LITERARY USES OF DIALECT

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British authors since Chaucer have made creative use of dialect in their writings. Up until the eighteenth century, the range of dialects represented was limited, the representations depended on a narrow range of stereotyped features, and the function of such representations was chiefly comic. From the late eighteenth century onwards, a much wider range of dialects began to appear in literature, to be represented in greater detail, and to take on a greater range of functions. Norman Blake in his 1981 survey *Non-Standard Language in English Literature* places the most significant shift during the Victorian period, arguing that during the Romantic period 'regional varieties of English were gaining acceptability', but that 'only the Scots and Irish varieties found acceptance'.[1] In this chapter I argue that, even if the most significant changes did not occur until later, the foundations for those changes were laid during the Romantic period itself. The period saw the publication of a number of landmark texts that used dialect in new and innovative ways or which offered a reconceptualization of the literary value of different varieties of English. These include the poetry of Robert Burns and John Clare, the novels of Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott, and John Galt, and William Wordsworth's influential statement about 'the real language of men' in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

The primary question that arises when addressing any incident of dialect representation is: why has the author chosen to use non-standard forms here? Recent

[1] N. F. Blake, *Non-Standard Language in English Literature* (London: Deutsch, 1981), 146.

work by dialectologists has demonstrated that, above all, what written representations of dialect do for readers is construct a sense of voice. Through experimental work which asked informants to read out and respond to written dialect representations, Jaffe and Walton established that readers 'took for granted that orthography could authentically represent social voices and identities'.[2] This suggests one reason why Romantic-period literature began to embrace dialect: it enabled writers to invoke local and specific voices. This effect is not uniform, however, and dialect functions differently when it is the voice of a first-person speaker in lyric poetry, that of the homodiegetic narrator of a novel, that of a minor character in a novel written in Standard English, and that of a character in a play who will be brought to life by an actor on the stage. Two contrasting uses are exemplified in the following extracts:

> Let other poets raise a fracas
> 'Bout vines, an' wines, an' druken *Bacchus*,
> An' crabbed names an' stories wrack us,
> An' grate our lug,
> I sing the juice *Scotch bear* can mak us,
> In glass or jug.[3]

[2] Alexandra Jaffe and Shana Walton, 'The Voices People Read: Orthography and the Representation of Non-Standard Speech', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4.4 (2000), 561-87 (p. 582).

[3] 'Scotch Drink', lines 1-6, in Robert Burns, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Kilmarnock, 1786), 22.

> "You have a noble stock of linen, cousin," said Mrs Mason. "Few farmers houses in England could produce the like; but I think this rather too fine for common use."
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> "For common use!" cried Mrs MacClarty; "na, na, we're no sic fools as put our napery to use! I have a dizen tableclaiths in that press, therty years old, that were never laid upon a table. They a' o' my mother's spinning. I have nine o' my ain makin forby, that never saw the sun but at the bookin washing. Ye needna be telling us o' England!"[4]

In the first extract, from Burns, it is the first-person voice of the speaker of the poem who adopts non-standard forms, mingling high-register Italian-derived vocabulary ('fracas') and classical references ('*Bacchus*') with Scots vocabulary ('lug', 'druken'), respellings to indicate pronunciation ('mak', 'bear'), and apostrophes to indicate the elision of sounds ('an'' and 'o''). The poem is a pastoral, a highly sophisticated and conventionalized genre which celebrates rural life but in a self-consciously literary way. As such, the yoking together of Scots lexis with classical references is more conventional than it might initially appear, performing a confident and playful poetic persona who praises '*Scotch bear*' (barley) whilst also demonstrating cultural knowledge that 'vines an' wines' are more commonly associated with pastoral writing. Burns's experiments with code-switching, though, go beyond the occasional mixing of vocabularies typical of pastoral. As Alex Broadhead argues, he not only makes extensive use of the language varieties of his country of birth, but is actively engaged

[4] Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie: A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-nook*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh, 1808), 143.

with remaking those varieties: 'Burns's response to contemporary understandings of language is characterized by a consistent desire to transform and reinvent its functions, boundaries and taxonomies'.[5]

The second extract, from Elizabeth Hamilton's novel *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808), is primarily written in a third-person narrative voice in Standard English. The direct speech of one of the characters, Mrs Mason, is represented as Standard English, but the direct speech of the other, Mrs MacClarty, is represented as Scots through dialectal vocabulary ('bookin washing'), respelling ('dizen', 'claiths', 'therty'), negatives ('needna'), and apostrophes to indicate elision of sounds ('o''). In both what she says and how she says it, Mrs MacClarty's speech characterizes her negatively as a woman incapable of making good choices -- one who has more than twenty fine tablecloths stored away in her 'press' but none suitable to put on her table. Even her name reinforces an association between her language, her place of origin, and her failings as a housekeeper: 'clarty' is a Scots or Northern dialect word meaning 'dirty'.[6] Dialect is here clearly separated from Standard English and used to mark out the speech of one character in opposition to another. In both extracts the writer is using dialect in highly performative ways, but in the extract from Burns the focus is on the linguistic agility of the poetic persona, while in the second the focus is on the personal qualities of a fictional character.

