

**The Dislocated Mind:  
The Fiction of Raymond Williams**

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## **Abstract**

The thesis seeks to clarify why Raymond Williams's fiction has been generally ignored or marginalised, arguing that the novels articulate political contradictions and social possibilities only latent elsewhere in his writings. The crucial relation between Williams's biography and his fiction is acknowledged, specifically the dialectic of experience/abstraction, whereby 'experience' is founded on the values and practices of the intimate community of his Welsh working-class boyhood and 'abstraction' on those of the professional, 'objective' Cambridge of his adulthood. The tension of this dialectic is understood as the structuring principle of the novels which, while adopting a variety of genres, produce the same narrative: that of the boy who, breaking the bonds between father and son, abandons the place and people of his birth and re-locates among a professional middle-class whose practices devalue those of his origins. This move, offered as at once necessary, in terms of dominant historical processes, and disabling, in its generation of guilt and anxiety, produces the trope of treachery which haunts the fiction. Much of the textual energy is expended on structural devices which seek to exculpate the protagonist from the taint of treachery. It is argued that although in the novels Williams is seeking to give coherence and justification to his life, he does not seem fully aware of the psychological and political implications of his narrative.

The centrality of the political agenda is recognised as informing Williams's choice of the realist form and his belief in its potential for representation of the contemporary world. His use of literary production as a means of resistance to dominant culture is understood as fundamental to a reading of the fiction, and the novels are positioned in terms of a range of oppositional socio-historical discourses, including English and Welsh literary forms, psychological and feminist perspectives and Welsh historical narrative. Crucial to the thesis's methodology is ecocriticism, which suggests that a re-assessment of Williams's discourse of place demonstrates that, rather than imprisoning him in a conservative discourse of homogeneity and stability, his theme of dislocation and his insistence on the value of the local and the material are core to current political debates.

## Introduction

'His novels do seem to be where his heart was' comments John Mullan in a *Guardian* article printed to coincide with his Raymond Williams lecture at the 2005 Hay Literary Festival.<sup>1</sup> In the series of interviews with Williams published as *Politics and Letters*, his interviewers note the 'discrepancy between the proportion of fiction in your publicly visible work and the amount of moral and intellectual energy that you have invested in your work as a novelist.' Williams responds that he has indeed 'given far more time in comparison to what became visible and valued to fiction than to any other form of writing.' This, he says, has been because 'all along there have been certain things pressing on me, which I could simply find no alternative way of writing.'<sup>2</sup> Yet it is his critical work on which his continuing reputation rests. He is referred to as 'having transformed cultural studies from the relative crudity in which he found them to a marvellously rich, resourceful body of work.'<sup>3</sup> The editorial acknowledgements in *The New Keywords*, published in 2005, refer to the Williams *Keywords* as 'inspirational' and 'indispensable' while the introduction uses the original to define and legitimise the methodology adopted.<sup>4</sup> *A Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory*, published in 1999, has thirteen entries for Williams, more than for any other thinker and in 2005 Verso published a new edition of his essays in its series, 'Radical Thinkers'.<sup>5</sup> Yet all but one of his novels is out of print and their status within his oeuvre is a questionable one.<sup>6</sup>

When *Border Country* was republished in January 2006 as one of the first five in the Library of Wales 'reissues of neglected classics by Welsh writers in English', Dai Smith, the series editor, commented that 'although nearly 30 years after his death



Williams is still a major international figure in the field of cultural studies,' his fiction which 'he valued as highly as his theoretical work', has been 'largely forgotten'<sup>7</sup>

While Smith's evaluation of *Border Country* as 'one of the most moving and accomplished novels of the twentieth century' is arguably inflated, Williams's novels are, as Smith asserts, 'vital for an understanding of his work as a whole.'<sup>8</sup> One aim of this thesis is to recontextualise the novels in terms of contemporary fiction, both the English and Welsh traditions, and to examine the grounds for the virtual isolation of this significant part of Williams's writing. It aims too at a clarification of the place of the novels in the hierarchy of his writing, arguing that they articulate contradictions and complexities only latent elsewhere. While many of their overt thematic concerns – the strengths and limitations of working-class communities, the tensions and anxieties of social mobility, the need to register that local and national 'communities' are always in process – are also central in his non-fiction, their deployment in fiction generates a narrative the psychological and political implications of which Williams does not seem to be fully aware. The recurrent themes, structures and tropes give the sense of a need to produce a story that will offer coherence to his life and justification to the choices he has made, yet the cumulative sense of the narrative so generated, of victimhood and hope thwarted, is one that subverts his explicit political agenda. The thesis will argue, however, that although biographical and contextual elements, and Williams's need to rationalise the effects of these, may have significant determining effects on the nature of the fiction produced, it is vital not to under-estimate the importance of the political agenda that informs his choice of a realist form and of a variety of fictional genres.

One of the key issues in any reading of Williams, including his fiction, is that of his biography: Williams invites this reading and critics, whether insisting on a political or a psychological perspective, have followed his lead. 'We begin to think where we live' he says in 'The Idea of a Common Culture.'<sup>9</sup> This idea is developed in *The Country and the City* and its opening pages set out his experience of place:

In a predominantly urban and industrial Britain I was born in a remote village in a very old settled countryside on the border between England and Wales...I was born in a village and I still live in a village. But where I was born was under the Black Mountains...where the meadows are bright green against the red earth of the ploughland...Where I live now is the flat country, on a headland of boulder clay, towards the edge of the dikes and sluices, the black earth of the Fens...<sup>10</sup>

The power for Williams of this place of origin, and its loss, as demonstrated in his novels and other writings, cannot be over-estimated. The Williams that he constructs in his non-fictional writings is a man always, quite literally, out of place: from the sixties onwards the lost place is very firmly situated in Wales. He writes himself as a countryman, a man used to an intimate culture of practical mutual support and practice of community, one moved to rage by the 'alien' culture of 'the class which has dominated Cambridge' and the value systems that he perceives it to represent. This culture, which 'is given to describing itself as well-mannered, polite, sensitive' he perceives as a group which is 'extraordinarily coarse, pushing, name-ridden'.<sup>11</sup> Across all his writing he contrasts this dominant culture with that of his upbringing in 'rural Wales'. He is well aware that he will be accused of 'class feeling, class-envy, class-resentment.' But, he says: 'Nobody fortunate enough to grow up in a good home, in a genuinely well-mannered and sensitive community, could for a moment envy these



loud, competitive and deprived people.' This division, in soil and in cultural practices, is at the heart of his biography and deeply inscribed in his fiction.

Williams was born in 1921 in Pandy, a village near Abergavenny, in the county of Monmouthshire, a small market town between the Black Mountains and the plains stretching east to Herefordshire. The English/Welsh border now runs, definitively, a few miles east of Pandy but until local government re-organisation in 1970, when an enlarged county was re-named Gwent, the status of Monmouthshire was ambiguous: although probably most people in the county, certainly those in the industrial valleys to the west, perceived themselves as Welsh, the official designation was 'Wales and Monmouthshire.' The concept of 'borders' and border crossings is an important one for Williams, although he seems to have made no reference to the unusual legal position of Monmouthshire, always positioning his childhood unequivocally as Welsh. His father's work, as a railway signalman, Williams also understands as a 'border' position:

I grew up within a very particular situation – a distinctly rural social pattern of small farms, interlocked with another kind of social structure to which the railway workers belonged. They were unionized wage-workers, with a perception of a much wider social system beyond the village to which they were linked.<sup>12</sup>

Williams has written eloquently, in fictional and non-fictional terms, of his boyhood in Pandy. But his account of the later stages of his life, as demonstrated by the interviews that he gives in *Politics and Letters*, and on which Fred Inglis's biography does not expand significantly, is essentially a narrative of political commitments, job related moves and a list of publications.<sup>13</sup> This powerful emphasis on Wales, and on

the values established by his early experience there, is highly suggestive for any reading of his work.

Both his parents were members of the Labour Party and his father was active in the 1926 General Strike: in the 1930s the young Raymond campaigned for local Labour candidates, joined the Abergavenny Left Book Club and spoke publicly against the Munich agreement. When in 1939 he went to Trinity College Cambridge to read English he joined the Communist Party and was active in the C.P. Writers' Group, where he produced short stories as well as collaborating on pamphlets. After a period in the Royal Artillery during World War II, which included service in Normandy in 1944, he returned to Cambridge. Having completed his degree he took a post as Staff Tutor with the joint committee of the Oxford University Extra-mural Delegacy and Workers Educational Association and moved with his wife Joy and their children to Sussex.<sup>14</sup> It was during this time as a tutor in Sussex, from 1949 to 1960, that he began his serious writing career: the variety of texts produced in this period established the Williams who was to be called a librarian's nightmare. He was co-editor of the journal *Politics and Letters* for which he wrote numerous articles on the arts and on politics. As well as the more conventional academic text *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, he completed *Culture and Society*, which laid the foundations of his life-long commitment to the concept of culture as social practice and to the recapture of 'culture' from the 'decisively reactionary positions' he understood as having appropriated it.<sup>15</sup> It was now too that he began seriously to work on fiction: the biographical notes in *Politics and Letters* record seven writings and re-writings, from 1947 to 1958, of the novel that was to become *Border Country*. Following a brief period in Oxford as Resident Tutor with the Extra-Mural Delegacy, in 1961 Williams



was appointed as a Lecturer in English at Cambridge and elected a Fellow of Jesus. Here his writing continued to span the academic, political and fictional. He published on drama, with *Modern Tragedy* (1966), on the novel in *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970; henceforth *English Novel*), while *The Country and the City* (1973) focuses on poetry. Each text, however, adopts a specifically oppositional position which is consistent with the appropriation of culture for the Left that was set up in *Culture and Society*. They were followed by a text that more explicitly marked the situation of literature as necessarily ideologically determined, *Marxism and Literature* (1977). There were too several books and a number of articles which explored the ideological implications of modern technology.

Following his resignation from the Labour Party in 1966 Williams continued to be active in opposition: the *May Day Manifesto 1968* proposes 'a socialist alternative to Labour government policies' while *Towards 2000*, published in 1983, is an angry engagement with the social policies of the Thatcherite era. Between these there appeared numerous political articles, published both in mainstream magazines and journals such as *The London Review of Books* and those more clearly Left aligned such as *New Left Review*. His critical commentary, as Alan O'Connor's bibliography in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, published after Williams's death, demonstrates, engages less and less with contemporary English literature and marginalises literature in favour of social policy.<sup>16</sup> Of the books that he chose to review for *The Guardian* during the 1980s, only the recurring name of D.H. Lawrence suggests an allegiance to the English canon, while there are a significant number of reviews of publications on Welsh history. The 'turn' to Wales, which Williams himself marks as occurring 'well into' his thirties is a significant fact in his biography and one

which is important for the reading of his fiction.<sup>17</sup> The variety and extent of his other publications also clearly sets out a specific context in which his fiction needs to be read.

