The regional novel has been remarkably neglected as a subject, despite the enormous number of authors who can be classified as having written regional fiction. This interdisciplinary collection of essays from leading literary critics, historians and cultural geographers, addresses the regional novel in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. It establishes the broader social and political contexts in which these novels emerged, and by combining historical and literary approaches to the subject explores contemporary manifestations of regionalism and nationalism in Britain and Ireland. *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1990*, covers novels from the eighteenth century to the present day, and will be of interest to literary and social historians as well as cultural critics.

THE REGIONAL NOVEL IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND, 1800–1990

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Contents

Preface and acknowledgements

This project began in the mid 1980s, as part of an investigation into cultural regions in the British Isles. It grew out of a widely shared concern over political and cultural centralisation during the last two decades of the twentieth century, and the effects of this on regional cultures. Such issues have taken many forms in political debate, and their prominence has been growing for many years. In this book on the regional novel, we hope to encourage interdisciplinary study of a literary subject that has received very little attention in the relevant academic fields, despite its obvious importance and popularity among so many local readers in Britain and Ireland.

It was originally planned to include county-by-county and city bibliographies of regional fiction in this book, covering all four countries of the British Isles. Work for these was funded by the British Academy, and very large bibliographies resulted. These bore testimony to the extraordinary array of (sometimes forgotten) regional fiction that has been written over the past two centuries. Limitations of space and production costs inhibited the publication of these bibliographies here, and this bibliographical work will now be published as a separate volume. The two books – one scholarly and interpretative, the other bibliographical – should serve as a welcome aid to interdisciplinary study and appreciation of regional fiction in the future.

This book's scholarly chapters have been written by some of the leading literary critics, cultural historians and geographers working today in Ireland and Britain. I have been most fortunate in their participation, and for their tolerance of this editor, an historian prone to cross disciplinary boundaries. Some contributors also waited a long time for their chapters to appear, and Wynn Thomas and Liz Bellamy abided the delay with considerable patience and courtesy. Another chapter was planned on East End London fiction, by Raphael Samuel, but the illness and sadly premature death of this fine scholar and friend

has meant that London regional fiction goes uncovered here. I am indebted also to W. J. Keith, John Lucas, Linda McKenna, Ray Ryan, Joanne Shattock and Tony Wrigley for many helpful comments, and to Simon Ditchfield, Ian Dyck, Andreas Gestrich, Ralph Gibson, Franco D'Intino, Barry Reay, Tom Sokoll, Steve Taylor, David Thomson, Hiroko Tomida and Michael Yoshida for advice on regional fiction outside the British Isles. The assistance in particular of my colleagues Charles Phythian-Adams, Harold Fox, David Postles, Margery Tranter and Alasdair Crockett has been a constant pleasure. The University of Leicester, in sustaining the Department of English Local History, created excellent facilities that were indispensable for the project. To these colleagues, and this institution, I extend my warmest gratitude.

John Barrell's chapter, and the chapter by Stephen Daniels and Simon Rycroft, were published respectively in the *Journal of Historical Geography*, 8:4 (1982), pp. 347–61, and in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 18:4 (1993), pp. 460–80.

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CHAPTER 1

The regional novel: themes for interdisciplinary research

K. D. M. Snell

DEFINITION

'Novels of character and environment' – that was how Hardy described his 'Wessex novels'.[1] What is meant by 'the regional novel'? Inevitably, there are problems of definition, even definitions that rival each other in scope. Yet most readers agree about who the quintessential 'regional' writers are. The definitions on offer have much in common, although there will always be a large number of novels that fall into borderline categories. By 'regional novel' I mean fiction that is set in a recognisable region, and which describes features distinguishing the life, social relations, customs, language, dialect, or other aspects of the culture of that area and its people. Fiction with a strong sense of local geography, topography or landscape is also covered by this definition. In such writing a particular place or regional culture may perhaps be used to illustrate an aspect of life in general, or the effects of a particular environment upon the people living in it. And one usually expects to find certain characteristics in a regional novel: detailed description of a place, setting or region, whether urban or rural, which bears an approximation to a real place;[2] characters usually of working- or middle-class origin (although in some regional novels people of these classes may be absent, and in a few the focus may be on a family or lineage and its connection with local landscape or history); dialogue represented with some striving for realism; and attempted verisimilitude.[3]

[1] Thomas Hardy, 'General preface to the Novels and Poems', Wessex Edition, vol. 1 (1912), J. Moynahan (ed.), *The Portable Thomas Hardy* (1977; Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 694. (Place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated.)

[2] Hence for example one would not include Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as a regional novel: the place names and terrain may occasionally be based on recognisable fragments of a known landscape, yet this is clearly an imagined landscape. Hardy's 'Wessex', however, far more tightly located in English geography, provides a setting one would certainly class as regional.

[3] See P. Bentley, *The English Regional Novel* (1941), pp. 45–6.

'Regional' thus conceived is not the same as 'national', but it does not exclude that: the term includes regional writing within the four countries of the British Isles. A 'nationalist' novel, say of Wales, lacking clear regional specificity within Wales would not be included here; but a Welsh regional novel might in some cases be open to interpretation as a 'national' novel. We should note that such an understanding of the subject allows it to overlap with other literary genres, like regional romances, regional historical novels, novels dependent upon local folklore, industrial novels, or novels dealing with the life and times of people associated with a certain place, exploring their relation to that place.[4]

It is worth considering how the regional novel has been defined by the few literary critics who have approached it as such. The Yorkshire regional novelist Phyllis Bentley, author of the short book that is one of the few available discussions, argued that the regional novel may be seen as 'the national novel carried to one degree further of subdivision; it is a novel which, concentrating on a particular part, a particular region, of a nation, depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of the characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from others in the common motherland'.[5] She was writing during the Second World War, and the language of those years is prominent in her definition. More recently, the important (and virtually the only) discussions have come from W. J. Keith, R. P. Draper and Ian Bell.[6] These justify their careful usages, but I

[4] Extensive county-by-county and city bibliographies of regional novels set in Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England will be published as a separate volume by K. D. M. Snell in due course. These should aid local readers, librarians and academics. The two main works currently available are Stephen J. Brown, *Ireland in Fiction: A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances and Folklore* (New York, 1969), and L. LeClaire, *A General Analytical Bibliography of the Regional Novelists of the British Isles, 1800–1950* (Paris, 1954). Both these include items that are not fiction, and Brown includes works on the Irish abroad. LeClaire is still valuable, but is very incomplete, dated and most inaccessible.

[5] P. Bentley, *English Regional Novel*, p. 7. She wrote that 'locality, reality and democracy are the watchwords of the English regional novelist'; and as the main merits of regional novels she stressed verisimilitude, representations of landscape, and her view that 'the regional novel is essentially democratic. It expresses a belief that the ordinary man and the ordinary woman are interesting and worth depicting', pp. 45–6.

[6] W. J. Keith, *Regions of the Imagination: the Development of British Rural Fiction* (Toronto, 1988), see especially his valuable discussion on pp. 3–20; R. P. Draper (ed.), *The Literature of Region and Nation* (1989); I. A. Bell (ed.), *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff, 1995), which in addition to some valuable essays on regional fiction also contains essays by novelists; R. Williams, 'Region and class in the novel', in his *Writing in Society* (1983). See also M. Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (1932; Oxford, 1985), p. 816, who refers to the regional novel as 'a novel set in a real and well-defined locality, which is in some degree strange to the reader'. She added that from about 1839 'the localities described in regional novels were often smaller and more exact . . . Later novelists became ever more

depart here from Keith's focus only on rural fiction. The urban regional novel is such a crucial part of the genre that one cannot omit it. Nor does one want to regard cities as any less 'regional' than other areas: without making any value judgements, London and its districts in this regard are as 'regional' as parts of County Kerry, and the regional fiction of such cities should be treated accordingly. For our purposes, a sense and description of region may be wholly urban, as in the start of *Alton Locke*: 'I am a Cockney among Cockneys. Italy and the Tropics, the Highlands and Devonshire, I know only in dreams. Even the Surrey hills, of whose loveliness I have heard so much, are to me a distant fairy-land, whose gleaming ridges I am worthy only to behold afar . . . my knowledge of England is bounded by the horizon which encircles Richmond Hill'.[7] Alternatively, the idea of region may be as rural as Hardy's account of the Blackmoor Vale, which to Tess was 'the world, and its inhabitants the races thereof . . . Every contour of the surrounding hills was as personal to her as that of her relatives' faces; but for what lay beyond her judgement was dependent on the teaching of the village school'.[8]

Any definition must also stress the way in which such novels seek to conceive a regional or local world and its people. In such fiction the apparently real is mixed with the imaginary, the known with the unknown. W. J. Keith's book was rightly entitled *Regions of the Imagination*. The relation between fact and fiction varies considerably in regional fiction, between authors, and between the different literary movements which informed the artistic and social purposes behind many of the novels. The variety of such relationships has been especially marked during the twentieth century. If one compares regional fiction with documentary or historical writing, it is clear that work from the latter forms differ from much regional fiction in laying claim to deal with 'facts', with truth as perceived by the author. However, in conceptual schemes, choice of detail, and manners of evocation, historical or documentary writing can be as much an art form as regional

interested in precise regional attachment and description'. One should also draw attention to the definition in F. W. Morgan, 'Three aspects of regional consciousness', *Sociological Review*, 31, no. 1 (1939), pp. 84–6. He stressed the novel's 'absorption in a particular locality: absorption and not merely interest . . . The area, too, must not be too small', and, he continued, 'The true regional novel has people at work as an essential material: it has become almost the epic of the labourer'; the regional novel 'produces a synthesis, a living picture of the unity of place and people, through work'; and with regard to landscape, it provides 'an atmosphere which is not transferable'.

[7] C. Kingsley, *Alton Locke* (1850; Oxford, 1983), p. 5.

[8] T. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891; Harmondsworth, 1982), ch. 5, p. 75.

fiction, where the latter deals with a perceived reality.[9] Referential claims by historians are similar to those often made by novelists – think for example of Hardy's assertion that

> At the dates represented in the various narrations things were like that in Wessex: the inhabitants lived in certain ways, engaged in certain occupations, kept alive certain customs, just as they are shown doing in these pages . . . I have instituted inquiries to correct tricks of memory, and striven against temptations to exaggerate, in order to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of a vanishing life.[10]

There are many differences between regional fiction and other forms of writing, but in this context I would not assert them in too rigid a way. For regional fiction may often supplement other descriptions as a further way of imagining, realising or knowing life, character and social relations, with unique imaginative and evocative potential.

We shall turn shortly to interdisciplinary possibilities for study. But it is important here to point to the variety of the regional novel, which is one reason why it has usually been subsumed within other literary genres. Beyond its most predictable forms, and retaining strong elements of the above definition, this genre may on occasion encompass romance, historical novels, mystery or detective novels, novels dependent upon regional folklore (even turning folk tales into fictional form), and in a few cases – like Colin Wilson's account of a future Nottingham – may even stretch to science fiction. One could take any region of the British Isles to illustrate this point. Let me do this for the neglected literature of the Channel Islands. These islands have certainly provided a setting for regional fiction that comes close to the usual associations of the genre, like Ethel Mannin's *Children of the Earth* (1930), comparable to rural regional novels by Kaye-Smith or Mary Webb. Yet besides this, one finds historical novels like Edward Gavey, *In Peirson's Days: a Story of the Great Invasion of Jersey in 1781* (1902), J. E. Corbiere, *Mont Orgueil Castle: a Tale of Jersey During the Wars of the Roses* (1890), Philip Billot, *Rozel: an Historical Novel* (1945), or William Ferrar, *The Fall of the Grand Sarrasin* (1905). A further historical subject concerns the German occupation of the Islands, which has been the theme for novels such

[9] I think here also of E. Leach's defence of social anthropology as a form of art, and his view of social anthropologists 'as bad novelists rather than bad scientists', in his *Social Anthropology* (Glasgow, 1982), pp. 52–4.

[10] Hardy, 'General Preface', pp. 695–6. The role of 'oral history' in regional novels by Scott, C. Bronte, George Moore, Dickens, Bennett, Hardy and others, is discussed in P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (1978; Oxford, 1984), pp. 28–9.

as Sheila Parker, *An Occupational Hazard* (1985), Michael Marshall, *The Small Army* (1957), Peggy Woodford, *Backwater War* (1974), John Ferguson, *Terror on the Island* (1941), Sheila Edwards, *The Beloved Islands* (1989), and Jack Higgins, *Night of the Fox* (1986). There are also detective novels with a strong local setting, such as the Bergerac series, that are derived from other media;[11] novels that make use of certain financial connotations of the islands, like Nicholas Thorne, *Money Chain* (1987); and those which take issues of local and national politics as their subject matter, like Desmond Walker's *Bedlam in the Bailiwicks* (1987) or *Task Force Channel Islands* (1989). Here, as elsewhere, one also finds novels heavily dependent upon the actual or assumed folklore of the islands, best known among them being Victor Hugo, *Travailleurs de la Mer*,[12] but also including such works as Sonia Hillsdon, *Strange Stories from Jersey* (1987). The islands have also provided the setting for much children's fiction, which is less my concern here,[13] as well as novels that might be termed science fiction, like Hugh Walters, *The Blue Aura* (1979); fiction dealing with the lives of well-known figures connected with the islands, such as David Butler, *Lillie* (1978), or Pierre Sichel, *The Jersey Lilly* (1958); as well as romances like Anabella Seymour, *Dangerous Deceptions* (1988), and other forms of regional writing that fall outside the above classifications, or which combine elements of them. The regional novel can encompass many such works, beyond the usual equation of the genre with essentially rural and 'provincial' works like *Adam Bede* or *The Return of the Native*.

EARLY ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF REGIONAL FICTION

The circumstances from which the earliest regional novelists emerged deserve special attention. Sir Walter Scott, drawing in part upon Maria Edgeworth, interpreted character and speech within a Scottish historical setting, using vernacular surroundings which were often lowly and imbued with local narratives and folkloric traditions. His 'anthropological' work did not recognise distinctions between biography, fiction and history, so that one reads him as if 'in a suspension between

[11] Michael Hardwick, *Bergerac: The Jersey Cop* (1981).

[12] Translated as *The Toilers of the Sea* (1888). Compare the view that Hugo's book cannot 'in any way be relied upon as giving anything like a correct view of the popular superstitions of Jersey', in J. S. Cox (ed.), *Guernsey Folklore, Recorded in the Summer of 1882* (1971, 1986), p. 5, as reprinted from an article by 'A. P. A.' in *The Antiquary* (November 1882).

[13] For example Viola Bayley, *Jersey Adventure* (1969).

creative writing and historiography'.[14] In particular, the social range of his characters was to be a common feature of subsequent regional fiction.[15] Before him, one may take Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), written it seems in 1797–9, as probably the first regional novel. Prior to this regionality in fiction had frequently been presented in terms of regional stereotypes, epitomised by supposed traits of people from different areas. Thus John Barrell, in discussing *Roderick Random*, draws attention to the range of provincial character and dialectal 'types' in Smollett's work, to characters who have become isolated from their regional settings, losing some of their identity as they are abandoned to the mobile plots and loose form of the picaresque novel.[16] In contrast to such use of regionality – involving much regional stereotype in characterisation and a stress on an elite overview that alone could coordinate such great diversity – the regional novel came to establish much firmer regional settings, developing characterisation within such contexts, showing awareness of regional influences on people and social relationships, and, in a great variety of ways, interpreting these relationships or using them to develop more complex and explanatory depths of character.

Walter Allen, in *The English Novel*, made a considerable claim for Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*. He commented that its date of publication, 1800, marks 'a date of the first importance in the history of English fiction, indeed of world fiction'. Edgeworth, he argued,

> occupied new territory for the novel. Before her, except when London was the scene, the locale of our fiction had been generalized, conventionalized. Outside London and Bath, the eighteenth-century novelist rarely had a sense of place . . . Maria Edgeworth gave fiction a local habitation and a name. And she did more than this: she perceived the relation between the local habitation and the people who dwell in it. She invented, in other words, the regional novel, in which the very nature of the novelist's characters is conditioned, receives its bias and expression, from the fact that they live in a countryside differentiated by a traditional way of life from other countrysides.[17]

[14] R. Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), p. 126, and see his ch. 3, on 'Anthropology and Dialect'.

