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Attitudes Towards British English Dialects in the 19th Century

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Abstract[1]

The 19th century saw the emergence of ModE, the standard language now becoming accessible to wide ranges of the population, as a consequence of literacy spreading through various types of schools before 1870/72 and compulsory education thereafter, urbanization and a degree of geographical and social mobility unheard of in the much stabler society of the previous period, and the availability of cheap reading material: newspapers, novels and teach-yourself manuals. Concurrently, the functional range of broad dialect receded; village dialects gave way to regional dialects and later to modified standard spoken with whatever heavy accent, and attitudes towards dialect changed from widespread negligence, to amusement and comic attraction to fiercely negative and, finally, nostalgic evaluation.

Although the topic has been treated in a few publications (Bailey, 1996; Görlach, 1995; Honey, 1988; Ihalainen, 1994; Phillipps, 1984 and Wakelin, 1977) the use of the available sources has been too selective, and the analysis frequently too one-sided, to permit a comprehensive and balanced overview.

1. *Introduction*

The English language in 19th-century England was largely determined by the heritage of the 18th. This is true for concepts of good styles and correctness in grammar and pronunciation (where the pattern set by Lowth, Murray and Walker provided the norms well into the 19th century); the statement also applies to attitudes towards social and geographical varieties of English. An analysis of late 18th-century views on non-standard English is therefore important; it has to take

into account the following authors and text types:

1) The two dictionaries by Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785) and *A Provincial Glossary* (1787), attempted to draw together the available evidence on slang and dialect lexis. Neither was based on original research, but the collection of non-standard lexis from various sources was apparently seen as a necessary and worthwhile complement to the efforts of Johnson who had intentionally excluded both types of vocabulary, in his attempt to codify the respectable standard lexis attested by the best authors.
2) The dialect collections of the lexis of five regions by W. Marshall (1787-96), who included a wealth of regional folkloristic material besides dialect proper, but gave due recognition to the apparent interest in the provinces.
3) Dialect poetry, among which *An Exmoor Scolding* and *Exmoor Courtship* (Anon., 1727?, 1746, ^{7}1771/^{9}1782) and John Collier's (Tim Bobbin's) *View of the Lancashire Dialect* were possibly best known. Published simultaneously[2] in 1746 in opposite parts of England they were felt to be similar enough to be sometimes bound together (as in the Bodley copy I used), and complemented by discussions of the value of dialect in later editions. I here quote a relevant passage from the ninth edition of the *Scolding* 'on the propriety and decency of the Exmoor language':[3]

> **Q1** It may be proper to advertise such of our Readers as may be Strangers to the *Devonshire* Dialects, that the following is a genuine Specimen thereof, as spoken in those Parts of the County where the Scene is laid; (the Phraseology being also agreeable thereto, and the Similes, &c. properly adapted to the Characters of the Speakers;) and not an arbitrary Collection of ill-connected clownish Words, like those introduced into the Journals of some late Sentimental Travellers as well as in the Productions of some Dramatic Writers, whose Clowns no more speak in their own proper Dialects, than a dull School-boy makes elegant and classical *Latin*; their suppos'd *Language* being such as would be no less unintelligible to the Rusticks themselves, than to those polite Pretenders to Criticism who thereby mean to make them ridiculous. (...)
> (v) And even near *Exmoor*, none but the very lowest Class of

People generally speak the Language here exemplified; but were it more commonly spoken by their Betters, perhaps it might not be so much to their Discredit as some may imagine; most of the antiquated Words being so expressive as not to be despised, tho' now grown obsolete, and no longer used by the politer Devonians, who in general speak as good modern English as those of any other County. (...) Hence every County has its peculiar Dialect, at least in respect to the vulgar *Language* of their Rusticks, insomuch that those of different Counties can't easily understand each other. Among Persons engag'd in Commerce indeed, or who have had a liberal Education, we may better distinguish their several Counties by their Accent, than by any Impropriety in their *Language*: But we are here speaking only of the lower Class of People in each County; and that these have in several Parts of England a more uncouth and barbarous Jargon than the worst among the Devonians, might be easily shewn (...).

(Preface, Exeter, *January*, 1782)[4]

A negative evaluation of dialect was common at the beginning of the 19th century. Crombie in 1802 flatly denied the practicability of remedial education for the vulgar in the countryside – and what is even more significant is that these remarks were reprinted without changes in later editions of his book (the latest I have checked is the ninth of 1865!):

Q2 (...) to define the proper province of the grammarian, I proceed to observe, that this usage, which gives law to language, in order to establish its authority, or to entitle its suffrage to our assent, must be, in the first place, *reputable*.

The vulgar in this, as in every other country, are, from their want of education, necessarily illiterate. Their native language is known to them no farther, than is requisite for the most common purposes of life. Their ideas are few, and consequently their stock of words, poor and scanty. Nay, their poverty, in this respect, is not their only evil. Their narrow competence they abuse, and pervert. Some words they misapply, others they corrupt; while many are employed by them, which

> have no sanction, but provincial, or local authority. Hence the language of the vulgar, in one province, is sometimes hardly intelligible in another. Add to this, that debarred by their occupations from study, or generally averse to literary pursuits, they are necessarily strangers to the scientific improvements of a cultivated mind; and are therefore entirely unacquainted with that diction, which concerns the higher attainments of life. Ignorant of any general principles respecting language, to which they may appeal; unable to discriminate between right and wrong; every one therefore prone to adopt whatever usage casual circumstances may present; it is no wonder, if the language of the vulgar be a mixture of incongruity and error, neither perfectly consistent with itself, nor universally intelligible even to them. Their usage, therefore, is not the standard, to which we must appeal for decisive authority; a usage so discordant and various, that we may justly apply to it the words of a celebrated critic, *Bellua multorum est capitum; nam quid sequar aut quem*?