Williams published five novels during his life time, two volumes of the proposed three volume *People of the Black Mountains* (henceforth *Black Mountains*) appeared posthumously and there were also three early unpublished novels.<sup>18</sup> The first published novel, the much rewritten *Border Country*, is the story of Matthew Price, a London-based academic, called back to the Welsh border village of his boyhood by the illness of his father, Harry, a railway signalman. The novel is structured by chapters alternating the present of Matthew's visit and the narrative of Harry and Ellen from their arrival in the village as a young married couple to the time of Matthew's departure to study at Cambridge. The novel, which ends with Harry's death, is centrally concerned with the emotional and political unease that his life, and the values that it establishes, raises for his son. The character of Morgan Rosser, a fellow signalman and union activist disillusioned by the failure of the 1926 General Strike, is the prototype of a character which will recur in Williams's novels: an articulate, politicised man or woman, incapable of emotional or sexual fidelity or, in later models, incapable too of becoming rooted, of settling. In *Border Country* we first encounter the challenge that runs through the novels, that of seeking to negotiate the move from the place of origin. That such a move involves division is signalled by the fact that in his home village Matthew was and is known as Will, a split that mirrors Williams's own double naming:

All the people who knew me until I was eighteen called me Jim. I adopted my legal name Raymond at university. The two names in the novel, and my own



experience, point up the problems of being two persons to know, and of negotiating between two different worlds.<sup>19</sup>

The autobiographical elements that mark *Border Country* are far less evident in *Second Generation* (1964). The families around whom the narrative centres, those of the two Owen brothers, have their origins in the Welsh valleys across the mountains from Williams's border country, but the novel takes place in a city, divided between university and car plant, based on Oxford, although the place is never named. Both brothers work at the car plant. Harold is active in union politics and his wife, Kate, heavily involved in local politics while their son, Peter, is completing his thesis under the supervision of Robert Lane. Next door live Harold's brother Gwyn and Myra, with Beth, Myra's daughter from her first marriage, who has an, often uneasy, 'understanding' with Peter. In the course of the novel both Kate and her son are sexually unfaithful to their partners, Kate with academic Arthur Dean and Peter with Rose, an ex-girlfriend, now wife of another academic. The novel is, though, centrally concerned with the stultifying effects on social relations of the current political system and the affairs are politicised to the same degree as the strike and protest march that, like the General Strike in *Border Country*, form a central episode. The ending, with the reconciliation of each 'official' pair, offers compromise and muted hope.

The third novel in the so-called 'Welsh trilogy', *The Fight for Manod* (1979; henceforth *Manod*) brings together Matthew Price and Peter Owen, now employed as consultants for a proposed new town, to be called Manod, its economy based on cutting-edge technology, in mid-Wales. Robert Lane reappears, now an adviser for a Labour government, and responsible for the appointment of the consultants. Settled in

a local cottage, Matthew and Susan Price become conscious of the economic tensions of this depopulated region, watching them demonstrated in the lives of their neighbours, farmers and agricultural workers, whose family relations are brought under continuous pressure by the need to make a living from this marginal land. Matthew and Peter become aware too of a conspiracy to make massive profits from land speculation tied to the proposed development. The plot has a local 'villain', builder and entrepreneur John Dance, but it has too national and international ramifications. Although the plot is uncovered, the fate of the dying rural community is left unresolved. The ending offers a note of tentative optimism as Matthew accepts a post as Director of a new Institute and Library of Industrial Wales: he is coming home.

Written in parallel with *Manod*, *The Volunteers* (1978) also uses some of the conventions of the conspiracy novel, although here the model is rather that of the political thriller. The only one of Williams's novels to use a first-person narrative, it takes as its protagonist the political journalist Lewis Redfern. He sets out to investigate the shooting of Minister Edmund Buxton, responsible for sending in troops to occupy a power depot in the South Wales valleys, where a worker, Gareth Powell, was killed. Redfern, a cynical sleuth in the Dashiell Hammet mode, is concerned both to identify Buxton's attacker and to find the truth behind the killing of Powell. This trail leads him to politician and writer Mark Evans and to the existence of the mysterious Volunteers who have infiltrated the Establishment. At the end Redfern drops his cynicism and, at some personal risk, gives evidence to the tribunal investigating the killing of Powell, thereby exposing Buxton's full complicity in the



command structure that brought about the shooting. As with the ending of *Manod*, there is no sense of triumph, only of a minor but necessary stand against the powerful.

The theme of secrets and conspiracy is also employed in *Loyalties* (1985). Using the device of a framing narrative structure, the subject of which is a television exposé of computer espionage, the novel operates in discontinuous episodes from the 1930s to the 1980s. The plot centres on the interaction between a group of Cambridge radicals, members of the Communist Party or fellow travellers, and a Welsh mining family. At a C.P. political camp in South Wales in 1936, Norman Braose, son of a 'diplomatic family', meets Nesta Pritchard, daughter of a mining family, seduces, impregnates and abandons her. His sister, Emma, maintains contact with Nesta, her child Gwyn and the man she later marries, miner Bert Lewis, veteran of the Spanish Civil War and the Normandy invasion. Episodes from the lives of the Cambridge characters and those in the Welsh valleys alternate, while Gwyn grows up to become a scientific civil servant and the 'treachery' of Norman Braose, in providing 'secret' information on computer technology to the Soviets, is unravelled. Central to the narrative are Gwyn's relations with his fathers, natural and adoptive. Just as in *Second Generation* where the two sexual affairs were situated politically, here Gwyn's reaction to each father is given as a narrative of political values. The final episode sees a confrontation between Gwyn and Norman, in which the former accuses his father of betraying 'indigenous' socialists by causing their beliefs to be necessarily associated in the public mind with 'alien' and enemy states.

The final novels, the uncompleted *Black Mountains* sequence, were very different indeed. Volume One, *The Beginning*, opens in 23,000 B.C. and its last episode is

dated 52 A.D. *Eggs of the Eagle* begins in 82 A.D. and ends in 1425. Like *Loyalties*, however, there is a contemporary narrative which opens the novel and punctuates the historical episodes. Here a young man, Glyn, wanders in the mountains searching for his missing grandfather, Elis. Glyn hears the voices of the long dead and these episodes allow for explanatory linking historical material. Williams had begun working on this sequence of novels eight years before his death and, according to the cover of the proof copy of *The Beginning*, 'he left a vast, untidy manuscript – over 250,000 words, revised and corrected in minute handwriting.' Joy Williams, who had carried out much of the research, 'sorted, amended and typed' and, as her postscript clarifies, made judgements between versions.<sup>20</sup> With the exception of 'Gwydir and Gwenliana', which takes place in the South Wales coastal region, the stories are set in the Black Mountains. Thinking of the potential for such a novel, Williams had told the *Politics and Letters* interviewers:

I thought of trying to achieve [the necessary unity] through continuity of place rather than of people – taking the same place as it is inhabited in different periods.... by different kinds of people, manifesting different social relations and exercising different ways of using the land.<sup>21</sup>

What this account omits is the extent to which the recurring theme is that of invasion of the place, the subordination of the original inhabitants and the erasure of their cultural practices. According to Joy Williams, the concluding argument of this concluding novel was to have been that 'people can only survive if they live in harmony with each other and with their land.'<sup>22</sup>

As this account makes clear, there were often considerable gaps between the publication dates of the novels. The long silences are explained in part by Williams's



teaching and administrative commitments, speaking engagements and continuous production of other forms of writing: as well as the publications referred to above, there were chapters in books, articles, reviews, pamphlets, interviews and lecture tours throughout Europe. After *Second Generation* he 'had a couple of plays accepted for BBC television while he polished off *Modern Tragedy*' says Inglis. He mentions too that *Manod* 'had to wait' when Williams was invited by Karl Miller to provide a monthly television column for *The Listener*.<sup>23</sup> There were also the pressures of political events. Of this same period Williams notes that: 'so much else started happening: the decisive political break in 66 and the beginning of the very absorbing work on the Manifesto.'<sup>24</sup>

The gaps, however, also mark problems that Williams experienced specifically in the writing of fiction. *Border Country* was, as outlined above, written seven times. This he explained as necessitated by the need to represent the Welsh village community not as isolated but as determined by its relation to wider economic and social processes.<sup>25</sup> This self-imposed pressure to offer a fuller representation of social structures he experienced as being at odds with contemporary publishing demands. Believing that only the more leisurely pace characteristic of the nineteenth century novel offered the opportunity for representing full 'connections', with *Second Generation* and with *Manod* he was frustrated by publishers' demands for compression. Of *Manod* he says:

To begin with it went very quickly....what are now the second to the seventh chapters seemed just to flow...Then I did a count. I had done six out of a projected thirty chapters, moving at the only pace at which I judged it could be properly done. It would be well over two hundred thousand words.<sup>26</sup>

Compression, then, not only slowed down the writing process but had very notable impacts on the nature of the narratives. When discussing *The Volunteers*, Williams is asked by his interviewers whether cuts were imposed which would explain a lack of clarity over motivations of central characters. He tells them that he had to cut 20,000 words and details a number of scenes that had to be drastically shortened or omitted.<sup>27</sup> Williams's style across the range of his writing, theoretical and political as well as fictional, is notoriously dense and difficult at times. To read the novels is to be challenged by an opacity which is partially a question of style, but also of content. This sense of a writer whose material demands space, who perceives himself as working against the grain of contemporary practice, is suggestive: but does it offer an adequate explanation for the difficulties posed by the novels?

The bafflement experienced by many readers of Williams's fiction is sometimes of a localised nature, dialogue frequently elliptical to the point of obscurity being the main problem. The highly characteristic mode has been neatly captured in Terry Eagleton's parody of *Second Generation*.<sup>28</sup> J.P. Ward gives a more sympathetic account: 'Every remark seems to be a pointed or a defensive answer to the one before...always taut and highly strung, and no interaction ever lets up for a moment.' Characters never meet, he says wryly, to engage in 'joyful, meaningless banter' but always to 'think through their positions, sometimes their strong differences.'<sup>29</sup> The nuances of these positions, however, whether articulated by the village people in *Border Country* or *Manod*, with their often terse utterances, or by the graduate community in *Second Generation*, are often unavailable to the reader. When at the beginning of *Border Country* Matthew Price returns to his home village he is met at the station by old family friend Morgan Rosser. Harry Price, says Morgan, 'has been too good a



man...It's what we ought to have known...That strength, yes, and that's what he showed. But now this, always.'<sup>30</sup> What does this final phrase mean? Is this simply a mystery set up at the opening of the novel to which the narrative will reveal an answer? Not really. The phrase which gestures to a subject somewhere out of sight, even while, by that 'always', insisting on its significance, is an idiom highly characteristic of Williams and one that engenders frustration. The extended dialogues of *Second Generation*, such as that between Kate Owen and her son Peter in the final chapter, also generate this sense of being excluded. 'It's just the pressure, all the time, you can't begin to understand. If I can't say what I feel I shall break,' Kate tells her son who responds, 'The feeling itself may be breaking.'<sup>31</sup> The nature of Kate's distress, its basis in the class formation in which she and her family are set, is clear enough. But Peter's response is another of the 'localised' points of obscurity.

The sense of a cryptic encoding in Williams's fiction is not limited to his use of dialogue but covers the whole question of the identity of the readership to which the novels are addressed. The sense that Williams may be talking to himself, or to a closed group, extends to the information carried in the text, or rather to the omission of crucial elements of that information. Dai Smith, his official biographer and a commentator extremely sympathetic to Williams, makes the point that the reader's understanding of the Cold War politics of *Loyalties* is 'unusually reliant, even for a Williams novel, on the full details of a more general, ascertainable record.'<sup>32</sup> A very specific example of where the reader needs access to external 'records' occurs in the central episode of *Border Country*, the 1926 General Strike. The village policeman, an essentially sympathetic figure, declares that he was in 'Sirhowy in twenty-one'. This operates as short-hand to demonstrate that, whatever his amiable personal

qualities, he represents the brutal power of the state mobilised against the workers. The full meaning is accessible, however, only if, like Williams, one was trained in this particular code.<sup>33</sup> A more extended example of 'in-crowd' reading occurs in *Loyalties*. Here we find not only the complexities of Cold War politics to which Smith refers, but that the family name of 'traitor' Norman Braose is that of the Norman knight responsible for carrying out a massacre of the local Welsh gentry at Abergavenny in 1157. This link with an ancient act of treachery has a clearly determining effect on how these characters will be read but the significance of the name is never remarked in the text and it is unlikely that readers other than those, like Williams, familiar with the story from childhood, or specialists in Welsh mediaeval history, would recognise its import.<sup>34</sup> The question inevitably recurs: for whom is Williams writing? What, and given his political project the word is significant, is his *agenda* in writing the novels?

