

Brian Maidment

THE
POORHOUSE
FUGITIVES

*Self-taught poets and poetry
in Victorian Britain*

CARCANET

For Kathy and Caroline

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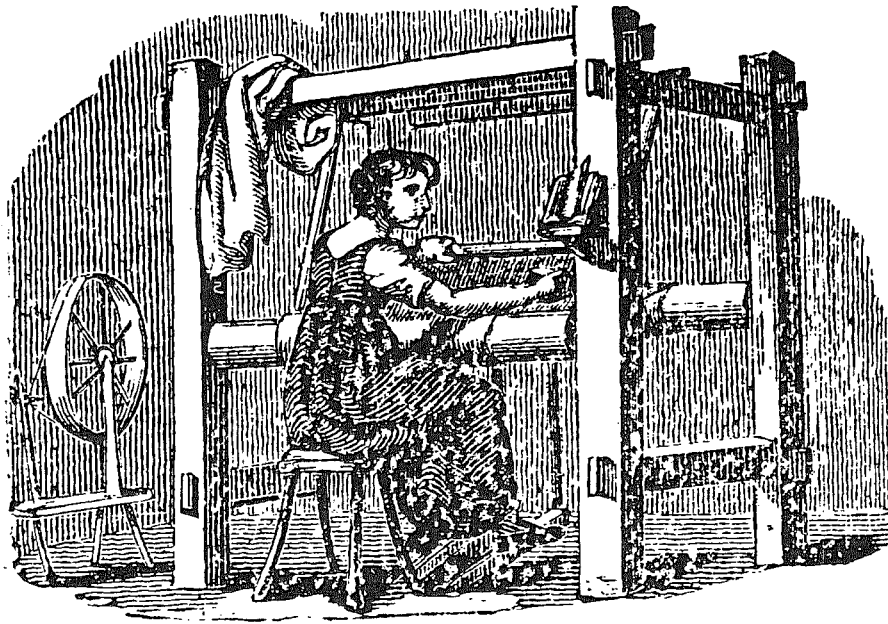
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A child handloom weaver

Martha Vicinus called her chapter on dialect writing in *The Industrial Muse* 'An Appropriate Voice', and, even if an implicit question mark is added to this title, the chapter conveys a deliberate sense of dialect writing as the most important literary context in which the working classes talked to each other and reflected back their own concerns and ideologies. The other main recent critical work on dialect writing in the industrial cities, Brian Hollingworth's *Songs of the People* (Manchester, 1977), also stresses both the link between dialect writing and the working classes and the traditional and oral nature of much dialect writing. The major critical orthodoxy in the study of nineteenth century working class literature seems to be that of the 'authenticity' of dialect as an accurate representation of the values and insights of working-class communities: that is, it is widely viewed as a direct expressive medium for industrial working class culture. While there is some substance in this view, I think that there is a need for considerable caution in accepting the view of dialect writing as an authentic and representative working-class discourse.

Dialect writing quickly became a literary convention. To be sure much dialect writing was intended to re-create the speech rhythms, inflections, and narrative methods of the speech of ordinary people, but even in the ballads and folk narratives, the development of consistent and widely used conventions in dialect writing was immediately apparent. Dialect writing came early to print, and the work of the mid-eighteenth-century writer John Collier ('Tim Bobbin') had quickly passed into communal awareness. Collier had only incidentally been a poet, but he had pioneered the notation of dialect as a literary language, and he had also established a number of stereotyped characters as dialect literary personae. By the 1830s and 1840s there was an acknowledged method of annotating dialect speech, used as confidently by Mrs Gaskell as by Edwin Waugh or Joshua Ramsbottom, a development which suggests the self-conscious nature of much dialect writing. Most dialect writers had in fact two languages — standard English and the dialect — and often moved