[15] See for example K. Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 86–91, 142; H. Auster, *Local Habitations: Regionalism in the Early Novels of George Eliot* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 24–6.

[16] J. Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–1780: An Equal Wide Survey* (1983), ch. 3. And see J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800* (1932, 1969), pp. 187–8, on national and regional character 'types' in fiction in the late eighteenth century.

[17] W. Allen, *The English Novel: a Short Critical History* (1954; Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 103.

We can note here the acknowledgement of London and Bath settings in earlier fiction, a point (following our genre definition) that others may wish to pursue. However, Allen's emphasis has since been adopted by others. George Watson for example, in his introduction to *Castle Rackrent*, saw this book as 'the first regional novel in English, and perhaps in all Europe'.[18] It was, he suggested, documentary in purpose, concerned with that branch of human knowledge later termed sociology, and as such Edgeworth's regional writing – together with Scott, Burns and Crabbe (and Rousseau in France)[19] – may represent a 'vast literary revolution', that was continued by Turgenev. *Castle Rackrent* promoted 'an aspect of human knowledge which novelists and poets, not historians, inaugurated . . . the novels of Maria Edgeworth and of her first pupil [Scott] are decades in advance of the historians in their social concern'.[20]

In many ways, *Castle Rackrent* is a generic description or caricature of the life and manners of a 'certain class of the gentry of Ireland some years ago', as Edgeworth put it, a class of Irish squires that could have existed in virtually any part of Ireland. It is sometimes thought that her subject is Ireland rather than any region within it. She wrote of how 'Nations as well as individuals gradually lose their identity', as will occur, she felt, in the union with Great Britain – a misjudgement of interest today.[21] Her preface contained no hint that her concern lay with the characteristics of specific regions of Ireland. Yet one senses elements of this in her details of dialect, local agricultural terms (for example, a *loy*),[22] tenurial arrangements, characteristics of middlemen or 'journeymen gentlemen'; popular superstitions and folklore like the fairy mount,[23] or the right to be buried in certain churchyards;[24] mention of the regionality of Caoinans (funeral songs),[25] and the burning of death-bed straw and of funerary practices. Such detail places the novel in a broad region of the Irish midlands, and the main setting appears to be County Longford.[26] Her novel is also regional in having a certain gentry family as its subject. Other novels subsequently appeared that one might think of as 'regional' in a similar sense, especially with regard to a tight association of such families with particular areas, and

[18] G. Watson, Introduction to *Castle Rackrent* (1800; Oxford, 1980), p. vii. Or see H. Zimmern, *Maria Edgeworth* (1883), p. 108, and particularly the essay by Liz Bellamy in this volume.
[19] J.-J. Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloise* (1761), presented a view of country life in the Vaud, set in romantically landscaped gardens at Ermenonville, thirty miles north-east of Paris.
[20] Watson, Introduction to *Castle Rackrent*, p. viii.
[21] M. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1800; Oxford, 1980), pp. 4–5.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 16. [23] *Ibid*. [24] *Ibid*., p. 106. [25] *Ibid*., p. 101. [26] *Ibid*., p. 116.

the often unquestioned assumption that the history and identifying features of an area may be entwined with its gentry family, so closely were they identified. It might be argued that the regional novel could only develop in a fuller social sense when such neo-feudal signification was relinquished, that the gentry themselves had become the least regional of classes. One certainly finds a move away from such gentrified focus in Scott and most succeeding authors. Yet the narrator of *Castle Rackrent*, Old Thady, is himself a lowly gentry servant, and the issues of land, tenure and lineage (so important in Edgeworth's account) themselves tie the novel to lowland Irish land issues in a way that justifies the label 'regional'. The national question is always present however, justifying LeClaire's view that the regional novel in its early years, until about 1830, and notably in Edgeworth and Scott, was a genre above all concerned with this issue – one, we should add, to which it has repeatedly returned.[27] The point is reinforced in Edgeworth's presentation of her work, which she laid

> before the English reader as a specimen of manners and characters, which are perhaps unknown in England. Indeed the domestic habits of no nation in Europe were less known to the English than those of their sister country, till within these few years. Mr Young's picture of Ireland,[28] in his tour through that country, was the first faithful portrait of its inhabitants. All the features in the foregoing sketch were taken from the life, and they are characteristic of that mixture of quickness, simplicity, cunning, carelessness, dissipation, disinterestedness, shrewdness and blunder, which in different forms, and with various success, has been brought upon the stage or delineated in novels.[29]

The role of the regional novel in regional stereotyping, and further issues of regionalism and nationalism, will occupy us later.

An important feature accompanying this emergence of the regional novel was an interest in the more realistic portrayal of regional topographical, economic and cultural traits. Representations of barely recognisable British landscape elements heavily overlaid with classical imagery increasingly gave way to ways of depicting people in their

[27] L. Leclaire, *Le Roman regionaliste dans les Iles Britanniques* (Paris, 1954).
[28] Arthur Young, *A Tour in Ireland* (1780), an account by the agricultural commentator and improver of Ireland in 1776–9.
[29] Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, p. 97.

regional settings.[30] A taste for fidelity in imitations of nature, for close attention to detail, as in the Dutch painters, became more manifest after about 1770. This was especially so from the early 1780s 'in a good measure, in consequence of the direction of the public taste to the subject of painting', as Hazlitt wrote in his essay on Crabbe; a poet who, like Goldsmith, Clare or Elliott, was strongly associated with such realist preference.[31] In addition to this poetry of the anti-pastoral – and growing out of the picturesque writing of the period from the late 1760s – a very large topographical literature of exploration developed, notably of the Lake District and north Wales, but also of many other regions.[32] The popular guides of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and in particular the tours of Arthur Young or Gilpin[33] – blending as they did practical agrarian instruction with the fading ethic of melancholy ruin, and, in the case of some of Young's tours, information about landlord artistic taste – were important aspects of the changing nature of internal tourism and instructive travel. There was certainly a tradition of topographical writing, such as that by Fiennes, Kilburne or Defoe, but the scale of the late eighteenth-century developments was unprecedented. Between 1770 and 1815, for example, at least eighty books describing trips through Wales were published; and among the imaginative writers 'discovering' this principality were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, Scott, Peacock, Landor and De Quincey.

[30] See in particular J. Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730–1840* (Cambridge, 1980); D. Solkin, *Richard Wilson: the Landscape of Reaction* (1982).

[31] W. Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits* (1825, 1969), p. 267. See also J. Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730–1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge, 1972).

[32] See T. Gray, *Journal in the Lakes* (1769); J. Clarke, *Survey of the Lakes of Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire* (1787); W. Hutchinson, *Excursion to the Lakes in Westmoreland and Cumberland, in the Years 1773 and 1774* (1776); W. Gell, *Tour of the Lakes made in 1797* (1968); J. Housman, *Descriptive Tour and Guide to the Lakes, Caves, Mountains and other National Curiosities in Cumberland, Westmoreland, Lancashire* (Carlisle, 1800); T. West, *Guide to the Lakes, Dedicated to the Lovers of Landscape Studies* (1778); W. Wilberforce, *Journey to the Lake District from Cambridge, 1779* (1983); N. Nicholson, *The Lakers: Adventures of the First Tourists* (1955); M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot, 1989). On north Wales, see T. Pennant, *A Tour in Wales* (1784); W. Bingley, *North Wales; Including its Scenery, Antiquities, Customs and some Sketches of its Natural History* (1804); and on Scotland, the very saleable work by T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland* (1771, 1772), one of the aims of which was to 'conciliate the affections' of England and Scotland.

[33] A. Young, *A Six Weeks Tour Through the Southern Counties of England and Wales* (1769), *A Six Months Tour Through the North of England* (1770), *The Farmer's Tour Through the East of England* (1771); W. Gilpin, *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, made in the Year 1772 on Several Parts of England, Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland*, 2 volumes (1786).

Such internal tourism appears in its early days to have been associated with a largely visual and sometimes quaint interest in 'scenery', that term of the mid- and late eighteenth century: a feeling for a picturesque landscape that was often depersonalised or unpeopled, tied to certain artistic genres and influenced by ideas in landscape gardening.[34] By the mid-nineteenth century however, at the same time as a proliferation of 'hand books for travellers', regional fiction was becoming one of the most important means by which regional landscapes were distinguished from a generalised countryside. The genre was taking over some functions of the visual arts, particularly of oil painting, and was now independently contributing to more diverse, literary and symbolic aesthetics of landscape. It was now to be crucial as a way in which particular landscapes ('countries') became structured and known, going well beyond a largely pictorial form of knowledge.

Superimposed on this more variegated sense of landscape was an interest in the working lives and technologies of industrial and rural workers: an eagerness to view, or represent, other people in 'communion' with their places of work, even if this relationship was often infused (by middling-class observers) with romantic and pastoral colour at some remove from local working consciousness. This tendency survived long after the period of Wordsworth's 'Michael'. It was manifested in many changing ways, and for our purposes it is worth observing that the subjective associational motives underlying it were important in the popularity of regional fiction. The examples come to mind randomly. There were to be many in the history of Victorian photography, including key figures like Henry Fox Talbot, Octavius Hill (in particular his studies of sailors and fisher-girls), Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, P. H. Emerson or Henry Peach Robinson. Emerson, well known for his studies of East Anglian life and landscape, repudiated 'composition pictures' and other studio contrivances, advising photographers to take their cameras outdoors and photograph real people in their native environments, aiming for 'as true an impression . . . as possible'.[35] As with much of the photography, empathetic interest could also have strongly gendered aspects: I think of middle-class women from Liverpool decked out as female

[34] On internal tourism, see I. Ousby, *The Englishman's England: Taste, Travel and the Rise of Tourism* (Cambridge, 1990); J. Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture', 1800–1918* (Oxford, 1993); M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism, 1760–1800* (Aldershot, 1989).

[35] P. H. Emerson, 'Photography, A Pictorial Art', *The Amateur Photographer*, 3 (19 March 1886), p. 139.

'Welsh peasants' in the Llandudno photographic studios for their *cartes de visites*, of Arthur Munby and his preoccupations,[36] or the itinerant 'Walter' stalking regional variety in his feminine prey.[37] More generally, one could mention Mayhew, Engels, Angus Bethune Reach and many other social investigators; Alexander Somerville,[38] the Welsh writing of George Borrow,[39] and later the Victorian folklorists; the English folk dance and song revival,[40] and its Celtic counterparts, or the 'back to the land' movement. There have been many similarly inspired developments in the twentieth century. For example, the motivations behind the modern 'real-life' working museums of farming, vernacular architecture or industry, like those of the Rhondda, St Fagans, Ruddington, or Cultra, are surely in the same tradition. So much in museum culture caters to morally driven curiosity and empathetic habits of mind. The moral, almost fraternal and self-identifying, qualities of internal tourism and historical interest became visible in a great variety of regional, ideological, class, and sexual guises, and these were particularly strongly manifested in the writing and buying of regional fiction.

The emerging style of antiquarian British historiography was a further shift in taste that expanded demand for *historical* fiction set more firmly in identifiable locales. In the crucial early nineteenth century one thinks particularly of Grose, Carter, Hall, Gough, Britton, and Southey, coupled with ballad collections, Scott's own *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3), and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, itself one example of a frenetic interest in the archaeology of the medieval period at the turn of the century. This repeated, some decades late, the demand for ascertainable, non-classical imagery in British landscape painting, of a sort that might appeal to genteel middling classes. It also had a strong political dimension in its faith in 'time-hallowed' feudal institutions, upheld as a last bulwark of stability against the influence of American and French democratic politics. Hazlitt wrote of Scott as 'a mind brooding over

[36] D. Hudson, *Munby: Man of Two Worlds* (1972); L. Stanley (ed.), *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant* (1984).

[37] 'Walter', *My Secret Life* (1972). This preoccupation with working women seems to have been widespread. Walter or Munby were extreme examples, but such traits are manifest in many regional novelists, like Hardy or Gissing.

[38] A. Somerville, *The Whistler at the Plough* (1852; Manchester, 1989); and see his *Letters from Ireland during the Famine of 1847* (Dublin, 1994).

[39] G. Borrow, *Wild Wales: Its People, Language and Scenery* (1862). He began his tour of Wales in 1854. Both Borrow and Somerville reported in great detail, and with an attempt at dialectal realism, the conversations they had with poor people encountered during their travels.

[40] For recent discussion, see G. Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester, 1993).

antiquity – scorning "the present ignorant time" . . . The old world is to him a crowded map; the new one a dull, hateful blank.'[41] Scott's work, with its close topographical references and connection to historical legend, was itself subsequently used in county directories throughout the nineteenth century, to give further appeal to the localities whose distinctiveness and historical attributes were being described alongside their general and family histories, and their physical and current economic characteristics.[42] Locally-based antiquarian historical writing was a remarkable feature of this time, which also saw the growth of many county antiquarian and archaeological societies. There were many who, like Southey, hoped to preserve 'local history . . . everything about a parish that can be made interesting – all of its history, traditions and manners that can be saved from oblivion'.[43] In Wales, rather earlier, this tendency was apparent in Edmund Jones, *An Historical Account of the Parish of Aberystruth* (1779), and Thomas Pennant, *The History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell* (1796). There were many other examples, varying between the semi-fictionalised account, as in the case of John Galt's *The Annals of the Parish* (1821), and what might today be termed as historical writing.

In the developments affecting the genre of print-making, there was also an increasingly popular demand for picturesque and topographical illustration. Turner's *Liber Studiorum* series between 1805 and 1819 was planned as a hundred engravings, divided into categories under the headings Historical, Mountainous, Pastoral, Marine and Architectural. His designs for topographical works, published by W. B. Cooke, included the copper-plate and early steel-plate engravings entitled *Picturesque Delineation of the Southern Coast of England* (1814–26), and the *Views in Sussex* (1816–20), as well as his illustrations for the series *The Rivers of England*. Copper-plate was being replaced by steel around 1820, and this had major implications for the productivity, circulation and cost of such engravings, making them more widely available. Further prints by Turner, *The Ports of England*, appeared between 1826 and 1828. Between 1825 and 1838 he engraved ninety-six *Picturesque Views in England and Wales*. He was also commissioned to produce illustrations for literary

[41] W. Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits* (1825; 1969 edn.), p. 96.

[42] For an example of this, see the frequent use of myths and legends as described by Scott in T. F. Bulmer, *History, Topography and Directory of Northumberland (Hexham Division)* (Manchester, 1886).

[43] See Southey's letter to the (regional) novelist Anna Eliza Bray, cited in R. M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: a History* (1968), p. 95.

works, including those of Sir Walter Scott.[44] Many other artists participated in these developments, including David Cox,[45] Thomas Girtin,[46] Richard Earlom, George Cuitt, Andrew Geddes, Hugh Williams, Samuel Prout,[47] Julius Ibbetson, or John and Cornelius Varley. Finden and Batty's *Welsh Scenery* appeared in 1823, and thousands more prints of Welsh scenery were to appear subsequently, drawing upon the work of artists like Henry Gastineau. Nor should one forget David Lucas' mezzotint engravings for Constable's *English Landscape Scenery*, with their illustrations of such places as Weymouth Bay, Yarmouth, or Old Sarum. These aimed, as Constable stressed, to promote the study of all features of landscape scenery in England, from simple localities to places of exceptional grandeur.