The question chimes too with the sense, noted by a number of critics, of a deep unease in the fiction. Of *Manod* Jeremy Hooker says: 'It is a novel where something is being withheld.'<sup>35</sup> In his discussion of *Border Country* Ward is more specific about what he understands as silenced: 'Time and again in this book a potentially disruptive or critical event, a hint of sexuality, a touch of sudden rearing passionate anger, is then simply erased or withheld.'<sup>36</sup> Commenting on Williams's writing more generally, both Eagleton and Tony Pinkney express the sense in which his language enacts a private drama. It is, says Eagleton, 'edgily defensive, private and self-absorbed.'<sup>37</sup> Pinkney describes Williams's use of language as 'shot through with obscure private resonances and impulses which it only just holds in place' and 'infiltrated by subterranean currents of anger, anxiety and crisis.'<sup>38</sup>



These critics give a sense that Williams's concerns, in the fiction and elsewhere, are somehow inaccessible to the reader. Ward and Hooker, both using 'withheld', imply a conscious act by the author. There is an apparent paradox here as, even while he 'withholds', Williams puts his personal life very firmly in the frame as a way of explaining his own discourse and values. It is, of course, a highly selective account of his life, in which boyhood and Wales are privileged and England and academia omitted or marginalised. Although for Williams the 'personal' is always understood in terms of insertion into class and national identities in precise historical terms, the reader's sense of being denied access to the text's full meaning, a sense particularly strong in the fiction, provokes a desire to read for evidence of the psycho-drama that the surface text refuses to yield.<sup>39</sup> Such readings do, however, need to be held in tension with one that gives full weight to his sense of language as social practice. 'What you write is in a very wide sense of identity and social relationship what you are' Williams says, drawing attention to the fact that modes of writing do not represent free choice but are produced in dialogue with a series of communities.<sup>40</sup> His commentaries on George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and D.H Lawrence insist on the particular 'problem of language' for writers from 'specific communities', while he talks of the Welsh industrial novel as struggling with 'dominant literary forms, shaped primarily as these were by another and dominant class.'<sup>41</sup> The sense of using literary production as a means of resistance and opposition to a dominant culture is crucial to any reading of the fiction and to read Williams in his own terms, by positioning him within a range of socio-historical discourses, yields a number of valuable insights.

The challenges raised by Williams's fiction suggest the methodology needed for their effective reading. The first three chapters of this thesis aim at giving the reader a

context by situating the novels in relation to his critical writings, to contemporary debates on the novel form and its relation to political commitment, and to the works of other novelists. Williams's position in the debates on the nature of realism and representation are scrutinised, and the importance of situating him within the context of Welsh as well as English literary form is emphasised. The question of the role of his biography in setting the agenda for his fiction is highlighted and the range of existing critical responses examined. A number of themes are thereby identified which form an appropriate structure for discussion and, rather than being focused on a single text, each of the four later chapters takes one of these themes for detailed readings of two or three of the novels. Given his well attested commitment to an ecological perspective, the value of eco-criticism is explored. At the same time, the importance of examining his work through theoretical approaches he found less congenial, notably feminist and psychoanalytical readings, is acknowledged.

This introduction has established the fundamental split central to Williams's value system, as expressed in his writings, between the strong positives of his boyhood and the negatives of his experience of Cambridge. Chapter One, 'Experience and Abstraction', develops this relation in terms of the dialectic that structures Williams's work, arguing that it informs and influences much of the critical commentary. The nature and development of that commentary, particularly by Eagleton and David Harvey, will be explored. Harvey reads Williams as a writer centrally concerned with place and space and attention will be given to the political implications of this in relation to Williams's key concept of 'community'. The concern with place leads too to an examination of the value of applying an eco-critical methodology to his fiction.



Chapter Two, 'The Outsider', examines both how Williams positions himself and how he has been critically positioned by a variety of modes of reading. The techniques whereby he situates himself as an Outsider, in terms of both his reading and writing practices, and his construction of 'Raymond Williams' through the selective biography he presents are examined. His decision to situate himself within a Welsh literary tradition, while rejecting certain of its stylistic implications, forms part of this discussion. In particular the chapter focuses on the debates around 'politics of form', whereby realism and modernism were positioned politically, on the way in which these debates developed from the fifties to the eighties and on how Williams's fiction and critical commentaries were read within the terms of these debates.

The third of the contextual chapters, 'The Ambiguities of Settlement', offers an analysis of this term in the fiction, suggesting its instability for Williams and the ways in which this relates to the experience/abstraction dialectic discussed in Chapter One. The various ways in which 'settlement' is inflected in the novels, and the way that these shifting meanings also operate in the critical writings, is outlined. The issue of 'settlement' is intimately related to the narrative of 'the scholarship boy' which structures three of Williams's novels, *Border Country*, *Second Generation* and *Loyalties*, as well as those of a number of his contemporaries. The significance of the differences which mark his handling of this theme is clarified. It is the discussion of the central importance of the contested nature of 'settlement' that sets up the themes of the following three chapters.

The related theme of these chapters is that of a sense of allegiance – to family, class and place – and the lurking sense of actual or potential betrayal of this cluster of

values. The subject of Chapter Four, 'The Father', is explored principally through reference to *Border Country* and *Loyalties*. The complexity of the relation between fathers and sons in the novels, and the way this is mapped onto class and political tensions, is examined. The parallels with the experience/abstraction dialectic are important here. The questions of guilt and betrayal, and the way in which Williams adopts particular narrative structures to situate these, look forward to the later fuller discussion of this trope in Chapter Six. In Chapter Five, 'Land of his Fathers', tensions of settlement are explored through an examination of Williams's construction of specific place and the 'imaginary' of Wales. The validity of his representations of Wales, the extent to which they may be criticised as static and idealised or defended as demonstrating discontinuity and an identity in process, will be addressed in relation to *Manod* and *Black Mountains*. Betrayal, integral to the themes both of the Father and the Nation, is the central subject of Chapter Six, 'The Traitor in the House', and will be explored through *The Volunteers*, *Loyalties* and *Black Mountains*. The importance of the trope for Williams, the narratives which he employs to represent it and its relation to his experience of Welsh history are central here. It is argued that two contesting narratives of treachery may be identified and their significance in terms of political and biographical ways of reading his fiction will be assessed.

In the final chapter, 'Purity and Danger', Williams's representation of gender and sexuality is the focus, examining *Second Generation* in the context of his critical writings. His failure to address adequately the articulations of gender in his commentaries on other writers is a critical commonplace and the chapter looks at a range of feminist responses to his writings. It also examines the representation of women, socially and sexually in his fiction, the way in which women's role is



perceived as a 'performance' and the relation of this to class struggle. The implications of Williams's limited responses when challenged on issues of gender are discussed. An important extension of the argument, however, is an account of the politicisation of the body that is central to *Second Generation* and the suggestive relation between political and libidinal liberation that the text may be seen to offer. A brief conclusion seeks to draw together the significance of issues identified in earlier chapters, focusing on the anxieties engendered by the relation between the personal and historical crises and suggesting ways in which the discursive production of space in the fiction engages with contemporary political debate.

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### **Endnotes**

**Place of publication London unless otherwise stated.**

**Full details of Raymond Williams's publications given for first reference only.**

<sup>1</sup> John Mullan, 'Rebel in a Tweed Suit', *Guardian Review* (28 May 2005), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (Verso, 1981), 271. Hereafter *Politics and Letters*.

<sup>3</sup> Terry Eagleton, Introduction to Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), 9. Hereafter *Critical Perspectives*.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Bennett *et al.*, *New Keywords: a Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Brooker, *A Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory* (Arnold, 1999), 39. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (Verso, 2005). Hereafter *Culture and Materialism*.

<sup>6</sup> *Border Country* was re-issued in January 2006 under a new imprint, the Library of Wales, established to publish 'neglected classics by Welsh writers in English.' Ten books will be published each year for the next five years.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Diary', *Guardian Review* (21 January 2006), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Dai Smith, Foreword to *Border Country* (Library of Wales, 2006), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams, 'The Idea of a Common Culture,' in *Resources of Hope* (Verso, 1989), 32. Hereafter *Resources of Hope*.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Paladin, 1975), 11-12. Hereafter *The Country and the City*.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Williams, 'My Cambridge', in *What I Came to Say* (Hutchinson, 1989), 5-6. Hereafter *What I Came to Say*.

<sup>12</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (Routledge, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 11-16.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Alan O'Connor, 'A Raymond Williams Bibliography', in *Critical Perspectives*, 184-227.

<sup>17</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 25.



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- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 277. Williams describes these as ‘experiments’ and made serious attempts to publish only one, *The Grasshoppers*. ‘Today I’m glad that it wasn’t published.’ He told the potential publisher that ‘I have never in my life worked so hard’ as in its composition. Inglis, *op. cit.*, 164.
- <sup>19</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 283.
- <sup>20</sup> Raymond Williams, *People of the Black Mountains: the Beginning* (Chatto and Windus, 1989). Hereafter *The Beginning*. Raymond Williams, *People of the Black Mountains: Eggs of the Eagle* (Chatto and Windus, 1990), 318-323. Hereafter *Eggs*.
- <sup>21</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 302.
- <sup>22</sup> *Eggs*, 323.
- <sup>23</sup> Inglis, *op. cit.*, 193 and 212.
- <sup>24</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 201. The reference is to *The May Day Manifesto 1968* first published by the May Day Manifesto Committee in 1967 and in expanded form by Penguin in 1969.
- <sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘Region and Class in the Novel’, in *Writing in Society* (Verso, 1984). 231. Hereafter *Writing in Society*.
- <sup>26</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 291.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.
- <sup>28</sup> Terry Eagleton cited in Inglis, *op. cit.*, 191-192. Inglis gives no source for this.
- <sup>29</sup> J.P. Ward, *Raymond Williams* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), 38.
- <sup>30</sup> Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (Penguin, 1964), 15. Hereafter *Border Country*.
- <sup>31</sup> Raymond Williams, *Second Generation* (Chatto and Windus, 1964), 342. Hereafter *Second Generation*.
- <sup>32</sup> Dai Smith, ‘Border Loyalties’, in *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 294.
- <sup>33</sup> *Border Country*, 110. Charles Loch Mowatt, *Britain Between the Wars* (Methuen, 1968) writes that in 1921: ‘The Triple Alliance of Mineworkers, NUR and Transport Workers Federation against the reduction in miners’ pay, particularly severe in the South Wales coalfield, caused the government to send armed troops into the valleys.’<sup>120</sup> Williams says: ‘Of course we knew what the troops had done in the valleys. We were constantly told of it.’ *Politics and Letters*, 34.
- <sup>34</sup> The significance for Williams’s fiction of Braose and the Abergavenny Massacre is discussed in Chapter Six.
- <sup>35</sup> Jeremy Hooker, ‘A Dream of a Country: the Raymond Williams Trilogy’, *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist* 49/50, (1980), 53.
- <sup>36</sup> Ward, *op. cit.*, 40.
- <sup>37</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (Verso, 1978), 22-23.
- <sup>38</sup> Tony Pinkney, ‘Raymond Williams and the Two Faces of Modernism’, in *Critical Perspectives*, 20.
- <sup>39</sup> Williams was consistently dismissive of the discipline of psychoanalysis. See John Higgins, ‘A Missed Encounter: Raymond Williams and Psychoanalysis’ in *Journal of Literary Studies* 6:1-2 (1990), 62-76.
- <sup>40</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 278. *The Country and the City*, 208-209.
- <sup>41</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘The Welsh Industrial Novel’, in *Culture and Materialism*, 219.

