



NORTHERN ENGLISH

A SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL HISTORY

Katie Wales

CAMBRIDGE

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A Cultural and Social History

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Preface

It is a universal truth that we have no control over our place of birth but we live with the consequences for ever. (Alan Plater, 1992: 71)

This book is as much a personal journey, as it is a journey in time and space to discover the history of Northern English, itself a story of migrations, emigrations, travel and border-crossings. I was born at the end of the Second World War in Darlington, on the edge of County Durham separated from North Yorkshire by the River Tees. Midway between the glorious Dales and the sea-side, and poised in its dialect between 'Geordie' and Yorkshire English, Darlington was for me the *origo*, the still-point of my personal or 'numinous map', in York-born W. H. Auden's terms (1967: 830), of the North and its ways of speech. *Salve magna parens*. My family rarely ventured north of Newcastle, and Hadrian's Wall was a clear border: for Scotland was certainly perceived as being too far away and too cold, even for us Northerners. J.B. Priestley obviously had similar feelings: north of Newcastle he felt he was 'marooned in Lapland' (1934: 290). For the writer Beryl Bainbridge also, but on the other side of the Pennines, 'the North stretched from Birmingham to Liverpool and then became Scotland' (1987: 15). Rarely did we ourselves venture 'over the top', that is, over the Pennines, to the Lake District; and certainly Blackpool was out of bounds as being 'common'. In the 1920s and 1930s Lancashire folk apparently had misgivings about Scarborough: not that it was 'common' (quite the contrary), but that it 'lay somewhere in the Mysterious East' (Mitchell 1997: 83). Our family holidays were always spent Down South, and so beyond Doncaster on the old A1, our mental boundary of the North-South divide. At the age of eighteen I left the North for London, believing in the Dick Whittington trope, like

Bainbridge and many before me, that its streets were paved with gold. However, I was determined never to lose my short *bath* vowel. After nearly thirty years in the University of London I became the Native Returned, coming back to the North to teach in the University of Leeds, the home of the famous *Survey of English Dialects*, the vision of a scholar himself born in County Durham. Leeds, it must be said, was never part of the 'real' North from my own childhood perspective; but of course, from a southerner's perspective it certainly is; and as a product of the Industrial Revolution and the birthplace of Richard Hoggart, Alan Bennett and Tony Harrison it is integral to the present-day mental and cultural landscapes of the North. West Yorkshire too, like the rest of the North, is in J.B. Priestley's words again 'the region of stone walls'; and to me, as for Priestley himself 'When I see them, I know that I am home again; and no landscape looks quite right to me without them' (1934: 154).

As the North-east writer Alan Plater said in *Close the Coalhouse Door* (1969), 'there is no such thing as cold objectivity, in theatre or anywhere else'. Neither is there, as this book aims to reveal, in media or literary or historical discourses or in perceptions of dialect and accent. Least of all is there cold objectivity in my own narrative, since my own linguistic centre of gravity is the North and especially the North-east. My only defence is that, in order to reclaim the history of Northern English from obscurity and marginalisation, this itself the product unconsciously or consciously of an ideological perspective in the writing of histories of English, it has been necessary, once again, to *feel* what it is like to be a Northerner. To paraphrase a Northern proverb, you can take the woman out of the North, but you can't take the North out of the woman.

The North may be familiar territory to me, but in trying to weave a coherent and plausible narrative of the history of Northern English I have ventured into hitherto unexplored domains. Many puzzles still await an explanation, and many areas still await further research. However, I am grateful to the following people for their patience in responding to my many questions, or for their helpful encouragement: David Bovey, Joan Beal, Helen Berry, David Britain, Malcolm Chase, Stanley Ellis, David Fairer, Alison Findlay, Vic Gammon, Rowena

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I should also like to thank the School of English, University of Leeds, for permission to reproduce map 5.1 from the *Survey of English Dialects*; Helen Burnley for permission to reproduce map 3.2. from David Burnley's *Guide to Chaucer's Language* (1983); and Dick Leith for map 2.9. from his *Social History of English* (1983). Taylor and Francis are to be thanked for permission to reproduce map 2.5 from D. Graddol et al. (eds) *English History Diversity and Change* (1995) (Routledge/Open University); maps 2.2. and 2.3. from A.C. Baugh and T. Cable *A History of the English Language* (1978) (Routledge and Prentice-Hall); and map 3.1. from J. Smith, *An Historical Study of English* (1996) (Routledge). Maps 2.2 and 2.3 are also reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., NJ. Maps 1.1. and 1.2. are reproduced from C.S. Upton and J.D.A. Widdowson *An Atlas of English Dialects* (1996) by permission of Oxford University Press; maps 1.4., 1.5., 2.7. and 5.2. from Peter Trudgill *The Dialects of England* (1999) by permission of Blackwell Publishing; and maps 2.1., 2.6. and figure 2.1 from D. Freeborn *From Old English to Standard English* (1992) (Macmillan Education) by permission of Palgrave Macmillan and the University of Ottawa Press. Maps 1.3. and 1.6., from M. F. Wakelin *English Dialects: An Introduction* (1972) (Athlone Press), are reproduced with the kind permission of Continuum. I have been unable to trace the copyright holder of map 2.8 from *The Story of English* (1986) by R. McCrum et al.

