

Carola Croll

Literary Yorkshire
A Genre Study

Heinz Kosok, Heinz Rölleke, Michael Scheffel (Hg.)

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towards Top Withens (ccroll 2010)

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Preface

As my work on 'Literary Yorkshire' draws to a conclusion and the final revisions and additions to the finished book are made, I am pondering the question whether I am ready to let go. Since handing in the finished thesis on April 1st 2015 I have constantly come across new discoveries. My favourite by far was the somewhat far-fetched – yet ever so appealing – connection of Lewis Carroll and Yorkshire. Stephen McClarence writes for *The Telegraph* about his research for places to celebrate the 150th anniversary of *Alice in Wonderland* and surprisingly names Whitby as one of them. This intrigued me as Whitby is my favourite Yorkshire destination. It is close to the moors, has deliciously dangerous cliffs high over the sea, a graveyard full of story-telling tombstones, and a ruined abbey. Besides its topographical attractions, it also boasts literary associations with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers*. Lastly, James Cook, who took sail from Whitby, is a connection not only to my days as an anthropology student, but also to my alma mater Göttingen. So, I was delighted to learn that one more of my favourite authors, Lewis Carroll, had apparently also been there and been inspired to write. As if this was not enough, I then read in the August 2015 edition of the *Dalesman* that Carroll actually grew up in Croft-on-Tees in North Yorkshire, which effectively makes him a Yorkshireman and Yorkshire author as well.

Of course, 2016 also marks the beginning of the Brontë 200 celebrations that will last the next five years, celebrating the bicentenaries of the births of Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne Brontë and the year the family moved to Haworth. The greatly anticipated BBC film *To Walk Invisible* will tell the story of the family. The filmmakers created an elaborate set when they re-built the Brontë parsonage up on the moors, only to demolish it after filming had concluded. Publications about every little detail of the Brontës have started to appear and I could collect information and write about the Brontë family forever.

Lastly, in May 2016, fracking was sanctioned on the North Yorkshire Moors. This was a decision that will influence the development of Yorkshire in the years to come and also leave its mark on the tourist and literary value of one of the most beautiful areas in Britain. So, too, will the outcome of the EU Referendum on June 23rd 2016. However, it is up to future writers and scholars to make of this what they will. As long as Yorkshire evolves, as long as Yorkshire authors are celebrated, and as long as Yorkshire nature is changed yet again, the Yorkshire novel will continue to be and 'Literary Yorkshire' will continue to develop. It will be exciting to see where it will take us and I will simply continue with the fun part of writing a literary guidebook to this wonderful and diverse country in the hope of convincing many more people that it is worth a visit, whether they need a passport or not.

I would like to thank the following people:

Prof. Dr. Brigitte Glaser, for suggesting that I look up North to find a place for my literary geography study in the first place, for her constant feedback, for reading parts of this book again and again, and especially for patiently bearing with me through my slow learning process of English punctuation and prepositions.

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Göttingen, July 2016

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1. Introduction

Yorkshire is a state of mind. (Machin 17)

Yorkshire lies in the northern half of England and spreads almost across the entire width of the island. It is England's largest region and can be subdivided into four parts, which are most commonly named: East, West, North, and South Yorkshire. Despite offering a broad variety of cultural, industrial, and natural attractions, each of these four parts can roughly be described in a few words. East Yorkshire has a coastline and the wide farming fields of the Yorkshire Wolds; it is also referred to as the East Riding¹ of Yorkshire. West Yorkshire is the most industrialised area of Yorkshire, boasting a great number of factories and an extensive industrial history. South Yorkshire is industrial as well, but in a different manner, with many mining areas and a large number of mining towns. North Yorkshire is often seen as the natural heart of Yorkshire. Its main natural attractions are the national parks of the Yorkshire Dales in the west and the North Yorkshire Moors expanding east all the way to the coast. "It has been said in respect to its Scenery [sic!] that Yorkshire is an epitome of England" (Kendall and Wroot v). The diversity of Yorkshire gives it a special charm and makes it attractive to study from various academic perspectives. Its character is representative of the English landscape and makes it an approachable and popular setting for novels:

The beauty of the Yorkshire landscape has inspired some of the most prominent writings of our time and Yorkshire literature is infused with wild and beautiful surroundings. Let your imagination run free and follow in the footsteps of Yorkshire's greats. (Welcome to Yorkshire: Literary Yorkshire)