## Chapter One

### Experience and Abstraction

From a study of Williams there emerges the sense of a strong and continuous dialectic between experience and abstraction, a dialectic that serves as a central structuring principle in his fiction. The ways in which the terms are produced are subject to complex motivations, generating shifting and ambiguous meanings. Whatever the definitions adopted, the associations which accrue to the terms, in Williams's writing and in those of his critics, are the site of key problems of interpretation and representation.

In this chapter I examine the complexities of Williams's own understanding and deployment of the key terms of 'experience' and 'abstraction' and the range of critical and political responses thereby provoked. The commentaries of Eagleton and David Harvey, both of whom make sustained reference to the problems and strengths of Williams's understanding of 'experience', are here used to explore shifts in the ways in which Williams's work has been critically situated and evaluated. This leads to an examination of the intricate relationship between Williams's positive valuation of experience and the centrality of community and place in his value system.

'Community' was generally approved by social theorists and policy makers until the 1980s, when, with new emphases in social and cultural discourse, the concept and its practice became objects of radical suspicion, and Williams, as a prominent supporter, damned by association. Other developments in the discourses of eco-criticism, ecology and globalisation, and their potential for a revised, and more positive, reading of Williams, form the final section of the chapter's argument.



Hostility to Williams's apparent over-valuation of experience peaked during the ascendancy of Althusser and Macherey in critical theory during the 1980s, although critical reception has since moved to a position of more tempered respect. He was seen as failing to interrogate the concept of experience, with dire consequences for his readings of culture and for his political and fictional practice.<sup>1</sup> 'Experience' is here understood with reference to his upbringing in a Welsh working-class rural economy marked by strong face-to-face relationships. The argument of those who see his valuation of experience as disabling is that his childhood formed allegiances and laid down a value system of such power that no escape was subsequently possible. He was thereby entrapped in a form of place-bound community essentially reactionary and inappropriate to an analysis of contemporary social formations. The same critics would see his inability to distance himself from specific experiences as damagingly reactionary, a response that determines the assessment of Williams as literary critic and as novelist. Even as he is seen as failing to interrogate the philosophical limitations of the empirical, he is seen as failing to question the essentially conservative nature of the realist mode and to appreciate fully the subversive qualities of modernism/experimentalism.

The politics of form, its relation to Williams's own understanding of the limits and potential of literary representation in the late twentieth century and to his own fictional practice, will be discussed fully in Chapter Two. Critical revisions of Williams's work which are inclined to re-instate elements of 'experience' understood as crucial both to fictional and political practice have significance, however, for the concerns of this chapter. David Harvey's re-positioning gains particular force by



situating the term with reference to practical politics, while the instability of Eagleton's use of the dialectic makes him a paradigmatic figure in changing evaluations of Williams.

Andrew Milner has suggested that 'the trajectory of [Eagleton's] intellectual career nicely traces the varying impact' of Williams's work on British criticism.<sup>2</sup> Eagleton's readings of Williams as well as being, as Milner claims, characteristic of a number of Left critics, are useful in terms of the parallels between the two writers. They share a history of borders, between classes and value systems, the crossing of which is problematic.<sup>3</sup> It is notable that while Eagleton's readings may shift in their evaluation, they retain a consistent focus: the relation in Williams's work between 'lived experience' and abstraction. I have chosen to focus too on Harvey's commentary on Williams, as, although also structured around this dialectic, he uses the terms in significantly different ways. The variation of definition and emphases in the meaning and associations ascribed to each term that marks much of the critical commentary is suggestive. For while the tensions produced by the relationship of experience and abstraction need to be seen as crucial to any reading of Williams, it can be argued that, rather than a dialectical model with fixed terms, they can more usefully be read as refusing fixity of definition and thereby producing ambiguities of interpretation.

'Experience' has been variously defined and valued, by Williams and by his critics. The word has no place in Williams's first, 1976, edition of *Keywords* - although there is an entry for 'empiricism' - but does appear in the 1983 edition. The debates and definitions of that period clarify his understanding of both 'experience' and 'abstraction' as contested terms and their developing use as an aspect of political

struggle. A critical aspect of his strategy in defending 'experience' is to extend the term to include those areas of abstract analysis that might be said to operate as part of quotidian experience, and to understand 'abstraction' as a mode of analysis employed only by those one might term 'professional thinkers' – often academics. Such an extension renders 'abstraction' vulnerable to attack as being a specialist practice alien to the competencies and values of most people.

It is useful to begin with the intensive interrogation of Williams's use and evaluation of 'experience' in the *Politics and Letters* interview that centres on *The Long Revolution*. The interviewers challenge Williams on 'the epistemological privilege of experience itself' in his work. The 'category of experience', they say 'remains perplexing':

For your most recent discussion of a structure of feeling defines it as the field of contradiction between a consciously held ideology and emergent experience. The idea of an emergent experience beyond ideology seems to presuppose a kind of pristine contact between the subject and the reality in which this subject is immersed.<sup>4</sup>

Such a usage, they point out, is the 'diametrical opposite' of Althusser's understanding of experience as 'simply a synonym for illusion. It is ideology in its pure state - the opposite of science or truth.' Williams defends his position by declaring that he does not, of course, argue that there can be such a thing as 'natural seeing' and 'direct and unmediated contact with reality'. He does not wish to 'make a god out of an unexamined subjectivity.' He agrees that the use of 'a great blockbuster word like experience...can have very unfortunate effects over the rest of the argument.'<sup>5</sup> Where he does, however, wish to draw a line, is against a theory dominant in much of



linguistics and 'a certain kind of semiotics' in which 'the epistemological wholly absorbs the ontological.' It is, he says, 'necessary to recall an absolutely founding presumption of materialism: namely that the natural world exists whether any one signifies it or not.'<sup>6</sup> Rather than treating experience as a 'forbidden' word, it should rather be one which describes an area understood as 'limited', since 'there are many kinds of knowledge that it will never give us in any of its ordinary senses.' He accepts that such an emphasis gives the 'necessary correction' to his earlier formulations, and his interviewers agree that the new 'balance seems very acceptable.'<sup>7</sup> The entry in the 1983 edition of *Keywords* also focuses on an extension of the term 'experience', here from the popular meaning as being solely individual in origin:

At one extreme experience (present) is offered as the necessary (immediate and authentic) ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis. At the other extreme, experience...is seen as the product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception, and thus not of material for truths but as evidence of conditions of systems which by definition it cannot itself explain.<sup>8</sup>

What, however, is clear from the *Politics and Letters* debate is that both Williams's definition of the epistemological term and his recognition of the ontological term are very particular.

One needs to examine carefully the extent and nature of the value that he accords to the non-empirical. He has said that he accepts as indisputable that 'unmediated contact with reality' is not possible and one assumes that this acceptance holds true across time and place. Yet his account of the relation between the ontological and epistemological is argued in explicitly historical terms: he wishes to differentiate the



relationship which obtained at different periods. Specifically, he argues that from the industrial revolution onwards, 'there has developed a type of society which is less and less interpretable from experience'.<sup>9</sup> He says that 'new forms had to be developed to penetrate what was to a large extent obscure', offering as examples the statistical method developed by Booth to 'read' the East End of London and Dickens's use of 'figures' in *Dombey and Son* 'to render the basic reality of the society, which is certainly not empirically observable.'<sup>10</sup> The implication is that it is only in more complex societies that recourse to modes of understanding other than the experiential is necessary: the emphasis is firmly on applications which enable the practitioner in the crucial task of representation of the otherwise obscure. This emphasis on practice is allied to what I would understand as a politicised reading of the relationship between the theoretical and empirical terms. He fully accepts 'the positive power of techniques of analysis ...capable of interpreting...the movements of an integrated world economy and...the negative qualities of a naïve observation that can never gain knowledge of realities like these.'<sup>11</sup> He shows himself appreciative of the necessity of those methods, models and techniques – statistical, economic and fictional – which, while not available to 'naïve observation', are vital for the fuller understanding and representation of social relations. Yet one notes that what is valued is the *application* of models and techniques to particular practices, and indeed to his own writing practices, both in his fictional and non-fictional works. The status of the non-empirical is not denied, then, but that status must not be allowed to erase the value of 'experience,' here understood in the wider sense that he has sought to define.

Despite negotiating a balance with which his interviewers declare themselves satisfied, Williams remains uneasy. In a passage which I would read as crucial, he speaks of an 'ideological crisis' in contemporary society:

this inevitable awareness [that] has...led to a privileged dominance of the techniques of rational penetration and a corresponding undervaluation of areas where there is some everyday commerce between the available articulations and the general process that has been termed 'experience.'<sup>12</sup>

Alertness to this reworking and rewording of the terms of the dialectic is vital to an understanding of the tensions that inform both Williams's writing and critical responses to it. Here one notes the introduction of the term 'available articulations', by which I would understand orders of abstraction and analysis which in practice are available to the non-specialist. The understanding of the epistemological term as 'rational penetration' is unexceptionable, but is now opposed by the conjunction of the 'everyday' and 'the general process.' It is not the use of 'rational penetration', or analytic techniques, per se to which he objects, but the political use to which it has been put. By 'privileging' its position it is made to legitimise the construction of a set of social relations that devalue the 'everyday' lives of those people who routinely employ other modes of interpretation. It is a hierarchy of values that devalues his own place and class of origin, effectively his own life. The terms, then, demand constant revision and their meanings must be teased out to discover, and to challenge, their application. The political importance of such revisiting and 'extension' is demonstrated very clearly in Eagleton's readings of Williams.

