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## **Introduction: Print Culture, Agency, Regionality**

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### **Keywords**

Thomas Gent, regionality, regional, agency, print culture, print trade, book trade.

### **Abstract**

The introduction explains the central claims of the book: print trade professionals exerted agency to articulate regional identity in the hand press period; they also shaped the development of the regional book and print trades. Part of this book's intent is a realignment of the dominant terminology used to discuss the book and print trades outside of London, away from the 'provincial' and towards the 'regional'. The introduction therefore establishes the historical context for the essays that follow, and sets out the implications of the terminology. It then goes on to define the book's key concepts - regionality, and agency – before locating them in the existing scholarship. Finally, it summarises the individual essays.

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### **Figure 1.1 TO APPEAR ON PAGE FACING FIRST PAGE OF INTRO**

This woodcut, which appears in a handful of books printed by Thomas Gent in York during the mid-eighteenth century, speaks eloquently to the concerns of *Print Culture, Agency, and Regionality in the Hand Press Period* (see figure 1.1). It depicts, as its subscription explains,

‘the Printing-Office in Coffee-Yard, YORK’. This particular premises was occupied by a succession of related printing families and was home to Gent’s business from 1724-42. When Gent, a printer and publisher who also authored many historical works about the region, included the woodcut in his *The Antient and Modern History of the Loyal Town of Rippon* (1733), he described the activities of the Coffee Yard press, ‘where that useful ART, to which the Sons of Learning are infinitely oblig’d, is perform’d after a neat Manner’ (Gent 1733).<sup>1</sup> One of its earliest appearances, however, is in a 1728 Latin and English facing page translation of Eutropius, *Eutropii Historiæ Romanæ Breviarium*, printed by Gent and written by (as the title page explains), John Clarke, ‘Master of the Publick Grammar-School in Hull’. The image is located on the closing page, immediately after a catalogue of Clarke’s other books. This positioning sets the bibliographic tone for several of the woodcut’s later instantiations; it characteristically serves an advertising function and appears in works that have strong associations with the North of England. In Gent’s history of Ripon its use is typical, as it is found at the top of a short list of books which are ‘Sold at the Printing-Office’. The list includes Gent’s other histories of York and Hull (which he published in 1730 and 1735 respectively), and a mathematical work by ‘Thomas Baxter, Master of a Private-School at Crathory CLEAVELAND, Yorkshire’. These works either directly praise and promote the features of the area, or imply its excellence by mentioning local details. The woodcut is bibliographically connected to announcements about the literary and typographic strengths of Northern England.

The detail of the woodcut contributes to this effect. In the subscription, Gent joins the chorus of early modern voices who proclaim printing to be an ‘ART’ that strongly supports

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<sup>1</sup> The section of this book that the woodcut is in has no pagination, but it is on the first page of the backmatter. Rachel Stenner discusses Gent in chapter three.

‘the Sons of Learning’. The civility of his phrasing – the Sons are ‘infinitely oblig’d’ to printing - presents the relationship as one of courteous, unceasing, dependency. Especially noteworthy is Gent’s association of this rhetoric not only with the city of York, but with his office in Coffee Yard, something the colophon makes even more precise when it gives his address, ‘over-against the Star in Stone-Gate’. Readers are to infer that in this place, printing of the most reliable sort takes place, ‘after a neat Manner’. The woodcut’s presentational aesthetics amplify Gent’s celebratory tone. The double border pictures a cornucopia which makes the foundation for the ornate inner frame; the twisting curls visually symbolise fertility, growth, and abundance, connoting the productivity of Gent’s press. Contained within the border are three inset images showing papers and writing implements. The highest place is reserved for the book itself, though the viewer must infer from the context that this codex is printed. It is also robustly bound and locked, in a manner that invokes the enticing charisma of the knowledge that books contain. The central image depicts the work of the press with two figures visible, one applying the ink to the type in the chase, the other stacking the freshly printed sheets. The viewer notices the heavy bulk of the machine but also the large windows behind it, which flood the room with light in a symbolic representation of the illumination both enjoyed and created by the ‘Sons of Learning’.<sup>2</sup> While the machinery itself spreads across the frame, it is the pressmen who are centred and whose labour is depicted in action: the image evokes the twinned technological processes and human agency that are integral to print culture. Gent’s woodcut is a striking emblem for *Print Culture, Agency, and Regionality in the Hand Press Period*. This book examines the ways that members of the regional book

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<sup>2</sup> All of this symbolism is typical of the ‘typographic imaginary’ that Stenner delineates; for discussion see Stenner 2019, 32-55.

and print trades contributed to the development and expression of regionality by exerting creative and professional agency.



### **Histories and Terms: Regionality, Agency**

The essays collected here consider the notion of regionality from two angles. They show the ways in which the print trades overtly articulated regionality, and they explore the development and characteristics of different regional trades. They thus collectively discuss print culture that is *representative of a region*, and printing that takes place *in the regions*.