It is certain also that the continental wars had directed travellers' attention in an unprecedented way to the resources offered by Britain. At this time the combination of extended wartime mobilisation, state intervention, improved transport, enormously significant socio-economic changes, and the growth of popular radicalism underlined the regional cultures that comprised the British Isles. The impetus to agrarian improvement, driven by the food shortages and high prices of the Napoleonic Wars, the heightened fervour for enclosure, the evident profit to be made from agricultural investment, and the transition towards short one-year leases and greater tenant-farmer (and other occupational) inter-regional mobility stimulated an interest both in farming and related practices in different regions. The writings of commentators like Young's great rival William Marshall, the General Views of the Agriculture of different counties, or the eclectic letters and reports to the *Annals of Agriculture* were part of this growing interest in the regional viability of investment in an increasingly divergent and specialised agricultural and industrial economy. A more regionally nuanced knowledge of landscape, local manners, customary behaviour, locally different market measures, levels of poor relief, and economic conditions in general was needed for informed investment. These were all

[44] Turner toured Scotland in 1818, producing the illustrations for Scott's two-volume *Provincial Antiquities and Picturesque Scenery of Scotland* (1819, 1826).

[45] D. Cox, *The Young Artist's Companion; or, Drawing-book of Studies and Landscape Embellishments* (London, 1825).

[46] See J. M. W. Turner, *River Scenery* (London, 1827), or T. Miller (ed.), *Turner and Girtin's Picturesque Views* (London, 1873); S. M. Morris, *Thomas Girtin, 1775–1802* (New Haven, 1986).

[47] See his *Studies of Cottages and Rural Scenery* (London, 1816).

considerations which became even more material during the railway age and the regional specialisations associated with it.[48]

DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES AND NEGLECT OF REGIONAL FICTION

The regional novel, therefore, emerged at a time of complex change and national reassessment, and some of the major elements – cultural, aesthetic, social and economic – of this early nineteenth-century context have been sketched above. Our priority now must shift to rather different concerns: the question of why the genre and its various forms have been so neglected in disciplinary and critical study; or, to give this question more precision – for there has certainly been abundant study of individual authors – why has the regional novel, *as regional*, been ignored? Why, in so many thousands of critical studies of the novel, is there usually no mention whatever of the regional novel? Auster commented in 1970 on how 'the regional novel in England appeared still to be a relatively obscure and neglected topic.'[49] Only rarely, he continued, 'have modern critics of any stature concerned themselves, even briefly, with the subject of regionalism; when they have done so their attitude has generally been one of condescension, if not outright scorn'.[50] 'Regionalism in English fiction, as distinct from American, when regarded at all, is normally regarded as something of a curiosity, and a curiosity of no significance. Enduring literature, it is said, is universal: only second-rate writers are regional'.[51] Auster was writing on George Eliot. The view that he describes was earlier epitomised by Q. D. Leavis, when she wrote that 'there are excuses for a scepticism that refuses to consider that subject [regional novels] as more serious than a future academic classification'. It has rarely achieved even that. 'We register a suspicion', she wrote of authors like Phillpotts, Kaye-Smith, or Mary Webb, 'that the esteemed regional novel is some commonplace work of fiction made interesting to the Boots Library public by a painstaking application of rural local colour'.[52] The idea that scrutiny of regional

[48] J. Langton, 'The Industrial Revolution and the regional geography of England', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, no. 9 (1984), 164; W. J. Keith, 'The land in Victorian literature', in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside* (1981), p. 139.

[49] Auster, *Local Habitations*, p. vii.

[50] *Ibid*., p. 19.

[51] Auster, *Local Habitations*, pp. 14–15. Or see P. Keating, *The Haunted Study: a Social History of the English Novel, 1875–1914* (1989), p. 332, on how regional realism 'is still usually ignored by academic and metropolitan critics'.

[52] Q. D. Leavis, 'Regional novels', *Scrutiny* 4, no. 4 (March 1936), p. 440.

fiction could shed light on questions of 'organic community' was far from her mind. Such novelists epitomised that disintegration of tradition, authority and civilised standards of taste that Leavis complained about elsewhere.[53] Apparently its American forms were, as in England, 'a cashing in by a professional fiction-monger on a knowledge of an attractive locality, or 'an excuse for left-wing propaganda'.[54]

This critical tone was associated with the development of literary studies over this period as a centralised academic discipline, a formulation that left it stranded for too long from history and other areas of study, although one that has recently been much questioned both within and without the discipline. Interpretation of the regional novel stood to gain from cross-disciplinary association, and lost much from the way in which literary study was devised. Relevant here is a matter that has lurked behind much antipathy towards study of the 'regional novel' as such. Few would deny that defining the 'regional novel' for study can imply an extrinsic agenda, a socio-cultural approach to texts concerned with matters other than earlier Leavisite judgements about literary value, and one that is *ipso facto* still likely to be received with lukewarm enthusiasm in some quarters. The formal emergence of a new discipline, let alone its more recent convolutions and antagonisms, has often delimited the repertoire of questions tolerated within it. Leavis' dismissiveness occurred at a time of expanding output of the regional novel, when writers like Walter Greenwood or George Orwell were supplying new political agenda for the representation of working-class life, sensitively handling social and human dimensions of the great slump and the problems of the depressed areas.[55] The prior realist and naturalist traditions of the regional novel bespoke a relevance of novels to social context that should have been obvious, and should have implied a critical agenda to match, one that would also have incorporated regionalism in debates about 'realism'. Attacks on the entire genre for ostensible political reasons – and we have just seen an example from Leavis – could easily have been rebutted. Certainly a foregrounding of locality, region and cultural distinctiveness frequently constitutes a kind of political statement, for example a reaction against centralised government. Realism and naturalism often carried certain political presumptions. And many regional novels had a nationalist purpose at the

[53] Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932; London, 1965), ch. 4.
[54] Leavis, 'Regional novels', p. 440.
[55] See A. Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (1990), on regional novels in the 1930s.

root of their loyalties, a pre-emptive 'nationalism' tied to particular regional cultures, and a defence of language. In these senses literary regionalism is undeniably political. Yet there is no predisposing *conventional* political bias in regional fiction, in the ideological terms Leavis had in mind: this fiction ranges from Henry Williamson to Lewis Jones.

The way in which literary criticism ordered itself as an autonomous discipline contributed to the neglect of the regional, contextual and historical aspects of fiction. The ahistorical bent of much literary theory (with the exception of Marxist and much feminist theory) has often resulted in little regard being paid to regional history, to writers' contexts, to the creation of methods by which to study literary milieux, to the local connections between writers and the extent to which they saw themselves as writing within certain regional traditions, and to their dependency upon a sense of place, whether their own or that of their readers. As an exception to such criticism put it: 'the study of literature in the present century has been, in effect, de-historicised'.[56] Literary criticism established itself as an exercise in a certain type of critical appreciation of salient texts, a training in refined judgement. In the 'new criticism' of the 1940s and 50s in particular, an extreme form of emphasis only on the texts (and few at that) discountenanced any study of author, circumstances, or social context. And this feature, at least, has been shared by structuralist and post-structuralist theory; the latter has been described as 'a wholesale retreat from geography and history into a domain of pure "textuality" in which the principle of indeterminacy smothers the possibility of social or political "significance" for literature'.[57] Academic critics are without doubt the most 'centralist' and displaced of all readers, and much of their work has had limited appeal to the reading public. A literary sociology too, that might also have extended strong historical strands, has been slow to develop, especially in Britain, even though the *communicative* role of any novel – its messages to intended or actual readerships – has always invited such an approach. The suspicion persisted in academic literary circles that the purpose of literary sociology was ambiguous and untrustworthy, that it was perhaps above all concerned not with studying selected

[56] Keating, *The Haunted Study*, pp. vii–viii.

[57] S. Slemon and H. Tiffin (eds.), *After Europe: Critical Theory and Post-Colonial Writing* (1989), pp. x–xi. They comment rather strongly on 'the production of an institutionalised army of ridiculously credulous readers – "critics" who systematically shut out the world in order to practice . . . a textual form of interior decoration'.

great novels, but with using the novel to study the world external to it.[58] The result may well have been damaging to the endowment and credibility of literary criticism. As Escarpit wrote: 'Literary history has held – and still holds fast – to the study only of particular writers and their works, to a biographical and textual commentary. It has considered the aggregate context as a sort of decoration best left to the inquisitive mind of the political historian.'[59]

Yet it would be wholly tendentious to suggest that the problem lies mainly with literary criticism. Historians themselves have traditionally been dependent upon various forms of literary 'evidence', including novels, but have made virtually no attempts to set the bounds to what a writer may know and be able to express of his or her society and its social relations: to understand in what areas authorial knowledge is likely to be limited, occluded, or distorted, and for what artistic and social reasons. On the contrary, too often they have tried to prove the 'accuracy' of the novel in question, or the credentials of its author, just as they try to buttress the credibility of their other sources. An unimaginatively straitened view of 'literary value' can follow easily from such preoccupations. The use of fiction as 'evidence', assumed to be commensurate with more traditional standards of historical 'evidence', has not eased interdisciplinary communication. Many historians have not appreciated that literary texts cannot be forced to yield information or 'evidence' that they do not intend, and are unable through context or intention to give.[60] Through the absence of an effective literary sociology, and in the dearth of precautionary schemas treating such issues, the potential links from history to literary criticism remain undeveloped, and are shunned by many literary critics partly in response to the crudity of those forms of social history that they commonly encounter. That

[58] I do not wish to deny the justification of such suspicion. See e.g. L. Goldmann, 'The sociology of literature: status and problems of method', in P. Davison, R. Meyersohn & E. Shils (eds.), *The Sociology of Literature, vol. 6: Literary Taste, Culture and Mass Communication* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 171: 'this sociology proves to be all the more fertile the more the works studied are mediocre. Moreover, what it seeks in these works is more documentary than literary in character'. Goldmann stressed, however, that literary sociology was concerned 'with the mental structures, with what might be called the categories which shape both the empirical consciousness of a certain social group and the imaginary universe created by the writer'. (*Ibid*., p. 171). It is clear that such preoccupation is relevant to *all* regional novelists, but that consideration of this also has significant bearing on more traditional literary-critical questions of originality and authorial distinctiveness.

[59] R. Escarpit, 'Why a sociology of literature?', in P. Davison, *Sociology of Literature*, p. 137.

[60] There are a few notable exceptions to this criticism, like D. Cannadine, *This Little World: The Value of the Novels of Francis Brett Young as a Guide to the State of Midland Society, 1870–1925* (Worcester, 1982).

history has itself very often been indifferent to regional differences.[61] Historical methods reliant upon literary sources have too frequently lacked appropriate caution, independent confirmation from other sources, and a defined and delimited social and regional focus. In addition, historians have rarely appreciated the specific questions and genre traditions to which a literary work was addressed, the senses in which such a work formed a dialogue with its own artistic history. Nor have they often defined or comprehended those shifts or moments in history which suggest new potential or meanings in a text, new intepretations of an author in altered situations, and the contextual links from present to past that underlie their own options, choices and interpretations.

It is clear then that regional fiction is not an historical 'resource' in the same form as conventional historical 'evidence', that it does not have a simple mimetic function, representing the structures of a pre-existent reality. Its role in representing 'things as they are', for example, is often complicated through a juxtaposition with the rather different function of representing a didactic model of how things ought to be. Such precautions cannot be emphasised too strongly, especially to historians. And yet few historians can afford to bypass fiction, especially in the British Isles, where regionally nuanced cultural description is so weak compared to many continental countries. The novel itself, in its earliest days, developed from non-fictional forms, from letters, journals, biographies or historical chronicles, all preoccupied with the details of social living, and after Scott these influences widened in fictional traditions. Fine social, occupational and regional distinctions were persistently and subtly articulated in many regional novels, dealing with ambiguities and discernments that most scholarly disciplines rarely approach. The literary critic John Lucas wrote of how 'the provincial novel in the nineteenth century is not only concerned with the nature of social change but uniquely well placed to record and explore how it happened, note its effects on individual lives, on patterns of living, on communities', and he added that it is 'supremely well equipped' to handle questions of class and human separation.[62]

[61] It has been rightly observed by J. Langton that much recent historical writing 'has been marked by a further relegation of regional differences to the very lowest level of concern. Modern approaches, like modern societies, have no place for regions . . . All of significance is conceived of in terms of national sectors, trends and interest groups'. See his 'The Industrial Revolution and the regional geography of England', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 9 (1984), 146. One could write an extensive critique of social history, highlighting its neglect of region.

[62] J. Lucas, *The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel* (1977; Brighton, 1980), pp. xi, 119.

In addition, literary consideration of social and political questions has been prominent. To neglect this point, and the questions that arise from it, is to miss key elements, political themes and reformist intentions in works like *North and South*, *Yeast*, *Sybil*, *Alton Locke*, or, rather later, novels like *Love on the Dole* or *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. The 'artistic' merit of such books, like the artistic, evidential or rhetorical merit of the regional reports in the parliamentary blue books (as read and used extensively by Kingsley or Disraeli), requires assessment partly with an eye to the way these novels addressed regional subjects, working experiences, traditions or histories. Their authors certainly felt themselves to be interpreting local issues and grievances for national political purposes, appealing in part to regional readerships, while also drawing the attention of metropolitan readers to them.[63] Such literary use of distinctly regional documentation was a new phenomenon in the 1840s, of crucial importance in the emergence of the regional novel; it was quite different to the fiction of earlier writers like William Godwin. This carefully focalised writing also increasingly eclipsed local poetry as the medium of moral concern or warning, important though much of the Chartist poetry was. It was a new departure too from the didactic fiction of Hannah More,[64] or from the non-regional moralism and noetic perspective of writers like Harriet Martineau, whose policy-oriented fiction had popularised certain general and theorised expedients in poor-law reform and taxation.[65] The developments of the regional novel in the 1830s and 1840s were clearly influenced by changes in governmental investigative procedures, select-committee collection of tabulated information and statistics, the verbatim question-answer format of government reports, and by a new respect for small factual and almost photographically precise visual details, rather than by the sweeping moral, political or economic ideals of the previous decades. Interesting scholarly

[63] On novelists' use of blue-book evidence, see S. M. Smith, 'Willenhall and Wodgate: Disraeli's use of blue book evidence', *Review of English Studies*, 13 (1962); S. M. Smith, 'Blue Books and Victorian Novelists', *Review of British Studies*, 21 (1970), and in particular her *The Other Nation: the Poor in English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s* (Oxford, 1980). See also W. O. Aydelotte, 'The England of Marx and Mill as reflected in fiction', in *Journal of Economic History*, supplement 8 (1948); I. Kovacevic, *Fact into Fiction: English Literature and the Industrial Scene, 1750–1859* (Leicester, 1975); A. Kettle, 'The early Victorian social-problem novel', in B. Ford (ed.), *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 6: *From Dickens to Hardy* (London, 1958); P. J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (1971); G. Beer, 'Charles Kingsley and the literary image of the countryside', *Victorian Studies*, 8, no. 3 (1965), pp. 243–54.

[64] H. More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808).

[65] H. Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–4); *Poor Law and Paupers Illustrated* (1833); *Illustrations of Taxation* (1834).

work has begun on the relation between empirically ascertained working experiences and fictional re-creations; but there has been little attention paid by historians to the effective fictional ways in which post-1834 issues were popularised, and to the changes that made the 'social-problem' novel and its characteristics such a viable medium at that time.[66]

When one views at a general level the efforts to bridge the disciplines of history and literary criticism, in connection with regional fiction, one finds them limited, and commonly biographical. This is true whatever the period discussed. They frequently amount to a recognition that many regional novelists have used a 'real' landscape; and discussion has followed to connect or relocate the historical landscape of the novel to its geographical equivalent, with the encouragement, bemusement or annoyance of the novelists concerned. Some of this work has been substantial and creditable. Hardy's bird's-eye topography has been explored by many scholars, like H. C. Darby.[67] Similar exercises have been undertaken for Mrs. Gaskell, R. L. Stevenson, Charles Kingsley, the Brontës, Dickens, George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Mary Webb, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Neil Gunn, Alan Sillitoe, Catherine Cookson and others, often with strong biographical purpose, occasionally by the novelists themselves.[68] Sometimes the emphasis here has been

[66] On the later nineteenth century, these issues have been covered in the fine work by P. Keating, *The Haunted Study: a Social History of the English Novel, 1875–1914* (1989).