John Poole, who employed the Bell and Lancaster system in Enmore School in Somerset, advised very drastic measures against the students' use of dialect features:[5]

> **Q3** Even a coarse or provincial way of pronouncing a word, though sanctioned by the general practice of the district, is immediately noticed by the teacher; and exposes the child, who uses it, as much to the correction of those below him, and consequently to the loss of his place, as any other impropriety in reading would do.
> (J. Poole, *The Village School Improved*, 1813: 40-41, quoted from Mugglestone, 1995: 293)

Confidence that teachers would prove competent in dealing with the problem increased during the 19th century, but in 1860 Foster & Foster were still quite diffident, pointing to the long tradition of village-school teaching which had achieved few of the intended results (1860/1995, I: 334).

In spite of these critical voices, there was a great deal of interest in, and sympathy for, regional dialects at the beginning of the 19th century. We might

wish to argue that a more positive attitude towards dialect is normal to develop when it is no longer felt as a threat to the standard language – and this may happen long before the loss of dialect is seen as imminent. However, such general assumptions are impossible to verify, at least for England around 1800. It is difficult to say whether concepts like Wordsworth's, who stressed the importance of plain language as a poetical medium in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, has anything to do with our topic – after all, he did not use dialect in his poetry, which would have appeared too uncultivated. There is, in England, apparently no parallel to the re-evaluation of dialect that took place in Germany at the same time, and where Herder's interest in folk traditions provided the intellectual background which made J.P. Hebel's poetry (and that of his followers) possible. If we look at dialect in English literature, it is clear that the stimulus came from outside, mainly from Maria Edgworth in Ireland and particularly Sir Walter Scott (cf. Blake, 1981). I will return to dialect literature later on.

However, the main interest in dialect was because it was seen to preserve valuable linguistic documentation of 'pure' stages of English. Thus, a new self-assertive attitude towards dialects made itself felt from the early 19th century onwards – even though it was, of course, mostly voiced by non-dialect speakers, namely gentlemen and schoolmasters. The statement by 'a native of Craven' who stresses the ancient status of the dialect and the threat of corruption by the outside world is a good example of this type of evaluation:

> **Q4** I have attempted to make the second edition of the *Craven Glossary* more worthy of the readers attention, by a large addition of words, and by numerous authorities, collected from ancient writers. Though this has been the most laborious part of my work, it has, at the same time, been the source of the greatest pleasure; for whenever I found a Craven word thus sanctioned by antiquity, I was more and more convinced, that my native language is not the contemptible slang and *patois*, which the refined inhabitants of the Southern part of the kingdom are apt to account it; but that it is the language of crowned heads, of the court, and of the most eminent English historians, divines, and poets, of former ages. (...)
>
> Pent up in their native mountains, and principally engaged in agricultural pursuits, the inhabitants of this district had no opportunity of corrupting the purity of their language by the adoption of foreign idioms. But it has become a subject of much

regret that, since the introduction of commerce, and, in consquence of that, a greater intercourse, the simplicity of the language has, of late years, been much corrupted. Anxious, therefore, to hand it down to posterity unadulterated, the author has attempted to express, in a familiar dialogue, the chaste and nervous language of its unlettered natives. (1828)

The similarity to the statement made by Forby on the dialects of East Anglia will be obvious:

Q5 From a writer who offers to the public a volume on a *Provincial Dialect*, and ventures to announce his intention of confirming, by *authority* and *etymology*, the strange words and phrases he is about to produce, some introductory explanation of his design may reasonably be required. The very mention of such an undertaking is likely to be received with ridicule, contempt, or even disgust; as if little or nothing more could be expected, than from analysing the rude jargon of some semi-barbarous tribe; as if, being merely oral, and existing only among the unlettered rustic vulgar of a particular district, *Provincial Language* were of little concern to general readers, of still less to persons of refined education, and much below the notice of philologists.

However justly this censure may be pronounced on a fabricated farrago of cant, slang, or what has more recently been denominated *flash language*, spoken by vagabonds, mendicants, and outcasts; by sharpers, swindlers, and felons; for the better concealment of their illegal practices, and for their more effectual separation from the 'good men and true' of regular and decent society; it certainly is by no means applicable to any form whatsoever of a *National Language*, constituting the vernacular tongue of any province of that nation. Such forms, be they as many and as various as they may, are all, in substance, remnants and derivatives of the language of past ages, which were, at some time or other, in common use, though in long process of time they have become only locally used and understood.

(Forby, 1830: 1-2)

Note the value Forby ascribes to dialects for their preservation of old words – and his scathing criticism of cant and slang. Forty years later the attitude remained much the same, though the desire to preserve the dialect had become more urgent; however, the greatest threat to local dialects was, of course, still to come with the introduction of compulsory education in 1870. Huntley's very detailed description of the sociolinguistic change in the Cotswolds deserves to be quoted at length:

> **Q6** Another reason, which at this present time renders dialects more worthy of remembrance, is the universal presence of the village schoolmaster. This personage usually considers that he places himself on the right point of elevation above his pupils, in proportion as he distinguishes his speech by classical or semi-classical expressions; while the pastor of the parish, trained in the schools still more deeply, is very commonly unable to speak in a language fully 'understanded of the people,' and is a stranger to the vernacular tongue of those over whom he is set; so that he is daily giving an example which may bring in a latinized slip-slop. In addition to this, our commercial pursuits are continually introducing American solecisms and vulgarisms. Each of these sources of change threaten deterioration. Many homely but powerful and manly words in our mother tongue appear to totter on the verge of oblivion. As long, however, as we can keep sacred our inestimable translation of the Word of God, to which let us add also our Prayer-book, together with that most wonderful production of the mind of man, the works of Shakespeare, we may hope that we possess sheet-anchors, which will keep us from drifting very far into insignificance or vulgarity, and may trust that the strength of the British tongue may not be lost among the nations.
>
> It has, moreover, been well observed that a knowledge of dialects is very necessary to the formation of an exact dictionary of our language. Many words are in common use only among our labouring classes, and accounted therefore vulgar, which are in fact nothing less than ancient terms, usually possessing much roundness, pathos, or power; and, what is more, found in frequent use with our best writers of the Elizabethan period. The works of Shakepeare abound in examples of the Cotswold

> dialect, which indeed is to be expected, as his connexions and early life are to be found in the districts where it is entirely spoken; and if, as has been thought, he spent some part of his younger days in concealment in the neighbourhood of Dursley, he could not have been better placed to mature, in all its richness, any early knowledge which he might have gained of our words and expressions. This, however, is certain that the terms and phrases in common use in the Cotswold dialect are very constantly found in his dialogue; they add much strength and feeling to it; and his obscurities, in many cases, have been only satisfactorily elucidated by the commentators who have been best acquainted with the dialect in question.
>
> The Cotswold dialect is remarkable for a change of letters in many words; for the addition or omission of letters; for frequent and usually harsh contractions and unusual idioms, with a copious use of pure Saxon words now obsolete, or nearly so. If these words were merely vulgar introductions, like the pert and ever-changing slang of the London population, we should look upon them as undeserving of notice; but as they are still almost all to be drawn from undoubted and legitimate roots, as they are found in use in the works of ancient and eminent authors, and as they are in themselves so numerous as to render the dialect hard to be understood by those not acquainted with them, they become worthy of explanation; and then they bring proof of the strength and manliness of the ancient English tongue, and they will generally compel us to acknowledge, that while our modern speech may possibly have gained in elegance and exactness from the Latin or Greek, it has lost, on the other hand, impressiveness and power. (...)

The contrary opinion was held by the Hon. Samuel Best, who, obviously expressing a commonly accepted view, stated in the fourth edition of his *Elementary Grammar for the use of village schools* of 1857:

> **Q7** The classically-educated man cannot, if it were desirable, so ignore his education as to address a congregation in the jargon and patois of the village. [...] We may and ought to raise them to

> our standard; we cannot, without profaneness in sacred things, descend to theirs.
>
> (Best 1857, quoted from Michael, 1987: 351)

Demographic evidence explains why even in the major industrial centres (at least in the north) dialect remained stable because the vast majority of migrants came from the immediate neighbourhood. This meant that extreme forms of village dialects were given up in the new melting pots, but regional dialects in a somewhat levelled form were strengthened.[6]

There were obvious regional differences in the amount of deviation from the London-based standard, and in attitudes to rural speech. Halliwell (1847) found Derbyshire dialect 'broad', but Buckingham close to standard, and Northern, Southwestern, East Anglian and London varieties best known (cf. Ihalainen's summary, 1994: 212). The degree to which regional dialects were accepted by their speakers as badges of identity is partly reflected by the number of publications the English Dialect Society were able to use as sources. Ihalainen's count of the pages devoted to each county in the 1877 bibliography (1994: 273) gives the following rough proportions:

Lancashire	32%
Yorkshire	18%
Cumberland	14%
Cornwall	7%
Northumberland	5%
Devon	4%
Westmorland	3%
Others	16%

2. *The erosion of dialect*

Grievous concerns about the imminent loss of dialects began around 1870. There is W. A. Wright's classic appeal of 1870 for the founding of a dialect society:

> **Q8** It has long been my conviction that some more systematic effort ought to be made for the collection and preservation of our

> provincial words. In a few years it will be too late. Railroads and certificated teachers are doing their work.
>
> (*Notes & Queries* 1870, quoted from Petyt, 1980: 76)

When the English Dialect Society was started in 1873, two motives were prevalent for the move:

1) The data collected from rural forms of speech were intended to broaden the data basis for linguistic history and reconstruction, an objective which was motivated by the comparative method in linguistics, then also dominant in Britain, though with some delay.
2) Dialect lexis in particular was seen as rapidly disappearing in view of increasing mobility and the end of the relative isolation of many villages and entire regions. Hardy saw in retrospect what happened as a consequence of social stigmatization:

> **Q9** ... education ... has gone on with its silent and inevitable effacements, reducing the speech of this country to uniformity, and obliterating every year a fine old local word. The process is always the same: the word is ridiculed by the newly taught; it gets into disgrace; it is heard in holes and corners only; it dies, and worst of all, it leaves no synonym.
>
> (Hardy, 1908: iii, quoted from Jacobs, 1952: 10)

Elworthy's account in 1888 of how the Board Schools modified the speech of the rural working classes is very relevant in this context:

> **Q10** The children have all learnt to read, and have been taught the 'correct' form of all the verbs they use. The girl would come home, and her mother would say, 'Lize! you didn ought to a-wear'd your best shoes to school.' Eliza would say, 'Well, mother, I wore my tothers all last year, and they be a-wore out.' In this way parents become familiar with the strong forms of literary verbs, but they have no notion of dropping the past inflection to which they have always been accustomed, while at the same time they wish to profit by their children's 'schoolin'. Consequently the next time the occasion arrives, Eliza is told she should have *a-*

