

# Editorial:

## Region, Identity, and the Genesis of *Romance, Revolution and Reform*

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(Editor-in-Chief & Deputy Editor)

AT THE HEART of the study of regionalism is a tension that continues to both shape and complicate the thinking behind what is an inherently fractious discipline. On the one hand, to seek clear definitions of 'the region' as quantifiable space seems to be an unavoidable necessity in order to render it distinguishable from, yet comparable to, other spaces. On the other hand, whilst regions can take on identities from their geographies in a given moment in time, these geographies are also prone to shifts. Added to this is the fact that regions are also shaped by more elusive and mutable factors, such as the communities that reside within them and the shifting ideologies upon which those communities are built, shaped or destroyed. It is therefore difficult to seek definitions that might help us to understand the fundamentals of regionalism, when those definitions can be nefariously challenging to pinpoint or map. As Edward Royle has pointed out, this is compounded by the fact that regional identity is sometimes more easily determined by what it *doesn't* represent, than by what it does.<sup>1</sup> The difficulties wrought by complex and contradictory definitions have resided at the centre of regionalism debates historically. However, they nonetheless also continue to drive the discipline forward in some fascinating new directions.

In this respect, the at times fraught distinction between the provincial or non-metropolitan, and the regional—with its more direct association with mapped or named topographies, such as counties, and including the metropole—has recently yielded multiple studies that have served to clarify or challenge the terms or to nuance their definitions. For example, Rachel Matthews and Mary Hammond have both applied

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Royle, 'Introduction' in *Issues of Regional Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 11

the theoretical frameworks of regionalism to a study of the periodical press.<sup>2</sup> Where Matthews uses the press to ground and clarify the regional and provincial as categories, however, Hammond uses the same medium and the ideologies and identities it supported to unsettle them, interrogating Ian Duncan's understanding of the evolution of the regional novel into the provincial novel.

This focus on ideology and the constitution of self is in-keeping with another key thread in the study of regionalism, which, for many, represents a process of self-understanding by locating the individual within the space that they either inhabit or visit. This view has been advanced by Wendy Katz and Timothy Mahoney, who argue that human interaction with nature and the physical environment is integral to studies of regionalism, although the extent of the significance of these interactions is contested.<sup>3</sup> Some have gone so far as to suggest that regionalism inevitably brings with it a degree of geographic determinism, suggesting that the environment moulds human perception and actions, which in return shapes regional character.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, however, this has been considered to be insufficiently pluralist, with Guy Reynolds noting that it implies a homogeneity in the characteristics of a particular region and its people, which fails to appreciate the diversity that exists within a given region.<sup>5</sup>

Most recently, the issue of the provincial and how its regional parts might be understood is situated at the centre of a new AHRC research project led by Ruth Livesey. Livesey's work charts a 'simultaneous rise of provincial fiction and disparagement of provincialism in English cultural criticism during the nineteenth-century', speaking further to the ways in which definitions—clear or contested—serve both to propel and refresh the discipline.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rachel Matthews, *The History of the Provincial Press in England* (New York; London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Mary Hammond, 'Wayward Orphans and Lonesome Places: The Regional Reception of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*', *Victorian Studies*, 3 (2018) pp.390-411.

<sup>3</sup> Katz and Mahoney, p. ix.

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Kinbacher, 'Imagining Place: Nebraska Territory, 1854–1867' in *Regionalism and the Humanities*, ed by Wendy Katz and Timothy Mahoney (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pp. 251-273

<sup>5</sup> Guy Reynolds, 'Willa Cather's Case: Region and Reputation', in *Regionalism and the Humanities*, ed by Wendy Katz and Timothy Mahoney (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pp. 79-94.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Livesey, 'Provincialism: Literature and the Cultural Politics of Middleness in Nineteenth Century Britain', (January 2019-July 2020) <<https://qtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FS002545%2F1>> [Accessed: 02/04/2019].

It was in response to these complex tensions and contested definitions, and with a view to exploring new directions, that the Southampton Centre for Nineteenth Century Research (SCNR) held a two-day interdisciplinary conference on 'Regionalism Across the World in the Long-Nineteenth Century' in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Southampton, in September 2018. Many of the articles in this inaugural issue of *Romance, Revolution and Reform* are in fact drawn from papers presented at that conference. The articles have been selected to demonstrate the rich and multidimensional nature of regionalism and its definitions, and since their authors come from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and career stages, their contributions to the debates are cumulative as well as individual.