The *Welcome to Yorkshire* project² introduces the topic of Yorkshire's rich literary history and proves that Yorkshire fiction is worth studying. In recent years and quite possibly due to the *Welcome to Yorkshire* project, Yorkshire has been placed on the map of modern tourism. In 2013 Yorkshire won the World Travel Award for the top European destination (Rushby). It was named "one of the top places in the world to visit in 2014 in a new travel booklet" (BBC: Lonely Planet) by Lonely Planet. Hull was named City of Culture 2017 (Taylor). York has been voted the "safest place to visit in the world" (Clarke-Billings) in March 2015. However, the biggest event took place in 2014, when

-
- 1 The older geographical term riding is no longer commonly used in Great Britain. It was used to classify the three parts of Yorkshire up until 1974, when Yorkshire was divided into four parts and the term riding, pertaining to a third of something, was no longer appropriate to be used. *Riding* is derived from the Danish word *thrydding*, which means a third (Bentley 1965, 148).
 - 2 The project was launched in 2009 and its main goal is the promotion of Yorkshire as an internationally recognised brand: "It can also achieve a strong message that Yorkshire is a confident and united place, ready and willing to do business with the rest of the UK and around the globe" (Welcome to Yorkshire. 5 years). Literary Tourism is one of the aspects discussed on the project's website.

the 'Tour de France' made its 'Grand Départ' from Yorkshire.³ Local MP Jason McCartney claimed that "the Tour coming to Yorkshire is the biggest thing to happen [...] since the Industrial Revolution" (Moore); a statement which is full of Yorkshire pride and which seems to lead into a new direction of world-wide Yorkshire fame. Ever since the Tour started in Yorkshire, the country has received increased media attention and coverage from around the world, leading to a Hollywood discovery of "Yorkshire's picturesque winding roads, hills and streets" (Sherwin) as perfect settings.

In 1960 Phyllis Bentley⁴ held a lecture on *Yorkshire and the Novelist*, which was later published as an article. She asked:

Why has Yorkshire in the present, why had she in the past, so many novelists? What has Yorkshire to offer, that is to say, which causes writers of fiction to flourish so abundantly within her borders? How have they handled the material available? What rank does this Yorkshire product hold in English literature? Is there any especial quality, any especial characteristic, which marks all their writing? (Bentley 1965, 145-146).

These questions are relevant to any study of Yorkshire Literature, and Norman Dennis, who wrote on coal mining in Yorkshire, has a rather simplistic answer that can also be applied to literary studies: "Yorkshire might be described as a microcosm of England in that every type of region in the country from remote hill farms to industrial towns is represented" (11). Yorkshire is recognisable. Bentley agreed and in her lecture described Yorkshire as being "a representative county in the rationale behind regional writing" (Wade 107). The region had at that time 182 published writers who were "Yorkshire born and bred" (Bentley 1965, 145). Bentley goes on to note how special Yorkshire is as a real place, as well as an imaginative construct:

The northern climate, the strong winds blowing in from the North Sea, the Pennine Hills, the distance from the centre of the country's culture, the drop of Danish Blood [...], the centuries-long practice of industry [...] – some or all of these factors have combined to produce a character which is [...] sturdy and independent, and at once blunt and reserved. (149)

Yorkshire is home to a great variety of authors who manage to capture the essence of the land and the changes Yorkshire experienced throughout the past 200 years. With a growing interest in regional character and county⁵ identity, Yorkshire was "waiting to be put on the literary map" (Wade 28) during the 19th century.

-
- 3 The 'Grand Départ' was very popular and it was decided to start Yorkshire's own and smaller version, the 'Tour de Yorkshire', which had its debut in 2015.
 - 4 Phyllis Bentley is important for my thesis for three reasons: Firstly, she is the first scholar to discuss the regional novel. Secondly, she shows great interest in Literary Yorkshire. Thirdly, she is a regional and, more important, a Yorkshire writer herself. In her autobiography she describes how her native country in the West Riding influenced and shaped her as a writer (Bentley 1962, 161-162).
 - 5 I will go on to refer to Yorkshire as region or country, instead of using the more common county for the simple reason that I feel the distinct identity of Yorkshire makes it merit the term country. Both terms have also been used interchangeably in literature on and about Yorkshire.

It is useful to reflect at this point on why Yorkshire should be so fascinating to the Victorians. The evidence points to the fact that it was an area waiting to be put on the literary map. Emily Brontë obviously extended her imaginings of the inhabitants of her childhood world of Gondal into her Yorkshiremen, and *Wuthering Heights* effectively juxtaposes the mythic Heathcliff (not too far from the youthful Julius Brenzaida of Gondal) with such preaching, life-denying souls as Joseph. (28)

Yorkshire shows great potential for a study from a literary perspective as it offers a great variety of literature to choose from.

