascend far beyond their wonted and natural height,

while the lake which stretched beneath, and filled their

bosom with all its frozen waves, lay like the surface of

a darkened and broken mirror around the black and rocky-

islet, and the walls of the grey castle, with which it was

crowned.

    As the castle occupied, either with its principal

buildings, or with its flanking and outward walls, every

projecting point of rock, which served as its site, it

seemed as completely surrounded by water as the nest of a

wild swan, save where a narrow causeway extended betwixt,

the islet and the shore   (The Monastery, Ch. XXIII).

There are several other such word paintings in the prose works of

Scott as, for instance, the depictions of Ellangowan Castle in Guy

Mannering (Ch. IV), of Ravenswood Castle (Ch. II) and Wolf's Crag

(Ch. VII) in The Bride of Lammermoor, and Norna's dwelling at Fitful-head

in The Pirate (Ch. XXVII), but the examples presented must suffice to

illustrate and substantiate my point, which is that place names, whether

perceived as ruins or not, function in their embeddedness in verbal

landscapes or on maps as counterparts to architectural or geological

survivals of the past, as remnants of what once was and therefore as

reminders of what might have been. They constantly keep the prospect

alive that, through an act of the human imagination, that past might be

restored with beneficial results for the present. "What Scott gave the

general public /in this respect/ was a change of heart. The barren hills

remained the same, but his readers were taught to place a value upon

those very aspects in the landscape which had once appeared matters of

shame. This change of heart was effected largely through the power of

historical association. Scott himself readily admitted that he did not

look at landscape quite as a painter would do, but that he was attracted

more by places 'distinguished by historical events' than by places merely

renowned for beauty."[6]

A similar "double vision" permits us to be attracted by certain

place names because of their historical potential. Whether, through the

various processes of name transmission, especially the common phonological

adaptation of names inherited from another language, we are confronted

with currently meaningless names, or, as in the case of Kennaquhair, with

names deliberately fabricated to have no meaning and therefore to invite

speculation, we are intent on restoring their documentable or imagined

original shape and meaning, a procedure which allows us to treat both

ruin (or folly) and complete structure alike. History comes alive in

the present. There is no doubt about the legitimacy and, from an

historian's point of view, the effectiveness of such strategies, as long

as we remember that the ruin as ruin has a function, too, and that, as

far as place names are concerned, any success in the etymological ploy

of restored lexical meaning does not affect, certainly not improve, the

function of a name as name. The lexical ruin usually shows onomastic

wholeness, and where there is no decay there is no need to restore or

repair.

W. F. H. Nicolaisen
State University of New York
at Binghamton

Notes

[1] James Holloway and Lindsay Errington, <u>The Discovery of Scotland:</u>

<u>The Appreciation of Scottish Scenery through Two Centuries of Painting</u>

(Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1978), p. V.

[2] The original lecture was illustrated by color slides of some of the

paintings mentioned.

[3] Because of the large number of editions of Scott's <u>Waverley Novels</u>

available and because of the relative brevity of most of his chapters,

references are here provided to the chapters in question only, in order

to avoid confusion.

[4] <u>Modern Painters</u>, Vol. III; quoted in Holloway and Errington, p. 111.

[5] All the painters were represented in the exhibition and are

discussed by Holloway and Errington.

[6] Holloway and Errington, p. 92.