> *wor'd* her tother hat, &c., and thus *wor'd* and *a-wor'd* soon become household words with the parents; and the same or a like process is repeated by them with respect to other words all through their vocabulary. All children naturally copy their parents' accent, tone and sayings ... Consequently the school-teaching sets the model for written language, and the home influences that for everyday talk. The result is that at the present moment our people are learning two distinct tongues – distinct in pronunciation, in grammar and in syntax. A child, who in class or even at home can read correctly, giving accent, aspirates (painfully), intonation, and all the rest of it, according to rule, will at home, and amongst his fellows, go back to his vernacular, and never even deviate into the right path he has been taught at school.
>
> (Elworthy, 1888; quoted from Phillipps, 1984: 87)

The expansion of the standard language, then, levelled out the major regional differences. The process is symbolized (although this was not the author's intention!) in Hardy's account (1883, in Golby, 1996: 300-1) of the urbanization of Devon rural society. He noted the disappearance of the old rural costume (~ dialect) which was being replaced by second-hand and ill-advised metropolitan dress, often in bad taste (~ modified standard) – the mirror-image in the dress:language symbol in Shakespeare's Edgar is obvious. As a result, bidialectalism became more common than it had ever been in England (and lasted for two generations at least until broad dialect was lost). Hardy, again, remarked on the fact in 1891 for the same region that Elworthy had commented on three years before him; he described the sociolinguistic situation in a much-quoted passage from *Tess*:

> **Q11** Mrs Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality.
>
> (Ch.3, also quoted in Phillipps, 1984: 88)

What remained of regional characteristics was, at least for educated speakers, an

unmistakable accent, tolerated until the mid-century even among leading politicians and other members of the upper crust (cf. Honey, 1988, 1989). For the West Country accent that was left in the speech of even one of Her Majesty's Inspectors compare F.H. Spencer's self-characterization:

> **Q12** In speech I acquired the accent and the intonation of the common people. That is sometimes a trifling inconvenience; and though the population was of so diverse an origin, so strong is the local speech of the countryside that we all spoke the mid-Wessex speech, the speech of Gloucester, Berks and Wilts, which thickens into Somerset as you go West ... Fifty years of intercourse with people of all kinds and much travel have seemed not entirely to dissipate all traces of that speech ... The grammatical peculiarities of the Wiltshire yokel ... were not, however, ours. We did not say 'Her be gwaain whoam' for 'she is going home'. Nor did we use *thic* or *thuc* or a dozen other locutions still in common use in North Wiltshire. But most people who know the vowel sounds of the English provinces, and can recognize the Wessex *r*, would place me today as a native of mid-Wessex.
> (On the 1880s, in Spencer, 1938, quoted from Phillipps, 1984: 88)

Dialect must have been a veritable problem of English lessons in the schools. One of the earliest reflexes of this is certainly Thomas Batchelor's *Grammar* of 1809 which was intended for 'provincial schools' and in which he provided an analysis of 'the minute varieties which constitute a depraved or provincial pronunciation' (cf. Honey, 1997: 80). However, such explicit concern is very rare among writers of school grammars and we must assume that not even all teachers, however much they admired the standard language and never dared to question its relevance and prestige, were capable of speaking it fluently without any interferences.[7] It therefore comes as a surprise that there are so few remarks relating to these problems in the grammar books of the 19th century: we are led to assume that since school English was taught in a diglossic situation in much of the country, teachers and grammarians may have thought that the less mention of parallels in the two systems was made, the less likely was the possibility of transfers.[8] Contrastive aspects of language teaching, then, made their way only

very occasionally into 19th-century grammars.[9] One of the few I found is Pearson (1865) whose *The Self-help Grammar of the English Language; Intended for Reading, Dictation, Parsing, Composition and Home-Work in the Second and Third Classes in an Elementary School* gave some attention to the specific learners' problems of Yorkshire children. Amongst other things, he warned against the use of *thou/thee*, since it was obsolete in St E (and had been virtually given up even by the Quakers). His warning reminds us of a similar statement made by Marshall (1788, quoted by Ihalainen, 1994: 229) on *thou* as a Yorkshire provincialism.

Complaints by Her Majesty's Inspectors on the poor quality of regional English, in particular pronunciation, became frequent only towards the end of the century (Honey, 1988: 219-21), but they do not add up to a picture of how dominant dialect still was among the pupils and how it affected their correct acquisition of the spoken and written standard. Compare the quotations above and an early statement by HMI F.C. Cook in 1845:

> **Q13** I could easily make out a long list of the gross mistakes, omissions and mispronunciations of the principal words, and perversions of the sense, which are almost universally made by the young children, and which are in many cases unobserved, or uncorrected, by the monitors.
>
> (quoted from Honey; 1988: 219)

By contrast, positive attitudes towards dialect were certainly rare exceptions among HMIs. Honey points out one of these:

> **Q 14** In Rochdale, an interesting preservationist inspector of schools (HMI Mr Wylie) caused controversy in the local press in 1890 by his attempts to foster the use of local dialect in school. The response of some parents is illuminating: 'Keep the old Lancashire dialect out of the schools, Mr Wylie, for I want my children to talk smart when they're grown up.'
>
> (1997: 100-01)

3. *Dialect literature*

Even for people who were in favour of dialect in written compositions, its use was restricted to certain text types. Thus, it occurs much less in prose than in verse, and prose writing is found mainly in humorous stories; wider ranges, as exemplified in the Yorkshire almanacs, were obviously found only in the north.

We must not make too much of the absence of dialect in biblical translation. Foster & Foster in 1860 saw the great advantage for parishioners in

> using the vernacular in the way of familiar exposition and exhortation, than to attempt a style of composition which they cannot manage without blundering.