between the two in the course of a single story. While such bi-lingualism had certain advantages, it increasingly led to the association of dialect with certain genres and literary modes (especially comic ones) and occasions. Although dialect, it can be argued, was pre-eminently an *oral* mode up to the 1860s at least, it also had a written circulation from a very early date, a circulation which attempted to exploit its oral characteristics. By 1860, however, the printed culture had largely ousted the oral one, and with the development of universal education and the growth of national mass communications, the oral vigour of dialect speech, if it had ever existed, became a literary and cultural myth, widely exploited by the growth of a local market for dialect writing and entertainment in the industrial cities. In the works of Edwin Waugh and Ben Brierley, the two great Lancashire entrepreneurs of dialect writing, the dialect became inextricably associated with a mythic version of the old 'organic' rural hand-loom weaving communities of the Pennines. Clearly, the relationship between dialect as 'real speech' and dialect as a literary convention is a complex one, and all I want to do here is to remind readers that the authenticity of dialect writing as direct expression of working class values has to be evaluated in terms of the literary conventions and traditions through which it is mediated.

One way in which the 'literariness' of dialect writing is apparent is obvious from the defences of dialect offered by such writers as Ramsbottom and Brierley. Such polemics always include references to standard English authors who wrote in dialect. Burns, Dickens, and Tennyson are persistently invoked as a justification for literary endeavours in the Northern dialects. Such a comparison shows the anxiety of dialect writers — there was no reason why dialect should not have a value of its own — but it also suggests the extent to which the literariness of dialect was a constant element in its perception by Northern writers. Dickens, Burns, and Tennyson all used dialect in a very self-conscious and deliberate way — in Tennyson's case more for rhythmic and musical purposes than for any intellectual or propagandist reason — and for specific literary effects. The whole point of the sophisticated literary use of dialect was to create an implicit or explicit contrast between standard English and dialect as expressive mediums. The aim of local and self-taught dialect writing was far more serious: to use dialect as a way of articulating values, concepts, and ideologies which were not available in standard English. The constant comparison of local dialect writing with

Burns, in particular ultimately damaged the case for local writing, as it showed only the parochialism and unself-consciousness of much Lancashire and Yorkshire writing.

A further impulse towards literariness and away from orality in dialect writing was created by the middle class antiquarian interest in dialect. It was only late in the nineteenth century that the work of linguists like Max Müller gave theoretical justification for treating dialect as expressive and complex language on a par with standard English, hence making a previously antiquarian impulse to study dialect intellectually respectable. Indeed, the discovery of the evolution of languages, with its inevitable implicit assault on Greek and Latin as ideal languages, was almost as much of a shock to the Victorian mind as the evolutionary hypotheses of Darwin and others. The careful historical placing of dialect in the evolutionary processes of language, and the new high status given to variation and deviation in language as indication of growth, were not applied widely until the 1870s and 1880s, and were significant only to Barnes and Hopkins among the major Victorian poets. For the rest, medievalism and Italianate ornamentation remained the ideal, and dialect was only important for its picturesque variety and quaint inversions. The market for much dialect writing remained middle class and scholarly, among those squires and clergymen who were not afraid to admit an interest in vernacular culture and who maintained close ties with their local community. Evidence of the nature of the readership for dialect can be found in the various editions of the *Lancashire Songs* of Edwin Waugh. Widely circulated in penny pamphlets, sixpenny booklets, and reprinted in local papers, Waugh's work was also produced in an elaborate volume designed and printed at the leading London commercial printing house and available on subscription only. Harland's *Lancashire Lyrics — Modern*, too, was available in both a small and large paper edition, the latter limited to a hundred copies, and both were aimed at the libraries of local scholars and mill owners as a representative sample of local cultural progress. Of course it is not true to say that dialect writing had no popular readership, but it is important to stress that some of the factors which permitted the development of local dialect writing depended on a knowledge of literature and literary traditions outside the merely local or provincial. Dialect writing was in some respects

an aspect of literary trends and fashions throughout Britain as a whole. The market was a mixed one, and the literary conventions of dialect writing were closely related to bourgeois taste as well as to the oral and popular traditions of the industrial North.