Abbreviations and symbols

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Cu | Cumberland |
| DAR | definite article reduction |
| <i>DARE</i> | <i>Dictionary of American Regional English</i> , ed. F.G. Cassidy, 4 volumes, 1985–2002 |
| Du | Durham |
| <i>EDD</i> | <i>English Dialect Dictionary</i> , ed. J. Wright, 6 vols., 1898–1905 |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| EME | Early Middle English |
| IE | Indo-European |
| La | Lancashire |
| ME | Middle English |
| MS(S) | manuscript(s) |
| NATCECT | The National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, University of Sheffield |
| Nb | Northumberland |
| NE | North-east |
| NECTE | Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English |
| Norw. | Norwegian |
| NW | North-west |
| OE | Old English |
| <i>OED</i> | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2nd edition |
| ON | Old Norse |
| pl. | plural |
| QCA | Qualifications and Curriculum Authority |
| RP | Received Pronunciation |
| <i>SED</i> | <i>Survey of English Dialects</i> , ed. H. Orton et al., 4 volumes, 1962–71 |
| sg. | singular |

| | |
|------|---|
| SW | South-west |
| US | United States (of America) |
| We | Westmorland |
| WGmc | West Germanic |
| WS | West Saxon |
| Y | Yorkshire |
| < > | enclose graphic symbols (letters of the alphabet) |
| // | enclose phonemic symbols |
| [] | enclose phonetic symbols |
| : | long vowel |
| ' | Main accentual stress or pitch prominence on following syllable |

Old English graphic symbols

| | |
|-----|----------------------------------|
| <ð> | as in <i>this</i> ; <i>thorn</i> |
| <þ> | as in <i>this</i> ; <i>thorn</i> |

Phonemic symbols

| | |
|------|--|
| /ɪ/ | as in RP <i>hit</i> |
| /i:/ | as in RP <i>heat</i> |
| /e/ | as in RP <i>hen</i> (Cardinal Vowel no.2, front mid-close) |
| /e:/ | Cardinal Vowel no. 2 (lengthened) |
| /ɛ/ | Cardinal Vowel no. 3 (front mid-open) |
| /ɛ:/ | Cardinal Vowel no. 3 (lengthened) |
| /ɜ/ | Cardinal Vowel no. 3 (central) |
| /ə/ | as in RP <i>vanilla</i> |
| /ɜ:/ | as in RP <i>bird</i> |
| /æ/ | as in conservative RP <i>bat</i> |
| /a/ | as in German <i>Mann</i> (Cardinal Vowel no. 4) |
| /a:/ | Cardinal Vowel no. 4. (lengthened) |

| | |
|------|---|
| /ɑ:/ | as in RP <u>part</u> |
| /ɒ/ | as in RP <u>dog</u> |
| /ɔ:/ | as in RP <u>paw</u> |
| /u:/ | as in RP <u>food</u> |
| /ʊ/ | as in RP <u>sugar</u> |
| /ʌ/ | as in RP <u>bud</u> |
| /aɪ/ | as in RP <u>night</u> |
| /eɪ/ | as in RP <u>day</u> |
| /ɔɪ/ | as in RP <u>boy</u> |
| /aʊ/ | as in RP <u>house</u> |
| /əʊ/ | as in RP <u>road</u> |
| /o:/ | Cardinal Vowel no. 7 (lengthened) |
| /ø:/ | rounded Cardinal Vowel no. 2 (lengthened) |
| /ɪə/ | as in RP <u>ear</u> |
| /ɛə/ | as in RP <u>care</u> |
| /ʊə/ | as in RP <u>tour</u> |
| /p/ | as in RP <u>pin</u> |
| /b/ | as in RP <u>bin</u> |
| /t/ | as in RP <u>tin</u> |
| /d/ | as in RP <u>din</u> |
| /k/ | as in RP <u>kin</u> |
| /g/ | as in RP <u>gun</u> |
| /x/ | voiceless velar fricative |
| /s/ | as in RP <u>sin</u> |
| /z/ | as in RP <u>zoo</u> |
| /θ/ | as in RP <u>thin</u> |
| /ð/ | as in RP <u>this</u> |
| /f/ | as in RP <u>fin</u> |
| /v/ | as in RP <u>vine</u> |
| /ʃ/ | as in RP <u>shin</u> |
| /ʒ/ | as in RP <u>genre</u> |
| /tʃ/ | as in RP <u>chin</u> |
| /dʒ/ | as in RP <u>judge</u> |
| /h/ | as in RP <u>house</u> |
| /m/ | as in RP <u>mouse</u> |
| /n/ | as in RP <u>nice</u> |