Eagleton's interpretation begins with the general theoretical model used by the *Politics and Letters* interviewers and moves to one employing terms and clusters of



association more clearly related to Williams's own situation. This shift must be read in the context of Eagleton's own changing critical/political views. In the 1970 *Exiles and Emigrés*, he makes only one direct, and positive, reference to Williams but the critical approach, and even the terminology with its frequent use of 'settlement' and 'break', terms which, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, are central to Williams's fiction and critical writings, are saturated with his influence.<sup>13</sup> In *Myths of Power* (1975), the positives of Williams's influence dominate but in *Criticism and Ideology*, published in 1976 and categorised by Milner as 'fairly full blown Althusserianism', he mounts a strong attack on his former teacher.<sup>14</sup> There are side swipes at Williams as 'ideologically bound to the moment of nineteenth century realism' and the negative effect of such 'allegiance' on his own writing of fiction, particularly *Second Generation*.<sup>15</sup> The main thrust of the attack, however, is on Williams's valuation of experience. While the substance of Eagleton's attack prefigures that of the *Politics and Letters* interviewers, its style is more overtly aggressive:

It is this insistence on experience, this passionate premium placed upon the 'lived' which provides one of the centrally unifying themes of Williams's oeuvre – which supplies at once the formidable power and drastic limitation of his work.<sup>16</sup>

For Williams, 'reasoning' that does not arise 'organically from lived experience' is 'likely to be suspect', and he is accused of 'a muted strain of anti-intellectualism.' This weakness of understanding Eagleton situates in the tradition of 'commonplace English empiricism', to be found variously in David Hume (*sic*) and in *Scrutiny* and, internationally, in 'the Romantic anti-scientism of Lukacs and the Frankfurt school.'<sup>17</sup> At this time, Eagleton's relation to Williams's thinking and writing is clearly soured



by Williams's perceived failure to make 'a vital, individual contribution to the development of a Marxist aesthetics.'<sup>18</sup>

Writing more than ten years later, soon after Williams's death, in the introduction to the *Critical Perspectives* volume of which he is editor, Eagleton is full of admiration for the man and the teacher. His account returns to the role of the relation of lived experience and theory. This he now perceives as 'a fertile conjuncture' if one with 'severe tensions.'<sup>19</sup> The definitions of experience and theory used here are reminiscent of Williams's reworking of the terms in the *Politics and Letters* interview. They are, that is, designed to provoke a specifically political response in that abstraction is understood as effectively conflated with the dominant hegemony and experience with the lives of the disempowered. Abstraction means the Cambridge mind-set that Eagleton has here already constructed as socially exclusive and alienating: 'the learnt habit of a specialized, separated intelligence'. This intelligence is 'radically disassociated from how most people actually had to live'.<sup>20</sup> This formulation, very close to the way that Williams, in his first two novels, *Border Country* and *Second Generation*, constructs the sense of separation from their working-class origins felt by his academic protagonists, signals clearly a new consensus between writer and critic. Eagleton admits that in *Criticism and Ideology*, he had dismissed this 'duality' 'with the brisk impatience of relative youth'.<sup>21</sup> Although one can argue that the 'duality' as he here constructs it is not exactly the duality that he condemned in *Criticism and Ideology*, in a later work he makes the retraction in rather different terms.

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, published in 1990, he writes of Williams's 'subtle sense of the complex mediations between such necessarily universal formations as

social class, and the lived particularities of place, region, nature, the body' and contrasts this favourably with the 'universalist rationalism' of Habermas.<sup>22</sup> In a later essay on Williams, he offers the tension as one existing between two senses of culture: 'one sense of culture - forms of life - lay on one side of the border, while another sense of it - "educated consciousness" - lay on the other.' Williams, he says:

had to learn to keep his sanity and equipoise in the continual tension between these polarities, knowing as he did that the social reality lay in the *tension*, not either pole taken in isolation, that this was the formative and typical historical experience, not something which lay safely on one side of the border or the other.<sup>23</sup> (original emphasis)

One notes here that 'experience' includes not only the 'forms of life' on one side of the border, but also the 'educated consciousness' on the other – what one might take to be positive aspects of 'theory' or abstraction rather than negative 'specialized, separated intelligence': Eagleton, like Williams, extends experience to include what he understands as valuable. Eagleton, then, does not argue that 'lived experience' has ceased to be fundamental to any assessment of Williams's thinking, but he has moved to a position where he sees it as held in a fruitful tension with 'theory.'

Essentially Eagleton adopts a model where the goal, sought and achieved by Williams (and perhaps by himself), is 'sanity and equipoise'. That this for him remains a crucial goal is illustrated when, in a 2005 review, he suggests the important role of aesthetics in considering 'one of the questions that dogs the history of Western thought...how much reason contributes to our knowledge of the world, and how much experience.'<sup>24</sup>

He says: 'The work of art itself is a kind of sensuous logic. It is reason brought home to lived experience, and so vastly more effective than some abstract imperative.' The



point about aesthetics 'is that as a science of the concrete, it promises to *reconcile* the rational and the experiential' (added emphasis). An important question is whether Eagleton, in his concern for equipoise, is effacing those elements in Williams which resist such reconciliation.

David Harvey's commentary on Williams is also structured around the dialectic of abstraction/experience, although the specific terms that Harvey uses are significantly different from those of Eagleton. His sympathy with Williams is signalled by the title of his *Spaces of Hope* (2000) which he announces as a parallel to the posthumous collection of Williams's writings, *Resources of Hope* (1989).<sup>25</sup> While, like Eagleton, Harvey is sympathetic to Williams's general political project, he is closer to Williams's particular position in that he is centrally concerned with the practical political consequences of theoretical understandings. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) he sees Williams as an ally in the 1980s 'crisis in historical materialism,' against those of the New Left who are more interested in Foucault and Derrida than in Marx.<sup>26</sup> In his most extended commentary on Williams, however, an essay in his 2001 *Spaces of Capital*, he acknowledges those aspects where Williams is vulnerable and his identification of these has much in common with Eagleton's attack in *Criticism and Ideology*. Central is his recognition that Williams is 'reluctant to let go of "lived experience" ...as if there were nothing problematic about taking daily experience as a direct basis for theory construction.'<sup>27</sup> The main emphasis in this essay, however, is an examination of the way in which Williams's writings acknowledge and negotiate the difficulties of the relation between experience and abstraction and, crucially for Harvey, the way in which this relates to political practice.

The essay opens with an account of Harvey's experience of a research project on the proposed closure of the Rover car plant in Cowley, Oxford, interestingly the same plant which features in *Second Generation*. While his fellow researcher was unambiguous in her loyalties to 'the militant shop stewards in the plant', whose motives and trials he too respects, Harvey is conscious of a need to acknowledge different perspectives on the closure. The defining issue is the need to agree on which parameters of *space* are relevant. What is the community here? Is it the work-place only or the Cowley community outside the work-place? Should the discussion extend to encompass Britain, or Europe, with its 'incredible overcapacity of the automobile industry'? How, in terms of socialism and ecology, can one justify a fight to continue to produce 'cars for the ultra rich'? This is where the conflict intersects with the issues raised by Williams. What value should be placed on the immediate experience of the workers, what Williams calls 'militant particularism'?<sup>28</sup> One cannot, Harvey believes, hold that 'what is right and good for the militant shop stewards of Cowley' can simply be extended to the wider society:

Other levels and kinds of abstraction have to be deployed if socialism is to break out of its local bonds and become a viable alternative to capitalism as a working mode of production and social relations. But there is something equally problematic about imposing a politics guided by abstractions upon people who have given their lives and labour over so many years in a particular way in a particular place.<sup>29</sup>

Harvey, understanding this to be the question that Williams addresses, offers the answer that 'theoretical practice must be constructed as a continuous dialectic of the



militant particularism of the lives lived on the one hand and the struggle to achieve sufficient critical distance and detachment on the other'.<sup>30</sup> He quotes Williams:

The unique and extraordinary character of working class self-organization [is] to connect particular struggle in one quite special way. It has set out, as a movement, to make real what is at first sight the extraordinary claim that the defence and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact the general interest.<sup>31</sup>

An additional, and perhaps more interesting, comment by Williams which supports Harvey's argument occurs in an essay on the General Strike where he writes of workers: 'Urged to act in solidarity...not by place or work or by physical connection, but in essence by an idea, an idea that may even contradict their immediate local and material interest: an idea of the class, of the solidarity of the class.'<sup>32</sup> The idea of 'extension' from the diverse and material to the abstraction of class is a central theme in Williams's political writings, a strongly positive sense of the potential of the dialectical relationship, and one which needs to be remembered when examining elements of his thinking that appear to support Eagleton's comment on his 'muted...anti-intellectualism' and distrust of the abstract. One notes, of course, that in this context the non-material 'idea' is the property not of a dominant and socially exclusive group but rather of a group who are *acting* on that idea in ways intended to redefine the experience of social relations. The political context is crucial to the positive response. Harvey acknowledges the difficulties that Williams experiences in holding the relation in tension, but asserts the absolute value of maintaining this pressure in terms of practical political action. 'The core task', as he understands it, is 'the return of theory to the world of daily practical politics'<sup>33</sup>

Reading Williams in the context of 'practical politics' is an important emphasis. It helps to clarify that an important distinction between Williams and many of his academic colleagues is not so much his commitment to 'lived experience' at the expense of theory, but rather a commitment to a political practice that insisted that theory be tested in its application to what Harvey calls 'daily politics.' His own practice clarifies this commitment. An examination of the sources of the pieces collected in *Resources of Hope* reveals not a series of refereed articles from academic journals or papers given at symposia, but, rather, versions of talks given to Plaid Cymru summer schools, the Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA) and the National Union of Mineworkers.<sup>34</sup> Jack Woolford, a colleague during Williams's period as a tutor with the Oxford University Extra-Mural Studies Delegacy, writes of what was effectively his role as tutors' shop steward: 'he was prepared to take unbelievably endless trouble of behalf of colleagues and could quietly argue administrators... into the ground.'<sup>35</sup> Asked by CND to take part in a twenty-four hour cycle of readings outside St Martin in the Fields, he opted for a distinctly low profile time slot in the early hours of the morning.<sup>36</sup> Tariq Ali remembers that 'Williams was among the few from the older generation of The Left who defended the VSC (Vietnam Solidarity Campaign) on television in debates with the Police Federation and actually spoke on our platforms whenever we asked him to appear.'<sup>37</sup> He was a man who understood that politics was about the boring business of sitting up into the early hours at a conference putting together details of a composite motion that stood some chance of being approved. Throughout his professional life he continued to operate across the boundaries between disciplines and those between theory and practical politics. The failure, as he perceived it, of the



academic community, including those on the Left, to forge such connections was clearly a matter of continuing anger and distress.

The centrality of the experience/abstraction dynamic in the evaluation of Williams took another turn in the debates of the 1970s and 1980s, when Williams opposed the ideas and allies of Saussure, Lacan, Goldmann, Lyotard and Baudrillard. Battle was now engaged for the soul of the British Left. Williams's critical practice was consistent in its attempts to identify and to foreground oppositional or alternative positions within cultural systems. His practice and his coinage of the term Cultural Materialism had been a major influence on 'critics such as Sinfield, Dollimore and Belsey.'<sup>38</sup> Such credentials were no longer adequate as proof of one's anti-Establishment position: deconstruction alone was legitimately subversive since it exposed the ideological presuppositions of certain narrative structures which inscribed 'dominance' and 'repression of desire.'<sup>39</sup> Williams understood this as dangerous, as his attack centred on the 'abstraction' of these approaches demonstrates:

I can feel the bracing cold of their inherent distances and impersonalities and yet have to go on saying that they are indeed ice-cold. I see, practically and theoretically, the estranging consequences of the general assumption - as active in modernist literature as in theoretical linguistics and structuralist Marxism - that the systems of human signs are generated within the systems themselves and that to think otherwise is a humanist error.<sup>40</sup>

One notes the spatial emphasis of distances and estrangement, presumably from a more quotidian 'experience' which is 'warm' as against this cold. He here sets himself against a theoretical model, and its literary practice, which he understands as politically disabling and a denial of the possibilities of a radical art. He sees his

opponents, in their acceptance of the unassailable power of the dominant forms, as risking collusion with the enemy by lending 'unwitting support to the conceptions of the self, individual or subject which Thatcherism drew upon for its representation of an acquisitive and asocial world.'<sup>41</sup> Against this he wishes to assert that 'the celebration of possibility is the most profound need.'<sup>42</sup>