At this point, one is entering a discussion of dialect writing and class. In many ways both dialect speech and dialect writing cut across specific class allegiances. Mill owners and navvies from the same area shared some similarities of speech and expression. I am not enough of a linguist to pursue this extremely important issue, but I think it necessary to note that dialect writing does reflect both this shared regional culture and the anxieties caused when regional allegiances cut across the wider issues raised by developing class consciousness. The movement between standard English and dialect characteristic of so many local writers reflects the contrary impulses of wanting to belong to a national culture without sacrificing local identity illustrated elsewhere in this anthology. The use, for example, of literary personae derived on the one hand from local myth and story and on the other from the European literary picaresque tradition shows the cultural ambiguity of dialect writing. Accordingly, even the most contentious critical issue concerning dialect writing — its apparent lack of political, radical, or oppositional social perspective — is not straightforward in its resolution. A certain populist idealism among contemporary scholars has led to many attempts to recognize the true voice of working-class opinion in dialect writing but the difficulty has always been to reconcile a belief in a radical, self-reliant, articulate proletariat with the quietist, domestic, and humorous modes of most dialect writing. Equally, the explanation of the nature of dialect writing which argues that the middle class controlled access to print with a thoroughness which precluded radical expression seems too simple an answer given the way in which the market for dialect literature developed. Dialect literature clearly does show the difficulties of locating ideologies through literary expression. Dialect writing is compounded out of a variety of social and literary traditions each of which is itself in complex relationship to ideas of class, and a proper study of the literary modes, language, and values of dialect writing has still to be undertaken.

It is not only for these reasons that I have chosen to exclude dialect

poetry from this anthology as a distinct category. Many dialect poems will be found in their appropriate place among the more orthodox standard English writing in earlier chapters. Clearly, some dialect writing does exemplify aspects of 'self-taught' culture which are not well illustrated in standard English writing. None the less, I have retained standard English as an important defining characteristic of the writing I have chosen to discuss in this book, and I have assumed, crudely, but with the qualifications explained in chapter 3, that the aspiration towards standard English was one of the central endeavours of self-taught writers, in early Victorian England at least. Yet I have retained this section, which comprises extracts which illustrate how dialect was understood and discussed as a literary and cultural formation in the period between 1840 and 1900. The aim is to suggest the variety of approach, perhaps even confusion, which informed the defences of the dialect in the nineteenth century. It is interesting that contemporary criticism seems equally confused about the same issue.

Elizabeth Gaskell

NORTH AND SOUTH

London, 1854–55. Serialized in Charles Dickens's weekly periodical *Household Words*. From chapter XXIX.

The following defence of dialect in terms of its expressivity in areas where standard English is inappropriate is an important foreshadowing of later, more extended, defences. Mrs Gaskell's refutation, through the narrative voice of Margaret Hale, of the charge of 'vulgarity' is part of the wider strategy of the novel in defining industrial culture not as worse than, but as different from, metropolitan society. Elsewhere, especially in *Mary Barton* (1848), Elizabeth Gaskell uses dialect speech and popular song to give authenticity to the surface texture of her accounts of working-class life in Manchester, drawing heavily on the scholarly interests of her husband William in the history and structure of the local dialects in Manchester.

'As you please. As Dixon pleases. But, Margaret, don't get to use these horrid Milton words. "Slack of work": it is a provincialism. What will Aunt Shaw say if she hears you use it on her return?'

'Oh, mamma! don't try and make a bugbear of Aunt Shaw,' said Margaret, laughing. 'Edith picked up all sorts of military slang from Captain Lennox, and Aunt Shaw never took any notice of it.'

'But yours is factory slang.'

'And if I live in a factory town, I must speak factory language when I want it. Why, mamma, I could astonish you with a great many words you never heard in your life. I don't believe you know what a knobstick is.'

'Not I, child. I only know it has a very vulgar sound; and I don't want to hear you using it.'

'Very well, dearest mother, I won't. Only I shall have to use a whole explanatory sentence instead. . . .

'Mamma is accusing me of having picked up a great deal of vulgarity since we came to Milton.'

The 'vulgarity' Margaret spoke of referred purely to the use of local words, and the expression arose out of the conversation they had just been holding. But Mr Thornton's brow darkened; and Margaret suddenly felt how her speech might be understood by him; so, in the natural sweet desire to avoid giving unnecessary pain, she forced herself to go forwards with a little greeting, and continue what she was saying, addressing herself to him expressly.

'Now, Mr Thornton, though 'knobstick' has not a very pretty sound, is it not expressive? Could I do without it, in speaking of the thing it represents? If using local words is vulgar, I was very vulgar in the Forest — was I not, mamma?'