In what follows I explore the use of dialect in Romantic-era fiction and poetry, a new field of research which complements other work on regional and national aspects

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[5] Alex Broadhead, *The Language of Robert Burns: Style, Ideology and Identity* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 1.

[6] *Oxford English Dictionary* (online).

of Romanticism, and which intersects too with current work on Romantic literature and class (see Brian Goldberg's essay in this volume). The role of dialect in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theatre is another important topic, with a longer scholarly history, but is excluded here for reasons of space.[7] I focus on three key challenges that arise when attempting to understand the literary uses of dialect in the Romantic era. The first is the one inherent in using concepts such as 'dialect' to talk about a period before a modern understanding of language variation had emerged. The second is that of accounting for the overall development of dialect representation while also respecting the different trajectories of specific dialects. The third is that of understanding the ideological implications of dialect: what does it mean for a literary text to 'make use' of dialect? In addressing these questions, I draw on historical perspectives from both literary and linguistic scholars.

An initial step is to ascertain how contemporary readers would have responded to literary texts that represent dialect. While Jaffe and Walton's findings provide insights into how dialect representation functions for modern readers, this is not necessarily generalizable to readers two hundred years ago who were operating within a different linguistic landscape. The founding principle of modern linguistics is that all

[7] Older articles on stage dialect include J. O. Bartley and D. L. Sims, 'Pre-Nineteenth Century Stage Irish and Welsh Pronunciation', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 93.5 (1949), 439-47; and Richard Walser, 'Negro Dialect in Eighteenth-Century American Drama', *American Speech* 30.4 (1955), 269-76. See also Blake, *Non-Standard Language in English Literature*, 130-4; and Arden Hegele's database of stage dialects in eighteenth-century comedy at: http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/prescrip/18thcComedy/home.html.

language varieties are equal and that it is only socio-political accident that elevates one variety to the prestige of 'the language' while demoting other varieties to the status of 'dialects'. Historians of the English language recognize that English has followed the same set of processes that have occurred in other languages where a standard variety has emerged: first the variety to be standardized is selected from among all other varieties, typically on account of its association with social and economic centres of power; then it takes on an increasing number of functions relating to law, writing, publishing, and education; its developing circle of activity means that it becomes more prestigious**;** concerns grow about its correct use, resulting in increased prescription about which variants are to be preferred; and finally the 'the language' is codified in grammars and dictionaries. Concurrently with this process of standardization for one variety, other varieties of English, which may have been associated with centres of power and had their own emergent literary traditions in earlier periods, become de-standardized as mere dialects.

From this perspective it is apparent that the Romantic period coincided with the latter part of the codification process of English, after the publication of some of the key works such as Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) and Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), but while there was still a rising tide of new grammars, dictionaries, and pronouncing guides.[8] In particular,

[8] See Ian Michael, *The Teaching of English: From the Sixteenth Century to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Joan C. Beal, *English in Modern Times: 1700-1945* (London: Arnold, 2004); and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 'English at the Onset of the Normative Tradition', in *The Oxford History of English*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the codification of pronunciation was under way. Lynda Mugglestone has demonstrated that while issues of accent and pronunciation were not given much attention in the first half of the eighteenth century, thereafter they were in greater focus. She notes that '[f]ive times as many works on elocution appeared between the years 1760 and 1800 than had done so in the years before 1760' and suggests that the purpose of these texts was 'to codify a non-localized, supra-regional "standard", and thus explicitly to displace the linguistic diversities of accent which currently pertained throughout the nation'.[9] Writing in the 1980s, Olivia Smith identified a specifically political aspect to this codification process, arguing that 'late eighteenth-century theories of language were centrally and explicitly concerned with class division',[10] and that the writings of Hugh Blair, Lindley Murray, and Johnson 'established grounds for dismissing any writings addressed to or originating from the vulgar audience, while making a language considered adequate for public discourse more difficult to learn'.[11]

Recent research in the field of Later Modern English, however, has challenged the narrative which sees eighteenth-century grammarians as deliberately pursuing a repressive agenda. Ingrid Tieken, for example, has explored the work of Robert Lowth and found him to be a careful investigator of English, not the dogmatic prescriptivist of

[9] Lynda Mugglestone, '*Talking Proper': The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3, 15.

