



Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities

By Roberto M. Dainotto

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Since the 1840s, when Victorian England emerged into the modern era and industrial cities became the new cultural centers, regionalist literature has posited itself as an aesthetic alternative to nationalist culture. Yet what differentiates regionalism's claims of authenticity, derived from blood and soil, from those of nationalism? Through close readings and theoretical elaborations, Roberto M. Dainotto reveals the degree to which regionalism mimics nationalism in valorizing ethnic purity. He interprets regionalism not as a genre in the pastoral tradition but as a rhetorical trope, a way of reading in which regionalism figures as the "other" against a historical process that disrupts the organic wholeness of place.

Dainotto traces the genealogy of the idea of place in literature, examining European texts from Victorian England to Fascist Italy. He finds, for example, in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* a virtual thesaurus of regionalist commonplaces. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* mediates between Madame de Stal's privileging of the sophisticated north and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's nostalgia for the naive south. The regionalism of the Sicilian philosopher Giovanni Gentile exhibits a deep longing for the humanities as they define Italy and Western culture. Dainotto concludes with a close look at the rhetoric of Nazism and Fascism, dramatizing the convergence of regionalist aesthetics and nationalist ideology in Italy and Germany between the two World Wars.

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