The interplay between the 'provincial' and the 'regional' lies at the centre of our opening essay by Leonard Baker on 'West Country Scum' — awarded the BAVS/SCNR prize for the best postgraduate paper at the conference — as he demonstrates that the unenfranchised were not uninterested in national political issues, but instead sought to express their political views through the possession of space during elections. He examines in fascinating detail how they sought to influence the political process through the exclusion of individuals from those occupied spaces.

Baker's piece is followed by Harry Bark's exploration of how regional identities were expressed in poetry anthologies to examine issues of marginalisation — especially as experienced by women — in Manchester, whilst also exploring the role of poetry and anthologising in the development of the city's identity, by arguing that it sought to facilitate a shift away from the national perception of Manchester as having a solely industrial character.

Tom Heritage's statistical study of affluence across the North-South divide explores the role of human and physical geography in the varying regional experiences of the elderly, and the disparity between regions within 'The North' and 'The South'. In the process, he urges a more nuanced approach to the study of regions than the broad delineation of 'North-South divide' implies.

Also exploring the topic from a literary angle, Yuejie Liu offers an assessment of the regional landscapes in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and Shen Congwen's *Long River*, to uncover a crucially under-researched relationship between the two authors, their ideologies and the regional landscapes of Wessex and West Hunan, which are so central to their respective works. Deploying theories shaped by Qi

Shouhua after Mikhail Bakhtin, Liu reveals a subtle but immensely productive 'dialogic reverberation' between the novels that not only sheds light on the regional identities in the texts, but nuances our understanding of the complex relationship between nature, culture and modernity.

In a similarly literary vein, Barry Sloan's exploration of the work of William Carleton contributes to ongoing questions about what constitutes regional identity and self-representation, as he explores how Carleton strived to reconcile the myriad influences on his own identity with the shifting regional tones of his novels and poetry. Sloan sheds light on how the colonial relationship between Ireland and London led to an appropriation of Carleton's work as part of a project of cultural nationalism.

This issue also welcomes two informative book reviews. The first, by Eleanor Shipton, analyses Karin Koehler's *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication* (2016), whilst Roger Hansford examines Bennet Zon's *Evolution and Victorian Musical Culture* (2017). Finally, Sophie Welsh has written an illuminating review of the SCNR conference, which interrogates the conference's engagement in and advancement of current debates on regionalism and regional identities.

It is because questions of identity and self-definition are so central to the regionalism debate that we have chosen it as the perfect theme with which to launch the inaugural issue of *Romance, Revolution & Reform*, as it forges its own unique identity in the dynamic sphere of nineteenth-century research. Consciously spanning the divide between academic scholarship and student-run publications, *RRR* was founded upon the principles of instantaneous open access and academic rigour. From the outset, we have been committed to forging policies which guarantee that all articles are subjected to a thorough double-blind peer review undertaken by experts in the field of the article's chosen topic area, whilst also ensuring that we are fully compliant with the expectations of the 'Research Excellent Framework' (REF). In so doing, we forge a unique place for ourselves in the scholarly journal field, offering student contributors the best possible start in a competitive career market by treating them on an equal footing with established scholars, and giving our student Board Members invaluable management and editing experience. This is a stance which has been whole-heartedly endorsed by our superb Editorial Board (listed on page 2) from the outset. At the same time, we have adopted an innovative approach to leadership, as the journal's most senior positions are held by Post-Graduate Researchers, who are supported by the

Editorial Board's academic editors. Our most fundamental founding principle, however, is the supportive environment which we seek to provide for our authors. We welcome submissions from those at all levels of academia, regardless of their level of experience. We are therefore neither 'academics-only' nor 'students-only', but instead aim to offer everyone the chance to navigate the often-challenging experience of honing their research into publishable articles of the highest academic standards.

Time and again, it was said that *Romance, Revolution & Reform* was not a viable concept, that this journal could only exist by abandoning its commitment to Open Access, and that sacrifices would have to be made to our supportive environment for PGRs, and our pioneering PGR-led board structure. We on the Board firmly believe this inaugural issue proves them wrong, and that we have carved a new niche in a dynamic area of scholarly publishing.