[10] Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. viii.

[11] Smith, *Politics of Language*, 29.

later caricature.[12] In my own work on Joseph Priestley, an eighteenth-century grammarian who has sometimes been identified as a forerunner of twentieth-century linguistics, I have argued that modern accounts of eighteenth-century language study tend to be highly coloured by the claims that the linguists writing them want to make about their own discipline.[13] Alex Broadhead has proposed more generally that what is needed is a more sympathetic perspective on how writers on language perceived their own efforts, arguing that the eighteenth century should be understood not simply as an era of arid prescriptivism but as 'the age of the language makers'.[14]

Above all, these language-makers placed emphasis on finding the permanent and universal in language. A good example is the Aberdeen philosopher and theologian George Campbell, author of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776). As linguistic historians have noted, Campbell appears at times to entertain a descriptivist view of language, making statements such as: 'It is not the business of grammar . . . to give law to the fashions which regulate our speech. On the contrary, from its conformity to these, and from that alone, it derives all its authority and value.'[15] Despite this apparently

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[12] Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *The Bishop's Grammar: Robert Lowth and the Rise of Prescriptivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[13] Jane Hodson, 'The Problem of Joseph Priestley's (1733-1804) Descriptivism', *Historiographia Linguistica* 33.1-2 (2006), 57-84.

[14] Broadhead, *Language of Robert Burns*, 4.

[15] George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 2 vols (London, 1776), i. 340. For descriptive and prescriptive tendencies in his work, see Sterling Andrus Leonard, *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800* (1929; New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 148-62.

favourable view of everyday speech, however, Campbell insists in the same chapter that proper use of English depends upon identifying 'reputable', 'national', and 'present' use. He distinguishes 'national' use against 'provincial' use as follows:

> In every province there are peculiarities of dialect, which affect not only the pronunciation and the accent, but even the inflection and the combination of words, whereby their idiom is distinguished both from that of the nation, and from that of every other province. The narrowness of the circle to which the currency of the words and phrases of such dialects is confined, sufficiently discriminates them from that which is properly styled the language, and which commands a circulation incomparably wider.[16]

Campbell is concerned to identify what speakers have in common across the nation, not what distinguishes them from one another. Campbell's own position as an English speaker is significant: like other key figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, he was part of an academic institution proudly rooted in a distinctive Scottish intellectual tradition, but he wrote in standard English and was careful to eradicate Scotticisms from his speech. His 'philosophy of rhetoric' promotes a standard form of English -- grammatical, lexical, and phonological -- which involves an active suppression of any 'dialect' features of his native tongue. The linguistic assumptions are made explicit in expurgatory guides such as that of another prominent Aberdeen academic (and poet),

[16] Campbell, *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, i. 353.

James Beattie's *Scoticisms, Arranged in Alphabetical Order, Designed to Correct Improprieties of Speech and Writing* (1787).[17]

Yet alongside attempts to identify the national and permanent in English, dialect was on the rise as a serious object for scholarly investigation. The volume of work that had accrued in this burgeoning field by the early nineteenth century is evidenced by John Russell Smith's *A Bibliographical List of the Works that have been Published, towards Illustrating the Provincial Dialects of England* (1839). Smith does not describe his methodology and it must be borne in mind both that the quantity of print was increasing overall, and that recent works would have been easier to identify. Still, it is striking that Smith records just 10 works before 1700, 38 between 1700 and 1799, and 104 between 1800 and the publication of the bibliography in 1839. Although a few of the earlier works focus specifically on dialect, many are either collections of vocabulary, e.g. *A Collection of English Words* (1674), or only incidentally contain dialect, e.g. *History and Antiquities of the Isle of Tenet* (1736). By contrast, most of the later works listed by Smith address the topic of dialect specifically, such as *A Cornish-English Vocabulary* (1808) and *An Essay on the Peculiarities of Pronunciation, and the Dialect of Sheffield and its Neighbourhood* (1825), and many titles attest to a growing interest in both collecting and writing texts in dialect, including *The Northumberland*

[17] See Richard W. Bailey 'Scots and Scotticisms: Language and Ideology', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 26.1 (1991), 65-77; and Marina Dossena, *Scotticisms in Grammar and Vocabulary: 'Like Runes Upon a Standin' Stane'?* (Edinburgh: Donald, 2005).