[67] H. C. Darby, 'The Regional Geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex', *Geographical Review*, 38 (1948), pp. 426–43. See also D. Maxwell, *The Landscape of Thomas Hardy* (1928); O. D. Harvey, *Puddletown, the Weatherbury of 'Far from the Madding Crowd'* (Dorchester, 1968); J. Stevens Cox, *Hardy's Wessex: Identification of Fictitious Place Names in Hardy's Works* (Guernsey, 1970); D. Kay-Robinson, *Hardy's Wessex Re-Appraised* (Newton Abbot, 1972); D. Kay-Robinson, *The Landscape of Thomas Hardy* (Exeter, 1984); A. Enstice, *Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind* (1979); D. Hawkins, *Hardy's Wessex* (1983); H. Lea, *The Hardy Guides: Touring Companion of Thomas Hardy* (Harmondsworth, 1986); D. Hawkins, *Hardy at Home: the People and Place of his Wessex* (1986); G. Beningfield, *Hardy Landscapes* (1990). For a rather different focus, see W. J. Keith, 'Thomas Hardy and the literary pilgrims', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24 (1969), pp. 80–92.

[68] P. Ackroyd, *Dickens' London: an Imaginative Vision* (1987); G. Prettejohns, *Charles Dickens and Southwark* (1974); H. E. Wroot, *The Persons and Places of the Brontë Novels* (New York, 1906); A. Pollard, *The Landscape of the Brontës* (1988); S. Chitty, *Charles Kingsley's Landscape* (1976); L. Stott, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Stirling, 1992); W. Reid Chappell, *The Shropshire of Mary Webb* (1981); L. Spolton, 'The spirit of place: D. H. Lawrence and the East Midlands', *East Midlands Geographer*, 5 (1970), pp. 88–96; H. T. Moore & W. Roberts, *D. H. Lawrence and his World* (1966); G. Hardy & N. Harris, *A D. H. Lawrence Album* (1985); R. Spencer, *D. H. Lawrence Country* (1980); M. Bennett, *A Visitors Guide to Eastwood and the Countryside of D. H. Lawrence* (Nottingham, 1992); K. Sagar (ed.), *A D. H. Lawrence Handbook* (Manchester, 1982); B. Pugh, *The Country of My Heart: a Local Guide to D. H. Lawrence* (Nottingham, 1972); D. Norris, *Joyce's Dublin* (Dublin, 1982); J. McCarthy, *Joyce's Dublin: a Walking Guide to Ulysses* (Dublin, 1988); R. Nicholson, *The Ulysses Guide: Tours Through Joyce's Dublin* (1988); B. Bidwell,

on the region, illustrated or analysed in more complex fusions and personal understandings through literary fiction. In other work the novels discussed have been contained within clear regional boundaries.[69] These boundaries have also sometimes been those of class.[70] A large guidebook literature, for 'literary pilgrims', has developed, representing an approach that deserves analysis in its own right.[71] A rather different and ambitious programme has been initiated by geographers like Gilbert, Langton or Butlin, who have promoted agendas of another kind, for example in connection with the effects of industrialisation upon the sense of region.[72] It has also been clear to some that human geography must involve study of regional novelists.[73] Recent analysis, once again largely by cultural geographers, has focused upon the symbolic and iconographical representation of past regional environments.[74] These various approaches informed by the discipline of geography are still few in number, but they promise well in their supply of more diverse agenda for study.

The Joycean Way: a Topographical Guide to Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Dublin, 1981); V. Igoe, *James Joyce's Dublin Houses* (1990); J. M. Wilson, *Virginia Woolf, Life and London: a Biography of Place* (1987); A. Sillitoe, *Alan Sillitoe's Nottinghamshire* (1987); A. Sillitoe, 'A Sense of Place', *Geographical Magazine* (August, 1975), also in his *Mountains and Caverns* (1975); Daphne du Maurier, *Enchanted Cornwall: Her Pictorial Memoir* (Harmondsworth, 1989); Winston Graham, *Poldark's Cornwall* (1983); Catherine Cookson, *Catherine Cookson Country* (1986); R. Talbot, *Cadfael Country: Shropshire and the Welsh Borders* (1992).

[69] For example, F. J. Snell, *The Blackmore Country* (1906), with its discussion of Baring-Gould and Phillpotts. More recently, see for example the very different approaches of C. W. Sizemore, *A Female Vision of the City: London in the Novels of Five British Women* (Knoxville, 1989), on Margaret Drabble, Maureen Duffy, P. D. James, Doris Lessing and Iris Murdoch; J. W. Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (Dublin, 1974); A. MacRobert, *The Novels of Dumfries and Galloway* (Dumfries, 1992).

[70] R. Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel* (Cardiff, 1979).

[71] See many of the above references, and also J. Freeman, *Literature and Locality: the Literary Topography of Britain and Ireland* (1963); D. Eagle and H. Carnell (eds.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to the British Isles* (Oxford, 1977); M. Drabble, *A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature* (1979); D. Daiches & J. Flower, *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles: a Narrative Atlas* (1979); F. Morley, *Literary Britain: a Reader's Guide to Writers and Landmarks* (1980).

[72] E. W. Gilbert, 'British Regional Novelists and Geography', in his *British Pioneers in Geography* (Newton Abbot, 1972); J. Langton, 'The Industrial Revolution and the regional geography of England', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 9 (1984), pp. 145–67; D. Pocock (ed.), *Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays on the Experience of Place* (1981), and his *The Novelist and the North* (Dept. of Geography, University of Durham, Occasional Publications, no. 12, Durham, 1978).

[73] L. Spolton, 'A "Novel" Geography', *The Nottinghamshire Countryside*, vol. 11, no. 8 (April, 1949), pp. 1–2. More recently, see J. R. Short, *Imagined Country: Environment, Culture and Society* (1991).

[74] D. Cosgrove & S. Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge, 1988). The question of what is symbolic, and why, requires local knowledge to explain the meaning and association of local features, and here extra-textual approaches seem especially valuable in their bearing on the regional novel.

THE RURAL REGIONAL NOVEL

Certain key novelists aside, the frequent identification of the regional novel with rural areas has also been a factor that has inhibited discussion of the genre. We can remind ourselves of how fiction on rural society, and the development of more varied forms of the rural novel – invaluable as one complex opening to understanding rural life – were lampooned in a clever, caricatured fashion by Stella Gibbons. Her book is still a force to be reckoned with when considering the faults and strengths of rural regional fiction.[75] This is also a book that reminds us of the problem of an over-historical approach to regional fiction, in that it highlights the importance of literary form and convention in determining the content of the genre. *Cold Comfort Farm* had its justification. It was written in response to an outpouring of overly dramatised rural novels, which often seemed to impose social Darwinist sentiments onto the perennial tensions between town and country. For example, John Lindsay's *The Lady and the Mute* made up for its literary limitations by being advertised as

> a powerful, uncompromising, almost harrowing study of the brutality and blind stupidity underlying primitive life in a country village. The clock is set back a little, for it was sixty years ago that the Greens came to Wheatfield, an East country hamlet on a hill, where the feudal tradition still lingered, and squire and parson ruled the roost. Agatha Green was a little girl then, and, as fate ordained it, she was destined to live a long and lonely life in the same surroundings, closed in on every side by half-suppressed cruelties, and torturing inhibitions, born of thwarted desire. There is a wretched dumb man in the village, the butt of all the children and fools, and Agatha gives him a home in her house. Out of this friendly gesture spring complications yet more tragic; and the picture gains a lurid emphasis, as the shadows of fate close in. It is a terrible witness to the degree of Paganism still possible in neglected corners of Christian England.[76]

The usual elements are all in this summary: 'fate', cruelty, backwardness, remoteness, 'paganism' – a view of rural existence mediated through an outsider, written sometimes for urban self-assurance, that reinforced stereotypes of rural workers as primitive and unenlightened, and that hinted strongly at the cultural advances attained by those who had migrated from the land. Similar themes exist in many other regional novels, influenced by Hardy, Kaye-Smith, Constance Holme,

[75] S. Gibbons, *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932).
[76] As advertised at the end of M. E. Lambe, *Crag's Foot Farm: a Novel of Leicestershire* (1931).

John Trevena, Phillpotts or Mary Webb, although the locale and characterisation may be better developed. One may date the heyday of the 'rural-as-primitive' regional novel from perhaps 1878 (the date of *The Return of the Native*, as well as the foundation of the Folklore Society in London, and the start of the collapse of agricultural prices) to the Second World War, its perspectives accentuated by the depths of rural decay and depression that afflicted many agricultural regions in the late nineteenth century and in inter-war years.[77]

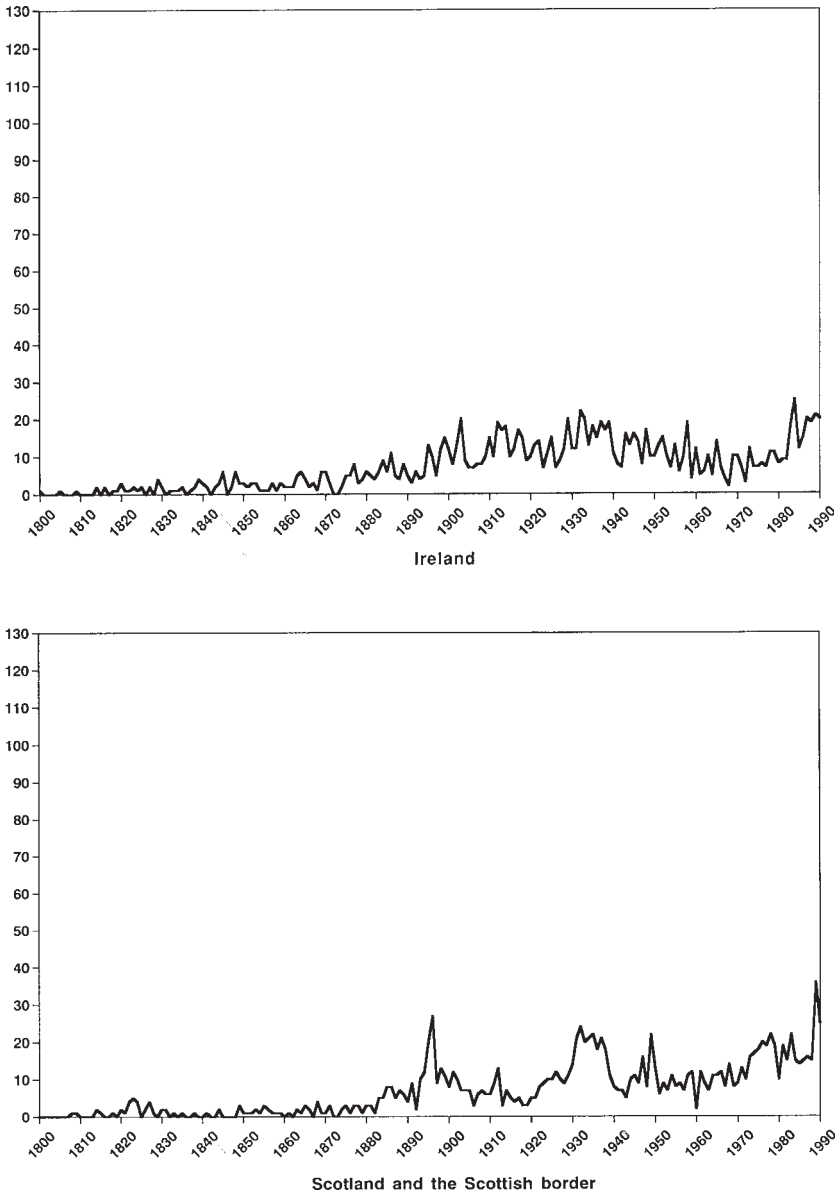
Yet, today and in retrospect, it is the intensity and regional range of fiction on British rural societies over this extended period that is most striking. Some of these rural novels, like those in other countries on comparable themes, can be read almost as informal ethnography.[78] The decades after 1880 – in so many ways an evening for rural history and one of the final British phases of what later came to be seen throughout Europe as *la fin des paysans* – saw the greatest analytical writing on the history of agrarian communities in England, by scholars such as Slater, Hasbach, Seebohm, Vinogradoff, Garnier, Green, Heath, the Hammonds, Gonner, Sturt, Collings, Robertson Scott and many others. This was a time of persistent and often nostalgic interest in rural culture and its demise, in small-holdings, allotments, vernacular architecture, folk song and dance, communal games, folklore, and agrarian craft traditions. But for the most sensitive, humanly-scaled and perceptive interpretations of the rural exodus from the mid-nineteenth-century – of the decline of pervasive rural understandings, traditions and regional ways of life – it is to this remarkable body of rural fiction and its assumptions that one should turn.

TRENDS IN OUTPUT AND MODERN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE GENRE

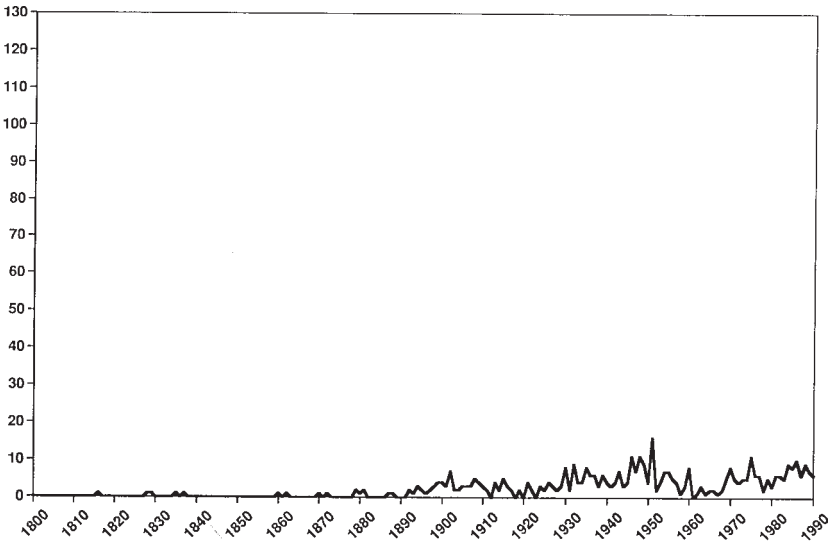
The growth of regional fiction was closely tied to the expansion of the reading public in the later nineteenth century. There was a massive increase in demand for fiction, associated mainly with improved levels of literacy. The Reform Act of 1867 had made the passing of a measure along the lines of the 1870 Education Act desirable, which considerably

[77] For discussion of this genre, see especially Keith, *Regions of the Imagination*; G. Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel* (1977); J. Alcorn, *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence* (1977); R. Ebbatson, *Lawrence and the Nature Tradition: a Theme in English Fiction, 1859–1914* (Brighton, 1980).

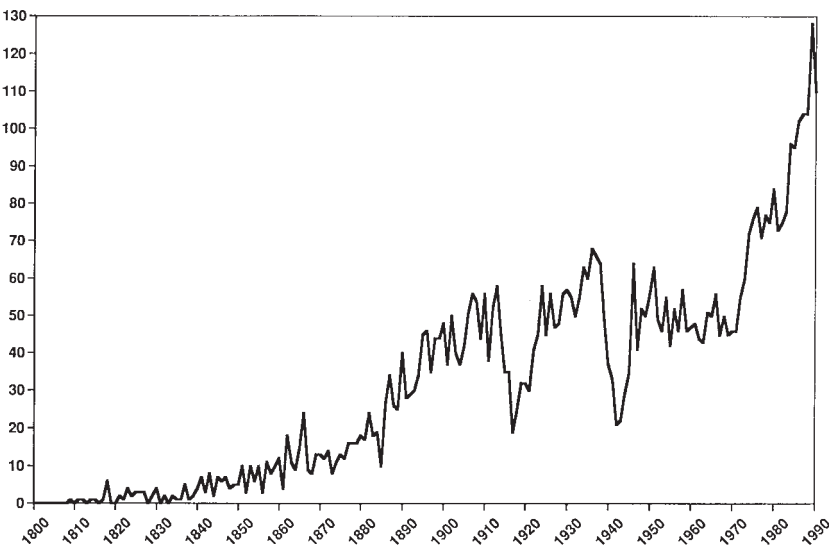
[78] Compare A. Waswo's preface and introduction to Nagatsuka Takashi, *The Soil: a Portrait of Rural Life in Meiji Japan* (1910, 1993 edn), pp. vii–xvii.