Historically in the analysis of British book history, scholarly attention to the capital's dominance has perpetuated a centre/periphery model. This is despite the spatial turn in the Humanities, and the recent increase in postcolonial, indigenous, and transnational book histories.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the role of location in the canon of book historical writings, such as Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's *The Coming of the Book: the Impact of Printing 1450-1800* (1958; 1976), Adrian Johns' *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (1998), or, more recently, James Raven's *Bookscape: Geographies of Printing and Publishing in London Before 1800* (2014), the British regional trades lack sustained attention. The first intent of this book is to redress that lack. Its second aim is terminological. We advocate for a shift in the terminology that scholars use to describe the print and book trades outside London, preferring 'regional' to the widely used 'provincial'.

Before further considering this book's key concepts – regionality and agency - and their scholarship, it is essential to understand the unique ways in which the regional book and print trades developed during the hand press period. Extending from the mid-fifteenth to the early nineteenth century, this period occurred within a mutable historical context, strongly defined throughout by the legislation and institutional structures governing the trades. While records of book production in England predate the Norman Conquest, printing started relatively late; only in 1476 did William Caxton arrive on the London scene, bringing skills, equipment, and workmen from Bruges.<sup>4</sup> Caxton's printing inched its way into a thriving trade in manuscript books, that was (certainly at this early stage) mainly distributive beyond London. By 1600 the book trade was healthy in several urban centres (Barnard and Bell 2002,

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<sup>3</sup> Though see (with an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century focus) Hinks and Archer-Parré 2020.

<sup>4</sup> For more on medieval English book production see Gillespie and Wakelin 2011.



667), and, swiftly after Caxton established himself, printing businesses appeared elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Attempts were made in different parts of the country, including Oxford, St. Albans, York, Cambridge, Worcester, Canterbury, and Norwich, but these incipient organisations had little success sustaining themselves. Comparably, Andrew Pettegree finds a pattern of early growth and decline in continental Europe, but only in England did regional printing completely perish (Pettegree 2008, 114) - thanks to the tender mercies of the capital.

1557 was the first decisive moment for the English trade, as the Stationers' Company received its royal charter, restricting to London both printing, and official governance of it. From 1557 onwards, members of the Company needed a license to print any book, and in 1559 further official articles also brought the booksellers into the Stationers' control. 1566 saw the Wardens of the Company acquire unlimited power to search printers' premises, and in 1586 printing houses in London were formally limited to twenty. More seriously for the regional trades, in 1586 printing outside the capital was explicitly prohibited (except in the University towns of Oxford and Cambridge). Not content with such stifling legislation, the Company operated via finely tuned business practices that privileged the London trades, namely the 'conger system' (limiting wholesaling to a London coterie) and the trade sale (an exclusive copyright auction) (Feather 1984, 2-3). Consequently, the capital city had a stranglehold on the English trade. A marginal relaxation occurred in 1662 when the Act 'For Regulating of Printing and Printing Presses', also known as the Licensing Act, came into play. This approved printing in one city – York – but also barred unlicensed publication, in practice restricting all other commercial printing to London (Feather 1984, 1). Famously and fatefully, the 1662 Licensing Act was allowed to lapse in 1695, completely lifting restrictions on the location of the press. One of the earliest developments after 1695 was the nimble and

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<sup>5</sup> On the distribution of London books during this period, see Capp 2013.

expansive growth of regional newspaper printing. The first local newspaper emerged in 1702; by 1723 there were 24, in 1805 over 100 (Black 1990, 63). During the course of the eighteenth century, newspaper proprietors (who were often print trade professionals from the middling rank) would form a co-operative organisation that had significant national economic and political power born of its members' hefty influence at regional level (Gardner 2016, 45-6). The operating conditions for the book and print trades as a whole thus changed dramatically over the time span of this volume.

While John Hinks posits that the historical conditions that privileged London have also governed the scholarship (Hinks 2020), there is a fundamental problem with the concept of the 'provincial trades'. The central, indispensable, piece of scholarship in this area is John Feather's *The Provincial Book Trade in Eighteenth-Century England* (1985) which, some decades ago, fixed the current terminology.<sup>6</sup> 'Provincial' is a suitable adjective to describe matters 'relating to an English county', but it promotes the centre/periphery model, setting those counties in an implied, and unfavourable, comparison to a centre that is elsewhere ('provincial, adj. and n.', *OED*, 2.a). Since the early eighteenth century, 'provincial' has indicated 'parochial or narrow-minded; lacking in education, culture, or sophistication'. No less an authority than Samuel Johnson defines it in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) as 'rude, unpolished' (*OED*, 6). As Feather notes, and as more recent critics have emphasised, the terminology does this area of study no favours (Feather 1984, 1). Andrew Hobbs, for example, writes that the 'provincial press is misunderstood by many scholars. It is seen as an inferior, scaled-down version of the London press; it is dismissed because it was not produced, or read, by powerful people, and because local topics are to be avoided if one