Garland, or Newcastle Nightingale: A Matchless Collection of Famous Songs (1793) and *Ballads in the Cumberland Dialect* (1808).[18]

It is tempting to interpret the increased interest in dialect as a reaction against the ongoing codification of a single variety as 'the' language. While this may have been true in some cases, there are at least three objections to adopting this interpretation too readily. First, to a great extent it is the codification of Standard English that makes literary uses of dialect possible. It is because authors were well schooled in the use of 'good' English that they were able to play off against it, knowing that their readers were increasingly adept at interpreting the social signs of literary dialect. Second, it is a mistake to assume that an investment in codification was incompatible with an interest in dialect. In the case of Scotland, for example, poets including Allan Ramsey, Robert Fergusson, and Robert Burns rediscovered and took inspiration from older Scots poets such as William Dunbar in a movement described as the Vernacular Revival. Liam McIlvanney has argued that while the Vernacular Revival may initially appear directly opposed to the Scotticism-eradicating tendencies of the Scottish Enlightenment, in practice there is 'little warrant for viewing eighteenth-century Scottish culture as bifurcated between two monolithic and antagonistic movements' and that the two movements 'interacted with one another and intersected in the lives of individual Scots'.[19] Third, there is the fact that the emergent interest in dialect itself can be read as

[18] John Russell Smith, *A Bibliographical List of the Works That Have Been Published, Towards Illustrating the Provincial Dialects of England* (London, 1839).

[19] Liam McIlvanney, 'Hugh Blair, Robert Burns , and the Invention of Scottish Literature and the Invention of Scottish Literature,' *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29.2 (2005), 25-46 (p. 28).

a form of codification in its attempts to identify and record the purest form of the dialect. When Broadhead speaks of the age of 'language makers' he is not only referring to efforts to codify what we would now term Standard English, but also attempts to 'make' other varieties, including most notably Scots.

All of this renders problematic the apparently harmless term 'dialect'. A typical modern definition of 'dialect' states that dialect is 'a variety of language associated with subsets of users: in a geographical area . . . or with a social group'.[20] At first glance, eighteenth-century definitions of dialect do not appear strikingly different. Johnson in 1755 defines dialect as 'The subdivision of a language; as the Attic, Doric, Ionic, *Æ*olic dialects.'[21] John Collier's (pseud. Tim Bobbins) early and enormously successful dialect work was titled *A View of the Lancashire Dialect* (1746), and Burns's first collection was titled *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786). Yet a closer view suggests some important differences between eighteenth- and twenty-first century understandings of the term. The modern definition is deliberately vague as to the 'subset of users', 'geographical area', or 'social group' in question; as Penny Eckert has noted dialectologists are just as happy to turn to 'the street kid in the inner city' or 'the burned-out burnout in midwestern high school' as to 'the traditional peasant in an isolated community'.[22] By contrast, Johnson immediately cites the major Greek literary dialects as examples of dialects, while Collier's title speaks of '*the* Lancashire dialect'

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[20] Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1997), 119-20.

[21] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London, 1755), i, n. p.

[22] Penelope Eckert, 'Sociolinguistics and Authenticity: An Elephant in the Room', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7.3 (2003), 392-7 (p. 392).

and Burns of '*the* Scottish dialect'. In each case there is an assumption that there is a single dialect which holds across a wide geographical area.

This points towards the second challenge I have identified, which is that while an overview of the literary uses of dialect in the Romantic period is desirable, the dialects under consideration are multiple and various, with individual histories and trajectories. Dialects that could claim historical depth were felt to be inherently of more value than those of a more recent vintage, and writings on dialect frequently laid claim to the notion of dialects as particularly historic. John Russell Smith's bibliography is prefaced with a quotation from Joseph Bosworth's *Elements of Anglo-Saxon Grammar* (1823), which reinforces the importance of dialects for preserving older forms of the language:

> Much of the peculiarity of dialect prevalent in Anglo-Saxon times, is preserved even to the present day in the provincial dialects of the same districts. In these local dialects, then, remnants of the Anglo Saxon tongue may be found in its least altered, most uncorrupt, and therefore in its purest state. Having a strong and expressive language of their own, they had little desire and few opportunities to adopt foreign idioms or pronunciation, and thus to corrupt the purity of their ancient language. Our present polished phrase and fashionable pronunciation are often new, and, as deviating from primitive usage, faulty and corrupt. We are, therefore, much indebted to those zealous and patriotic

> individuals who have referred to the archaisms of our nervous language, by publishing provincial glossaries, and giving specimens of their dialect.[23]

What we see here is a reversal of the terms of the debate, so that it is the 'polished and fashionable' modern English which is faulty and corrupt, and the provincial dialects which are 'strong', 'expressive', and 'nervous'. The deconstructive turn of twentieth-century linguistic thought -- which understands the values placed on different language varieties as being social constructs rather than qualities inherent in the dialects themselves -- is not in evidence.