However, even they firmly stated that

> There can be no question about the propriety of Ministers using provincial dialects in their stated ministrations.

This attitude does not come as a surprise - that the Bible had to be in the accepted standard language remained true even for 19th-century Scotland – and the situation is not much different today after Lorimer's *New Testament in Scots* has become available. Also, there is still no bible in Jamaican Creole or, further afield, for Occitan or Luxemburgish, and bibles in Low German are little used. Ironically, then, it is Lucien Bonaparte's philological interest that gave us at least some biblical passages in 19th-century English dialects. This statement is true even though Shorrocks (fc.) rightly points to 18th-century clergymen's attempts 'to learn local dialects in order to understand their parishioners better'. One such effort was made by the Rev. William Hutton whose *A Bran New Wark* was 'written in a mixture of literary English and Westmorland dialect'; the author 'explained in his introductory remarks that his parishioners were more likely to heed his homilies if these were written in the local dialect' (Shorrocks' summary).

The sociolinguistic change sketched above obviously affected the frequency and functions of dialect writing. In Hollingworth's (1977) somewhat controversial opinion, Lancashire dialect poetry developed in three stages:

1) A phase of predominantly oral poetry (of which a few famous specimens like 'Th' Owdham weyver' came to be written down after 1840).

2) The 'golden age' of Lancashire dialect poetry, 1856-1870, represented by Waugh, Laycock and Ramsbottom: 'the amount of poetry produced, and its quality [...] considering what came before and what came afterwards, are truly amazing' (1977: 2). Hollingworth attributes much of the flowering of this tradition to the belated influence of Burns and to 'the rapid and transient movement of dialect poetry at this time from an oral tradition in which it was already well established, though poorly recorded, into a written form where it became more permanent but quickly lost vitality' (1977: 3). 'Waugh in particular was often referred to as the Lancashire Burns, and he clearly relished the title. In his commonplace book he carefully preserved a letter from Spencer J. Hall of Burnley written in 1874. "You and your confreres [have] done for Lancashire what Burns and Hogg [have] done for the Lowlands of Scotland – you [have] immortalised a dialect and made it classical"' (1977: 3).[10]
3) A final phase, in which the tradition 'moved away from a living expression of the "songs of the people" to an antiquarian and rather nostalgic attempt to conserve a dying culture and language' (1977: 5), an interpretation used to explain why the three poets (who lived on until 1891, 1893 and 1901 respectively) had 'burnt themselves out' (1977: 5).

There are various difficulties with Hollingworth's persuasive hypothesis, especially if we wish to look at his evidence from the viewpoint of the historical sociolinguist:

1) Since dialect prose is much more difficult to read than (short) poems, how can we explain that it lived on in the Yorkshire almanacs well into the 1920s?
2) How can we believe that the impact of general education in 1870 was as immediate as Hollingworth suggests? Potential readers of these poems who had gone through the new school system would not have read them as children, and therefore not before 1890 – when the tradition had been dead for some time.

Although the situation in Scotland was slightly different, especially with the much firmer hold Scottish dialects had on the countryside, it is interesting to see the parallels not just in the impact that Burns and Scott had on English writers, but also in what Scottish Kailyard poetry and newspaper prose (Donaldson, 1986) had

in common with Lancashire dialect poetry and the Yorkshire almanacs, namely the fact that they relied on dialect being dominant in everyday life.

Even 19th-century English novelists, who only made restricted use of dialect in their dialogues, depended on this vitality of spoken dialect when they wished to be moderately 'realistic' (cf. Dickens[11] and Thackeray for London and East Anglia, Mrs. Gaskell for Lancashire,[12] George Eliot for North Warwickshire and Hardy for 'Wessex'/Dorset[13]). Emily Brontë's representation of Haworth dialect in the speech of Joseph is a much quoted example:

> **Q14** 'Nelly', he said, 'we's hae a Crahnr's 'quest enah, at ahr folks. One on 'em's a'most getten his finger cut off wi' hauding t'other froo' sticking hisseln loike a cawlf. That's maister, yah knaw, ut's soa up uh going tuh t'grand 'sizes. He's noan feared uh t'Bench uh judges, norther Paul, nur Peter, nur John, nor Mathew, nor noan on 'em, nut he! He fair likes he langs tuh set his brazened face agean 'em! And yon bonny lad Heathcliff, yah mind, he's a rare un! He can girn a laugh as weel's onybody at a raight divil's jest. Does he niver say nowt of his fine living amang us, when he goas tuh t'Grange (...)?
> (*Wuthering Heights*, ch.10, quoted from Petyt, 1970: 47-48; also in Blake, 1981: 149)

Note that, largely true to the Scott tradition (and likely to reflect the sociolinguistic realities in the Haworth parsonage), broad dialect is reserved to the semi-literate Joseph (cf. for a close dialectal analysis, Petyt, 1970). Moreover, the passage was dedialectized by Charlotte for the second edition in 1850[14] to make it intelligible to readers outside Yorkshire (and not so much because of more general concerns about propriety).

Most authors saw the limitations on the use of dialect quite clearly, as, for instance, Hardy did:

> **Q15** An author may be said to fairly convey the spirit of intelligent peasant talk if he retains the idiom, compass, and characteristic expressions, although he may not encumber the page with obsolete pronunciations of the purely English words, and with mispronunciations of those derived from Latin and Greek. [...] If a writer attempts to exhibit on paper the precise

> accents of a rustic speaker, he disturbs the proper balance of a true representation by unduly insisting upon the grotesque element.
>
> (Hardy 1878, quoted from Blake 1981:166)

This statement is apparently not quite true of the north – a consequence of the type of urban in-migration mentioned above. One of the most convincing uses of 19th-century literary dialect is found in Burnett's *That Lass o'Lowries* (1877), a story with a Lancashire industrial setting; the fact that this successful novel was part of a wider fashion for dialect prose is indicated by *Punch*'s immediate reaction (20 Oct.-17 Nov. 1877) which made fun of such use of dialect.