Ab O' th' Yate (Ben Brierley)

GOOSEGRAVE PENNY READINGS

c. 1865. First published in Manchester as a penny pamphlet and then widely reprinted in magazine and book form.

Ben Brierley (1825–1896) and Edwin Waugh (1817–1890) were the two most popular dialect authors of the late nineteenth century. Both turned from periodical and pamphlet writing to professional careers as lecturers and public entertainers in an attempt to exploit the orality and communality of dialect culture in Lancashire. Unfortunately, by 1860 print had already seriously weakened the strength of the dialect tradition, and dialect writing had in general become a homely and

conventional expression of respectable working-class values. None the less, the strength of dialect writing lay in humour, and Brierley retained the ability to ridicule the pious hypocrisies of middle-class society. In this passage, basically in standard English, Brierley wittily attacks the cultural aspirations of Lancashire worthies towards a snobbish imitation of metropolitan culture. Brierley also offers an interesting description of the 'penny reading' as a form of social control.

It was time to commence proceedings. Rising like a tilted cask from his chair, the civic dignitary said —

'Ladies and Gentlemen, — On the occasion of inaugerating oor third session of penny readings, I wish it to be understood that waur gaun to be mair classical in oor selections of readings and music than we hae bin on either of the twa privous occasions. It has been remarked by many people that I hae met, that on the twa privous occasions we have had ower muckle o' the Lancashire dialect. Noo I must just tell ye that I am apoosed to a' dialucts, an mair especially the Lancasheere: an' by my ain adveighs the committee hae resoalved to have nae mair dialuctal readings given on this platform. Iverything must be in proaper Henglish, sic as is written by oor Scoatts, oor Burnsies, an oor Shakspeares; mair partecularly the first twa. The same spirit shall gueide us in the selection of the music, — nae 'Cam hame to thy childer an a'; nae 'The deil's i' this bonnet sae braw'; nor ither Lancasheere sangs o' the same ilk; but we'll hae sic classical sangs as —

Doon i' the glen by the lown o' the trees
Lies a weel-theeket bield, like a bike for the bees.

and

I coft a stane o' haselock woo'
To mak' a coat for John o' t.

(A voice — 'Dun yo' co that English?')

'We'll hae nae interrooption. The sangs are British classics an' every Briton ought to understand his ain language. (Another voice — 'Talk gradely, an' then we con understand yo'.') Weel, noo let this be understid, that if there be any mair interrooption the parties will be turned oot, as they deserve to be. D'ye understand me noo? The first part of the programme is an overture by Miss Macsarkin — the Edinbro' Quadrilles.'

His worship hereupon sat down amidst the applause of some, and strong expressions of disapprobation from others . . .

. . . It was all over. Nobody would sit on the platform after that ebullition of merriment, and we had 'God Save The Queen' at least an hour earlier than usual; but not before the rector had made the announcement that, through the behaviour of the cheaper portion of the audience, that would be the last penny reading that would ever be permitted to take place in the National School of 'Goosegrave-cum-Bumblethorpe'.

Thus was a cheap and wholesome kind of pastime brought to a close by the overweening priggishness of a class of people who refuse to attend popular entertainments, and by their non-support of such give up to the mercenary and licentious the charge of providing amusements for the multitude.

Joseph Ramsbottom

WRITING IN THE DIALECT

From *Country Words* (Manchester periodical) 15 December 1866,
104–105.

Like the Darwinian theories of biological evolution, Victorian study of language had important repercussions on intellectual life. The discovery of the Indo-European common root for many European languages gave status to what had previously been insignificant languages with negligible literary traditions. The recognition that languages 'evolved' also rendered spoken English — and hence dialect — central to the language. Defences of the dialect as a literary medium, especially among ordinary people, were thus given a new status furthered by the continuing interest of such poets as Hogg, Scott, Tennyson, Hardy, and Barnes. Celebration of the dialect as part of the English literary heritage began to appear widely in the periodical literature of the 1860s and 1870s — a typical example is J. W. Hales's 'English Dialects' in *Good Words* (1 August 1867, 557–561). Ramsbottom's cogent article is especially interesting as the author was himself an accomplished dialect writer whose volume *Phases of Distress* (Manchester 1864) had offered a working class perspective on the Cotton Famine. *Country Words* addressed both middle- and working-class readers and published, as well as Ramsbottom's verse, other articles on the evolution of dialect by 'Jonathan Oldbuck' (John Harland). Ramsbottom's defence of the

dialect here is not in terms of its historical authenticity, however, but rather through its cultural value as an expressive medium for ordinary people.