Each language variety thus has a different trajectory during the Romantic period, resulting both from its own literary history and from its position in a series of complex and sometimes conflicting hierarchies which privileged not only 'good English' over 'dialect', but also 'national' over 'local' and 'ancient language' over 'polished phrase'.[24] Above all it is Scottish Literature -- exemplified by Ramsey, Burns, Scott, Galt and Hogg among others -- which led the way in dialect representation. Blake notes that the pre-existing tradition of writing in Scots meant both that writers had to hand a ready means for representation that simply did not exist for other varieties, and that

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[23] Joseph Bosworth, *Preface to Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. xxvii, cited on frontispiece of Smith, *Bibliographical List*.

[24] In his chapter on 'Bad Englishes', Elfenbein takes Black English and Jewish English as his two exemplar dialects, but in many ways these are atypical of the dialects of the Romantic period because of the additional racial and foreign dimension that they bring. Andrew Elfenbein, *Romanticism and the Rise of English* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), ch. 3.

readers were primed to read serious literature written in Scots.[25] As many scholars have pointed out, however, Scots is properly not a dialect of English at all but a parallel Anglo-Saxon variety with its own literary standard. Scots started on the path towards standardization, but then became destandardized at a political level by the Union with England, even though a literary tradition was -- albeit somewhat spasmodically -- maintained. This effectively meant that from 1707 onwards it had two existences: one as a standard language within Scotland and another as a dialect within the British Isles. It was, moreover, not a single uniform variety but a range of varieties on a cline from Standard Scottish English through Scots to Braid Scots, further complicated by regional variations within Scotland, as well as by the influence of Scots Gaelic. From a cultural position North of the border, writing in Scots must be treated as a literary tradition in its own right. And yet Scots is the literary dialect of the Romantic period *par excellence*, and many of the key innovations originated in Scotland.[26] Burns had an enormous influence on later poets including Wordsworth and Clare, for example. Within the history of the novel, Maria Edgeworth may have written the first homodiegetic novel narrated by a dialect-speaking character as an Irishman with *Castle Rackrent* (1800), but much of the innovation in the novel form that followed was undertaken by writers using

[25] Blake, *Non-Standard Language in English Literature*, 137.

[26] A recent survey found that from a quantitative perspective it is novels featuring Scots which led the way in the rise of dialect representation in this period. See Jane Hodson and Alex Broadhead, 'Developments in Literary Dialect Representation in British Fiction 1800-1836', *Language and Literature* 22 (2013), 315-32; and our analytical database, *Dialect in British Fiction 1800-1836*, at: www.dialectfiction.org.

Scots, as evidenced across the novels of Walter Scott as well as experimental works such as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).[27] Even little-remembered novels such as Robert Mudie's *Glenfergus* (1820) demonstrate a nuanced attention to the social dimensions of dialect that are far in advance of the crude stereotyping found in novels set in England during the same period. It is, in short, difficult to imagine how the English literary tradition of dialect representation would have developed in the absence of Scots.

One result of the very different histories of Scots as opposed to regional varieties of English is that poems which make use of regional Englishes often look very different on the page to their Scots counterparts. It is striking, for example, to consider Clare's use of dialect:

> The fields all clear'd, the labouring mice
> To sheltering hedge and wood patrole,
> Where hips and haws for food suffice,
> That chumbled lie about their hole.
>
> The squirrel, bobbing from the eye,

[27] For Irish, Scottish, and Welsh influences on the development of the novel in this period, see Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

> Is busy now about his hoard,
> And in old nest of crow or pye
> His winter-store is oft explor'd.[28]

Clare describes the landscape around him using words that are likely to have been familiar to rural speakers, being both specific and everyday (e.g. 'hips and haws', 'crow or pye'). Clare also makes use of higher-register Latinate words ('suffice' and 'explored'). There is only one word that is distinctly regional: 'chumbled', which the *Oxford English Dictionary* first attests in this poem. While this is not the most dialectal of Clare's poems -- a poem such as 'Dolly's Mistake', written in the first-person voice of a hapless milkmaid, is more nonstandard -- none of Clare's poems shows the density of respelling, dialect vocabulary, and grammatical features to be found in Burns's 'Scotch Drink'. The fact that what Clare does here is nevertheless highly significant is attested by the reception of his poetry. In 1821 *The Monthly Review* offered the following review of *The Village Minstrel*, comparing Clare's use of dialect unfavourably to that of Scots writers:

> We leave it to the sober judgment of our readers, to decide, whether these, though indisputable, are desirable additions to our language. We may perhaps be told, that a Glossary is annexed to the book; but this does not alter our view of the subject. If the example of Burns, Ramsay, Ferguson, or other Scottish poets be pleaded, we answer, that they employed a dialect in general use through an

[28] 'Autumn', lines 137-44, in John Clare, *The Village Minstrel, and Other Poems*, 2 vols (London, 1821), i. 94-5.