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<sup>6</sup> Feather builds on Pollard 1985, and Wiles 1976.



wants to say something significant' (Hobbs 2018, 21).<sup>7</sup> For all of these reasons, this book proposes that 'regional' is a favourable term for the book and print trades outside London.<sup>8</sup>

Taking a recent political definition, the idea of the regional indicates both a reaction to globalisation and homogenisation (to the dominance of the 'centre'), and a malleable spatial approach to geographical and cultural clusters. Louise Fawcett finds that, globally, regions and nations are partially comparable 'in the sense of an imagined community: states or peoples held together by common experience and identity, custom and practice' (Fawcett 2004, 432). Fawcett is alluding here to Benedict Anderson's idea of the imagined communities forged by print capitalism (and we discuss this idea below). She formulates the ways that the regional indicates a bounded commonality of experience and practice. However, regions are not coterminous with states: 'they may comprise substate as well as supstate and trans-state units, offering different modalities of organization and collaboration' (Fawcett 2004, 432). The term 'region' reorients thinking towards the relationship between areas (say, Yorkshire and the Midlands), that is not defined by those regions' relationship with any implicitly overseeing place defined as the 'centre'. Such a reorientation counters what Robert Barrett describes as the persistent elision of the regional (Barrett 2019, 14) in medieval and, we might add, early modern studies.<sup>9</sup> From an American Studies perspective, Timothy

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Beavan 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Cawood and Peters 2019, a recent study that shares our study's emphasis on the 'regional identity of the provincial press' (6), but whose title, *Print, Politics, and the Provincial Press in Modern Britain* retains the idea of provinciality.

<sup>9</sup> As is suggested by the career of the Irish printer Gent, whose professional life spanned Dublin, London, and York, a related perspective useful for book and print trade history is the

Mahoney and Wendy Katz politicise the term further still: ‘the concept of a region itself [...] an observable uniformity of certain cultural attitudes, behaviours, and artefacts in a socially and naturally defined place and time—is itself an assertion of power’ (Mahoney and Katz 2009, xi). In this book we define a region as a loose, non-national, area of networked settlements, of varying size and population density

From the considerations of regionality undertaken in the essays collected here, two overriding observations are clear. Firstly, it is no straightforward task to disarticulate constructions of regionality in an abstract sense from qualitative statements about a particular region. Secondly, where overt articulations of regionality occur, the fact that a text describes the characteristics or features of a region does not mean that they are accurate or ‘true’ in any verifiable sense. This collection therefore differs from Barrett’s comparable formulation of ‘local identity’ as ‘always more than an epiphenomenon of cultural nostalgia. It has a material basis in distinct institutions and practices’ (Barrett 2009, 4). In fact, the perceived cultural, topographical, or social characteristics of any one place, and therefore a perceived sense of what is regional, may offer provocative grounds for discussion because they show residents (or observers) of a region describing their sense of it. Some of the essays use their case studies to demonstrate a region’s ‘awareness of itself as a community’ (Barrett 2009, 1); they may show, for example, how the agency of the print trade foregrounds particular regional qualities, or how a particular printing activity develops a flavour that is distinct to that region. The essays collectively suggest that print trade professionals were active in crafting narratives about their regions, aimed at readers both in the regions and beyond, and in promoting the interests of those regions in diverse ways. At the same time, few of the case studies feature

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archipelagic. This approach frames the United Kingdom and Ireland not as a group of nations, but as the Atlantic Archipelago (see Schwyzer and Meador 2004).

agents oriented only to their regions. As David Atkinson demonstrates for cheap print in Northumbria, its production, circulation, and consumption was not predominantly local. And, Alex Benchimol finds, regional centres can have transnational orientations that eclipse the national. Moreover, as the example of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish trade shows (discussed here by Rebecca Emmett), regional and national interests can, in fact, compete in ways that favour hegemony.

Alongside their consideration of regionality, several of our contributors analyse what might be called the typical forms of print trade agency: typographic or bibliographic, commercial, cultural.<sup>10</sup> These forms of agency are operative from the level of the letters on the page to more expansive abstract spaces. James Misson and David Osbaldestin consider the ways that typographic and design choices - made in the printing house rather than authorially - convey cultural and political messages. Commercial decisions in the quotidian running of or participation in a business, such as those analysed the chapters by Sarah Griffin and Kaley Kramer, and by Helen Williams, form the next level of print trade agency. As Williams' study of Anne Fisher demonstrates, however, such agency is often gendered. Unlike many female print trade professionals, Fisher was not a widow but was active in partnership with her husband in the operations of Slack and Co. Fisher also, like other figures discussed in the volume, occupied the broadest level of print trade agency: cultural agency. As the author of her grammatical, educational, and ephemeral publications, her writerly choices are interventions in public discourse designed to produce a particular cultural effect. If typographic or bibliographic, commercial, and cultural modes are the typical manifestations of agency in the print trade, certain figures exerted a more overtly political and social mode, as Adam James Smith's and Benchimol's chapters show. Benchimol's analysis of John

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<sup>10</sup> We theorise the concept of agency below.