It is, in the context of the experience/abstraction debate, crucial to indicate that Williams's rejection of theorists as dangerously misguided was a partial one, targeted at adherents of structuralist, certain post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories. This is by no means a wholesale rejection of 'abstraction.' He admired Bourdieu and his political thinking was heavily influenced by Gramsci's concept of hegemony. What these thinkers can be seen to have in common is an ascription of positive value to attachment and commitment: not for them the marginalisation or denial of the 'lived experience' term of the dialectic. Milner, identifying what he understands as similarities of position between Bourdieu and Williams, notes Bourdieu's 'pointed contrast between the aesthetic disposition of legitimate taste which presupposes the distance from the world which is the basis of bourgeois experience' and 'the popular aesthetic based on the continuity of art and life' with its 'deep rooted demand for participation.'<sup>43</sup> Gramsci writes that 'the error of the intellectual consists in believing that it is possible to know without understanding, and especially without feeling and passion.'<sup>44</sup> Milner's image of 'rootedness' in his discussion of Bourdieu is repeated by Edward Said in his linking of Williams and Gramsci. Said says of Williams that:

[his] greatest virtue as a critic is that alone of his generation in the United States and Britain he was attuned to the astonishingly productive possibilities of the Gramscian critical consciousness, firmly rooted as it was in the very



landscapes, geographies and mobile spaces of a history conceived and interpreted as something more complex and uneven than the Hegelian synthesis had once permitted.<sup>45</sup>

This reading of Williams in terms of 'landscapes, geographies and mobile spaces' is a suggestive one, echoed in Harvey's reading of the fiction as centrally concerned with 'place, space and environment' as 'inseparable elements in complex processes' of social and environmental transformation.<sup>46</sup> Pinkney's reading focuses even more forcefully on the 'geographical consciousness' in Williams's fiction. He, however, understands the emphasis on space as producing particular tensions in the experience/abstraction dialectic. He writes of a 'paradoxical interaction of spaces, of the local and global, of an intensely specific, loved place and the multinational world space of the late twentieth century' as being a 'postmodern phenomenon.'<sup>47</sup> The way in which, in this spatial model, the experience/abstraction relation may be mapped onto the 'specific loved place' and the 'multinational world space' is clear. In a discussion of *Black Mountains* Pinkney highlights the tensions suggestively: 'Is there, Williams's fiction seems persistently to ask, something about the very nature of abstract universalising inquiry that means that even an intellectual politically aligned with an oppressed community will – indeed must – betray it?'<sup>48</sup> Although where Eagleton sees reconciliation, Pinkney is alert to the possibility of the irreconcilable, he is, like Said and Harvey, unqualified in his admiration of Williams's representation of space and place. Such a positive reading is, however, by no means consensual. The political import of his understanding of 'community' and its relation to place has been read as outmoded, reactionary, even racist in its implications, as Brooker's and Gilroy's commentaries outlined below, make clear.

A useful beginning is an examination of the way in which the concept 'community' has been critiqued. This is clearly relevant to Williams's representation of community in process and in practice in his fiction, where, as will be examined in Chapter Three, an exploration of the relation between 'rootedness' and 'escape' is a major structuring principle. The way in which he understood community was strongly influenced, as he readily accepted, by his experience of its practice in Pandy. The issue here is whether the power of this experience strangled his ability to analyse and to move beyond it. The shifts in the political reading and evaluation of 'community' in the thirty years between the first edition of *Keywords* and the present are absolutely central to the critical responses to Williams. In 1976 he could state wryly:

Community can be the warmly persuasive way to describe an existing set of social relationships, or the warmly persuasive way to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society etc) it never seems to be used unfavourably and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.<sup>49</sup>

Yet by the late '90s the term no longer basked in this warm consensual glow, having become one of the counters in the debate on the nature and possibility of civil society. Within this debate, 'community' has been positioned as essentially place-bound, a static monolith set in opposition to a world of fragmentation and vanishing boundaries. This fragmented world is read by Stuart Hall as one where 'the pluralization of social life expands the possibilities and identities available to ordinary people (at least in the industrialized world) in their everyday working, social and familial lives.'<sup>50</sup> Set against this sense of liberation, choice and challenge, community, with its values of stability and sustained relationships, has been positioned as,



reactionary, as a denial of ethnic diversity and sexual choice. 'Community' has also suffered from guilt by association with the rhetoric and practice of the communitarian movement, condemned by Harvey and others as essentially 'exclusionary' and 'predominantly racist at the populist level.'<sup>51</sup> Paul Gilroy has indeed identified Williams's own ideas as racist and made a direct link between him and Enoch Powell in their ideas of 'authentic and inauthentic types of national belonging.' Williams is taken to task for his understanding of social identity as formed through 'long experience...actual and sustained social relationships'. This, says Gilroy, 'prompts the question – how long is long enough to become a genuine Brit?'<sup>52</sup>

The entry for 'community' in Peter Brooker's 1999 *Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory* takes as its focus Williams's entry in the 1976 *Keywords* and his 1977 essay 'The Importance of Community.' Brooker understands Williams as emphasising local association and comments that the connotations of 'local face-to-face relations have often now been found implausible and conservative in the face of altered metropolitan conditions.' He refers to the argument of Iris Marion Young that 'the ideal of community denies difference' and that it 'totalizes and detemporalizes [the] conception of social life.' This, Brooker goes on, 'is now commonly adopted within the field of postmodern cultural geography which celebrates 'unassimilated otherness' over an impossible communal association.'<sup>53</sup> As a way of repositioning Williams, Brooker offers Doreen Massey's 1993 essay 'A Global Sense of Place' which, he suggests, negotiates these polarities. The concept of place advanced by Massey is one 'without boundaries in the sense of divisions that frame simple enclosures' but rather of communities 'imagined as articulated movements in networks of social relations and understandings.'<sup>54</sup> This, however, works to reinforce the sense that for Williams

communities *are* solely 'divisions which frame simple enclosures', that they are undifferentiated and purely spatial – an outdated model, frustrating for the individual and politically damaging in their denial of diversity.

One point raised in Massey's essay, that communities such as small mining villages initially appear 'relatively stable and homogenous' but in fact have different structures in terms of gender differentiation, does point to a crucial weakness in Williams's reading of social relations which will be addressed in Chapter Seven. It is not difficult, however, to mount a strong defence of Williams against the argument posed by Brooker and others that his ideal of community is one of stability and ethnic homogeneity. Both his fictional and his non-fictional works stress that all 'communities', even those seemingly least vulnerable to change, are always necessarily in process. His essays and speeches are threaded with references to diversity. In a presidential address to the Classical Association at University College Cardiff in 1984 he insists on the recognition of 'the facts of actual change and diversity' as 'necessary grounds of wisdom in complex and contending societies.'<sup>55</sup> An essay in the following year makes the point that 'the public interest is not singular but a complex and interactive network of *different* real interests. A sharing plan begins from this acknowledgement of *diversity*, and encourages the true social process of open discussion, negotiation and agreement'<sup>56</sup>(original emphases).

Sympathetic critics have defended Williams from charges of constructing community on the model posited by Brooker. Alan O'Connor dismisses arguments that Williams's term 'knowable communities' should be understood as a reactionary and ultimately ineffective way of seeking to stabilise social identity. He points to the



'Communications' section of *The May Day Manifesto 1968* where the accepted wisdom that traditional communities exist and then are disrupted by mass media is reversed: Williams says rather that the experience of face-to-face community is 'discontinuous and fragmentary.'<sup>57</sup> Eagleton too engages directly with the attack on Williams's ideal of community, rejecting the actual structure of the hostile argument. He denies that 'what for so much postmodern thought is a rigid binary opposition – community, consensus and solidarity on the one hand, heterogeneity, multiplicity and plurality on the other' had any meaning for Williams. Eagleton argues:

He is always politically partisan and always a pluralist and the two emphases evolve side-by-side in his work, so that by the time of the *Politics and Letters* interviews he's actively rejecting any homogenous notion of community and stressing instead the inevitable complexity and specialisation of a socialist society.<sup>58</sup>

It is impossible to read Williams attentively and fail to understand that he argues that both the actual and the desired society are necessarily complex and evolving. In *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) Fredric Jameson twice refers to 'Raymond Williams' wonderful remark that socialism will not be simpler than capitalism but immeasurably more complex.'<sup>59</sup> What Williams resists is denial that any positive values adhere to a 'settled' society and he is particularly concerned to reiterate the power of place and the local. The remainder of the chapter therefore considers models of reading that offer the potential for a revised evaluation of both 'place' and 'experience' in his work.

The rise of eco-criticism as a theoretical approach - its official approval signalled by the Modern Languages Association's acceptance in 1998 of The Association for the

Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) as an 'allied group' – offers a good starting point for a different theoretical approach to a concept of place.<sup>60</sup> The second volume of the journal *Keywords* (1999) takes eco-criticism as its main theme. Not all the papers in this section are written with direct reference to Williams, but the choice of focus suggests this is perceived as a critical approach relevant to his work. There is, however, a need to clarify the concept and practice of eco-criticism and thus its applicability to Williams. Such clarification is not without problems. Within the eco-critical field, not only is the distinction between academy and political activism an unregulated border but there is little agreement between eco-critics as to the status of the 'natural world' in their theoretical model. It is, writes Michael Cohen in 2004, 'a hot and contested topic.'<sup>61</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty writes that 'as a theoretical discourse [eco-criticism] negotiates between the human and the non-human.'<sup>62</sup> Ursula Heise asserts that: 'Eco-criticism has nothing specifically to do with *nature* writing...to suggest that it deals with nothing else is comparable to claiming that feminism is only applicable to texts by or about women.'<sup>63</sup>

The contestation is demonstrated in the approaches adopted by the authors in *Keywords*. Dominic Head is conscious that an eco-criticism focused on those writers who explicitly deal with the natural world is too limiting, but then selects for his 'application' of an eco-critical model the very soft target of Graham Swift's *Waterland*. Of Williams's novels, he cites only *Black Mountains* 'in which narrative continuity is supplied by place rather than character' as 'a major experiment in support of this eco-centric principle.'<sup>64</sup> If an eco-critical approach is valuable for an assessment of Williams's fiction, it needs to be tested too by application to the predominantly urban *Second Generation*. An understanding more potentially valuable



for reading Williams is adopted in Gerry Smyth's *Keywords* paper. He does not offer any analysis of Williams's fiction, but suggests that his practice of what he terms 'ecomaterialism' might offer 'one place to continue working for an eco-criticism worth the name.'<sup>65</sup> The focus of Smyth's paper is a number of urban novels where 'individual consciousness is subtly yet indissolubly meshed with specific physical environments' and he understands 'engaged ecocriticism' as 'deliberately [engaging] with discourses of genealogy, local history and local geography'.<sup>66</sup> As well as freeing Williams from an eco-critical reading narrowed to the 'rural', this usefully points precisely to areas in his fiction that have been under-emphasised. *Black Mountains* uses 'discourses of genealogy, local history and local geography' to link the fictional episodes. The use of such discourses is significant. Although most critics note his later allegiance to Wales, and to a particular understanding of culture and commitment derived from it, it is only in Dai Smith's commentaries that one finds any emphasis laid on the fundamental importance of the particular discourses of Welsh fiction and history in constructing Williams's understanding of social process and identity.<sup>67</sup> Smyth's focus is on an understanding of space, the ways in which 'political prescriptions are encoded into social space' and power struggles 'embedded in the local environment': these emphases have a clear relevance to the conflicts which structure each of Williams's novels.<sup>68</sup> Their emphasis on the need to understand the relation of place to power suggests too the extent to which eco-criticism and the wider environmental movement discourage compartmentalisation, whether it be between disciplines, between different levels of the educational process or between theoretical academician and political activist.