1 Numbers of regional novels published every year for Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, 1800–1990.



Wales and the Welsh border



England

enlarged the younger readership for novels. And the extension of the franchise in 1884 increased the electorate to about five and a half million, necessitating further educational improvements. Concern over relative industrial decline, in the face of competition from Germany and America in particular, was another consideration that enhanced education provision, as for instance in the 1889 Technical Instruction Act. Additional educational acts in 1880, 1891 and 1902 advanced standardised primary and secondary education, contributing to the augmentation of teachers and reading public over these years.[79] There was a commensurate expansion of training colleges, universities, working men's colleges, mechanics institutes, in all of which the role of English literature as an emergent subject fostered mass readership of fiction. Male literacy rose from about 67 per cent in 1841 to 97 per cent in 1900. Female literacy over the same period rose at an even steeper rate, from 51 per cent to 97 per cent.[80] A general level of literacy of 75 per cent had been reached by the time of the greatest expansion of regional fiction, which occurred from the 1880s.[81] Real wages were now rising significantly, and matching this, newspaper circulation grew rapidly in the latter part of the nineteenth century, especially the 1890s.[82]

These changes, and the accompanying transformations in the publishing industry, had sweeping implications for regional fiction and its readership. The eclipse of the old-established circulating libraries and the highly priced three-volume novel was apparent from the 1880s. During the years 1894–7 the single-volume novel displaced the three-decker, with many novels following the lead by Heinemann when they published Hall Caine's *The Manxman* in July 1894, priced at only six shillings. To illustrate literary output, and as an exercise in the 'sociometric' branch of literary sociology, figure 1 may be taken as indicating the phases of regional-novel publication for the British Isles. It is based on very extensive county-by-county bibliographies of regional fiction conducted as part of this research initiative, and due to be published separately elsewhere. The graphs plot the numbers of regional novels in English published every year, and distinguish

[79] H. C. Dent, *The Training of Teachers in England and Wales, 1800–1975* (1977); J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790–1960* (1961); J. Murphy, *The Education Act, 1870* (1972); G. A. N. Lowndes, *The Silent Social Revolution, 1895–1935* (1972).

[80] J. A. Bull, *The Framework of Fiction: Socio-cultural Approaches to the Novel* (1988), p. 150.

[81] J. Hall, *The Sociology of Literature* (1979), p. 129.

[82] R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961), ch. 3; Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 34.

between the four countries concerned.[83] The general trends are shared across Britain and Ireland. After a slow and gradual growth from the 1820s, output of regional novels then expanded rapidly from about 1885. This upsurge of regional fiction was probably a Europe-wide phenomenon, and it also accompanied a growing interest in local and regional history.[84] In Britain as a whole, the figures indicate that unprecedentedly high levels of output were reached in the years immediately before the First World War. These fell markedly during that war, then rose to higher levels in the 1930s. Output plummeted again as private and public resources and loyalties shored up wartime effort, and as books were subject to authorised economy standards. The numbers published then returned to slightly below pre-war levels in the post-war period, before rising to ever greater number from the early 1970s.

One point in particular may be made. In recent years it has sometimes been suggested that the regional novel is obsolete – that it had its heyday between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth, and that its future now, like that of regionalism itself, is bleak.[85] No one can doubt the significance of regional writing during that earlier period; and yet, qualitative judgements aside, such generalisation about decline seems questionable, especially if one considers non-rural fiction. As can be seen from figure 1, the genre as a whole has expanded in output since the Second World War, and noticeably during the later 1970s and 1980s. Probably more British regional novels were published in 1989 than in any previous year. There have been evident fluctuations. Regional-novel publishing fell markedly during times of war – during periods of nationalistic emphases – and emerged most strongly during periods when older interior ways of life were being threatened economically, and when changes in familiar and psychological 'landscapes' affected even those who were economically secure, who comprised the

[83] Further discussion of this data is forthcoming in a separate book, containing the county-by-county bibliographies of regional fiction that the graphs are based on. These also include collections of regional short stories. No such bibliographical work can be exhaustive, and it is possible that there has been a greater likelihood to miss items before the late nineteenth century than after, but the general trends are certainly as indicated here.

[84] F. W. Morgan, 'Three aspects of regional consciousness', *Sociological Review*, XXXI, no. 1 (1939), p. 78.

[85] See in particular Keith, *Regions of the Imagination*, ch. 11, 'The passing of regionalism'. Keith's perceptive comments are made largely with regard to rural regional fiction, using a slightly different definition of regional fiction than that employed here. From a rather different perspective and view of the 'regional novel', see R. Williams, 'Region and class in the novel', in his *Writing in Society* (1983, 1985), e.g. pp. 230, 238.

majority readership. The most obvious periods were the late nineteenth century, the 1930s, and especially the 1980s. This is true to a lesser extent in Ireland, where political developments have had such an impact on regional fiction. Superimposed and related to this pattern has been the effect of the trade cycle on the publishing industry, although it is notable how little this affected the genre during the great slump after 1929. Perhaps one has here a process of alternation: each swing being then succeeded by the revival of the previously discarded mode – nationalism and regionalism being experienced alternatively and not simultaneously.

However the trends may be explained, it is the case that in none of the four countries of the British Isles has such fiction been in decline. Among the best selling British authors of recent years are regional novelists: Cookson, Middleton, Sillitoe, Doyle and many others come to mind. The popularity of literary pilgrimages, to the Lakes, 'Hardy country', the Brontë parsonage and Haworth (the 'Blackpool of Literary Heritage'),[86] 'Mrs. Gaskell's country', Lawrence's Eastwood, George Eliot's Nuneaton, Joyce's Dublin, and so on, and the many 'guides' written for such travellers, 'to make it easy for the literary pilgrim . . . to follow up the associations of writers',[87] all attest to a strength of interest in the genre today that publishers, and others, have readily appreciated. Commentators on the fiction of particular areas have stressed the vitality of modern regional writing. For example, in her valuable account of the Glasgow novel, Moira Burgess discussed 'the remarkable increase in both the quantity and quality of Glasgow novels published since World War II'. 'At the moment of writing, in 1985,' she continued, pointing to the growing individuality and diverse creativity of regional fiction set in the city, 'the Glasgow novel is in full flower'.[88] The same statement could be made of many other areas of the British Isles in the past twenty years.

This persistence or growth of regional fiction is found in many other advanced countries. In Germany, where political entities and questions of unification have never been taken for granted, novelists like Siegfried

[86] The Brontë parsonage registered 221, 467 visitors in 1974, an average of over one person every minute during opening hours.

[87] For example, J. Freeman, *Literature and Locality: the Literary Topography of Britain and Ireland* (1963), p. vii – only one of many such works which are often focused on particular authors, especially the Brontës, Eliot, Hardy, Lawrence or Joyce. On Hardy, see in particular W. J. Keith, 'Thomas Hardy and the Literary Pilgrims', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24 (1969), pp. 80–92.

[88] M. Burgess, *The Glasgow Novel: a Survey and Bibliography* (1972; Glasgow, 1986), pp. 56, 62.

Lenz (on East Prussia and the North Sea Coast), Hermann Lenz (the Stuttgart area), Marie Beig (the Stuttgart-Constance region), or Max von der Grün (and some of the writers who were associated with his pro-East German stance), are unquestionably regional novelists, despite the reluctance in many German academic circles to view them in that light. Perhaps even Martin Walser, whose writing is predominantly concerned with middle-class life, might be thought a regional writer because his fiction is set in the rural area around Lake Constance. German dialect writing, for example in Plattdeutsch or Bavarian, remains very prevalent.

Among French regional novelists, one thinks of Pierre-Jakez Helias's writing on Brittany, or Michel Ragon, whose historical-regional novels are set in the Cholet area. Other regional authors, recently dead, include Jean Giono (on Provence), or Henri Bosco (on the Cévennes). Marcel Pagnol is still very widely read. Italian regional novelists publishing works after 1950 have included Vasco Pratolini, Elio Vittorini, Leonardo Sciascia, Ignazio Silone, Giorgio Bassani or Alberto Moravia, and the extensive earlier traditions of such Italian writing includes many of these as well as authors like Cesare Pavese, Grazia Deledda, Federigo Tozzi, Matilde Serao, Federico De Roberto, Edoardo Calandra, Remigio Zena, Mario Pratesi, Giovanni Verga (whose translators include D. H. Lawrence), Luigi Capuana and Francesco Mastriani.

In New Zealand, where authors tend to define themselves or be seen as 'New Zealand' writers rather than 'regional novelists', there have nevertheless been obvious examples of regional fiction – I think of the *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme, or the writers Maurice Gee, the late Ronald Hugh Morrison, Karl Stead, or Rosie Scott. In Japan, the fiction of the late Sawako Ariyoshi and Kenji Nakagami (on the Wakayama Prefecture), Sei Ito and Takiji Kobayashi (on Hokkaido), Osamu Dazai (on Tsugaru), Sakunosuke Oda (on the Osaka region), Sakae Tsuboi and Junichiro Tanizaki (on the Kansai area), or Yasushi Inoue and Yasunari Kawabata (on the Izu Peninsular) is strongly regional in the sense defined here. Their novels are very widely read (and some have been translated into English). In the former USSR and the countries replacing it, there is strong resurgence of such writing – for example, the Russians Valentin Rasputin, Vladimir Soloukhin, and Yuri Trifonov, or Chinghiz Aitmatov (from Kyrgyzstan), or Yuri Rytkheu (from Chukchi) – with much of this work increasingly dealing with the tensions of the break-up of the USSR, and the emergent nationalisms of its hitherto component parts.

The political impetus behind such work is often very clear, as it has been in Bohemia, Wales, Ireland, Catalonia, Croatia, Slovenia and other such countries now or in the past, although the implications for regional fiction of national political circumstances are highly complex and varied. This warrants detailed comparative study. There is the example of Fazil Iskander, writing on the so-called republic of Abkhazia, which lies next to Georgia on the Black Sea. His work *Sandro of Chegem* is concerned with 'The history of a clan, the history of the village of Chegem, the history of Abkhazia, and all the rest of the world as it is seen from Chegemian heights – that is the concept of the book, in broad outline'.[89] Regional fiction in this case appears akin to patriotic local history. In Canada there is a definite regional sense to the urban or rural novels that deal with the Maritimes, the Prairies, or British Columbia as well as smaller areas and towns. Indeed, the vastness of this country has meant that its fiction might generally be labelled as regional, with many regional novelists producing outstanding work in recent decades, such as Rudy Wiebe, Matt Cohen, or Margaret Laurence.[90] And in the United States (where pressure for national unity has probably exceeded that in Canada) regional writing flourishes, so much so that one can barely hint at its scope and importance here.[91] Like in Canada, the late twentieth-century American examples have been conspicuous in describing life in the large urban centres, as in the writing of Richard Price,[92] or in works like Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the*

[89] Fazil Iskander, *Sandro of Chegem* (1983), Foreword.

[90] L. Hutcheon, 'The novel', in W. H. New (ed.), *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (1990 edn), vol. 4, p. 78. On the importance of regional fiction in Canada see D. Harrison, *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Edmonton, 1977), and his (ed.) *Crossing Frontiers: Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature* (Edmonton, 1979); L. Ricou, *Vertical Man, Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Vancouver, 1973); G. Woodcock (ed.), *The World of Canadian Writing: Critiques and Recollections* (Vancouver, 1980), and his *The Meeting of Time and Space: Regionalism in Canadian Literature* (Edmonton, 1981); W. Toye (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto, 1983); B. Proulx, *Le roman du territoire* (Montreal, 1987); G. Dusterhaus, *Canada, Regions and Literature* (Paderborn, 1989); W. H. New (ed.), *Native Writers and Canadian Writing* (Vancouver, 1990); D. Jordan, *New World Regionalism* (Toronto, 1994).

[91] For discussions of American regional fiction see note 137 below, and C. B. Brown, *Regionalism in American Literature* (Heidelberg, 1962); W. T. Pilkington, *My Blood's Country: Studies in Southwestern Literature* (Fort Worth, 1973); G. W. Haslam, *Western Writing* (Albuquerque, 1974); R. Gray, *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Cambridge, 1986); H. P. Simonson, *Beyond the Frontier: Writers, Western Regionalism and a Sense of Place* (Fort Worth, 1989); S. Manning, *The Puritan-provincial Vision: Scottish and American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990); D. M. Holman, *A Certain Slant of Light: Regionalism and the Form of Southern and Midwestern Fiction* (Baton Rouge, 1995).

[92] See for example his first novel, *The Wanderers* (1974).

Vanities: the latter contributing to a genre between journalism and the regional novel, tackling political, urban and ethnic life with much local realism and Dickensian scope.[93]

In England too, particularly in the 1980s, it has been remarkable how much regional writing has been concerned with London, specifically with the City of London and its associations, which became a key area in projections of 'England'. For an extended time there was an aversion to representing urban life in regional novels, which is one reason why some cities (like Birmingham) have such slight coverage within the genre.[94] However, in almost all countries, the urban regional novel has now taken over the rural, although we still have a rather vague sense of when this occurred, or how it may be related to rural depopulation, urbanisation and other cultural changes. In Canada for example, this development took place rather later than in England. Whatever the country, one conclusion seems clear: the desire of authors to create their own region, almost to assert their own uniqueness in not sharing too much space with other writers, is probably stronger today than ever before.[95]

ETHNICITY AND REGIONAL FICTION

One important modern development in regional fiction in Britain, as in countries like Canada or the United States, has been the burgeoning of a variety of 'black' and 'ethnic' writing since 1945, which in Britain has usually been centred upon particular urban areas. In defining some such work as 'regional' I do not wish to pre-empt alternative categorisation for this writing. Further, there are particular difficulties in categorising such regional writing that is significantly mediated through very varied cultural backgrounds and traditions that are Afro-Caribbean or West Indian, Asian, Chinese, South African and so on. There are also problems here in the definition of '"black" or "ethnic" British writers', some of whom certainly would question their inclusion

[93] For a study of such urban writing, see B. H. Gelfant, *The American City Novel* (Oklahoma, 1970).

[94] On Birmingham, see K. Pagett, *Image Problems: the Ambiguous Identity of Birmingham as Represented in Novels set in the City, 1870 to 1950* (Department of English Local History, University of Leicester, unpub. MA dissertation, 1992).

[95] For two recent discussions of regional fiction in other countries, see R. T. Sussex, *Home and the Homeland Novel: Studies in French Regional Literature* (Queensland, 1979), and C. J. Alonso, *The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony* (Cambridge, 1990).

in this or similar categories.[96] The sense of place in much of this (often autobiographical) literature is permeated and influenced by the memory of sometimes distant cultures, traditions and countries. This is true in probably different ways for so-called first, second or third generation 'immigrant' authors. The same applies for European, Jewish, Irish, Welsh or Scottish authors, setting their fiction in regions of the British Isles other than those in which they grew up, although I can think of few examples of English equivalents set in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In such writing one often finds representation of 'community' (or the idea of one, for such writing can be isolated and desolate) and its associations, which are regional even though they may be heavily influenced by distant memory, removed networks of social and personal relations, and the idea of a foreign past and culture. These features, alongside the often cultural self-preservational and dignifying qualities of such fiction, have contributed to the frequent richness of its dialect (for example, the work of Buchi Emecheta or David Simon),[97] as well as to its formal structure, senses of community and personal relations, and political intent. These may sometimes have an ironic bearing on local traditions of fiction, and on the common racial assumptions in supposedly indigenous fiction. This writing includes some of the most salient, spirited and promising developments in regional fiction, often innovative in form, a development in which the relationships between fiction and ethnic community are prominent, opening up many possible questions for study and appreciation.