Mennons in Glasgow and John Gore in Liverpool demonstrates the ways that print trade professionals actively encouraged new forms of regional identity among civic and commercial elites. The leading coteries of these cities strategically deployed printed news to serve new institutional structures of commerce. Yet, Emmett's analysis of royal patronage counters the picture of a trade able to exert agency on multiple levels. Printers did not always find a happy relationship with institutional power, and in formal relationships could see their decision-making and independence severely curtailed – sometimes with deleterious effect. Despite the differences in scale and scope, print trade agency characteristically centres on the reproduction and management of information.<sup>11</sup>

### **Scholarly Positions**

In all of these areas – the history of the regional trades, the idea of regionality itself, and print trade agency – this book enters a live debate. Interest in the regional trades has only recently started to move beyond what Peter Isaac describes as the ‘unspoken belief that everything memorable in the book trade happens in the “golden triangle” of London, Oxford, and Cambridge’ (Isaac 2001, 440).<sup>12</sup> Studies of the regional trades typically take the shape of statistical analyses, such as David Stoker's (1985) work on imprints in the English Short Title Catalogue; sometimes dated but still significant research about individuals or regions, such as Robert Davies' foundational *Memoir of the York Press* (1868); and broader analyses that begin to theorise. Feather's meticulous and indispensable study, for instance, reveals the ways

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Victoria Gardner's description of the eighteenth-century newspaper proprietor as a communications broker (Gardner 2016, 5).

<sup>12</sup> Two sources offer suggestions of key research directions for the field: Feather 2004; Hinks and Bell 2005, 63-4.

that ‘provincial booksellers’ were in ‘an essentially dependent relationship’ with London until, by the late eighteenth century, the capital and the regions became interdependent because ‘an ever-increasing percentage of a publisher’s profit was derived from country sales’ (Feather 1985, 4, 10). As these remarks imply, and as Feather elsewhere writes, ‘the heart of the provincial book trade has always been in distribution rather than production’ (Feather 2004, 2). Feather’s conclusions are supported by recent critics such as Barbara Crosbie, who finds that it was only ‘viable to publish’ (Crosbie 2018, 229) in the North thanks to the efforts of London booksellers nurturing the market. Yet there is no consensus, as other analyses uncover a process of negotiation, modification, and multidirectionality (Barnard and Bell 2002, 665). One such approach is that of Hinks (2012) who, rejecting the centre/periphery model, proposes network theory as an alternative. In this paradigm, social structures (say, the Newcastle printing community and the booksellers of Edinburgh) become a related set of nodes, the mobile relationship between which is of crucial importance.<sup>13</sup>

Any study of the book and printing trades organised spatially needs to reckon with Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). In this hugely influential study, Anderson argues that what he calls ‘print-capitalism’ creates ‘community in anonymity’, something he describes as ‘the hallmark of modern nations’ (Anderson 1983, 42, 36). He describes newspaper reading, for example, seeing this as a ‘mass ceremony’ in which ‘each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion’ (Anderson 1983, 35). This sense of anonymous, but certain and shared community is, in

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<sup>13</sup> For another spatial model, cf. Andrew Pettegree’s understanding of the continental European trade as a ‘series of concentric circles’ (2008, 105).

Anderson's thesis, the foundation for nationalism and inevitably gives rise to the conditions for the nation state. Despite the significance of Anderson's theory in political history, book historians including Trish Loughran have critiqued its privileging of linear time and teleological history, as well as its Eurocentrism - the codex and the nation both being 'deeply European forms' tied to white settler colonialism (Loughran 2014, 36). Notwithstanding this, when considering regions inside a nation state, it may be tempting to take Anderson's model and resize it; this would suggest that a regional printing industry has the same effect in the creation of imagined community but at a smaller scale, shaping regional rather than national affiliations.<sup>14</sup> However, within regions, and at a local level, Anderson's crucial component of anonymity frequently disappears to be replaced by a network of known institutions, domestic inhabitants, business and professional people, not to mention famous or infamous local characters. As Smith discusses in chapter four, identifiability cost both of Sheffield's late eighteenth-century printers, Joseph Gales and James Montgomery, dearly. At different times each was charged with treason and sedition for editorials, anecdotes, and reports of assemblies they had printed under their own names in their respective newspapers. Precisely this lack of anonymity is a strong characteristic of regional printing.