> entire country, and not the mere *patois* of a small district. If the peculiar phraseology of the Northamptonshire rustics is to be licensed in poetry, we see no reason why that of Lancashire, Somersetshire, and other countries should not be allowed an equal currency; and thus our language would be surprisingly enriched, by the legitimization of all the varieties of speech in use among the *canaille* throughout the kingdom.[29]

Clare's use of dialect terms may appear light when contrasted to Burns, but they were evidently highly salient. For this reviewer any use of 'the peculiar phraseology of the Northamptonshire rustics' is sufficient to categorize his poetry as 'dialect', or worse, 'the mere *patois* of a small district'.

Clare's poetry raises questions relating to intentionality in dialect writing. James McKusick has made the case for valuing the skill with which he uses dialect: 'Clare is not simply a dialect poet, but a poet who employs dialect for deliberate effect. Clare adopts a nonstandard lexicon only when it suits his poetic purpose, and he is fully capable of producing an "educated" sociolect when treating abstract or elevated topics.'[30] This argument is similar to the one Broadhead makes about Burns, attesting to the importance of the shifting registers these poets employ and interpreting their use of dialect as a deliberate strategy. In the case of Clare, however, the vexed issue of the

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[29] *Monthly Magazine* 52 (Nov. 1821), in Mark Storey (ed.), *John Clare: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 154.

[30] James C. McKusick, 'John Clare and the Tyranny of Grammar', *Studies in Romanticism* 33.2 (1994), 255-77 (p. 262).

editing of his poetry makes questions of authorial intent problematic.[31] In one of his letters, for example, Clare responds negatively to his editor's attempts to 'correct' his language: 'I may alter but I cannot mend grammer in learning is like Tyranny in government -- confound the bitch Ill never be her slave & have a vast good mind not to alter the verse in question'.[32] This reads like a refusal to conform to codifying tendencies of the age, although the fact that he then explains that the passage in question was 'written in ridicule of [Wordsworth's] affectations of simplicity' complicates matters. It is simply not possible to determine exactly which features of his nonstandard language Clare intended to achieve a 'deliberate effect', although from a reader's perspective the perception of intentionality can matter a great deal. There is also a tendency to read elements of nonstandard dialect differently: the use of regional lexical items is often associated with the positive performance of local identity, but non-standard grammar and punctuation are more likely to be read as indexing a lack of education and literacy.

If the idea that 'the *patois* of a small district' could have value was problematic for reviewers, varieties which could lay no claim to being 'rustic' were beyond the pale. In Amelia Beauclerc's novel *Disorder and Order* (1820), for example, the speech of the maid Patty is markedly non-standard. Given that the novel is set in Oxfordshire and Patty lives locally, it can be assumed that this is intended to be an Oxfordshire dialect:

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[31] For a discussion of the editorial issues, see Hugh Haughton, 'Revision and Romantic Authorship: The Case of Clare', *John Clare Society Journal* 17 (1998), 65-73.

[32] To John Taylor, 21 Feb. 1822, *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 231.

> She saw them smiling significantly every now and then; and, stopping suddenly she said, in an angry tone -- "None of your flams or your jeers! Your betters ha' come a courting to me; so go along! True *loviers* are to be add, as well as sweetarts! Fine times, indeed, when young *gals* can't walk the streets for you! I desires you wont keep me company, if you means nothen but fun."
>
> William Burrows, the other youth, was surfeited by her ignorance: he liked a frolic of all things, but Patty was too vulgar for his taste; he therefore accepted her dismissal. [33]

Patty's speech mixes some features associated with London speech (h-deletion in 'add' and 'sweetarts', slang terms 'flams' and '*gals*') with some features of rural speech (a-prefixing in 'a courting', respelling '*loviers*'). Even more salient are features which would have been perceived as grammatical errors: non-standard concordance in 'I desires you' and 'if you means'. What is signalled here through Patty's speech is not a specific geographical location but a generic nonstandardness, associated with her semi-urban background and loose morals. The novel endorses the brutal judgement of William Burrows that Patty is 'too vulgar' to be concerned with, and she quickly comes to a bad end, seduced and abandoned by the other young man.

