On *rivulets* and *macaronic duplex* placenames

In our September 2017 issue David Blair solved the enigma of *River Lett* vs *Lett River*. This reminded me of my various trips to Tasmania and being struck by the prolific use of the generic *rivulet* for so many streams there. (The OED defines a *rivulet* as being 'a small river; a stream.')

Tasmania seems to be the place in the world where this generic is used most often: there are 255 streams there that are called *rivulets*. In contrast, NSW only has 30, New Zealand 11, South Australia four, and Victoria three. The other States don't seem to have any *rivulets* at all. I have only been able to find one *rivulet* in Great Britain: the Bourne Rivulet in Hampshire. The USA has no recorded examples, although in Massachusetts the Rivulet Brook has *rivulet* as the specific element preceding its different generic.

These two non-Australian examples are particularly interesting because both have names that are termed in the literature as 'tautonyms' or 'tautologous toponyms'. David and I prefer to call such toponyms 'macaronic duplex toponyms'.[1] These are names where the specific and the generic come from different languages and have the same meaning—both *bourne* (< Old English *burna* < Old Germanic **brunnon*-)[2] and *brook* (< Old English Old English *bróc* < West Germanic **brôka*-) mean 'small stream', as does *rivulet* (< classical Latin *rīvulus* + *-et* suffix). It's conceivable that the following toponyms belong to this set too:

- *Burn Creek* (TAS) (*burn* an alternative form of *bourne*)
- *River Creek* (VIC) and *Brook Creek* (QLD) (where *creek* < Middle English *creke* < French *crique* < Latin *creca*)

Macaronic duplexes are quite common in river names. They occur all over the world—especially where languages have come into contact, because the phenomenon is a by-product of language contact:

- *River Avon* (Wales) lit. 'River River' < Brythonic; spelled *Afon* in modern Welsh
- *Mississippi River* (USA) lit. 'Big River River' < Algonquian
- *Sahara Desert* (Africa) lit. 'Great Desert Desert' from Arabic 'aṣ-Ṣaḥrā' al-Kubrā' 'the Great Desert'
- *Mount Fujiyama* (Japan) lit. 'Mount Mount Fuji' from Japanese *yama* 'mountain'
- *Saaremaa Island* (Estonia) lit. 'Isle's land Island'
- *Mount Maunganui* (NZ) literally 'Mount Big Mount' derived from the Māori *maunga* 'mountain'and *nui* 'large, big, important'
- *Dreketi River* (Fiji) lit. 'River River' from obsolete *dreketi* 'river'
- *Cowal Swamp* from Wiradjuri *cowal* 'swampy hollow'; Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay and Yuwaalayaay *gawal* 'watercourse, swamp, billabong' (also used a generic for the features SWAMP, STREAM, LAGOON, LAKE and WATERHOLE) (Nash 2008)
- *Gilgai Waterhole* from Gamilaraay and Wiradjuri *gilgai* 'water hole'

Strickland Falls on Hobart Rivulet (photo: J.J. Harrison, Wikimedia Commons)

Endnotes

[1] David Blair and I have a forthcoming publication on this phenomenon and term. *Macaronic* refers to a text using a mixture of languages (usually two). It can also be used to refer to hybrid words (i.e. internally macaronic); a good example is TELEVISION from Greek *τῆλε* (*tēle*) 'far' + Latin *visio* 'seeing' (from *videre* 'to see').

[2] The symbol < means 'derived from'; and the superscript asterisk (*) before a lexical item in historical linguistics means that a certain root or word has been reconstructed (based on linguistic principles) to what we think it must have been.

References

Nash, David. (2008). 'Examining the Name Element/Feature Type Cowal.' Unpublished paper presented to ANPS/CGNA workshop, Rydges Hotel, Wollongong, Australia, 11 October.

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