Scholarship on newspapers is one area where regionality is a developed, if undecided, theme. The regional newspaper of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century has become a significant site of both new scholarship and careful revision for scholars such as Hobbs (2018), Helen Berry (2008), and Crosbie (2018). Much has changed since J.E. Cookson lamented, in 1982, that the 'study of the British press in the fifty years after 1780 has lagged disappointingly' and the 'provincial newspapers of this period, for instance, badly need attention' (Cookson 1982, 84). Hobbs identifies this period as one in which regional

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<sup>14</sup> See Law 2005 for an example of this approach.

newspapers expanded significantly, establishing themselves as a discrete proposition independent of the national newspapers. He postulates that the success of the nineteenth-century ‘provincial’ press was that it ‘built upon, and built, local and regional identities’ (Hobbs 2018, 10). Seeking to correct the misperception of the inferiority of the regional press, Hobbs argues instead that it was ‘a different beast’ (Hobbs 2018, 2021), which presented print personnel with a different set of opportunities and, ultimately, a different relationship with readers. He finds that ‘content, both advertising and editorial, was different — it was either local or locally relevant’; the newspapers used both form and content ‘to evoke a sense of place and capitalise on local patriotism, which made them more varied across the nation, more open to local influences’ (Hobbs 2018, 10). As Ian Beavan stresses, these local publications were ‘perceived as an assertion and an affirmation of a particular locality’s - or indeed a particular nation’s - sense of identity, that diverged from that which was embedded in so many publications published in and from London’ (Beavan 2009, 13). There is no consensus on this point however: Jeremy Black argues that ‘the provincial press did not serve to foster feelings of regional identity’ nor an ‘accompanying hostility’ to London (Black in Isaac 2001, 70).

As Crosbie writes when warning of the dangers of assuming that a one-way cultural influence radiated out of eighteenth-century Newcastle into its surrounds, when it comes to the dynamics of regional print culture, nothing can be taken for granted (2018, 205). Even in cases such as Christopher Wyvill’s *Yorkshire Freeholder* (1780), which explicitly advocated for York’s exceptionalism whilst condemning London as the home of a corrupt and undemocratic government, easy assumptions about an implicit antagonism between a perceived centre and periphery are complicated by the fact that the periodical was sold in both York *and* London. Wyvill was not averse to flattering his London readers or praising their good judgement in taking an interest in the plight of their fellow freeholders, who, he claimed,



were suffering in the Northern provinces just as their American cousins suffered at the hands of the same Westminster politicians (Wyvill 1780, 2). Wyvill's paper does position York and London in opposition, but at the same time seeks to build solidarity between dispirited readers in the two cities.

Yet if scholarship accepts that the regional press had a distinct character, the question of what might actually constitute a 'local' or 'regional' publication is also vexed. Firstly, there was no necessary limit on geographical circulation. As we have already seen, Wyvill's *Yorkshire Freeholder* centred on 'local' grievances but found audiences in both York and London. Rachel Matthews notes that in 1725 the *Gloucester Journal* claimed to have readers as far afield as South Wales, Wiltshire, Shropshire, and Oxfordshire (Matthews 2015, 241). Secondly, the nature of the news contained in regional papers is variable. Black suggests that readers primarily consulted the regional press not for local news, but for syndicated news from elsewhere, typically London (Black 2001, 9), whilst Andrew Walker finds that local news only gained traction in the final decades of the eighteenth century when there were enough competing newspapers to focus circulation on more defined areas (Walker 2006, 276). The trend that Walker describes is complicated by specific exceptions, such as the *Norwich Post*, which published highly localised content, including news of what was happening in Norwich itself, as early as 1708 (Matthews 2006, 241). When discussing the nature of the relationship between locality, regionality, and print, Crosbie again cautions against attributing one-way channels of influence: 'Local and regional distinctions were evidently not eroded by the spread of print, but this is not to say that local identities were somehow retained in resistance to an encroaching national culture. Neither "the region" nor "the locality" had a fixity that set them apart from the more fluid concept of the nation' (Crosbie 2018, 229). Prior to the eighteenth century, this sense of fluidity is substantiated by Joad Raymond's landmark study of the earliest newspapers, which teaches that their capacity to broker information

across the nation ‘has direct bearings on issues of provincialism and neutralism. Information crossed the boundaries of the local communities and turned the provinces into parts of the nations’ (Raymond 1996, 15-6).

Where the question of what precisely defines a regional publication remains unsettled, for the nineteenth century at least, the contribution of newspapers to the formation of regional identities is widely acknowledged. This can be seen, for example, in David Fincklestein’s study of the construction of Scottish identity in *Blackwood’s Magazine* (Fincklestein 2000). For the eighteenth century and earlier, the point is moot. Raymond describes a one-way pattern of influence flowing from the centre to the periphery during the 1640s, finding that newsbooks educated a provincial gentry ignorant of the King’s policies (Raymond 1996, 16). Working with a more complex newspaper scene in the eighteenth century, Gardner finds that the regional press ‘distilled national and global worldviews into distinctly local perspectives’ (Gardner 2016, 1).<sup>15</sup> This shift between the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tendencies bears out the widespread view cited by Crosbie that ‘the expanding print trade [...] allowed for a wider and more dynamic discussion of competing and complementary ideas’ (Crosbie 2018, 206). If the creation of a public sphere is a phenomenon of which print is a recognised part, less appreciated are the local or regional factors within it. As Black suggests (and as Smith’s chapter discusses), ‘the increase of newspapers in the eighteenth century had created a public space, which not only linked other centres but also provided a discussion arena’ (2018, 21); in this area, artisan organisations like the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information could communicate. *Print Culture, Agency, and Regional Identity in the Hand*