LOCAL LANGUAGE, DIALECT AND REGIONAL FICTION

I mentioned earlier that one defining feature of regional fiction is attempted realism in dialogue. The regional dialect novel in particular treats language not only as representional, but as a living form integral and distinct to the people using it, although this form is represented and compromised in many artistic ways. There was considerable growth in dialect fiction during the nineteenth century, particularly in Scotland and England, and an earlier tradition of dialect writing expanded

[96] On questions of definition of 'black British writers', see Prahbu Guptara, *Black British Literature: an Annotated Bibliography* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 14–16. On black women's writing in Britain, see Lauretta Ngcobo (ed.), *Let it be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* (1987). More generally on post-colonial and immigrant writing in Britain, see A. R. Lee (ed.), *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* (1995).

[97] See for example Buchi Emecheta, *In the Ditch* (1972); David Simon, *Railton Blues* (1983).

self-confidently after about 1850.[98] It developed at the same time as dialect societies were formed to study and preserve regional dialects. This writing was local, often domestic and oral in purpose and appeal, influenced by ballads and almanacs; but, whatever the ubiquity of dialect itself, such writing was by no means universal. In England, for example, it had its centres in the north-east and north-west, in Yorkshire, and to a lesser extent in the Potteries and the Black Country. It extolled regional values and aspirations shared by rich and poor. It assumed the superiority of the ordinary people reading or hearing it, and it was commonly anti-metropolitan.[99] Its study should occupy the historian or cultural geographer as well as the literary critic. For representations of local language and speech, particularly before the advent of modern oral history, there can be few sources to compare with regional fiction. There are, for example, the greatly diverse technical and other languages of occupational cultures, as illustrated in novels like *Anna of the Five Towns*, *Love on the Dole*, *The Lonely Plough*, or *Whisky Galore* – in these cases covering the Staffordshire potteries, engineering works in Lancashire, a Westmorland rural community and the Hebridean islands.[100] Or there are the descriptions of the terminology of fishing communities along the English north-east coast in the work of Leo Walmsley,[101] or of the Derbyshire lead and coal-mining districts by Walter Brierley, Nellie Kirkham and Albert Rhodes.[102] Fictional representation of rural speech is extraordinarily rich in the British Isles, even if it is often relayed by outsiders. Whatever one's verdict on the historical accuracy of such dialect, language and description, a language of period is well conveyed by such works, whether captured at the time, or retrospectively in fine historical regional novels like *Waterland* or *Ulverton*.[103] A statement like this, on the temporal specificity of language and the possibilities of studying it, should imply shared work by historians and literary critics.[104]

[98] P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), chs. 11–12, contains an interesting discussion relevant here.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 294.

[100] A. Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), W. Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (1933), Constance Holme, *The Lonely Plough* (1914), Compton Mackenzie, *Whisky Galore* (1952).

[101] L. Walmsley, *Three Fevers* (1935), *Phantom Lobster* (1948), *Sally Lunn* (1967), *Foreigners* (1967), *So Many Lovers* (1969).

[102] W. Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (1935); N. Kirkham, *Unrest of their Time* (1935); A. Rhodes, *Butter on Sundays* (1964).

[103] Graham Swift, *Waterland* (1983); Adam Thorpe, *Ulverton* (1992).

[104] For interesting discussion of a closely related subject, see P. Burke & R. Porter (eds.), *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1987).

Dialect used by so many authors, particularly after Scott, has been fundamental in fictional characterisation, for speech is the firmest expression of emotion, variously carried by dialect and its regional and class associations, stereotypes and emotional expectations. In many novels idiolect (a character's aggregate features of speech) may bear a complex relation to dialect (the group features of speech), adding a further level of interest. Behind dialect, in obvious linkages, lies the idea of region, with crude or sophisticated understandings of it and of the regional societies it contains. Some fine work has been done on dialect and speech in fiction, notably by Norman Page, which deserves close attention from historians.[105] Fictional use of such speech epitomises one of the most prominent attempts made in any medium to handle questions of class difference in regional contexts. Think for example of the alternating, contextualised speech of Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But further questions remain. Dialect is frequently used by authors to indicate how closely tied to a locality specific characters are. In an appreciation of the social status of these characters (who are usually but not always of low social standing) there lies an opening to the question of the social and status connotations of regionality itself, in different periods, and with reference to varied regions. Such investigation parallels in an interesting way the study of the frequently pejorative or inferior status of 'regional', with its many cultural, political and indeed literary connotations. There is the need to make explicit the bases of dialect: to research in detail the relation between dialect and place in fiction, much as a dialect cartographer might do (for speech and dialect in fiction cannot be studied without reference to the region they supposedly pertain to).[106] One needs then to use such information to ask why an

[105] N. Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (1973); M. Sabin, *The Dialect of the Tribe: Speech and Community in Modern Fiction* (Oxford, 1987); R. Chapman, *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction* (1994); R. Golding, *Idiolects in Dickens: the Major Techniques and Chronological Development* (1985); P. Ingham, 'Dialect as realism: *Hard Times* and the industrial novel', *Review of English Studies*, 37 (1986). Compare also E. M. Burkett, *American English Dialects in Literature* (New Jersey, 1978); S. W. Holton, *Down Home and Uptown: the Representation of Black Speech in American Fiction* (1984). Careful note needs to be taken of Page's warning: 'It is dangerous to use literary dialogue, in fiction or drama, as a basis for assumptions about the prevailing features of common speech in earlier periods, even though this has been a frequent practice of historians of the spoken language. The nature of the written medium makes it inevitable that there should be considerable adaptation of the features of actual speech, by omission, modification and exaggeration, in the process of transposing it into visible form. Such terms of praise as authentic and realistic are to be understood, therefore, in a strictly relative sense . . . for most novelists the primary aim is not linguistic accuracy'. (Page, *Speech in the English Novel*, p. 86).

[106] Much work has been conducted on dialect situation and boundaries. See for example M. F. Wakelin (ed.), *English Dialects: an Introduction* (1972); his (ed.) *Patterns in the Folk Speech of the British Isles* (1972); D. J. North and A. Sharpe, *A Word Geography of Cornwall* (Redruth, 1980);

author has found it necessary to depart from the ascertainable social realities of such a relation. It is of further interest to study reviewers' and readers' responses to representations of dialect, which in some cases have been angry and dismissive.[107] To consider such questions is to open up significant areas of interpretation and judgement, and has broader possibilities beyond the study of dialect. The conclusions one might reach when assessing fictional verisimilitude against alternatively evidenced regional history – and the seeming disjunctures between the two – can suggest many further hypotheses about the author's position over putative subject matter, and the anticipated readership for the fiction. In the study of readerships in particular, such a method has much to offer.

REGIONAL STEREOTYPE, IMAGE-MAKING, READERSHIPS AND FICTION

Many regional novels use region or place in crucially important ways, to explain or interpret, to develop characterisation, to indicate how character grows out of certain occupied localities, how people respond to particular circumstances and environments, to evoke good and evil through landscape contrasts, or to intensify mood or convey a sense of irony, as is so often the case in a novel like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Hardy, like others, also used legends of place for similar purposes, with Tess, for example, being equated with the White Hart of Blackmore Vale. The use of local elements, in a closely known place or region, respective to each character – for example, in *Ulysses* – is a dimension that might be, and indeed, usually is, studied within the terms of the novel only. Yet these fictional allusions cannot be fully interpreted without knowledge of the popular associations and symbolism of such local elements or legends in a wider public consciousness or contemporary readership beyond the novel. This then is an agenda for the local historian, for the historian of popular culture, for the social historian, and when conducted with subtlety and reference to other sources, it is one that could enhance all the relevant areas of study.

P. Trudgill, *On Dialect: Social and Geographical Perspectives* (Oxford, 1983), and his *The Dialects of England* (Oxford, 1990); J. M. Kirk, S. Sanderson and J. D. A. Widdowson, *Studies in Linguistic Geography: Essays on English Dialect Study* (1985); P. Trudgill, *Dialects in Contact* (Oxford, 1986); C. Upton, S. Sanderson and J. Widdowson, *Word Maps: a Dialect Atlas of England* (1987); B. Strang, *A History of English* (1970).

[107] For example, the award of the 1994 Booker Prize to James Kelman for his *How Late it Was, How Late* was publicly condemned by one of the judges who felt that the novel's use of Glaswegian speech made it inaccessible to a broader readership.

An important effect of regional fiction has been the articulation of regional stereotypes, particularly of regional character and behaviour. Regional writers have created or (more commonly) perpetuated such stereotypes for the sake of sales, through disinclination to break with tried and tested formulae, for ideological or racial reasons, or through attachment to literary clichés. This is inevitable, and perhaps even artistically desirable in some fiction, for it is often the clichés that induce emotion in readers. This is as true for fiction as it is for music, or indeed religion. People respond to narrative structures, imagery, formulaic phrases and terms that are known either from other fiction or from different genres or contexts. 'Regional fiction' without these elements might not exist as such a popular concern. To point to literary use of such formulae is not necessarily to minimise any author. It ought rather to open up new ways of analysing regional fiction. Even Hardy – having argued against the view that 'novels that evolve their action on a circumscribed scene . . . cannot be so inclusive in their exhibition of human nature as novels wherein the scenes cover large extents of country'[108] – perpetuated views of the rustic chorus, of 'Hodge' and of the 'dialect'-using yokel. These figures served to clarify or comment on events in his novels, but they also contributed a comic and particular 'Wessex' colouring for something akin to a sidestepping ideological dodge.[109] Whatever the form it takes, stereotype or cliché may lead to the rejection of information contrary to it, and it can have far reaching if intangible consequences, for example on regional prejudice, political policy, and economic decision-making. In Dorset and the surrounding counties a dismissive and literary view of 'Hodge' allayed many contemporary worries over extreme low wages, poor health and rural poverty. Furthermore, cultural ascriptions of this sort underlie self-perceptions in deeply felt ways. Throughout nineteenth-century southern England, the attempts of rural workers to build self-respect through organisations like friendly societies, the Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan Churches or the rural trade unions become intelligible when we think of the prevailing stereotypes that these people were subjected to. Comparable situations and responses could be multiplied endlessly. In all

[108] See the General Preface to the 1912 Wessex edition of his works.

[109] K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 8. As N. Page commented, in George Eliot or Hardy, as indeed in many other novelists, 'regional speech is largely reserved for comic, pathetic or sentimental-nostalgic purposes. For more heroic or dramatic effects, standard speech is a *sine qua non*.' N. Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (1973), p. 126.

cases regional fiction was a key medium in the display of cultural ascriptions and the responses to them. It carried interpretations of the regional or ethnic past and present that contributed to personal and collective identities, and it highlighted artifacts, symbols or episodes of the local past that had significant influence upon current life.

No one can doubt the prevalence and influence of such literary stereotypes, images and formulae purporting to account for and describe people from different areas, and the reactions these may produce. The history of regional clichés – their forms, derivations, mutations and perpetuations, and (closely related to these) their artistic effects on different readerships – remains to be written.[110] Clearly some regions or districts have tried hard to modify or reject, as well as to capitalise on, the reputations given them by certain regional novelists. One thinks of the complaints against D. H. Lawrence's representation of morals in Eastwood and its surrounding area: 'We are trying to forget him', objected one resident, as outsiders to the community inaugurated their commemorations. 'Why must the people of Eastwood be classed with this type of filthy literature?' asked one local councillor in 1974, as he denounced a proposal to rename one of the town's streets as 'Chatterley Mews'.[111] Or there have been Brighton's efforts to shake off the influence of *Brighton Rock*. Some Dorset people felt that Thomas Hardy had ridiculed them, had made fun of them or presented them as miserably gloomy. Such antagonism to him can still be found in Dorchester. Lewis Grassic Gibbon's characters hardly endeared him to people in the Mearns.[112] In Wales, Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley* appeared in 1939, and had sold 150,000 copies within a few months. The novel's 'clichés about the Welsh miner and his society spread to the ends of the earth', complains one of Wales' most outstanding modern historians.[113] A remarkable novel, it was nevertheless slated by some, lampooned for example in Harri Webb's poem 'Synopsis of the

[110] See in particular P. Dodd, 'Lowryscapes: recent writings about "the North"' *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1990), for a discussion of how 'the "North" of the present continues to be haunted by an earlier "North" which it cannot escape'. On regional characterisation in America, see H. S. Fiske, *Provincial Types in American Fiction* (New York, 1968).

[111] Quoted, with other such comment, in C. I. Bennett, *'A Devouring Nostalgia and an Infinite Repulsion': the Impact of D. H. Lawrence on the Town and Country of Eastwood* (Department of English Local History, University of Leicester, unpub. M. A. dissertation, 1994), pp. 30, 45.

[112] L. G. Gibbon, *A Scots Quair* (1946). And see I. Carter, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair*, and the peasantry', *History Workshop*, 6 (1978), pp. 175, 182.

[113] John Davies, *A History of Wales* (1990; Harmondsworth, 1993 edn), p. 589. I can confirm this: my Welsh mother used to discuss *How Green Was My Valley* with me when I was a child growing up in tropical Africa.

Great Welsh Novel'. Very different in tone was the hostile reception in west Wales to Caradoc Evans. Rhys Davies has written of a deep-seated suspicion of regional novels in Wales, of Welsh reluctance to tolerate criticism, and the resulting difficulties for Welsh writers faced with controversy over their regional novels.[114] With the exception of Allen Raine, in whose work Welsh culture was slight, novels with Welsh settings have often sold poorly, and been well-thrashed with leeks upon publication. Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, with its enormous influence,[115] was almost as discouraging of plays and the dangerous snare of novels as it was of folklore, the harp, folk tunes, popular dancing and Sunday games. Such a religious ethos probably restricted both potential Welsh readership and the country's regional fiction.[116] In Scotland, a large body of literature has depicted an aggressive, 'gangland' Glasgow, notably Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Young, *No Mean City* (1935), but also many works by John McNeillie, George Friel, Alan Spence, Bill McGhee, William McIlvanney and others. *No Mean City*, wrote Moira Burgess, 'has cast a particularly long shadow', and huge sums have been spent in controverting 'shadows' like this.[117] Advertising by the City Council and other bodies (promoting 'Glasgow – City of Culture') has tried hard to rise above such gang-warfare images of the city. Some regions have perhaps been better served. Fiction from Walpole to Bragg has extolled the 'yeoman' hardiness of Cumbria's independent 'statesman farmers' and their workers. Popular images of 'Yorkshire' cannot be conceived without reference to the Brontës, Winifred Holtby, Phyllis Bentley, Storm Jameson, the harder hitting realist novels of the 1960s, like *Billy Liar* or *This Sporting Life* (and the films based upon them), and some more benign media creations.[118]

[114] R. Davies, *My Wales* (London, 1937 edn), pp. 204–14.

[115] See K. D. M. Snell and P. S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: Land and Religion in England and Wales* (provisional title, forthcoming), on the cultural distinctiveness of Wales in religious terms.

[116] I. C. Peate, *Tradition and Folk Life: a Welsh View* (London, 1972), p. 84. Or see R. S. Thomas, 'The Minister', in *Selected Poems, 1946–1968* (1946, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1986 edn), e.g. p. 32. The idea that fiction-reading was sinful had largely disappeared elsewhere by 1900. It would be interesting to know more about the relation between Welsh revivalism and the writing and reading of novels.

[117] M. Burgess, *The Glasgow Novel: a Survey and Bibliography* (1972, Glasgow, 1986 edn), p. 44. On images of Glasgow and their ramifications, see J. R. Gold and M. M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750* (Aldershot, 1995), ch. 9.

[118] For example, 'The Last of the Summer Wine', or the James Heriot inspired television series of a rural Yorkshire veterinary practice. For Scotland, there has been *Dr Finlay's Casebook*, *Whisky Galore*, the films of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, or those based on Neil Munro's Para Handy. On images of Scotland in film, including the adaptation to the screen of regional novels, see E. Dick, *From Limelight to Satellite: a Scottish Film Book* (1990). Other publications have dealt with the conversion of regional novels into film – for example, R. Ellis, *Making Poldark* (Bodmin, 1978).