There is a strong feeling, freely expressed, amongst a great body of educated people about us, that dialectal writing ought to be discontinued. It is contended that all *good* things can be as well said, and with better effect, in pure English; that where it is most fitly introduced, it gives prominence chiefly to low tastes and worse desires, and, therefore, it is a waste of time to read it . . . we submit that there may be and are cases in which the dialect is an appropriate, if not the best form of language an author can use to say what he has got to say effectively. . . .

In almost every village there is a stock of well-known songs and stories in dialect, of various qualities, the best of which have seldom risen to the dignity of being printed, even on a broadsheet; yet they maintain their hold on the minds and in the hearts of our villagers, by whom the songs of our greatest singers are altogether uncared for, and almost unknown; and with whom even the popular street lyrics of our large towns obtain only a transient resting place before they pass away into obscurity. But our dialectal songs and stories present themselves in the old form, full of reminiscences of the olden time. The old expressions get ready access to the feelings, and find a permanent place in the heart and memory, with the cherished ones already existing. We do not know either, as someone has said, 'it is better to write the songs of the people than make the laws;' but we are strong believers in the power of songs for good and evil. And we have little doubt that the singer has greatest influence, and is most loved by the people, who, avoiding all elaborate forms of expression and high flights of sentiment, comes to them in their own simple way, and, with their own homely phrases, weaves his songs, as it were, with a musical thread into portions of their everyday life.

. . . None but those who have lived it, or lived with it, and are able to describe that which they have seen, can show us the life of an honest, striving poor man, with a large family and an aspiring soul. Among other things, this has yet to be done; and the dialect should enter largely into the means of doing it, in order that our poor brethren may feel its full force, and draw the encouragement they so much need from the contemplation of commendable examples of silent heroism.

The over-anxiety of our friends for the purity, strength, and beauty of the English language makes them unjust. For when they are frowning down the dialect; when they are attacking its use by open speech or covert sneer, or in any other way, they are literally 'stoning the prophets'. The custom of writing in local dialects is an old one; and the reason, perhaps, that we have more of it today than hitherto, is that there is more to be said of, and for, our country populations; that they have more to say for themselves; that the great and hitherto dumb portion of our brethren has found a voice; and, rude and uncouth though it be, it is better, rather than attempt to stifle that we should try to understand it. . . .

In conclusion let us say, that though we are at variance with our friends on this matter, we honour them for their love of the English tongue. Yet we regard it as no sickly nursling, requiring summer weather and tender care at their hands; but rather in the condition of rough, robust, and vigorous youth, fond of forcing its own way, and capable of fighting its own battles. Therefore is their immoderate zeal uncalled for. By its own innate strength it is spreading itself all over the earth, striking, as it were, deep root in every land. It will, doubtless, become the speech of millions to whom the existence of our dialects will never be known. Yet these dialects will continue to be written so long as they are spoken; and while their homely phrases are the substances of our children's songs, the echoes of our mothers' voices, shall they be welcomed to our lowly hearth.

Ben Brierley

THE LANCASHIRE DIALECT

From an editorial in *Ben Brierley's Journal* (Manchester),
December 1871, 308.

The passages already cited from Brierley and Ramsbottom have touched upon the association in the middle-class mind between dialect culture and vulgarity. Such moral and social censure of local speech is met head on by Brierley in his own magazine, which was the most long-lasting and successful of the magazines published in Victorian Manchester. But in spite of his earlier attacks on the unjustified moral censure of dialect entertainments, and the dignity and good sense of Ramsbottom's article, Brierley here concedes the partial justice of

such attacks, and chooses to defend the dialect as a morally refining force within local culture. The result is rather half-hearted, and Brierley, himself writing in standard English of editorial purity and refinement, seems anxiously uncertain of his readers' expectations and affiliations.