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While an analysis like Smyth's demonstrates the way in which fiction is a vehicle for foregrounding 'political prescriptions', the 1980s was a time when, through the Council for Environmental Education and the Urban Study Centre movement, other disciplines such as geography and field biology became highly politicised. Like the readers of *The Country and the City*, school children learned that 'nature' exists in particular and unstable relation to culture, made maps of their localities in accord with their perceptions and worked towards an understanding of the powers inscribed in such documents.<sup>69</sup> This was far removed from traditional 'nature study', even as a more rigorous literary eco-criticism is not confined to 'nature writing.' This insistence by many eco-critics on situating 'the natural world' in a matrix of power relations is linked to the inextricability of theory and practice. Cohen, in his 2004 overview *Blues in the Green*, traces the importance of 'wilderness protection' as a motivator for 1970s American eco-critics and asserts the necessity to 'move beyond traditional literary and historical studies of intersecting American nature and culture to what it would mean to act wisely, that people may live well, and, as we now say, sustainably.'<sup>70</sup> Evan Mwangi, writing in the ASLE journal, interprets the award of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize to Nigerian Wangari Maathai, campaigner for 'forests and women' as 'a big boost to [African] eco-criticism' since it maintains 'the environmentalist ethical emphasis on a world beyond the text.'<sup>71</sup> The resistance of Mwangi, and other eco-critics, to a separation of theoretical models from the interventionism of ecological politics suggests that Williams's stance on the practical politics of the broader environmental movement should be included in any eco-critical model adopted for a reading of his fiction.



By the standards of more recently devised principles of 'deep green' ecology, Williams's understanding, as shown in his 1982 address to SERA, may certainly be labelled anthropocentric.<sup>72</sup> In this, however, he was consistent with the epoch: the 1987 Bruntland Report laments 'the lack of integrated social planning [that] limits the world's ability to meet *human* needs now and in the future.'<sup>73</sup> (added emphasis) There is clearly much that he found sympathetic in the policies and practice of environmentalism in the 1980s. His acceptance of the post as vice-president of SERA demonstrates that he saw the potential of a viable socialist future in the environmental movement's insistence on the values of individual agency and local democratic action, and in its demands for a more equitable distribution of natural resources as a precondition for global sustainability. The credo of eco-criticism, that there should be no barriers between these beliefs, their political application and the theories that sustain them, echoes Williams's own writing practice with its range across disciplinary boundaries and, as has been noted above, address to a variety of non-academic constituencies. When exploring the effectiveness of the eco-critical model for a reading on Williams, it is useful to map onto such commentaries as Smyth's the writings of sociologists and economists concerned to re-position place as a positive term and to cast the eye of suspicion not on 'community', but on what these writers perceive as the illusory glamour of a supposedly liberating disconnection and fragmentation.

Within the dominant discourse of globalisation, writers like Zygmunt Bauman believe it crucial to mount a defence of the material threatened by erasure by the cyber.

Rather than celebrating the death of the constraints of place, Bauman identifies this as a murder committed by global capitalism and one which operates to the detriment of

the majority of the world's people. In *Globalization: the Human Consequences* (1995) he writes that the last quarter of the twentieth century 'will go down in history as the Great War of Independence from Space. What happened in the course of that war was a consistent and relentless wrenching of the decision-making centres... free from territorial constraints – the constraints of locality.'<sup>74</sup> Bauman is eloquent, here and in *Wasted Lives* (2004), on the polarisation of those 'emancipated from territorial constraints' and the many still confined to territory 'denuded...of its meaning and its identity-endowing capacity.'<sup>75</sup> While Bauman stresses the human consequences of the death of place, Partha Dasgupta, himself a distinguished economist, is disquieted by the ecological implications of economists' rejection of geography. He comments that:

Economists have moved away from seeing location as a determinant of human lives... Modern theories of economic development dismiss geography as a negligible factor in progress. The term 'globalisation' is itself a sign that location per se doesn't matter.<sup>76</sup>

The danger of such the devaluing of location he understands to be an obsession with 'cultural survival' and a dismissal of 'our need to discover how to survive ecologically.' Within this discourse Williams's positive valuation of 'place' ceases to be an embarrassment and becomes evidence of a desire to defend the disempowered against the corporate destroyers. In *Second Generation* Peter Owen identifies a 'disastrously wrong pattern' in academic life: 'The idea of learning was right, but its current world was so deeply alienated, so deeply shut off from any actual human need, that it contradicted the intention in the very process of seeming to realize it.'<sup>77</sup> Eco-criticism, and the concerns of sociologists like Baumann, offer a way of opening the academy to consideration of 'actual human need': the experience/abstraction dialectic can be transcended and move into a new phase.



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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Politics and Letters', in *Critical Perspectives*, 62.
- <sup>2</sup> Andrew Milner, *Cultural Materialism* (Melbourne: University Press), 99.
- <sup>3</sup> Nicholas Wroe, 'High Priest of Lit. Crit.', *Guardian Review* (2 February 2002). Of Eagleton: 'He has negotiated a life lived on the cusps of different worlds.' Wroe quotes Eagleton: 'It was foolish to think that this [class] divide could simply be crossed.'  
<http://education.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4347953-108966,00.html>. Accessed 20.5.2004
- <sup>4</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 167.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.
- <sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Fontana, 1983), 54. Hereafter *Keywords*.
- <sup>9</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 171.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Emigrés* (Chatto and Windus, 1970), 198-203.
- <sup>14</sup> Milner, *op. cit.*, 99.
- <sup>15</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (Verso, 1979), 36-37.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>19</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction', in *Critical Perspectives*, 3.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>22</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 409.
- <sup>23</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Raymond Williams, Communities and Universities', Roger Bromley *et al.* (eds.) *Keywords: a Journal of Cultural Materialism* 1(1998), 34.
- <sup>24</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Lend me a fiver', *London Review of Books* 27:12 (2005),  
[http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n12/print/eag101\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n12/print/eag101_.html). Accessed 16.8.2006.
- <sup>25</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 17.
- <sup>26</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 354.
- <sup>27</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 164.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Decentralism and the Politics of Place', in *Resources of Hope*, 242. Harvey finds this phrase particularly resonant. He uses it twice in *Spaces of Hope*, 55 and 71, and entitles the Williams chapter in *Spaces of Capital*, "Militant particularism and global ambition: the conceptual politics of space, place and environment in the work of Raymond Williams.'
- <sup>29</sup> Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*, 158-163.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.
- <sup>31</sup> 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?', in *Resources of Hope*, 249.
- <sup>32</sup> 'The Social Significance of 1926', in *Resources of Hope*, 107.
- <sup>33</sup> Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 72 and *Spaces of Capital*, 186.
- <sup>34</sup> *Resources of Hope*, vii.
- <sup>35</sup> Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (Routledge, 1995), 125.
- <sup>36</sup> Mervyn Jones, unpublished interview with Elizabeth Allen, 23.6.02, Lewes, East Sussex, 2 hours. 'When I got there to do my turn, at around two in the morning, I took over from Raymond. I volunteered for the early hours because there were people more high profile than me for the times that the press would be around. But he was well enough known to have done his bit at a more comfortable time.'
- <sup>37</sup> Tariq Ali, *Street-Fighting Years* (Collins, 1987), 220.
- <sup>38</sup> John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (Macmillan 1998), 42.
- <sup>39</sup> Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (Macmillan, 1979), 13-38. MacCabe 'acknowledged, with the benefit of hindsight, the ways in which the "political weight" he and the others gave to their arguments was "deeply problematic."'. John Higgins, *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism and Cultural Materialism* (Routledge, 1999), 162.



- <sup>40</sup> 'Beyond Cambridge English', in *Writing in Society*, 223.
- <sup>41</sup> Higgins, *op. cit.*, 156.
- <sup>42</sup> 'Cinema and Socialism', in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (Verso, 1989), 129.
- <sup>43</sup> Milner. *op. cit.*, 109.
- <sup>44</sup> Cited in James Joll, *Gramsci* (Fontana, 1977), 101.
- <sup>45</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile* (Granta, 2001), 470.
- <sup>46</sup> Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*, 167.
- <sup>47</sup> Tony Pinkney, *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), 17.
- <sup>48</sup> Pinkney, *ibid.*, 129.
- <sup>49</sup> *Keywords* (1<sup>st</sup> edition), 65.
- <sup>50</sup> David Morley and Kuon-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 1996), 234.
- <sup>51</sup> Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 154.
- <sup>52</sup> Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Routledge, 2002), 151. See also Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Verso, 1993), 11-14.
- <sup>53</sup> Peter Brooker, *Concise Glossary of Cultural Theory* (Arnold, 1999), 38-39. Iris Marion Young, 'The ideal of community and the politics of difference', Linda Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (Routledge, 1990).
- <sup>54</sup> Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place' in *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University Press, 1994).  
<http://www.unc.edu/courses/2006spring/geog/021/001/massey>. Accessed 14.9.2002.
- <sup>55</sup> 'Writing, Speech and "The Classical"', in *What I Came to Say*, 55.
- <sup>56</sup> 'Walking Back into the Future', in *Resources of Hope*, 286.
- <sup>57</sup> Alan O'Connor, *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 68.
- <sup>58</sup> Eagleton, 'Raymond Williams, Communities and Universities', 13.
- <sup>59</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso, 2005), 163 and 249. See too Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (Columbia: University Press, 1994), 28.
- <sup>60</sup> The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. ASLE On-Line  
<http://asle.umn.edu/about/affiliated.html>. Accessed 15.07.2006.
- <sup>61</sup> Michael P. Cohen, 'Blues in the Green' *Environmental History* 9:1 (2004), 9:1.  
<http://www.asle.umn.edu/archive/intro/cohen.html>. Accessed 15.07.2006.
- <sup>62</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty, 'Introduction' in Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xix.
- <sup>63</sup> Ursula K. Heise, cited in Cohen, *op. cit.*
- <sup>64</sup> Dominic Head, 'Problems in Ecocriticism and the Novel' *Keywords* 1, *op. cit.*, 64.
- <sup>65</sup> Gerry Smyth, 'Hippies, Liberals and the Ecocritical Sublime', Roger Bromley *et al.* (eds.) *Keywords: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 2, (1999), 100-101.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.
- <sup>67</sup> Dai Smith 'Border Loyalties', in *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993).
- <sup>68</sup> Smyth, *op. cit.*, 107.
- <sup>69</sup> Paul Rasmussen (ed.), *Bulletin of Environmental Education* 201:2 (1988).
- <sup>70</sup> Cohen, *op. cit.*
- <sup>71</sup> Evan Mwangi, 'A Shot in the Arm for African Eco-Criticism' in *The Nation* (Nairobi, 24 October 2004) [http://www/asle.umn.edu/archive/intro/mwangi.html](http://www.asle.umn.edu/archive/intro/mwangi.html). Accessed 15.07.2006
- <sup>72</sup> Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* (Chicago: University Press, 1995). Ferry discusses 'deep' ecology's condemnation of the anthropomorphism of much environmentalism and debates extending legal status to the biosphere. *Socialism and Ecology* offers the most extended version of Williams's ideas.
- <sup>73</sup> 'Our Common Future', known as the 'Brundtland Report'. Document available at [http://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/nachhaltig/international\\_uno/unterseite02330/index/html](http://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/nachhaltig/international_uno/unterseite02330/index/html). Accessed 21.08.2006
- <sup>74</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: the Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 8.
- <sup>75</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).
- <sup>76</sup> Partha Dasgupta, 'Bottlenecks' in *London Review of Books*, 19 May 2005, 21.
- <sup>77</sup> *Second Generation*, 137.