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Raymond Williams’ discussion of the intertwining of region and class in the novel form, where the regional relates to ‘that close living substance’ in contrast to ‘what is now happening, through etiolation, in metropolitan and bourgeois fiction’ (238).

*Press Period* intervenes in this divided critical picture, by offering further case studies that substantiate the claim that regional print cultures not only existed, but did indeed delineate and promote a sense of regionality in different parts of the country.

The scholarship on the agency of print trade professionals is, perhaps, less conflicted than that on regionality in print; this is partly because there are fewer studies directly focused on this issue. Though we propose above three spheres of typographic or bibliographic, commercial, and cultural agency, the very concept of agency has a complex foundation. Hinks, Catherine Armstrong, and Matthew Day (2009) stress that when considering ‘provinciality’ in relation to the book trade it is difficult to generalize from what were very particular circumstances of individuals. Their collection proposes as a solution an examination of the businesses of individual printers and booksellers in granular detail and in so doing, much like our collection and another crucial study by Kathleen Tonry, recognizes that ‘prioritizing printers as agents enables us to identify important frameworks other than those generated (retrospectively)’ by large scale historical phenomena (Tonry 2016, 13). Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe defines agency, in its most essential form, as ‘the capacity for responsible individual action’ (O’Keefe 2012, 13). Andrew Pickering’s definition comparably adds to this the dimension of community, suggesting that a ‘person has agency precisely to the extent that his or her actions make a difference to other people’ (Pickering 2010, 16).

If we understand agency, then, as the ability to make informed choices that affect others, we can quickly recognise a variety of obvious agents at work within the book and print trades. There is, for instance, the bookseller acting as a newsagent; the publisher who owns and runs a newspaper; or the print professional acting as a commercial agent signing subscriptions for customers or connecting customers with bookbinders. Individual printers and their relationship to specific contexts have long been foregrounded by constructivist scholars of book history, including D.F. McKenzie (1986), Michael Warner (1990), Adrian

Johns (1998), and David McKitterick (2003). Much more recently, Tonry (2016) stresses that, prior to these interventions, attention to the actions and intentions of individuals within the print trade was obscured by the field's overwhelming emphasis on the commercial and technological aspects of early print: 'the handpress as a media innovation, the economics of publishing enterprises, the capacities and distribution networks of early print centres, the range of skills and workmanship evident from different presses, [...] the work of the press as the work of capital' (Tonry 2016, 11). Absent from this focus, she continues, 'are the ways that print was (and is) also an act of textual creation, of engagement, deliberate, intentional *making*, as well as interest in printers as agents of that making' (Tonry 2016, 11). This constructivist approach, to which Tonry makes a highly significant contribution, instead considers print's relationship to social and cultural spheres, recovering human agency by recognising the structures governing print but also considering 'the human motives and interactions which texts involve in every stage of their production, transmission, and consumption' (McKenzie 1986, 15).

The use of 'agency' to describe these phenomena comes from sociological criticism which, traditionally, examines the dialectical relationship between the decisions and actions of individuals and the structures within which they exist. These structures are understood variously as social, cultural, ideological, epistemological or, indeed, legal: for instance, an individual's decisions might exist in negotiation with political authority.<sup>16</sup> However, though dialectical, this relationship between subject and structure is not necessarily oppositional, and, as O'Keefe reminds us, neither do structures exclusively confine or delimit the actions of

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<sup>16</sup> A detailed overview of the changing history of these concepts and their relationship in sociological criticism, with consideration of the implications of their usage on historiographic scholarship, can be found in Sewell (2005).

subjects: '[agency is] not opposed to cultural structure but is enabled by it. To exercise agency requires actors to have knowledge of cultural forms within which they are enmeshed and some ability to affect them' (O'Keefe 2012, 13). Andrew Pickering similarly explores this idea in the context of material culture, describing 'a dance of agency' in which 'activity and passivity on both sides are reciprocally entwined' (Pickering 2010, 5). Pickering also argues that our understanding of agency should not be limited to the actions of persons, but that it should encompass non-human agents: 'matter has agency too, precisely in the sense that its actions can make a difference' (Pickering 196). This view of agency builds upon and revises Alfred Gel's highly influential challenge to the assumed primacy of the social over the material and cultural in prior anthropological theory (Gel 1998). Gel presents a theory 'of the work things do as exponents of thought and as catalysts for imagination and intuition', thus demonstrating 'how things make thinking possible and shape the way we see connections in the world spontaneously and effortlessly' (Küchler 2015, 24). As Küchler explains, 'all made things partake of intentional and systematizing thought, and potentially serve as vehicles for knowledge, as threads of thought that bind things and people via things to one another' (Küchler 2015, 24). These 'dances of agency', Pickering therefore suggests, have a 'decentred quality', in that they 'cannot be accounted for by focussing either on the human or the non-human' but are 'zones of intersection where the non-human world enters constitutively into the becoming of the human world and vice versa' (Pickering 2010, 196).

Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT), which provides a framework in which everything in the social and natural worlds exists in constantly shifting relationships, promises an effective means of mapping agencies in book history (2005). In ANT, society is not reliant on human actors, so non-human entities, such as books or the matter of print more generally, can become actants in exactly the manner that both Pickering and Gel suggest. Viewed according to this methodology, material objects and social formations do not exist in a

hierarchy, and human agency is not privileged above the agency of things. Instead, we again see a ‘dance of agency’, as things and people ‘arrange and rearrange themselves in multidirectional webs and mesh-like arrays’ (Stenner, 2021). Agency, in this collection, therefore refers to acts of intention and effect, self-conscious or otherwise, that exist within a shifting mesh of material and social relationships and drive the ‘making’ processes of regional print.

### **Regions of the Book**

As the above discussion suggests, the agency of print trade professionals and the material and social networks in which they were embedded are central to the construction of regionality in the hand press period. This is evident in the first of this book’s four sections, an extended case study of Yorkshire. Sarah Griffin and Kaley Kramer’s chapter, ‘PRINTED BY ALICE BROADE: The Career of York’s First Female Printer, 1661-1680’, introduces Alice Broad, a printer in York in the late seventeenth century who was the first of a line of women connected through a press. Her followers, including Grace White and Ann Ward, however, have both achieved more recognition. The case of Broad demonstrates the considerable challenges scholars face in the recovery of regional women in print history. By drawing on licencing information and imprint details, Griffin and Kramer locate Broad’s contributions to the developing print culture of York at a point of significant civic recovery and realignment following the English Civil War. **The chapter argues that Broad’s gender was less important than her political affiliations:** Alice Broad may have been a woman in a profession generally assumed to be dominated by men, but she was also, for a time, the *only* printer in York. The particularity of the region, especially during the Civil War, demonstrates the extent to which

assumptions about gender in the print trades need to be critically considered in light of specific geographical variety.

Rachel Stenner's chapter, 'Historiography, Regionality, and Print Trade Life Writing: the Case of *Mr Thomas Gent, Printer, of York*', draws attention to Thomas Gent, the most well-known, but barely studied, printer of that city. Gent, prolific in output, was also a regional historian, and an autobiographer; Stenner reads his historiography in dialogue with his life writing. Whilst Gent articulates at length the regional exceptionalism of Yorkshire, Stenner finds that he both aggrandises York and reveals its acrimonious underbelly. She positions Gent with other print trade authors, writers whose cultural production and professional identity are inseparable. This mode of authorship is particularised in the case of Gent, for whom regionality is fundamental to his self-conception in print.

In his chapter, 'The Newspaper, the Bookshop, and the Radical Society: Joseph Gales' Hartshead Press and the "Reading and Thinking People of Sheffield"', Adam James Smith surveys the various activities and outputs of Sheffield's late eighteenth-century press.

Founded in 1787, the Hartshead Press is best remembered for producing two radical newspapers, *The Sheffield Register*, edited by printer Joseph Gales, and *The Sheffield Iris*, edited by Gales' protégé, James Montgomery. These papers are well recognised as making a significant contribution to the development of the regional news culture described above.

Smith, however, situates these papers within a broader business model which saw Gales' wife, Winifred, managing a bookshop in Hartshead Square whilst Gales also used his press to furnish local societies with books, pamphlets, appeals, and other items of political ephemera.

In sourcing texts from London and printing them in York, Gales actively shaped Sheffield's literary and political culture. He contributed to the formation of a distinct regional character that was then documented, and celebrated, in texts produced by his press. Smith's essay rounds off a section that demonstrates the varied and sophisticated print cultures of early



modern Yorkshire, and their shaping participation in the region's distinct political and intellectual life.

The second section, *Circulation and Networks*, retains a Northern focus. Like the chapter by Griffin and Kramer, Helen Williams' 'Printing, Publishing, and Pocket Book Compiling: Ann Fisher's Hidden Labour in the Newcastle Book Trade', makes a crucial intervention in the expanding discussion of female printers. Contrary to women whose involvement in the trade flourished when they became widows, Fisher was an educator, editor, writer, and printer who collaborated with her husband in their business during his lifetime. This chapter brings to the fore new archival evidence, drawing on Fisher's correspondence to construct a picture of her as a central figure in the business, or, as Williams memorably puts it, 'the "Co." in "Slack and Co."' (page number). This chapter also explores the form of the pocket book - the almanack-like miscellany of verse, puzzles, and other information, in whose creation Fisher excelled. Throughout, Williams destabilises a patriarchal, London-centric view of the print trade.