A correspondent has called our attention to an article which recently appeared in a local weekly contemporary, and which contains some rather severe strictures on what the writer is pleased to call the 'Lancashire Dialect'. As the circulation of the journal alluded to may not be such . . . as to carry its influence in quarters where it ought to be felt, we take the opportunity of giving a portion of the article . . .

In our opinion it behoves all classes in this great and important county to do all that they possibly can, both by example and precept, towards the abolition of a dialect as boorish and uncouth as can well be imagined. We have heard of, but have never been able to discover, an alleged beauty and rhythm about true 'Lancashire' which may indeed be perceptible to the native though it may be far beyond the ken of the uninitiated. There can be no good object to serve in thus keeping alive a mere relic of barbarism which sooner or later must disappear. They who use or encourage the use of Lancashire dialect are doing all in their power to perpetuate a system at variance with social, moral and political progress, though happily their opposition to the march of intellect is as futile in effect as it is mischievous in purpose. We hope yet to see the day when the 'Lancashire Dialect' will be a thing of the past, and when pure and refined English shall alone be spoken in the County Palatine.

We readily accord our concurrence in these remarks; and if the writer had watched the progress of the *Journal*, and understood the secret of its mission, he would have seen that we were quite alive to the necessities of the age. Since our commencement we have been gradually refining the tone of what some people choose to call the dialect, but which is simply the language in which a humble Lancashire operative would speak when endeavouring to express his thoughts and feelings in the most natural and forcible manner. In adopting this course we have only been imitating, in our own humble way, the example set by many writers who have gone before. Neither

Burns, Scott, Ramsay, Dickens, Lover, nor even Tennyson (we could name a host of others) ever thought of putting into the mouths of their humbler characters the language spoken by a Cambridge scholar. They made them speak in their natural language, which may be called either a dialect or English very much broken up and ground down. And yet who dislikes these creations, or finds fault with their creators for their being such? . . .

Our object in making use of the humbler method of speech has been to get at a stratum of society to which no other class of journal can carry so potent an influence, and by degrees lift our readers out of their present 'barbarism' and lead them to the pursuit of a higher class of literature. When we have succeeded in that we shall have accomplished a greater good than if we had merely entered upon the occupation of a literary yard-dog, or addressed ourselves to the fashionable novel-reading public.

George Milner

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON THE DIALECT OF LANCASHIRE CONSIDERED AS A VEHICLE FOR POETRY

From *Poems and Songs* by Edwin Waugh (Manchester,
John Heywood, c. 1895).

Milner's essay is a sophisticated late synthesis of previous arguments about the vernacular as an expressive medium, bringing together an antiquarian interest in philology with a strong local pride. Milner's stress on the scholarly and literary respectability of dialect reveals the persistent anxiety of its defence.

In the biographical and critical Introduction prefixed to the first volume of this edition of Waugh's Works, I have briefly alluded to the widely prevalent idea that there is some innate vulgarity in a dialectal word, and also to the equally erroneous impression that the Lancashire dialect is not capable of expressing poetic conceptions with delicacy or force. It may not be thought inappropriate, in connection with the publication of a volume which depends for much of its attraction upon the poetic use of dialect, to consider

more fully what is the real nature of folk speech, and how far the particular dialect of Lancashire, for instance, lends itself to the expression of such ideas as are usually associated with the forms of verse.

Of late years, no doubt, some change has taken place in the popular view. Formerly the great majority, both of readers and of critics, were in the habit of regarding all the dialects, except the Scottish, as beneath their attention; literature, to have any influence with them, must be what was called 'polite'; all folk-speech was uncouth and vulgar — a thing to be got rid of, by the aid of the schoolmaster, with as little delay as possible — and even those who ventured, or vouchsafed, as the case might be, to use a dialect, only took it up as an instrument for the production of grotesque effects, or to cloak the poverty, perhaps the grossness, of their ideas. These opinions, however, are no longer held by educated persons. The true nature and importance of dialects having been apprehended, they have become the objects of investigation to many of the ripest scholars of our time. To study philology in a scientific spirit was to be forced back, as a necessity, upon the examination of dialects, because in them were so frequently to be found the very roots and springs of the modern literary language.