1.1 Selected Primary Works

Regional literature is abundant and "[t]he obvious problem confronting any writer on English regional fiction arises from the daunting amount of material available" (Keith vii). I will start out with the assumption that the Brontë sisters began a tradition of 'Literary Yorkshire' and are also very likely to be the first regional writers in England. It is then important to determine which other authors will be discussed in order to depict a representative literary history of Yorkshire. I decided to leave out works published before 1800 and therefore before the Brontës, as "Yorkshire had [then still] been one of the forgotten regions, still an unmeasured, featureless border, as it had been in the Tudor period" (Wade 31). While working on this thesis, I came upon a large number of works that can be seen as Yorkshire. In order to keep this thesis concise, I decided to mainly focus on novels and only occasionally, if necessary, to elaborate on the context and discuss other forms of writing, art, and film. However, not all Yorkshire novels can be discussed and it is not the goal of my work to include all of Yorkshire fiction. This thesis is the result of my analysis of the origins and inter-related influences in the selected works. I will discuss the emergence of a construct I will call 'Literary Yorkshire'. Each of the five main chapters will analyse novels which represent images of landscape and Yorkshire identity in a certain context. I chose these spatial moments⁶ according to their importance in the wider context of understanding national and regional identity and the forming of 'Literary Yorkshire'. Dave Russell, author of *Looking North* (2004), argues that regionalism in novels often went alongside "moments of economic dislocation and consequent political response" (81), such as the 'Industrial Revolution', World War I and II, or Thatcherism. This leads to the conclusion that the need to establish a secure background was higher in times of uncertainty. When "familiar and psychological 'landscapes'" (81) are changing, a stable

I will also use Yorkshire as a substantive as well as an adjective. For example: 'I am from Yorkshire' and 'I am Yorkshire', similar to 'I am from England' and 'I am English'.

6 I am aware that the term moment implies time; and even though I am discussing spatiality and the geographical, rather than the temporal, aspects of Yorkshire, I have chosen the term moment to suggest the idea of a spatial capsule, which is captured in the respective works of fiction. These capsules or moments represent Yorkshire as seen and processed by each author.

setting is needed to give the novels, the characters, and the readers a firm place to hold on to.

1.2 Theory and Methods

Alastair Fowler writes: "Every work of literature belongs to at least one genre" (20). But a text can be read in many ways and it can also be understood within the context of many genres, as Heather Dubrow cunningly proves when she asks her readers to read the same passage twice, both times assuming it to be the first paragraph of a novel written in a different narrative genre. Narrative elements obtain a different meaning if read within a different generic context (Dubrow 1-3). So why would we still consider applying the term genre and using it in literary studies? The notion of genre has undergone radical changes (Duff 1-2), which I will introduce shortly before I explain that I still find the term genre to be applicable and necessary for literary studies. I will concentrate on the following questions: How is a genre defined? How did the concept of genre change? And how can we make use of genre theory in contemporary literary studies?

My thesis will provide a case study that explains and defines the Yorkshire novel as part of the 'generic family' of the regional novel. After defining the origin and background of the term genre, I will take a look at the development of genre theory and how it can be used to study existing genres, but also to develop and define new genres. As stated, the term genre does not come without complications. It has been around for too long and used in too many contexts to remain an easily applicable concept. A simple and clear-cut definition remains somewhat elusive and therefore makes it essential to take a closer look at several definitions before actually working with genre theory.

1.2.1 Definitions

When talking about genres, the problematic use of the term and the difficulties of applying it need to be discussed. Genre is often used in a very broad sense and thus definitions easily lose their precision. To begin with, the definition of genre in *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* is fairly simple: "**genre** French noun, current English since 1816 (OED), used to describe a style or type of painting, book or film (such as FILM NOIR) characterised by a specific form, structure or thematic content" (Macey 158). Macey goes on to discuss the development of the genre, its origin in Aristotle's *Poetics*, and the primary division into three kinds: epic, lyric, dramatic. Many of our modern interpretations and readings of texts still take their lead from this Aristotelian model (Guerin 29). As far as genre definitions go, Heather Dubrow's approach is more detailed than standard dictionary explanations. She begins by stating:

As its etymological roots in the Latin word *genus* (kind) would suggest, 'genre' basically alludes to literary types and hence theoretically could be applied to lyric, tragedy, the novel, the sonnet, drawing-room comedy and so on. But the obvious distinctions be-