Williams' companion in this section is David Atkinson, whose essay, 'Elizabeth Davison and the Circulation of Chapbooks in Early Nineteenth-Century Northumberland', also uses new archival findings to foreground the literary activity of a woman, this time a collector. Davison's collection of 283 song chapbooks is held in the British Library. Atkinson has undertaken the first study of this material, and he presents a full catalogue of the collection in an appendix to his chapter. His analysis considers the collection within the broader context of the street literature that circulated across the English and Scottish borders in the hands of chapmen. Whilst some of the Davison collection's contents manifest a keen regional interest, many pieces reflect more general folk themes, or a broader nationalistic and military fervour. Williams' and Atkinson's case studies together demonstrate several things: the vibrancy of the Northern print trades; the robust networks, reaching North and South, in

which those trades were embedded; and the cultural scope that the regions could afford to women of bookish propensity.

Directions of alignment are also key for section three, Regions and Nations. Here Rebecca Emmett and Alex Benchimol both consider the operations of print trade agency within overlapping regional and national contexts. Emmett's attention, in "'The Privilege Granted to the Printer': The Role of James VI in the Scottish Print Trade 1567-1603", turns to the relationship the Scottish and English king had with his various King's Printers. James' tendency to promote foreign stationers, in ways that were not always favourable to them as individuals, effectively marginalised Scottish printers, and was detrimental to the Scottish trade. Remarkable here is the insight Emmett offers into the complex agencies of the King's Printer. In his mission to promote himself internationally, James appointed individuals to a prestigious role because of their own professional reach, but he curtailed their decision-making and personal freedoms in the process. Where other chapters reveal the ways in which regional trades flourished in the hand press period, Emmett's shows the intense competitiveness surrounding that of Edinburgh, and its vulnerability to external and internal forces.

A rather different story emerges for Scotland in Benchimol's chapter, 'Print Agency and Civic Press Identity Across the Border: Commerce and Regional Improvement in the *Glasgow Advertiser*, *Liverpool General Advertiser*, and the Urban Directories of Liverpool and Glasgow, 1765-95'. The printing of newspapers and directories in Liverpool and Glasgow, Benchimol demonstrates, fulfilled parallel regional agendas in both cities. Specifically combined with the commercial and civic strategies of the cities' elites, these publications explicitly served as vehicles for regional development and inculcated regional identities. Not only arguing that regional trades oriented themselves transnationally,

sometimes in preference to nationally, this chapter demonstrates the overlap of region and nation in the formation of a burgeoning North-Eastern commercial culture.

The final section, Technology, contains two essays focused on typography; in different ways these both expand the scope of the collection. James Misson, in 'For Lack of Letters: Early Typographic Shibboleths of English, and Other Foreign Languages', analyses a range of Tudor works. He considers the ways in which typographic 'kludges', that is, technological fixes borne of repurposing the tools at hand, convey nationality. When printers typographically present Englishness within a print culture heavily influenced by Latinate typographic systems, they do so in a way that others the English language. This reflects the marginal status of sixteenth-century England, positioned in Europe's technological backwaters, and of the English language itself. Misson's chapter challenges the terms of this book by extending an invitation to rethink the position of England. Unlike in other discussions that implicitly conceptualise the national as the dominant term in a dualism, in Misson's analysis the nation itself emerges as a marginal, vernacular region within the larger geographical formation of continental Europe.

Where Misson's interest lies in the accidents of typographic demand, David Osbaldestin turns to typography's more artful disposition. 'A New Type: Sans Serif Typography and Midlands Regional Identity' traces the emergence of a typographic family, the Sans Serif, and its role in the growth of jobbing printing in and around Birmingham. This chapter extends from the eighteenth-century history of sans serif's development, to its use in regional nineteenth-century political and instructional printing. Building on detailed and new archival findings, Osbaldestin presents evidence linking Midlands' population growth to increased ephemeral printing. Typographers used the Sans Serif both to differentiate audiences by social status, and to convey instructions to inhabitants of a commercial world with money in their pockets. Like Misson, Osbaldestin reframes the terms of the collection.

By inviting us to look forward into the steam press era, he conveys the continuities in the expression of agency by the regional print trades.

The wealth of new archival and interpretive evidence in these essays indicates the range of activities pursued, and the types of agencies expressed, by regional print trade professionals in the hand press period. These women and men worked in a variety of printed forms that both conveyed local information and spoke to a national audience. They characteristically innovated in their output and commerce, presenting in their works clear and early articulations of regional values and identities. These essays collectively and decisively demonstrate that print trade professionals made highly significant contributions to the economic, political, and cultural life of their regions.

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