The broader cultural and historical influences impinging on regional fiction are little examined, although more critical attention has been paid in media studies to their role in advertising and regional 'image-making'. Often these originated long prior to forms they took in regional fiction: in folklore, chapbooks and *blason populaire*, in proverbial sayings, in images created or perpetuated by characterisation in the picaresque novel, or in the popular perceptions of antiquarian local history and regional political association and tradition. Yet there has been no regionally-based historical study of how such assumptions, motifs, presuppositions about character and landscape were translated from folklore or regional oral traditions into new fictional forms, how they influenced such fiction, how fiction replaced or supplemented them, or how those fictional forms were themselves subject to redefinition or changing improvisation over time – that is, how the evolution of certain regional identities was staged, and how the montage of associations and formulae has been managed.

The pervasive social and economic ramifications of these associations is overwhelming, very visible in what we may think of as the 'management' of regional fiction. Appropriation of literature by local authorities, environmental pressure groups, local societies and other parties is increasingly common. One sees this in the cases of Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, Mary Webb, Eden Phillpotts, James Joyce, Brett Young, Dickens, and many others. 'Dylan Thomas Country' demonstrates how some poets have also been claimed in this way. This is noticeably so for Wordsworth, who has even had the Department of the Environment intervene to maintain the view from the house that he lived in. One could also mention Stratford-upon-Avon. These commercial locales with their visitors' centres are sometimes significant branches of the publishing industry, in some cases funded by that industry, outlets for sales of books and tapes, but they are more than that. The phenomenon of 'literary pilgrimage' has already been touched upon. Almost all County Councils have a variously named 'Department of Heritage'. Statues and plaques on buildings commemorate literary figures associated with the district. Local history is rewritten as the history of the author, not of the place. Author's faces appear on mugs, tea-towels and bookmarks. Postcards provide maps of Hardy's 'Wessex', and Wessex, Casterbridge, Mellstock and so on provide names for local businesses and amenities.[119]

[119] M. Millgate, 'Unreal estate: reflections on Wessex and Yoknapatawpha', in R. P. Draper (ed.), *The Literature of Region and Nation* (Basingstoke, 1989), p. 67.

The continuous 'Blue Line' appears on Eastwood pavements, to guide 10,000 annual visitors around significant 'Lawrence sites'.[120] Hospital wards are named after George Eliot novels. Schools and hospices also take her name. Coventry has its Marner and Garth Crescents, its Middlemarch, Lydgate, Barton and Bede Roads, and its Tulliver Street. The 'Middlemarch Business Park', owned by P. & O. Properties Ltd., tells me that it has close connections with 'Middlemarch School'. Maps of 'George Eliot country' (which adjoins so-called 'Shakespeare country') are separately produced by the Tourist Board and by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, thus 'putting Nuneaton on the map' via the author, allowing people to partake of 'the George Eliot tourist experience'. George Eliot's 'birthday' is re-scheduled from November to June, so that the 'festival of her birth' (started in 1919) may coincide with the tourist season.[121]

There has never been a time in which local residents have been made more aware of authors somehow associated with their district. However, much of this is directed at the outsider, the businessman, the tourist, at the agent of change and uniformity. Cultural expression that once celebrated distinctiveness or even a local attachment to place is now eroding much of its own principle. These tendencies appear to be stronger in Britain than in Europe or America, and much stronger than in Japan (where the idea of a literary pilgrimage has yet to depose that of a religious one). In this regard the conception of de-industrialised Britain as museum and historical theme park is one that overspills to its regional literature, that literature which can most easily be 'placed' and therefore 'visited', as well as to its material 'museable' artifacts. Thus a new cultural cytology develops from a once living literature, as a new commercial structure thriving in dead tissue.

Or is this too critical a judgement? For this predisposition and commercial usage is not only backward-looking, but has strong implications for cultural progression. Many areas, cities, and local companies or Chambers of Commerce have temporarily funded particular writers, partly in the hope that certain representations, or regional muses, could benefit the pursuit of industrial or commercial investment and

[120] Bennett, '*A Devouring Nostalgia*', pp. 63–74. This was apparently inspired by the 'Red Line' tourist trail of Boston in America.

[121] J. King, *George Eliot's Legacy: Local History Revisited* (Department of English Local History, University of Leicester, unpub. MA dissertation, 1992), pp. 34, 37, 52–4. The attempt to generate tourism in Nuneaton through the Eliot association has had limited success compared with other 'literary' areas.

location.[122] Authorial success is in some cases highly dependent upon such patronage, seemingly turning the writing of fiction, as well as the retrospective assessment of authors, into a branch of the advertising industry. The region of the north-east in which Catherine Cookson's novels are said to be situated is openly advertised as 'Catherine Cookson Country'. Yet the moral, commercial, historical and future-oriented purpose of identification like this is little considered, necessitating, as it does, close attention to how such a novelist is perceived among her readers, or even perhaps among those who have no immediate familiarity with her pages. Among the many issues that ought to be pursued here is an evaluation of the *effects* of literary appreciation, including its more conservative forms. In this as in the study of readerships one looks for participation from literary critics, and the adoption by them of social-science methods not often associated with their own discipline. As with the sociological study of individual authors and their relation to more general regional categories and contexts, it is indeed possible that the priorities of more conservative critics would benefit, at a later stage of assessment, from a fuller appreciation of these wider contextual issues and from the adoption of these methods.

There has as yet been no significant study of local readerships, and of how regional novelists have been locally received. Nor have the various societies associating themselves with some regional novelists been given much attention.[123] The issues arising here are historical as well as literary and sociological. One may use questionnaires and other such approaches to pursue the questions today, but it is a more problematical matter to press this issue in the past, to see how readers interpreted fiction then. The questions become all the more interesting when one considers our position now, standing (as we probably do) on the threshold of the electronic 'interactive novel'. It needs to be asked why and how regional novels came to mean something to people. To what extent do readers belong to a community of interpretation,

[122] On this general issue, see J. R. Gold and S. V. Ward (eds.), *Place Promotion: the Use of Publicity and Public Relations to Sell Towns and Regions* (Chichester, 1994); G. Kearns and C. Philo (eds.), *Selling Places: the City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present* (Oxford, 1993).

[123] It needs to be borne in mind that there is much variety in these local societies. Some of them were initiated by local people eager to keep familiar the achievements of writers who chronicled their area – for example, those connected with John Clare, Edward Thomas, Mary Webb, Henry Williamson, or the Richard Jefferies Society in Swindon. Most of them have expanded outwards as interest in the authors has grown. Many of course (e.g. the Thomas Hardy Society, founded in 1968) post-date the main upsurges of interest in the author concerned.

and what are or were those interpretative communities? How far did texts themselves create their readerships, and define a role for them as *regional* readers? In any period, local readers who know the areas supposedly described respond differently, and with different imaginative resources, to those who do not share their local knowledge, or to those who do not share such knowledge but who *believe* that they do. They may cross-relate information in a novel, of whatever sort, to other locally acquired references in ways that will also be unique to themselves. Their demands and expectations of such fiction may also be distinctive, like their reactions to it. Although not a homogeneous group, but one that reflects local social, ethnic, gender-based, or political differences, they may still share certain as yet undefined characteristics, mentalities and values as a specific regional (or associatively regional) readership.

One way of putting these points is to express them as the coupling of reception theory to the perspective of the regional historian. The literary critical stress in recent years (particularly in Germany) on the reader, or the readership, on the expectations directed at a text in the past, and the effects that it has on readers, on the uses of reading such a text, bodes well for the type of work advocated here. Furthermore, and to reverse the issue, there is the question of whether and in what ways a readership is envisaged by the author as 'regional'. This issue may be tied to the more empirical question of whether, for certain authors, readerships *are* regional. Both within social history and literary criticism there is increasing interest in the ways in which texts like regional novels have changed the horizons of readers. The 'regional novel' itself is an ideal starting point for such investigation. It is here that the sociological term 'horizon' takes on its most literal meaning: the regional novel in many of its forms provides a focus for the study of readers' expectations about the locality or region *vis-à-vis* a wider area such as the nation state, and for the study of those elements (e.g. speech, dialect, social relations, topography, local tradition) that form the basis for local consciousness and a sense of attachment. How can literary works be said to be 'representative' of the regions they purport to describe? In addition, the role of the reader in 'producing' the final text is crucial in the understandings of regionality at issue here. Many authors have been pre-empted as 'regional' at the behest of certain readerships, a process that has had ramifications for the development of particular novelists' work, for the ideologies they have become associated with, as well as for their retrospective interpretation.

A further question which emerges in this connection is that of the association of particular authors with the areas they describe. What is the nature of a novelist's loyalty to a region, and what are his or her motives when writing about it? Who indeed *are* the regional novelists, as a question of regional biography? Who do they believe themselves to write for? Of course, many write from within a community, almost as its spokespersons. However, just as in the folk song and dance revivals, or in the collection of folklore, the needs and expectations regarding regional fiction have often come from *outside* the community concerned. A recurring phenomenon has been the regional novelist as outside witness, in some cases almost as anthropological visitor, participant-observer and investigator, in others as having been displaced by education and mobility from the people and landscape the fiction describes, experiencing a sense of dislodged or multiple belonging. There have been many examples: Edgeworth, R. L. Stevenson, Hardy, Brett Young, W. Riley, Arnold Bennett, Lawrence, Henry Williamson, H. E. Bates, Raymond Williams or Cookson. In some cases the sense of place became more poignant the further the novelist was from the place concerned, as with Stevenson in the Pacific.

In many novels, key fictional characters have also been outsiders, like the English heroes of Scott's 'Jacobite' novels, David Balfour in *Kidnapped*, or Lydia Lensky in *The Rainbow*, even disruptive outsiders (as for example in *Shirley*), carrying certain moral connotations. In much regional fiction insider–outsider tensions are central to the plot. Such ambivalent stresses are persistent in Hardy, for example. While much eighteenth-century fiction was based around the portrayal of individuals in some kind of anomalous social position (often with some mystery over their birth or social status, for example Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, Roderick Random or Humphry Clinker), the regional novel seems to give this anomaly a spatial dimension. Clym Yeobright, Grace Melbury and so many others have been taken away from the landscape of their birth – they are from it but not of it – enabling the author to explore the relationships between the individual, the community and the landscape, as the eighteenth-century writers were able to explore social relationships.

The frequently distanced relationship between author and subject matter points to a central theme in the interpretation of much regional fiction: that it has often been a complex product of nostalgia, partial recollection, regret, ambivalence, uncertainty, guilt, hesitantly assumed superiority, recognition or reconciliation, brought about by the losses

and gains associated with mobility and new horizons, and by the consequent difficulties in communicating feelings to those who become the authors' subjects. Academic commentators, above all, are well qualified to discuss such issues. These relationships between authorial biography and the structures of regional fiction add a further dimension to the study of readerships, in this case to the relation between author and reader. For the regional novel is partly a communicative form that mediates between them, sometimes in the absence of any other possibility, and the subtle complexities of this relationship raise many issues about the passivity, viability and activity of readerships both within and outside the region described.

NATIONALISM AND REGIONAL FICTION

Jeremy Hooker, writing in his *The Poetry of Place* about the poet Ivor Gurney, spoke of how

> identifications of place or region with nation were common then; with individual and historical differences, they have been common in England from its beginnings as a nation, for England has always been characterized by physical, cultural, and social variousness, forming a mosaic of individual localities within the larger regional differences; and appeals to unified national feeling have invariably used images either of this variousness or of a locality or localities presented in *their* particularity and variety as *essence* of the whole. The identifications of part with whole are naturally felt with special intensity at times of national crisis . . .[124]

Now these observations were seemingly made here for England only, but they are of considerable relevance to the interpretation of regional fiction, to the questions surrounding its emergence, and to the forms it has subsequently assumed.

We saw earlier the connotation in Phyllis Bentley's definition of the regional novel, which related regional writing to national issues, to the 'motherland' as she put it in 1941. It was not just the wartime context of her book that may have suggested such an emphasis, important though that seems to have been. 'Regionalism' itself, on the literary and broader artistic scale that developed from the early nineteenth century, to be thought of as such, was arguably inconceivable in a context in which questions of nationality – of what it was to be Irish, Scottish, Welsh or

[124] Jeremy Hooker, 'Honouring Ivor Gurney', in his *The Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews, 1970–1981* (Manchester, 1982), p. 121. (I quote Hooker here for his general sentiment, rather than for the strict accuracy of his statement on the Anglo-Welsh poet Ivor Gurney.)

English – were irrelevant or minor. Those questions contributed in both negative and positive ways to focus attention on particular localities and cultures, taken rightly or wrongly to be either representative of key elements in nationalistic self-identity, or to be threatened by it. Without a concept of nationhood, it was perhaps impossible, or unnecessary, to conceive of 'regions' in the usual sense.

One commonly found a (regionally contested) emphasis in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature in Britain upon the fundamental importance of folk art and regional tradition as supplying the roots of national identity and human experience. Much of the Romantic movement and the forms of nationalism emerging at that time were affected and ostensibly inspired by such folk idioms. One finds this too in many other European countries – in for example the emphasis on nationalistic song as being based upon regional folk traditions, as being fundamentally *volkslieder*, songs of the people. This was stressed rather earlier by such writers as the German philosopher Herder, and was found in Johann André, the songs of Reichardt and Schulz from the early 1780s, and most markedly in composers like Carl Maria von Weber, Crusell, Beethoven, Berlioz, Chopin, Liszt, Glinka, Bortniansky or Johann Carl Löwe. In many languages 'folk music' and 'national music' have, or have had, the same names, and while the regional aspect of much folk music contributed to debates about 'authenticity' (about how truly a song reflects the spirit and personality of the people who sing it, and how far it may be said to belong to them), this has not detracted from willingness to define such music as 'national', and to alter its functions and form accordingly. The influence of folk music and regional traditions on musical composition at this time was as pervasive as regional folk traditions were to literature, to such figures as Scott, and to the nationalistic use made of much regional fiction. It is worth stressing how European-wide this phenomenon was, across different artistic idioms. As in Germany, Poland, France, Russia, Bohemia, or Hungary, so in Britain too such artistic developments were accompanied by a return to popular sources, from Shakespeare (now being set to song, and characters like Falstaff being widely engraved in prints), to the collections of older songs, narratives, regional artistic and oral traditions, which were to be restored in the sense that they were reinterpreted, reintroduced in different forms to 'the people', and to a gradually more democratic understanding of the latter. In many cases the reinterpretation was complex and multi-layered, speading into other genres, and this was not exclusively national. Scott, like

Shakespeare, was a widely influential example of this, and his material was often set to music. In addition, the ever-wider readership encompassed by market expansion, coupled with imperatives of patriotism and national alliance (especially during extended war-time mobilisation), required the pragmatic abandonment of official, polite, classical, politico-mythological themes in favour of the real, the recognisable, the regional and even the humble.

This argument was well made by Wordsworth in 1798, and elaborated to become the famous 1802 preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, where he defended his use of 'the real language of men': a language recognisable to middle and lower classes in society, a more conversational and vernacular language. His subject matter complemented this, being of 'low and rustic life', grounded in the domestic and working cultures of particular landscapes. The poet, after all, expressed 'the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men'; so how then, Wordsworth asked, 'can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see clearly?'[125] He wrote elsewhere of how 'local attachment . . . is the tap-root of the tree of Patriotism', a theme common to Burke and many others.[126] The emergence of the regional novel at this time – catering to an ever wider readership, revolving regional traditions into new and often nationalistic forms, interpreting character in personal or generic types but stressing common people and their local cultures and history – may be taken as a key element in the changes of focus and theme epitomised by Wordsworth.