> **Q16a** 'Let's hear,' cried a third member of the company.
> 'Gi' us th' tale owt an' owt, owd lad. Tha'rt th' one to do it graidely.'
> Sammy applied a lucifer to the fragrant weed, and sucked at his pipe deliberately.
> 'It's noan so much of a tale,' he said, with an air of disparagement and indifference. 'Yo' chaps mak' so much out o' nowt. Th' parson's well enow i' his way, but,' in naïve self-satisfaction, 'I mun say he's a foo', and th' biggest foo' fur his size I ivver had th' pleasure o' seein'.'
> They knew the right chord was touched. A laugh went round, but there was no other interruption and Sammy proceeded.
> 'Whatten yo' lads think as th' first thing he says to me wur?' puffing vigorously. 'Why, he coos in an' sets hissen down, an' he swells hissen out loike a frog i' trouble, an' ses he, "My friend, I hope you cling to th' rock o' ages." An' ses I, "No I dunnot nowt o' th' soart, an' be dom'd to yo'. It wur na hos*pit*ible," with a momentary touch of deprecation, – 'An' I dunnot say as it wur hospitible, but I wur na i' th' mood to be hospitible just at th' toime. It tuk him back too, but he gettin round after a bit, an' he tacklet me again, an' we had it back'ard and for'ard betwixt us for a good half hour. He said it wur Providence, an' I said, happen it wur, an' happen it wurn't. (...)
>
> (Burnett 1877:91-93)

Q16b OUR NEW NOVEL. **THAT LASS 'O TOWERY'S.**

By the Authors of Several other Things, &c. &c.

(...) It was NEGUS BARCROW, The Young Engineer.

'Yo domm'd dummer-tailed bolthead,' roared DAN BEERIE, fiercely. 'Yo yung poopy-cur snig-snagged boler! oil jewdy thee putty tupped naws, an giv yo siccan shuv i' th' oi, as yo'll reccomember fur ivvur, domm'd av oi doon't, th' oi gows t' gallus fur't!'

And he sprang on him with a ferocity that would have sent into the second week of the middle of the year after next (counting from the date of his receiving the blow) any man less physically powerful than NEGUS BARCROW.

EMMY raised a loud cry.

'A fyt! a fyt! T' owd feether's fytin an' millin Yung Ing'neer! Coom an, av yo be coomin! tiz ar reel beet o' jam, tiz!'

And she clapped her hands together, crying, 'Gow't, Yung Ing'neer. Gow't t' owd feether!' (...)

* At present we will offer no opinion as to the *quality* of the dialect. We have sent a Special Commissioner to the North, who, being a gentleman of considerable imitative power, will give us, on his return, some idea of what the dialect may be. We don't recollect anything exactly like it, but perhaps Mr. TAYLOR, who plays the part of '*Owd Sammy*' in *Liz*, will step in, and give us some explanation. In the meantime we will be cautious. – ED.

* Our Special Commissioner with a dictionary has not yet returned from the North, nor has he sent us either a line or a telegram. He was sent there to inquire into the dialect and the character of the people as represented in this story. Perhaps Miss ROSE LECLERQ, who is now performing most admirably in *Liz*, would kindly look in one morning and give us her opinion on the subject. Need we say we should be only too delighted to profit by her experience. – ED.

Extract from Letter of the three Co-Authors of the New Provincial Novel Company Limited, to the Editor. – 'We say!

> Isn't it going on capitally? Here's your fine fresh dialect, eh? Post the tin, sagacious *Redacteur, et croyez en nous à jamais*, as we say in Old Gaul. Never was such local colouring, eh? Worth all the money! And then the Curate! *that* fetches the Sunday readers.- No harm where there?s a Curate. 'Yours ever, CO-AUTHORS.' (...)
>
> (*Punch*, 1877)

That Lass is, however, significant also for another aspect which may come as a surprise to modern readers – the willingness of earlier readers to enjoy dialects not their own. How else could we explain the success of the book in America where it was first published, or the impressive overseas sales of Bell's *Wee MacGreegor* (1901), in which the very frequent dialogues are all written in dense Glaswegian? (cf. Görlach, 1992).

Dialect poems are shorter and easier to read. Tennyson's Lincolnshire and Barnes' Dorset poems still have a claim to be authentic dialect. However, Barnes saw the danger of an artificial 'revivalist' type of poetry and compared writing in a dying dialect to writing in snow on a spring day (quoted in Görlach, 1992), but he also saw the genuine, straightforward and honest character of local dialect. This attitude becomes apparent in his facetious 'translation' of stilted passages from the Queen's speech into plain Dorset dialect.

> **Q17** In somewhat of a merry mood, I was one day minded to see how far our homely Dorset speech could give the meaning of the seemingly ministerial wording of the so-called Queen's speech on the opening of Parliament in 1884. Her Majesty's speech as written and read in Her Majesty's name. Here are samples of a few clauses -
>
> 'My Lords and Gentlemen. – The satisfaction with which I ordinarily release you from discharging the duties of the Session is on the present occasion qualified by a sincere regret that an important part of your labours should have failed to result in a legislative enactment.'
>
> *(1) The lightheartedness I do mwostly veel when I do let ye off vrom the business upon your hands in the Sessions, is theäse time a little bit damped, owen to a ranklen in my mind, that a goodish*

lot o' your work vell short o' comen into anything lik laws.