The third and final challenge in the study of Romantic dialectology is that of understanding the broader implications of representing non-standard English. From a linguistic perspective there has been a tendency to evaluate literary dialects for the

[33] Amelia Beauclerc, *Disorder and Order*, 3 vols (London, 1820), i. 97.

potential information that they provide about real-world historical dialects.[34] The assumption underlying such approaches is that literary representations only have value in so far as they align with the real dialect which is 'out there' in the mouths of authentic speakers. Mary Bucholtz has noted that dialectology's obsession with 'the authentic speaker' is 'in part a residue of Romanticism', and that 'efforts to document the speech of the *Volk* . . . can in part be traced to philology and folklore, both central to Romanticism as a nationalist and intellectual project'.[35] While twentieth-century sociolinguists expanded their remit far beyond the remote peasant, the emphasis on the 'authentic' part remained and it is apparent that modern dialectology owes a direct line of descent from the kinds of arguments used by Bosworth to justify attention to rural speech. Within the last decade dialectologists have begun to interrogate the idea of 'the authentic speaker' much more critically and greater attention has been paid to the role of speaker agency and social creativity. This opens up new opportunities for cross-fertilization between literary and linguistic perspectives. For example, drawing on earlier work by Asif Agha, Barbara Johnstone et al. develop a framework to explore the historical process by which speakers become conscious of dialectal differences, with particular reference to the variety of English spoken in the North American city of

[34] See, for example, James P. Sullivan, 'The Validity of Literary Dialect: Evidence from the Theatrical Portrayal of Hiberno-English Forms', *Language in Society* 9.2 (1980), 195-219.

[35] Mary Bucholtz, 'Sociolinguistic Nostalgia and the Authentication of Identity', *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7.3 (2003), 398-416 (p. 399).

Pittsburgh.[36] It is not my intention to rehearse the whole model here, but it is notable that in the final stage (third-order indexicality) a subset of the linguistic features becomes widely recognized as marking that particular dialect, to the point where it becomes possible for speakers to perform the dialect simply by using a few features in isolation. At this point, both the dialect in question and the specific features associated with it are said to have become 'enregistered'. What is of particular interest to the literary scholar in this model is that it affords a particular role to print and sees representations of dialects in literature as having a constructive role in the development of perceptions of dialect.

In acknowledging the role that literature plays in constructing popular perceptions of dialect, consideration must also be given to the ideological implications of this process. As I have discussed, dialects that were held to be particularly rustic and unspoiled were valued highly in linguistic terms; as a result, poetry written in those dialects was almost always pastoral in genre, as in the case of the poems already discussed by Burns and Clare. Writing about the Scottish context, Nigel Leask notes that 'Despite its popularity, pastoral ranked low in the Augustan hierarchy of poetical genres, which meant that poetry written in the Scots "Doric" idiom was conventionally limited to pastoral eclogues and elegies . . . , epistles, songs and ballads, and the

[36] Asif Agha, 'The Social Life of Cultural Value', *Language & Communication* 23.3-4 (2003), 231-73; Barbara Johnstone, Jennifer Andrus, and Andrew E. Danielson, 'Mobility, Indexicality, and the Enregisterment of "Pittsburghese"', *Journal of English Linguistics* 32.4 (2006), 77-104.

"peasant brawl" genre of the Christ's Kirk tradition'.[37] 'Doric' was the variety of ancient Greek spoken in Doria and was associated with rural life, standing in opposition to the urban 'Attic' of Athens. The term was used early in the eighteenth century by Allan Ramsay to defend his use of Scots, and was later applied to Burns. The use of the Greek term confers classical connotations on poetry written in Scots, but at the same time it places constraints on subject matter and genre. Wordsworth's 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* calls for a new kind of literary language which embraces the language of the lower orders. At the same time, however, it relentlessly associates the lives of those lower orders with the simple, the elementary, and the natural:

> Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of these men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.[38]

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[37] Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57.

[38] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems*, 2 vols (London, 1800), i, p. xi. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.

From one perspective this is a powerful statement in support of regional language varieties, but from another it is evidence of how dialect was often confined to the marginal and remote. Certainly, in Wordsworth's own poetic practice in *Lyrical Ballads* there is little evidence of dialect features, and those do appear are carefully hedged about. For example:

> Beneath the large old Oak, that near their door
> Stood, and, from it's enormous breadth of shade
> Chosen for the Shearer's covert from the sun,
> Thence in our rustic dialect was call'd
> The CLIPPING TREE, a name which yet it bears.[39]

In using the phrase 'our rustic dialect' Wordsworth acknowledges 'clipping tree' to be a term that he himself shared in the past, and yet by glossing it in this way and footnoting its meaning he creates distance between the 'rustic dialect' and the national language shared by poet and reader.[40] There is thus an inherent contradiction in the arguments that brought dialect into poetry during the Romantic period: these arguments both validated the use of the language of ordinary people in literature, and yet also invalidated such language as rural and marginal.

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[39] 'Michael, A Pastoral', lines 175-9.

[40] See Alex Broadhead, 'Framing Dialect in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*: Wordsworth, Regionalisms and Footnotes', *Language and Literature* 19.3 (2010), 249-63.