Probably most people have not realized how large an element dialectal speech is found to be in the total sum of language. . . .

We may now ask ourselves the question — What is a dialect, and how does it differ from the ordinary current speech? It will be found to consist mainly of such English words as are not of classical origin. Of course, each dialect will not contain the whole of these terms; but a person writing in any one of them would find that he could use nearly all words of Anglo-Saxon derivation without offending against the genius of provincial speech. These words may be thus sub-divided — First, those whose pronunciation does not differ from that which is usual; second, those which are pronounced in an archaic or provincial manner; third, provincial words which are common to most English dialects though differing occasionally in form; fourth, words peculiar to a particular district, and these, contrary to the general impression, will be found to be but few in number; fifth, idioms and phrases, and in these last will probably be discovered, more than elsewhere, the distinction and the Doric flavour of each dialect.

If this be a true statement of the nature of dialects it will be clear

that there can be no reason why they should not be used for the purposes of poetry. At least three poets of eminence have indeed so used them — Spenser, Burns, and Tennyson . . . The reason of this is obvious. The truest poetry requires for its expression only the simplest words; and in poetical composition the nearer we are to the roots of the language the safer we are from jarring notes and false associations. For poetry we need a *clear* medium far oftener than we require a *complex* one. . . .

Let us now, however, turn to the particular dialect of Lancashire. Has it, in the first place, a vocabulary adapted for poetical expression? I believe that it has. Look over any list of words which form the Saxon, Scandinavian, or Celtic element in English, and it will be found that there is not one word in a hundred which could not, either with slight change of pronunciation or without it, be naturalized and used in the dialect of Lancashire . . . By some curious and, as yet, only half-defined, but quite natural canon, the poet finds himself rejecting a multitude of words which in prose would be eminently the best. And these are usually the words which are not native to us — words which are foreign and complex in their nature and derivation — the very words, in fact, which a dialect, by a self-imposed law, casts out from itself as being alien to its spirit and purpose. . . .

It will be perceived that I am making large claims for the dialect. I am asking the reader to believe, not only that it offers a fair vehicle for the conveyance of essentially poetical ideas; but that it also actually exerts, in a certain direction, a restraining and purifying influence — compels the poet, in short, to choose, little as he may know it, the preferable word.

Joseph Cronshaw
LOST IN LONDON or
THE DIALECT IN DISTRESS

From *Dingle Cottage — Poems and Sketches* (Manchester, 1908),
147–155.

Joseph Cronshaw was a self-made working man who became a large merchant despite humble beginnings as a barrow boy. He continued

to live in the Manchester suburb of Ancoats, and wrote for his own pleasure in local papers and magazines, mostly in dialect. 'Lost in London' is however a standard English poem, which takes the form of a dialogue between a Lancashire author and one of his dialect books, which the author finds on a barrow in London. The following section, in which the book addresses its author, gives an interesting if sentimental account of the unifying force of dialect for a wide range of working class gatherings. Thus the orality and vigour of the dialect are stressed against the imposed Board School English. When reading this poem, it is as well to remember that Cronshaw begins another poem in *Dingle Cottage* with the line 'Am I a poet? I rather think not'.

I remember when you wrote me, with anxious thoughts and fears,
I've heard your merry ringing laugh, and seen your honest tears;
Oh, how your neighbours praised you for your genius and skill —
I remember, too, a jolly row about a printer's bill.

With what rapture I was hailed when first I left the press:
I was quoted, read, recited, oftimes in evening dress;
At bands of hope and festivals I've often taken part,
For juveniles, and elders, too, recited me by heart.

In family circles I was read when nights were dark and long;
What tears of pity I have seen at some pathetic song;
And I have heard their merry laugh at some humorous joke;
Ah, that was up in Lancashire where the dialect was spoke.

But at last came Mr Board School, who said that it was wrong
To read or write, sing or recite, in our own mother tongue;
And teaching in the Board School now was rather circumspect,
And they had made a solemn vow to kill the dialect.

My owner then grew furious; he loved my rural song,
He gloried in the dialect, he loved his mother tongue;
He oft would take and read me when journeying by rail,
While others thought me out of date, and said that I was stale . . .