| | |
|-----|---|
| /ŋ/ | as in RP <u>s</u> <u>i</u> <u>n</u> <u>g</u> <u>i</u> <u>n</u> <u>g</u> |
| /ʌ/ | as in RP <u>l</u> <u>u</u> <u>l</u> |
| /r/ | as in RP <u>r</u> <u>o</u> <u>l</u> |
| /ʁ/ | uvular fricative |
| /j/ | as in RP <u>y</u> <u>a</u> <u>w</u> <u>n</u> |
| /w/ | as in RP <u>w</u> <u>i</u> <u>n</u> |
| /ʍ/ | voiceless labial-velar fricative |
| /ʔ/ | glottal stop or plosive |

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1 *'The North–South divide'*

1.1 Introduction: an 'alternative' history of English

Imagine a map of England upside down, as if London was not in the South-east, but 'Up North' in the far North-west, where Carlisle should be; and as if Lancaster was roughly in London's present location 'Down South', with Berwick the furthest point south. Even with the map the right way up, and Scotland included, it is hard to accept the fact that, as Cumbrian-born Melvyn Bragg has stated ([1976] 1987: 15) 'Wigton is the middle of the British Isles'. (Pearce (2000: 172 claims Dunsop Bridge in Lancashire for this same 'epicentre'.) For a rich variety of reasons, some of which will be explored in this book, the perceived centre of national gravity, so to speak, whether culturally, politically or economically, is 'Down South', particularly London and its 'Home' Counties, and this is certainly embedded in history; but one of my major aims is to upturn common conceptions of regions by changing the perspective. In focussing on the North of England and Northern English, a region and a dialect with a history that stretches far back before the Norman Conquest, the aim is also to turn upside down common conceptions of the history of the English language by inverting accepted hierarchies of influence and prestige.

By sheer coincidence this same metaphor recurs on the dust-jacket of a recent book by David Crystal, *The Stories of English* (2004). The book's avowed aim is to 'turn the history of English on its head', by placing 'regional speech and writing . . . centre stage'. Crowley (1991: 2) noted over ten years ago how the history of the English language, on the evidence of the many textbooks on the subject, has been a 'seamless narrative' which takes the story actually to be that of 'Standard' English: a metonym for the whole (see also J. Milroy 2002: 7). This is what I would term a 'funnel vision', not a 'tunnel vision' of the

development of the language, which has been continually enriched by forms of speech conveniently forgotten or marginalised. Even the four volumes of the *Cambridge History of the English Language* from the Old English period to 1997 have little to say that is not centred on the development of Standard English; nor indeed more recently Fennell (2001). It is essentially the same story that is being told over and over again. Dialects of English, conveniently subsumed under the general term 'non-standard' (and thus labelled *only* in relation to the 'standard', a point to which I shall return), are marginalised and silenced, ceasing to have any significance at all after the Middle English period. At an extreme there is the explicit comment by Burnley, but which is indeed implied in many accounts, that he 'sustains the consensus view of the development of the language through successive historical periods *to the goal of present-day standard English*' (1992b: x, my italics). Such a statement is an inheritance of similar sentiments from language study of the early twentieth century. Here is Wyld's more brutal comment (1929: 16; my italics):

Fortunately at the present time, the great majority of the English Dialects are of very little importance as representations of English speech, and for our present purpose we can afford to let them go, *except in so far as they throw light upon the growth of those forms of our language which are the main objects of our solicitude, namely the language of literature and Received Standard Spoken English.*