Within fiction, there is a parallel tendency for dialect to be used to signal the speech of lower-class characters, as in the case above with Mrs McClarty and Patsy. Even in dealing with a variety as well established as Scots, writers had to balance a desire to extend the literary range of Scots against the fact that they were participating in a literary culture which revolved around London as well as Edinburgh, and that they were writing for English as well as Scottish audiences. An example of how this might play out in practice can be seen in the novel *Edith of Glammis* (1836). In this historical novel, King James VI of Scotland makes regular appearances, often initially in disguise. Throughout he speaks in Scots:

> "God's grace, man!" exclaimed the king, "we shall ne'er extend it to you -- to you, wha, under Providence, hae been the instrument o' communicating the foul conspiracy to our gracious self. Na, na, man; that were but sma' thanks to return for the affection ye have shewn to our maist royal person, and the meikle mischief ye hae prevented by the timely disclosure o' the diabolical and maist unholy league."
>
> The latter parts of this sentence were spoken in a tone which, though veiled by natural urbanity and politeness, implied, to the most attentive hearer, the existence of a deep and bitter feeling of sarcasm and contempt.[41]

It is notable here that Scots is explicitly associated with 'urbanity and politeness' and that the king is presented as highly linguistically competent, mixing Scots 'meikle' and

[41] Alexander Hamilton, *Edith of Glammis, by Cuthbert Clutterbuck of Kennaquhair*, 3 vols (London, 1836), ii, 186-7.

'maist' alongside Latinate 'conspiracy', 'gracious', 'affection', and 'diabolical'. Scots is presented as a language fit for a king, but the narrator is also careful to comment on the fact that James is a very unusual monarch who stands in distinction from his (Standard-English-speaking) courtiers:

> James had been called to the throne at a very tender age, and his education had consequently been much neglected. His acquirements in general might therefore be looked upon more as those of a natural, than of an artificial kind. Yet nevertheless, no prince ever existed who was so completely versed in the laws and customs of his kingdom, or who could apply those laws in a more correct and expeditious manner.[42]

While this passage does not explicitly refer to his language, it is difficult not to read the explanation of his 'natural' acquirements as referring at least in part to his use of language. The novel is thus caught between celebrating the linguistic dexterity of a King who ruled both Scotland and England and conforming to the expectations of an audience trained to identify Scotticisms as a defect in polite speech.

Dialect in literature thus began to offer the possibility of representing the voices of characters who had not previously been heard in literature, or not been taken seriously. At the same time, however, to represent such voices was to place them socially and to pass implicit judgement upon the intellectual abilities of their speakers. The fact that concerns about the way in which dialect constructed social status could

[42] Hamilton, *Edith,* ii. 179-80.

and did occur to authors is confirmed by William Godwin's novel *St. Leon* (1799), in the passage where the eponymous hero reports on his first conversation with Hector:

> I was surprised at the propriety of his answers. I am unable at this distance of time to recal the defects of his language; and I disdain the mimic toil of inventing a jargon for him suitable to the lowness of his condition: the sense of what he said I faithfully report. I had before been struck with a certain correctness of thinking in him; but I now examined his countenance more attentively than I had ever before done, and thought I could distinctly trace in it the indications of a sound understanding and an excellent heart.[43]

Hector is 'a negro, a servant of the prison',[44] and novelistic conventions of the period require that he is represented as speaking an appropriately 'broken' English. In part St Leon's decision not to represent the 'defects' of Hector's speech is represented as a matter of practicality: he does not remember them sufficiently. There is, however, also a moral dimension to his argument: he recognizes that to attempt to construct a literary version of Hector's speech would be 'inventing a jargon', and he feels able to capture Hector's 'correctness of thinking' in Standard English. A similar point is made by one of the characters in Thomas Henry Lister's novel *Arlington* (1832) who criticises writers who 'profess to exhibit the feelings, habits, and language of the poor, upon the

[43] William Godwin, *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, 4 vols (London, 1799), ii. 298-9.

[44] Godwin, *St. Leon,* ii. 295.

strength of a few cruises of mere curiosity', arguing that, far from capturing real life, 'they have got nothing but a mouthful of slang'.[45]

Through their characters, both Godwin and Lister articulate the tension between the laudable aim of representing the voices of marginalized social groups and the reductive assumption that, through a few stock linguistic features, unmediated access to the lives of those groups is granted. In doing so, they testify to the fact that literary uses of dialect in the Romantic period occur at the intersection of a number of socially and ideologically contested categories: national versus regional, rural versus urban, gentry versus servant, educated versus uneducated, articulate versus inarticulate, moral versus immoral.

[45] Thomas Lister, *Arlington*, 3 vols (London, 1832), iii. 329.

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