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K.C. Phillipps, *Language and class in Victorian England*. (The Languages Library.)
Basil Blackwood, Oxford, 1984. x + 190 pp.

Reviewed by: Martha Vicinus, Dept. of English, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA.

This book gathers together quotations from a wide range of Victorian realistic fiction (and a few diaries and autobiographies) illustrating the acute sense of social class found among middle-class novelists. Phillipps uses as his theoretical basis the famous work of A.S.C. Ross on linguistic indicators of social class during the mid-1950s in England. (Ross is best known for having coined the phrases U and non-U English to indicate acceptable upper-class usage.) Phillipps specifically focuses upon the subtle distinctions in speech which indicate whether a character in a novel is defined by other characters as U or non-U. In an age marked by considerable social climbing and consequent social insecurity, Phillipps is able to mine a rich horde of examples of the endemic snobbery and minute social distinctions of the English.

Phillipps is concerned with both changing social mores and the accompanying linguistic changes. For example, he includes a most interesting section on the shifting time of the dinner hour. In the early nineteenth century, as Jane Austen indicates, the gentry followed the workday of the farmer, eating a large breakfast at around 10.00 a.m., after several hours of work. Lunch (or luncheon, as it was then more correctly called) was a stand-up meal taken during work. Dinner was then at four or five, at the close of a winter working day, or before the final farm chores. Supper followed at 9.00, when all work ceased. Working people, including shopkeepers, ate their main meal at mid-day. When the upper classes began to dine in the evening, a late dinner hour came to symbolized gentility. As late as 1865 Mrs. Gaskell could mock the social pretensions of a doctor's wife, when invited for lunch by Lord and Lady Cummor:

'In vain she piped out in her soft, high voice, "Oh, my lord! I never eat meat in the middle of the day; I can hardly eat anything at lunch!" Her voice was lost, and the duchess might go away with the idea that the Hollingford doctor's wife dined early.' (p. 26).

Phillipps traces the subtle linguistic evolution of meals, forms of address, slang and sport as increasing numbers of the upper middle-class mixed with the aristocracy. That brilliant observer of upper-class life, Anthony Trollope, provides an especially rich source for Phillipps. For example, Trollope captures the linguistic freedom permitted very wealthy women in contrast to those who were less secure in their social position and wealth. Miss Dunstable, in *Doctor Thorne*, 'was a little too fond of slang; but then,

a lady with her fortune, and of her age, may be fond of almost whatever she pleases' (p. 49). Men, of course, were expected to use slang among their friends, but writers such as Trollope showed how the excessive use of slang or its use in front of the ladies was a sure indication of low-breeding.

Phillipps' remarks about generational differences within the upper classes are particularly instructive. A close look at the older characters in Victorian novels reveals many linguistic carry-overs from the Regency period. The picture that emerges is one of Victorian dismay at both the looseness of manners and narrowness of behavior that seemed to characterize their parents and grandparents. The Victorians did not simply see their forebears as sexually profligate (after all, Bowdler first published his expurgated version of Shakespeare during the Regency period). Rather, they also could see them as excessively pious and unable to deal with the growing wealth and social complexity of modern times.

Phillipps is less interesting in his discussion of 'the lower orders', perhaps because Victorian middle-class novelists are themselves less reliable about the language of the working class. He is forced to turn rather too often to that notorious misanthrope, George Gissing. Perhaps the mixture of genres in Dickens's novels has made Phillipps' wary of quoting excessively from him. Certainly Dickens often uses linguistic quirks to place a character (we all remember Uriah Heep's continual plea of being 'umble), but he has as keen a sense of class distinctions among the lower middle class as Trollope had for the upper-classes.

Phillipps appears to miss numerous opportunities to develop his argument more fully. For example, he does not mention that peculiarly upper-class idiom, 'my people'. Just as upper-class English to this day often substitute the impersonal use of 'one' for 'I' when speaking, so too do they refer to their families as 'my people', an expression dating back to the nineteenth century. Its use indicates a peculiar form of self-protection, of distancing outsiders, when speaking in public that is well worth exploring further. Equally, Phillipps mentions only briefly the lower-class habit of referring to family members with a first-person plural pronoun, such as 'Our Bob'. The intimacy this implies contrasts sharply with the language of the upper-classes and is well worth investigating. People from northern England have always used this expression; they are also noted for their hospitality and warmth in contrast to the south. Phillipps has, unfortunately, ignored entirely the regional nature of language and manners. Perhaps he did not want to enter into the vexed area of dialect, but surely more could have been made of the differences between urban and rural, northern and southern speech.

Language and class in Victorian England is a highly readable survey of well-known Victorian novels, but the author is hampered, I believe, by a rather limited and familiar theory. Most close readers of Victorian fiction will find little that is new here, while surely linguists do not need to be reminded that language reflects social class. I longed for the development of Phillipps' own argument, moving beyond Ross's insights of some twenty-five years ago. I am not surprised that novelists were especially acute observers of social nuance, and that they captured the innumerable ways in which the

wealthy could snub those with pretensions beyond their God-given social place. But I suspect other issues are equally worth addressing in regard to the uses of language in fiction. For example, how is the language of women and men gendered? What differences do we see regionally, and what do they tell us about regional, as well as class, expectations? How does conversation differ from indirect discourse? When and how are women and men permitted to use metaphors? Do these differ according to class? What about the well-known device of addressing the reader? What kind of language does an author use in conversation with his or her readers? What are the class implications of this? These unanswered questions perhaps indicate the ways in which Phillipps has not made the most of his subject. There is certainly room for a book considering the language of Victorian fiction, but I would hope for one based upon a more complex theory about the relationship between language and society.