In subsequent periods too, regional writing has reflected such nationalistic impulses, and this occurred in different ways in all four British countries. One sees this in the literary flowering of the Welsh industrial valleys from about 1830 to 1870. It was notable in those regions where a fundamentally Welsh character was being most threatened by Anglicisation and English immigration, as in the western Gwent poets and other writers like John Davies of Tredegar, Thomas Price, T. E. Watkins of Blaenafon, the writers of the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society founded in 1833, or William Thomas the poet of Newport and Tredegar. The reaction against the 1847 educational commissioners gave further purpose to this. Similarities arose in the early 1890s, with Cymru Fydd, the Wales to be, and its emphases on

[125] The 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is reprinted in H. Bloom and L. Trilling (eds.), *Romantic Poetry and Prose* (London, 1973), and see especially pp. 596, 605–6.

[126] W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (eds.), *Essays upon Epitaphs, 3, The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (Oxford, 1974), 2, pp. 93, 495–6.

Welsh Home Rule, on Welsh education and literary culture. There were parallel developments in the mid 1930s, when revived stress on Welsh-language fiction followed the events connected with Saunders Lewis, himself strongly associated with nationalistic literature, 'against Philistia and her mire'.[127] These cultural developments were compounded by the resentment stockpiled in Welsh 'depressed areas' over the previous decade, a resentment and experience that produced a remarkable body of fiction, usually and significantly in English, from such authors as Kate Roberts, Gwyn Jones, Jack Jones, B. L. Coombes, Rhys Davies, Lewis Jones, Gwyn Thomas, and most popular of all, Richard Llewellyn.[128] The literary magazines *Wales* and *The Welsh Review* were inaugurated in 1937 and 1939. Many such nationalistic associations have been apparent also in the resurgence of English regional writing since the late 1970s, marked by a search for the meaning of 'Englishness' – initially in part response (often in antagonism) to centralising measures and their effects on local government, on local productive ways of life and their traditions, on regional cultures more widely understood. At times, regional fiction might be said to have fulfilled an eclectic role as comparative and self-assessing dialogue between regions. Such ferment overspilled to become one element in debates about Britain's position *vis-à-vis* European integration.[129] In other words, regional fiction cannot be interpreted without reference to the problems or even failures arising in different periods of formulating and imposing national programmes or ideologies. These have included problems of regional consensus, of incorporating diverse regional cultural traditions and political sensibilities within enveloping policies of the state, as well as the threats to regional landscapes, to local 'heritages' however and for whomsoever defined, and to local ways of making a living, so often perceived to be endangered from outside.

There has also been a demand, sometimes explicitly made (especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), that literature should eschew the local and regional, and should impart a sense of nationality and of national ideals. For example, many educationalists were strongly resistant to dialectal expression of any sort, found most

[127] Idris Davies, 'Saunders Lewis', in D. Dale-Jones and R. Jenkins (eds.), *Twelve Modern Anglo-Welsh Poets* (London, 1975), p. 30.

[128] On these novelists, see in particular Glyn Jones, *The Dragon has Two Tongues* (1968).

[129] On 'Englishness' during this period, see in particular R. Colls and P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880–1920* (1986); R. Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: the Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* (1989), 3 volumes.

notably in many regional novels, seeing it as one aspect of cultural degeneracy, wherever it was encountered, and as a challenge to a unified national language. The rigid vision of a standardised English that encapsulated supposedly common aims, that served as a vehicle for 'national efficiency', and a cultural nationalism expressed in centralising attempts to standardise language and literary expression, have a long history. They led to the reformulation of the educative role of 'English Literature' as a unifying expression of a shared culture.[130] As Crawford writes, 'anti-provincial linguistic prejudice . . . found its voice not just in singing the merits of one dominant cultural tradition, but also in its silencing of others'.[131] There was usually little place here for analysis of the regional diversity of fiction, let alone its relation to regional speech, cultural traditions and ways of life. Literary criticism was slow to shed the nationalistic coats in which the discipline had once justified itself. Such an academic ethos, however, seems not to have retarded the remarkable effervescence of regional, dialectal and ethnic writing.

'PROVINCIALISM' AND CENTRALISM

One issue bound up with my concerns here is the disparagement of regional literature as essentially an expression of the local, regional or 'provincial'. This has been a persistent influence in critical neglect, from which many novelists, of lesser stature than 'little Thomas Hardy', have suffered. The term 'provincialism' is open to varied understanding, but it usually involves belittlement of any form of cultural life other than that supplied by the metropolis. It assumes metropolitan arbitration of taste, the superiority of metropolitan people and expression over that of the merely 'local' person, whose criteria are 'only' those of locality – as though metropolis and locality were mutually exclusive terms. There have been qualitative assessments implicit here

[130] B. Doyle, 'The invention of English' in Colls, *Englishness*; on 'national efficiency' see G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: a Study in British Politics and British Political Thought, 1800–1914* (Oxford, 1971). For discussion of the linguistic issues in an earlier period, see J. Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–1780: an Equal Wide Survey* (1983), ch. 2; R. Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), esp. ch. 1; O. Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791–1819* (Oxford, 1984); J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800* (1932, 1969), p. 188, citing the *Monthly* in 1784: 'Readers of taste will be disgusted at descriptions which enter too minutely into vulgar scenes, and at dialogues which are degraded by the cant of provincial speech'. Compare the desire for centralisation and uniformity in France during and after the Revolution, and the consequent surveys of rural patois, as discussed in M. De Certeau *et al.*, *Une politique de la langue: la révolution française et les patois* (Paris, 1975).

[131] Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, p. 43.

in the types of people being compared as well as the artistic merits of 'provincial' production. 'Provincialism is the residuum which remains after the course of events has drawn the ablest local men away', wrote James Hannay in 1865, commenting on an increasing frequency of the term in popular literature.[132] He continued: 'Provincial politics are the politics of men who know nothing of any other. Provincial wit and literature are the wit and literature of those who, if they had more of both, would carry them to a better market, but who have just enough to make them distinguished where they are'.[133] 'Provincialism, in fact, may be defined as the counterpart of cockneyism, – as the cockneyism of country towns. For every city has its own cockneys. There are Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh, and Dublin cockneys, just as London produces the typical breed from which they all derive the name. The local man, the man whose prejudices are bred in him by the place, and who measures everything by the place's standard, is and must ever be a cockney.'[134]

The 'cockney' here – and remember the start of *Alton Locke* – stood not only for a certain London dialectal 'breed', the supposedly hidebound inhabitants of Mayhew's East End 'tribal' ghettoes. It stood also for its regional counterparts. This was a style of thinking not necessarily tied to conventional 'class'. It was one in which regional differences, the expansive variety in regional popular cultures, could be passed over by emphasis upon class separateness: that supposed difference whereby provincial cultures, including the provincial press, could be termed 'cockney' (the cultural equivalent and symbol for Hannay of the working class). By comparison the 'cultured' classes of the metropolis epitomised cosmopolitan and truly accomplished man, no longer 'intensely local', no longer 'jealous' of other provincial centres,[135] able to view with 'amusement' a provincialism that was as regionally provincial as the working class itself was felt to be. Hannay looked forward to the day when 'cockneyism and provincialism may be expected to recede together into the past'.[136]

Hannay was only one example among very many. The dismissive attitudes he and others expressed are less fashionable today, although one readily finds examples. More commonly now 'provincialism' is viewed as a frame of mind that accepts and relishes its 'marginality'

[132] J. Hannay, 'Provincialism', *Cornhill Magazine*, 11 (June, 1865), pp. 673, 675.
[133] *Ibid*., p. 675. [134] *Ibid*., p. 674. [135] *Ibid*., p. 679.
[136] *Ibid*., p. 681. See also Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 331, on 'the distinctly pejorative connotations' that were now habitually attached to the words 'regional', 'provincial', and 'local'.

from the 'centre', using this in original ways rather than deferentially following a habit of thought that is itself, after all, utterly parochial in its metropolitan location. Evidently, parochialism in the sense of antiquarianism in imaginative writing is of limited use, and (like its historiographical counterparts) it usually has slight attraction beyond the neighbourhoods that it addresses, despite the success of writers like Galt. Yet in choice of universal or wide-ranging themes, interpreted against a particular locality, regional writing assuredly has wide appeal, as has been demonstrated in the reception of writers from Scott through to the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Hardy, Lawrence, or more recently Llewellyn, Middleton, Gunn, Cookson, Plunkett, Sillitoe, Toulmin, George Mackay Brown, Doyle and so many others. The regional imagination of such writers is a crucial element in their art. This dimension has not been neglected in appreciations of American authors like Faulkner.[137] The critical indifference to this theme in Britain surprises social or local historians, cultural geographers or anthropologists. From their perspectives, there is great scope for interdisciplinary work of a wider nature, that supplements de-contextualised analysis and assessment of literary value. Nowhere is this more obvious than for the regional novel: widely neglected as such, and so frequently studied in guises other than its regional aspect, despite the regionalism that it addressed, perpetuated and helped to reformulate in a variety of ways that require close attention.

Many regional novels are present-day or historical affirmations of the regional life described, in direct antipathy to more metropolitan styles, to the cultural influence of London, or even other areas of England. Compton Mackenzie's *Whisky Galore*, for example, ends with the approbation of an old woman from Nottingham ('that peculiar place where she lives')[138] for the life of the Hebridean islands of Great and Little Todday. There are references throughout the novel to 'barbarous places like Africa and Devonshire',[139] and value judgements of the form: 'People in London thought I was mad when I came to live up here, but I've never regretted it. Not once'.[140] In William Riley's *Windyridge* the narrator, Grace Holden, leaves London for rural Yorkshire, taking a yearly tenancy in a cottage by the edge of a moor

[137] W. T. Ruzicka, *Faulkner's Fictive Architecture: The Meaning of Place in the Yoknapatawpha Novels* (Ann Arbor, 1987, 1992 edn); R. G. Deamer, *The Importance of Place in the American Literature of Hawthorne, Thoreau, Crane, Adams, and Faulkner* (New York, 1990); R. Rabbetts, *From Hardy to Faulkner: Wessex to Yoknapatawpha* (New York, 1989).

[138] C. Mackenzie, *Whisky Galore* (1955), p. 223. [139] *Ibid*., p. 34. [140] *Ibid*., p. 56.

– 'these wild parts which are as bad as a foreign country'.[141] Needless to say, she ends by controverting the way Londoners refer to 'the character of the heathen in whose midst I dwelt'.[142] These are sentiments much repeated in the extra-metropolitan regional novel: asserting a superiority and richness of that life and language thought to be condescendingly seen as 'regional' or 'provincial' by many in the metropolis.[143] This conflictual tension and interplay between supposedly subordinate and superordinate regions, and the morals and cultural norms associated with them, is a recurring element in such writing. It is related to, but goes beyond, the country–city tensions that are so common a feature in virtually all eighteenth-century and many nineteenth-century novels. The fiction may highlight the scarcely contained antagonisms between London and other regions. It may suggest comparisons of a more undecided nature.[144] Or the tension may be between England and the other three countries of the British Isles. 'We are fighting to preserve England, I mean Britain', proclaims Compton Mackenzie's Captain Waggett, an outsider commanding the 'home guard', a character incongruous and unpopular in Great Todday.[145] Mackenzie's Hebridean islanders display scant regard for the 'national' war effort, blaming it for the whisky shortage and then pinching the whisky bound for America to pay for that war. They assert their autonomy over central government and its agents, the latter represented as officious buffoons and snoopers, reporting unfavourably on islanders' attitudes to the war effort. Those islanders resent military titles, and do not respond to them, thus downplaying the standards and efforts of the wider nation during the Second World War.[146] A novel entitled *The Garrotted Announcer* is recommended by one of Mackenzie's cast – ostensibly for the inside view it gives of life in the BBC, perhaps also for its unconscious cathartic potential for those distanced from the centres of cultural and governmental influence.[147] Major Quiblick, by contrast, 'regarded all Gaelic Christian names as a threat to Security Intelligence'.[148]

[141] W. Riley, *Windyridge* (1913), p. 34. [142] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

[143] See for example the series of articles published by the *Yorkshire Post* in February 1930 by Yorkshire novelists. One such, Gordon Stowell, complained angrily of 'the arrogant, ignorant pretence that London is the only town in the world, or at least the only place fit for the heroes of novels to live in. It is a form of snobbery not confined to literature. There are too many people who can only conceive of life outside the Metropolis in terms of agriculture or slums.' 19 February 1930.

[144] For example, J. L. Carr, *A Month in the Country* (Brighton, 1980).

[145] Mackenzie, *Whisky Galore*, p. 68. [146] *Ibid.*, p. 163. [147] *Ibid.*, p. 56. [148] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

Much of the humorous potential of a novel like this, modest and dated though it now is, is contained in the relation between insider and outsider, and their respective regional associations. The use of dialect and of the Gaelic language reinforces this. It is worth recalling how such regional emphasis and approbation were reversed by Stella Gibbons. In *Cold Comfort Farm* the apparent distance between the rural and urban worlds was magnified: like a modern anthropologist, the urbane heroine finally leaves the earthbound churlish boors and returns to the metropolis by aeroplane.[149] In the novel's rural characterisation any suggestions of urban degeneracy and rural purity received short shrift. Joanna Godden, by contrast, was dismayed by the vulgar superficiality and rowdy triteness of the smoky London music hall, and sought rapid rural escape from it and from her little London clerk: 'I tell you, you ain't man enough for me'.[150] These themes have many forms and intentions, whether nationalistic, politically regionalistic, competitive, moral or gendered. Where they are found, their implied stance in fiction is usually in opposition to the standards and power of the metropolis, part of a long anti-centralist tradition, even if sometimes (as in *Whisky Galore*, with its Gaelic glossary) the novel appears to be partly directed to a metropolitan readership, and even if such fiction itself sometimes seems to acquiesce to a condescending understanding of the 'provincial'.

CONCLUSION

I have emphasised the remarkable absence of study of 'the regional novel'. To some extent I have accounted for this neglect by drawing attention to the fenced characteristics of the relevant academic disciplines, the way that their enclosures have developed, and how such development has been affected by cultural and political relations between the earlier metropolitan centre and the larger countries and regions of the British Isles. It is hard to conceive of a subject that has been more paralysed by disciplinary boundaries than the study of regional fiction. In the course of this introduction, certain themes and questions have emerged as being worth close attention. These are almost invariably of an interdisciplinary nature. The essays that follow have been written by leading literary critics, historians and geographers, and many further

[149] The novel was published in the same year as the famous photographs of Amy Johnson, before her flight to South Africa.

[150] Sheila Kaye-Smith, *Joanna Godden* (1921), pp. 285–98.

issues will arise from these analyses of selected aspects of the regional novel. The genre is today an even more widespread and international phenomenon than hitherto. Its artistic and regional diversity is certainly expanding, and its political relevance is conspicuous. Levels of readership are unprecedented. There is huge interest in regional authors from Hardy to Cookson, and thriving fluidity and reworking of the genre across various media. This most popular literary form can extend, confirm, deepen, question, refine or co-ordinate people's notions of belonging and region, affecting readers personally, and influencing their understanding of others. Above all, the issues of nationalism, centralism, regionalism and localism – of local distinctiveness or uniformity, and related questions about loyalties, personal identities and the meaning of 'community' – have rarely been so prominently discussed. What it is to be 'British' or 'Irish', and the issue of whether these are still relevant questions at all, now preoccupy a great many people. 'Britain' may be a political reality, but for many it is not a cultural one. There is perhaps a growing cultural and ecological sense that identity and senses of place can only be established locally or regionally, rather than nationally.

One sees here how literary analysis extends to matters of great private and public importance. In addition, there has been acceptance of self-reflexive attitudes in historical writing, as well as in fiction and autobiography. Fiction and non-fiction have now interpenetrated to the extent that we are seeing growing flexibility of form and a breakdown of conventional artistic and disciplinary boundaries. If the literary genre that concerns us is to be studied with the resourcefulness that it deserves, there must be academic open-mindedness, and inventive re-application of methods and questions found in the disciplines of literary criticism, cultural, regional and social history, cultural and media studies, geography and literary sociology. The many possibilities invite rethinking of disciplinary boundaries, adventurous approaches and fresh questions. I hope therefore that the scholarly essays of this book, and the extensive bibliographies of regional fiction due to follow, will help to promote creative, sympathetic and innovative approaches to the subject.