Further, given the historical fact that standard written English emerged out of London from the late fifteenth century; given London's influence thereafter on fashionable pronunciation with its associated notions of 'correctness'; and given the basis of 'Received Standard Spoken English' or 'Received Pronunciation' (RP) in the phoneme inventory of Southern English, there has also been a strong bias in histories of English towards both a metropolitan bias, and a southern one: what I shall term *metrocentrism* and *austrocentrism* respectively. So take these statements by Lass (1992: 32): 'English in the *normal* sense means one or more of the standard varieties spoken by educated native speakers . . . These considerations, as well as the weight

of tradition, make it *natural* for histories of English to be tilted *south-eastwards . . .*’ (my italics). For Trudgill (1999b: 13) and Crystal (2004: 217), it is the dialects in this same ‘southeast of England’ which rose to prominence, because this is where Oxford and Cambridge, as well as London, were also to be found. In the South-east? Such comments might go unnoticed, so used are we to the absence or ‘silence’ of dialects in linguistic historical accounts. We are used also to statements like, for example, ‘English does not have front rounded vowels.’ As Foulkes and Docherty (1999: 12) protest, however, this is really about Received Pronunciation, for front rounded vowels are certainly prevalent in Tyneside speech. Again at an extreme there is the strangely biased view of Zachrisson (1914: 47), which, thankfully, is no longer accepted: ‘Northern English is merely a variety of the Standard speech of the Capital. In earlier days London English was the best and purest form of English, and was therefore imitated by provincial speakers. This pure form of English has remained in the North of England.’

As it so happens, David Crystal provided an invited ‘Epilogue’ to a collection of essays on what is usefully termed ‘alternative histories’ of English edited by Trudgill and Watts (2002). This must be seen as a watershed for histories of English, which in future, as Crystal clearly recognised, can no longer provide what Trudgill and Watts describe as the same ‘system of self-perpetuating orthodox beliefs and approaches . . . passed down from one generation of readers to the next’ (2002: 1). Yet it is to be said, my own comments above notwithstanding, that while Crystal’s own work (2004) interleaves sections on regional variation in his ‘interludes’, he otherwise follows the orthodox history of English in the main. It is fitting, however, that a new millennium does appear to be signalling a change of direction in academic discourse towards a more variationist approach. For it is certainly the case, as I shall discuss further in chapter 5, that on the one hand vernaculars continue to be ‘threatened’ by Standard English but also, on the other hand, there are yet clear signs, especially in the spoken medium, that the ideological hegemony of a ‘Standard’ is being seriously undermined.

This book, then, is a contribution to the ‘Alternative History’ of the English language. So far as I know, there is no similar focussed account

of the history of a variety of English in England that is not the Standard; and certainly not of Northern English, whose ‘pedigree’ is much older. Even book-length studies of Northern English viewed synchronically are rare. One hundred years ago appeared R. J. Lloyd’s *Northern English* (1899), but a short description only of phonology. Yet Northern history and culture of itself has attracted considerable academic interest (see Musgrove 1990, Jewell 1994 and Kirk (ed.) 2000 in particular), and is the focus of such significant journals as *Northern History* and the *Northern Review*. Interestingly, however, thirty-five years ago Tomaney (1969: 64) complained about the tendency for historians to ‘reduce a complex and variegated history of English to a version of the history of the southern core’.

As I hope to reveal, the history of Northern English certainly raises interesting questions about the notion of a ‘standard language’. One important and recurring theme is that, in fact, Northern English (and its speakers) since the fifteenth century is perceived very much in relation to an Other, the prestigious Standard English, which is perceived as superior: thus, along with other vernaculars, dismissed not only as ‘non-standard’, but also therefore as ‘subordinate’: cf. the *OED*’s definition of *dialect*: ‘One of the *subordinate* forms or varieties of a language arising from local *peculiarities* of pronunciation and idiom . . .’ (my italics). Further, historically also dialects like Northern English are seen essentially as ‘sub-standard’: socially stigmatised and culturally inferior, ‘provincial’ and (in particular) ‘working class’ and ‘uncouth’. As Colls says very strongly (1998: 196–7): ‘In England, to be called a region from some metaphorical ‘centre’ is an act of patronage . . . regions are . . . used to fix a place’s relationship to power rather than geography.’ Or, as Jackson puts it, ‘To refer to a dialect is to make a political rather than a strictly linguistic judgment’ (1989: 159). For Northern English (as indeed for Cornwall English no doubt), such a biased opposition is most likely influenced by the perceived geographical periphery of the region. But in one sense, however regrettable, and however much I shall myself be trying to reclaim Northern English from what are sometimes seen as ‘post-colonial’ phenomena of marginalisation, illegitimacy or subordination, the relationship with Standard English is still part of the modern definition of Northern English,