'The most friendly intercourse continues to subsist between myself and all foreign Powers.'

(2) The very best o' veelens be still a-kept up, in deälens between myzelf an' all o' the outlandish powers.

(Barnes 1886)

There is, then, a distinction to be made in dialect writing according to the audience aimed at: it can raise respect for the living dialect and give it a kind of prestige as long as it is an exclusively spoken, but common, form; however, it tends to become artificial and nostalgic when the basis of everyday use is gone – a development that has increasingly affected writing in English dialect in the 20th century and is becoming a danger to Scots (for the complete context see my discussion in Görlach, 1992).

4. The question of Cockney

The development which came to consider rural dialect (as represented by the 'best' speakers, usually NORMS = 'non-mobile old rural males') as 'pure' was a 19th-century innovation. The nostalgic reverence of dialect as a phenomenon of the lost golden age found its counterpart in the depreciation of urban lower-class speech – in Britain represented by London, since the other urban centres were still on their way to develop urban norms. Cockney received two quite different evaluations, both, however, making it inacceptable as 'the regional dialect of London' (as in Mayhew's account).

1) Seen from the perspective of a traditional dialectologist, the speech was unbearably mixed and discredited by its connection with poverty and crime, as Forby had found as early as 1830. Later on, Halliwell (1847/1881) was even more outspoken:

Q18 The metropolitan county presents little in its dialect worthy of remark, being for the most part merely a coarse pronunciation of London slang and vulgarity.

(Halliwell, 1881: xxiv, quoted from Ihalainen, 1994: 212)

2) From the 18th century onwards, Cockney speech had been used for comic characters on the stage (Matthews, 1938) and later on in dialogue in narrative. The music-hall and Dickens are probably the most typical representatives of this tradition – which became quickly stereotyped and fossilized. When Shaw looked back on the tradition in the notes to *Captain Brassbounds Conversion* (1900), he found it was already a matter of the past.

19th-century Cockney can be regarded as a blend of regional dialect (being confined to London, and characterized by pronunciation, syntax and lexis) and sociolect (being restricted to informal uses of the lower classes), which is further stigmatized by its conventional association with comic characters of low intelligence and less education.

5. *Dialect research*

The methods of 19th-century dialectology in England are not my major concern here (cf. Petyt's summary, 1980: 68-81, and Shorrocks, fc.).[15] However, it is important to interpret the motivations that led to a noteworthy peak in scholarly dialectology between 1870 and 1898 as a reflexion of attitudes in the academia and educated circles outside the universities: whereas the organization of the great research projects and the analysis and publication of the findings was in the hands of Ellis and Wright and other members of the EDS, the data collection could not have been undertaken without the willing and unpaid assistance of thousands of helpers who served as correspondents, informants and collectors of data. This reflected a widespread positive interest in dialects in the English society of the time – evidenced by an impressive return rate of the questionnaires, which it would be difficult to repeat in our times. It may be good to distinguish between a more popular attitude and the linguistic interest and point out a few characteristics of the main researchers:

1) Many of the major scholars had been broad dialect speakers in their youth – such as Joseph. Wright, who described his idiolect in his epoch-making monograph on the dialect of Windhill (1892), or the Scotsman James Murray.
2) Most scholars were philologists devoted to the study of Old and Middle

English texts (most notably Ellis, Wright and Skeat), were active as editors for the EETS and all were committed to the comparative-historical method, which some had studied in Germany (such as Skeat, Sweet and Wright, who even published some of their research in German).

The background was, then, the conviction that comparative philology in combination with the rapidly developing discipline of phonetics would raise linguistics to a science at long last, capable to compete with the natural sciences. Dialect research was important since the data preserved many features lost from the standard languages but necessary for a proper reconstruction of the history of English. This unique combination of scientific rigidity (which culminated in the neogrammarian tenet that sound changes permit no exceptions) and the 19th-century fascination with history gave dialectology a special place in linguistic investigation, made more urgent by the widely accepted belief that the researchers were members of the last generation to find a bidialectal speech community with living dialects. Note that both comparative philology and phonetics led to an increased interest in dialect pronunciations, whereas earlier collectors had been mainly concerned with vocabulary.

Is a scholarly description of 19th-century dialects possible on the basis of the surviving data and interpretations? The prevailing attitudes, the topic of my reflexions, tend to distort the evidence – whether they are negative (as in HMIs' reports or in statements about urban speech) or positive (as in the nostalgic idea of a dialect-using golden age then being destroyed by railways and modern communication).

The elicitation of dialect data and their analysis has also been repeatedly criticized: Ellis' material was regarded by Dieth as 'a tragedy ... a huge store of information which every dialectologist consults, but, more often than not, rejects as inaccurate and wrong' (quoted from Petyt, 1980:76).[16] Not all regions were covered with the same degree of thoroughness by either Ellis or Wright, and Wright's exclusion of spoken data (in the tradition of the *OED*) is very difficult to understand and impossible to justify. If dialect was specific of certain social classes, mainly restricted to spoken uses and prevalent (or even obligatory) in informal registers in individual speech communities, then a full description should have included data from these ranges, and the researcher should have noted social and stylistic restrictions. The time was obviously not ripe for a dialectology systematically investigating the social aspects of dialect use (cf. Mattheier, 1980). Nor was anyone in the 19th century keen on making a survey of

attitudes to dialect and perceptual dialectology (cf. for the U.S. Preston, 1989). But since there has not been any modern investigation of nonlinguists' views of regional differences in BrE and their evaluation, either, the absence in the 19th century is less surprising. However, scholars investigating 19th-century attitudes have not even a modern description available for comparison if they wish to undertake a properly diachronic study of the topic, and to raise the discussion from the impressionistic and anecdotal level.

