

- Schmitt, “Interpret or Describe?” *Representations* 135, no. 1 (2016): 102–18.
3. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1918), 2 (emphasis original).
  4. James, *Principles*, 78 (emphasis original).
  5. See Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Picture Titles: How and Why Western Paintings Acquired Their Names* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 19–139.
  6. William Stanley Jevons, “The Use and Abuse of Museums,” in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: an Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources*, ed. Jonah Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 290; and George Brown Goode, “The Museums of the Future,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), 433 (emphasis original).
  7. Vernon Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), 58–59.
  8. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 30.
  9. See Benjamin Morgan, *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 219–54.
  10. Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.



## Dialect

TARYN HAKALA

AT the weekly meeting of the Manchester Literary Club on December 14, 1874, president George Milner read his essay “The Dialect of Lancashire Considered as a Vehicle for Poetry.” In it, he argues that the Lancashire dialect is not only more appropriate than but also superior to Standard English for use in poetry. In defending this position, Milner cites Alfred Tennyson’s use of Anglo-Saxon diction and Matthew Arnold’s assertion “about simplicity being the supreme style,”

before turning William Wordsworth's own argument from *Lyrical Ballads* against him, by rendering "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways" into the Lancashire dialect. In Milner's version, Wordsworth's "But she is in her grave, and, oh, / The difference to me!" becomes "But hoo's i'th' yearth, an', oh, it's browt / Another day to me!" With these changes, Milner hopes to show that "delicate sentiments . . . can be transmitted through the dialect without material injury" and that "the dialect can compel an improvement."<sup>1</sup> Such bold claims may seem surprising to us now, but these kinds of debates about dialect were not uncommon in England in the mid- and late-nineteenth century.

Thanks in large part to the increase of interest in English philology in the nineteenth century, regional varieties of English received increased attention, and several glossaries of regional dialects were published, culminating in Joseph Wright's *The English Dialect Dictionary* (1898). Even the much-maligned varieties of English spoken by the working classes of London were studied and defended: Samuel Pegge's *Anecdotes of the English Language* (1814, 1844) attempted to show that "the natives of the metropolis and its vicinities have not corrupted the language of their ancestors."<sup>2</sup> Pegge's assertion is in response to the stance of prescriptive grammars and pronunciation guides that also proliferated during the period. The sale of these publications was fueled by the desire of many speakers to adopt the prestige dialect, the non-localized variety that would later be coined "Received Pronunciation." As Richard W. Bailey and Lynda Mugglestone have shown, in nineteenth-century Britain, Standard English came to be regarded as not only the desired norm but also as the "proper" and "correct" way to speak; in direct correlation, other dialects and their speakers came to be viewed not only as nonstandard but substandard.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside this proliferation of prescriptivism, however, we see a veritable explosion in both the quantity and variety of uses of dialect in literature. Rather than erase dialect or relegate it to the literary margins, prescriptivism helped fuel its use and defense. No longer reserved for minor and comic characters, dialect in the nineteenth century was increasingly used to represent the speech of heroes and heroines. For example, in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) the potential for taking on the role of hero or heroine is located in the use of regional dialects, rather than middle-class Standard English.<sup>4</sup> Other writers went even further in their representation of dialect, using it as a weapon against linguistic discrimination. Robert Burns, who cast a long and wide shadow over dialect writing,

was often evoked in these attempts, either as an analogue (Edwin Waugh was called “the Lancashire Burns”) or as a *bête noire*. In the November 1871 issue of his periodical, *Ben Brierley’s Journal*, for example, dialect writer Ben Brierley offered a satirical take on the uneven treatment of English dialects in the humorous sketch, “Goosegrove Penny Readings.” In it, Brierley lampoons those who would venerate the Scots dialect while simultaneously denigrating the regional dialects of England. When the Aberdonian master of ceremonies, Mayor Macsarkin, takes over the program of the penny readings, he strikes out the “dialectal” readings. “Iverything [in the program] must be in proaper Henglish,” he explains, “sic as is written by our Scoatts, oor Burnses, an’ oor Shaksperes; mair parteclarly the first twa.”<sup>5</sup> Macsarkin’s declaration is humorously hyperbolic, especially with his /h/-insertion (a social shibboleth). But even more than this, his insistence that Lowland Scots is not “dialuctal” trenchantly expresses the discrimination that English dialect speakers and writers repeatedly faced throughout the nineteenth century.

This is not to say, however, that Lowland Scots was immune to ridicule by Standard English speakers, nor does Brierley single out Lowland Scots in this sketch. After Macsarkin recites selections of Burns’s poetry, the Reverend Stiltford Priggins, a “Cambridge Scholar,” treats the audience to a reading from Shakespeare’s *Othello*: “Mowest powtent, gwave, and wevewed Seignyaws. / My vevy nowble and appwoved good mawstaws. . . .”<sup>6</sup> Laden with /r/-/w/ substitution, Priggins’s speech echoes not only that of Thackeray’s upper-class “Snobs” and Dickens’s Lord Mutanhead but also middle-class imitators of the aristocracy. Eliot held similar views about this linguistic double standard; in an 1872 letter to philologist Walter William Skeat in which she explains her representation of the North Warwickshire dialect in *Silas Marner*, she concedes that it is “a just demand that art should keep clear of such specialties as would make it a puzzle for the larger part of the public,” but goes on to proclaim that “one is not bound to respect the lazy obtuseness or snobbish ignorance of people who do not care to know more of their native tongue than the vocabulary of the drawing-room and the newspaper.”<sup>7</sup>

The above examples barely scratch the surface of the depth of the debates surrounding dialect in the nineteenth century. Recent scholarship in dialect and literature aims to further explore these debates and the ideological implications of the representation of dialect in Victorian literature and culture. This scholarship is interdisciplinary in approach, drawing on recent developments in modern sociolinguistics to reevaluate the relationship between dialect and literature in this

complex period of literary and linguistic history. Jane Hodson's recent edited volume *Dialect and Literature in the Long Nineteenth Century* is just one recent example.<sup>8</sup> New directions include investigations of racialized dialects of English in imperial contexts, such as David West Brown's forthcoming *English and Empire: Literary History, Dialect and the Digital Archive*.<sup>9</sup> As these studies reveal, the representation of dialect in literature has material consequences. Around the globe, many nonstandard varieties of English remain stigmatized and the speakers of those varieties continue to face discrimination. Understanding the history of dialect representation and the ideologies that undergird it can help us transform its future.

## NOTES

1. George Milner, "The Dialect of Lancashire Considered as a Vehicle for Poetry," *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club*, Vol. 1 (Manchester: John Heywood, 1875), 24–26.
2. Samuel Pegge, *Anecdotes of the English Language; Chiefly Regarding the Local Dialect of London and its Environs* (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1844).
3. Richard W. Bailey, *Nineteenth-Century English* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Lynda Mugglestone, *Talking Proper: The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
4. Taryn Hakala, "Linguistic Self-Fashioning in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*," in *Dialect and Literature in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Jane Hodson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 159.
5. Ben Brierley, "Goosegrove 'Penny Readings,'" *Ben Brierley's Journal* (Nov. 1871): 295.
6. Brierley, "Goosegrove," 295.
7. George Eliot, Letter to W. W. Skeat, quoted in *English Dialect Society: A Bibliographic List of the Works That Have Been Published, or Are Known to Exist in Ms., Illustrative of the Various Dialects of English*, ed. Walter W. Skeat and J. H. Nodal (London: Trübner and Co., 1877), viii.
8. Jane Hodson, ed., *Dialect and Literature in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
9. David West Brown, *English and Empire: Literary History, Dialect and the Digital Archive* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