Apart from such obvious limitations, the specific motivation of the researchers in the 19th century was even more restrictive: the treatment of dialect in the poetry of Barnes, Tennyson or Hardy was as much a middle-class affair as that of Ellis and Wright, however different their motives and linguistic qualifications. It is obvious that their research did not raise the prestige of the dialects among the native speakers and did not convince them that dialects were worth handing on to the next generation (as publications of the Yorkshire almanacs may have done at least for a time).

Such a conclusion is of course not specific for the 19th century – but the period was possibly the beginning of a development which has reduced the frequency of the use of dialects as well as minority languages all over 20th-century Europe and in consequence impoverished them in functions, expressiveness, modernity and structural complexity, a development which results in a vicious circle, since the dialects tend to be used even less – unless they are supported by a very strong connection between language and local identity.

NOTES

[1] For helpful comments on draft versions I want to thank Clive Upton and Katie Wales. For a survey stressing different aspects of 19th-century English dialects and dialectology see in particular Ihalainen (1994). A much shorter version of this paper will also be included as a chapter in Görlach (1999).

[2] The Exmoor pieces are likely to be reprints of texts originally composed in 1727 (cf. Shorrocks, fc.)

[3] The seventh edition of the two Exmoor pieces was reprinted for the EDS in 1879; F.T. Elworthy accompanied the text by the phonetic transcription he developed for rendering English dialects and a joint glossary (1879: 24-176). The *Scolding* is also unique being published in a 'bilingual' edition, with accompanying translation in StE (Exeter, 1792).

[4] Note that the loss of dialect was felt to be an ongoing process in another stronghold at the same time. John Collier alias Tim Bobbin stated in the 1775 introduction to his *View on the Lancashire Dialect*:

> But as Trade in a general Way has now flourish'd for near a Century, the Inhabitants not only Travel, but encourage all Sorts of useful Learning; so that among Hills, and Places formerly frequented by Strangers, the People begin within the few Years of the Authors Observations to speak much better English. If it can properly be called so. (1775: iv)

[5] Cf. similar statements quoted by Mugglestone (1995: 306 and 308): In a report of 1860, Mr Grant claimed 'teachers were lying in wait for provincialisms', and, as they occur, making constant interruptions in order to align 'faulty' utterances with the normative paradigms of 'proper' speech. *Chambers' Educational Course* (n.d.) demanded that '*Clearness of articulation* should be most carefully inculcated, as indistinctness acquired in childhood can hardly ever be removed. By these means, vulgar and provincial dialects will be gradually extirpated, and purity of speech introduced.'

[6] In-migration from the neighbouring rural districts appears to have been a special feature of the newly-developing industrial centres of the Midlands and the North, which created large speech communities of speakers of regional dialects (though no longer village varieties). There is an obvious parallel in 20th-century urban German dialects; at least before 1945 newcomers to Cologne, Mannheim, Stuttgart and Munich, to name only a few centres, migrated from the surrounding countryside, which has made the regional urban dialects very stable to the present day (cf. Mattheier, 1980).

[7] There is indirect evidence of the ineffectiveness of the teaching of St E in emigrants' letters; the need to communicate in written form made many people write letters who would not have done so in England, and the proportion of semi-literates among them is particularly high. However, the value for these documents is slighter than claimed is by Garcia-Bermejo Giner & Montgomery (1997).

[8] Modern attempts in a framework of 'enlightened' linguistics may be contrasted (all, however, apparently discontinued): there were schoolbook texts in Black English developed by Wolfram and Fasold (1969) intended to smooth the students' transition to St E and an entire series, was published in Germany (Besch, 1976-78) which provided linguistic analyses contrasting one regional dialect with *Schriftdeutsch* and offered teaching aids based on predictable difficulties.

[9] This is also true for grammars published for use outside England. No special method was developed for the acquisition of English in, say, Ireland or India, and even grammar books published in Scotland usually contain lists of Scoticisms — at best.

[10] For Yorkshire, compare William Wright, who styled himself 'The Yorkshire Burns',

and wore a plaid cap to support his claim (Arnold Kellett, p.c.).

[11] For the most recent summary of dialect in Victorian fiction see Chapman (1994: 50-66). Dickens' attempts at Lancashire dialect (e.g. Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*) are not very convincing — but it is likely that his readers did not care whether its representation was realistic or not.

[12] There is a link with the poetry discussed above in that Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* contains a (toned-down) version of 'Th'Owdham weyver' (Hollingworth, 1977: 128), apart from a good deal of dialect in the dialogues.

[13] For an insightful comparison of Eliot's and Hardy's uses of dialect cf. Ingham (1970).

[14] She wrote to the publisher:

> "It seems to me advisable to modify the orthography of the old servant Joseph's speech; for though as it stands it exactly renders the Yorkshire dialect to a Yorkshire ear, yet I am sure Southerners must find it unintelligible; and thus one of the most graphic characters is lost on them. (Quoted from Petyt, 1970: 2)

Petyt comments: 'I think there can be little doubt that Charlotte did more harm than good (...) the resulting dialect speech is mixed, artificial and inconsistent' (1970: 3).

[15] Graham Shorrocks' paper read at the Harold Orton conference somewhat overlaps with mine and should be compared for this section; it will be published elsewhere.

[16] However, compare Shorrocks' fair statements about the achievement, with all necessary restrictions, of the *EDD* and Wright's contribution to it.

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