## Chapter Two

### The Outsider

The Raymond Williams produced through his writings is a figure working in unending opposition to established assumptions and current critical orthodoxies, isolated in his politics, professional role and in his writing practices. I am not, he wrote: 'part of orthodox English culture and social thought: not because it had not been made available to me but because I had seen it and did not want it.'<sup>1</sup> He disdains established *English* culture in favour of Welsh socialism and thereby seeks to define his audience and the terms in which he is read. He insists that his fiction has little reference to that of his contemporaries: when writing and rewriting *Border Country* he read 'hardly any other novels'; *Second Generation* 'did not connect with other people's reading' and has, in England, 'remained quite isolated.'<sup>2</sup> This chapter argues that this production of 'Raymond Williams the Outsider' has been inadequately interrogated. It questions whether Williams's insistence on isolation is an assessment endorsed by commentators and founded on values and practices that set him apart.

It is important too to explore what 'isolation' and 'alienation' mean in the context of Williams's writing and what this suggests for the significance of his fiction. Some of his remarks clarify that his 'alienation' was a response to events specific to his own experience. Of the period following the closure of the journal *Politics and Letters* in 1948 he says:

The collapse of the periodical was a personal crisis for me. So many other

initiatives... had also been blocked or failed. For a period I was in such a state of fatigue and withdrawal that I stopped reading papers or listening to the news...I felt I could only write myself out of this in a non-collaborative way. I pulled back to do my own work. For the next ten years I wrote in nearly complete isolation.<sup>3</sup>

Of his work at this time he says: 'I ceased to see work in criticism as the sort of book I wanted to produce. I didn't keep up with what they call "the literature."' <sup>4</sup> This assertion of an existential angst is central to Jan Gorak's argument in *The Alien Mind of Raymond Williams*: 'Alienation, rather than national or doctrinal affiliation, supplies the key by which Williams can be unlocked.'<sup>5</sup> Williams, he says:

approaches his host of topics as a polemical private researcher, advancing his own individual thesis with a heady disregard for competing - or even supporting - documentation...It was as if he must feel utterly isolated in order to be able to work.<sup>6</sup>

Yet Williams also, and more consistently, argues that 'the experience of isolation, of alienation, and of self-exile is an important part of the contemporary structure of feeling.'<sup>7</sup>

Eagleton sees Williams's fraught class insertion as 'the formative and typical social experience' of his era, an experience that Williams declares generates 'layers of alien formation in ourselves'.<sup>8</sup> Yet I would want to argue that it is in the relation between the personal and the 'typical' that one can locate the significant tensions demonstrated in his fiction. He wrote of Hardy, that he was a 'man caught by his *personal* history in the *general structure and crisis* of the relations between education and class.'<sup>9</sup> (added emphasis) This is a useful starting point for an exploration of his perception of himself as necessarily and continuously an oppositional figure.



Criticism, Nicole Ward Jouve asserts, is 'scrambled autobiography that seeks to conceal the self in the writing.'<sup>10</sup> There is an attraction in seeking some autobiographical psychodrama in what can appear to be Williams's wilful isolation. His critical writings, like much of his fiction, specifically invite a biographical reading and appear to reveal rather than conceal. His discernment in the writings of Orwell of a 'deep pattern' demonstrates an awareness of the means whereby the character of the writer is produced:

All [his] writing until 1937 is a series of works and experiments around a common problem. Instead of dividing them into 'fiction' and 'documentaries', we should see them as sketches towards the creation of his most successful character: Orwell. It would not have been so successful if it had not been so intensely and painfully lived.<sup>11</sup>

Williams's own 'common problem', as identified in Chapter One, is the negotiation between his 'lived experience' of the Welsh border country and the abstraction of academic study, more specifically his experience of writing and of Cambridge. It is, he declares, 'the deep blocking forces' that Cambridge represents which changed him from a young man 'extraordinarily unafraid' of the place to one who has been caricatured as 'a fraught, balancing, tense creature':<sup>12</sup> the 'Raymond Williams' he produces is, despite his celebration of community, a man isolated and embattled, writing and living in pain. He was suspicious of a range of critical orthodoxies, including Leavisites, New Critics and Deconstructionists, all of whom he understood as hostile to the political need to represent as extensive a society as possible. He disdained too the literary evaluations based on modes of reading which were self-indulgently individualistic and lightweight. While the criteria that underpin his literary evaluations and his own writings are indeed inextricable

from his politics, it is the way in which the politics informs his professional judgements which effectively isolates him.

While there are shifts and developments in Williams's understanding of cultural production, he is clear and consistent in his views on how fiction plays a part in this project. Essentially he agrees with Fredric Jameson's assertion: 'I assume...that all forms of aesthetic production consist in one way or another in the struggle with and for representation.' Williams's own struggle, and witness of the struggle of other novelists, may be read very much in terms of the 'contradiction' between 'lived experience' and 'structure' that Jameson identifies as arising under monopoly capitalism:

The phenomenological experience of the individual subject - traditionally the supreme raw materials of the work of art - becomes limited to a tiny corner of the social world...But the truth of that experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in Jamaica or Hong Kong. It is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual's subjective life. Yet those structural conditions are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people.<sup>13</sup>

Jameson's identification of the struggle between lived appearance and structure is at the core of Williams's fictional project but the dialectic is here differently inflected. While Williams distrusts what he sees as the privileging of 'the techniques of rational penetration' Jameson assumes that for individual 'phenomenological experience' to be understood it is necessary that 'structural conditions' be represented.<sup>14</sup> It is necessary



precisely because 'abstraction' is 'not even conceptualizable for most people'. Despite Williams's distrust of any undervaluation of the quotidian, in practice his fiction, and the fiction that he admires, does seek to represent structural conditions. Although the colonial experience, which Jameson understands as determinant, is inadequately recognised in Williams's fiction, a central concern, from *Border Country* onwards, is to seek to avoid the isolation of the 'regional' novel and to represent the relations of the 'complex internal processes' of the particular locale, 'including internal divisions and conflicts' to 'wider pressures.'<sup>15</sup> It is this concept of an extended realism, and its political import, which he felt called upon to defend against a variety of opponents. Committed to this concept and situating himself initially in opposition to much of the English fiction admired in the 1950s and 1960s, he later found himself positioned as linked with an essentially reactionary form, understood as opposed to modernism, experiment and the heady liberation of French theory. Since his death sympathetic commentators have continued to read his allegiance to realism as an embarrassment and sought to find in his fiction evidence that he escaped its bonds.

A double emphasis marks Williams's allegiance to realism: an admiration of what the realist tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth century achieved and a belief that it is a 'highly variable and complex term' capable of offering a model to practitioners of the late twentieth century seeking to represent different structural conditions.<sup>16</sup> This belief is given perhaps its most explicit expression in a 1968 *Guardian* review of Solzenitsyn's *The First Circle*:

Its method is not to draw a line around an area of human suffering, but to make

connections, from this instance to that until a whole system is described.....What happens in the novel is a kind of scrambling in which a human society (that connected community which is the ordinary form of the realist novel) is fragmented into pieces of sound, which can only be understood if they are put together in a particular way. *The First Circle* is as different as anything could be from what is known in the west as experimental literature. It is a novel in the great realistic tradition, which has transformed itself to meet altered reality.<sup>17</sup>

Solzhenitsyn, then, uses techniques very different from those of traditional realism but his desire to represent thereby 'a whole system' makes his project consistent with the aims of realism and demonstrates it to be capable of transformation. An even more radical understanding of the term occurs in the lecture delivered in 1976, published as 'A Defence of Realism'. Here he suggests that the Ken Loach/ Tony Garnett film *The Big Flame*, which moves from 'a developed realist film' on action in the Liverpool Docks to 'a politically imagined possibility', can be contained in the capacious category of realism since it is 'played out in realist terms.'<sup>18</sup> The film, like the Solzhenitsyn novel, meets the higher demands of realism as a 'conscious movement of social extension.'<sup>19</sup> Realism demands from its practitioners a serious engagement and he sees English critics and novelists, from different perspectives and over a period of decades, as failing to understand and to meet this challenge.

The literary atmosphere in which Williams wrote *Border Country* was one in which the issues of the relation of values, including political values, to technique and the question of the writer and 'commitment', were widely debated, in the journal *Politics and Letters*



and elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre's 'What is Literature?', originally published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1948 and translated into English in 1950, was a popular reference point. This debate on a historically appropriate form for the representation of political commitment suggests an atmosphere congenial to Williams. While Sartre, uneasy with 'the murky grey reality of postwar political participation', abandoned his *Chemins de la Liberté* sequence, Williams clearly did not concur with his despairing rejection of the novel form's potential for appropriate fictional representation of contemporary social formations.<sup>21</sup> It was, rather, English contemporary novels and critical practice of which he despaired. Much of the 1950s debate in England, as outlined in Rubin Rabinovitz's *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel 1950 – 1960*, is thin and parochial in its reference points.<sup>22</sup>

A major element of the debate, as set out by Robert Conquest's 'Commitment and the Writer' in 1957 and developed by John Mander in *The Writer and Commitment*, published in 1961, sought to link modernism with the apolitical or even the reactionary, and realism to a concern with social progress: an interesting inversion of the 1980s politics of form when realist texts would be read as inherently conservative.<sup>23</sup> The debate is marked by over-simplified oppositions and ill-defined terms. The 'experimental' novel's focus on the 'inner life' is understood as a retreat from history, rather than, as Williams would later point out, an emphasis constituted *by* history.<sup>24</sup> Those in the 'reaction' camp, who argue that experimentalists are unable to adapt to the essentially progressive features of contemporary life, establish an opposition between 'Man Alone', who rejects the turmoil and retreats into a solipsistic formalism, and 'Man in Society', determined to

engage with daily social demands.<sup>25</sup> Among the most articulate proponents of 'Man in Society' as the proper concern for novelists were William Cooper and C.P. Snow.<sup>26</sup> Snow, who advanced his 'socially progressive' arguments in his review columns for the *Sunday Times*, held mandarin status, regarded as 'one of the living writers who have brought distinction to English letters.'<sup>27</sup> His crucial term of approbation was 'readability', a belief demonstrated in his own fictional style, consciously free of wordplay of any kind and using strict linear chronology.<sup>28</sup> Snow is aware that other methods exist for representing the random, associative thinking process, but he causes his narrators to dismiss them as not 'profitable.'<sup>29</sup> Nowhere does the credo of the Snow camp acknowledge any need for the 'transformation' of realism that Williams understands as critical to the representation of the new social formations.

Examination of Williams's writing on fiction more or less contemporary with Snow's eminence demonstrates that, while he is on the side of 'Man in Society' as the proper concern of novels, he resists any affiliation, and indeed redraws the terms of the debate in significant ways. Two of the chapters in *The Long Revolution* (1961) offer a far more nuanced reading of the relationship between commitment and technique than that found in most versions of this debate, engaging with the relation between the individual and the collective, with the concepts of public and private, in ways that underpin his entire writing project, fictional and non-fictional. His comments in 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel' suggest that few works meet the challenge of realism, which he defines as:

the kind of novel which creates and judges the quality of a whole way of life in



terms of the qualities of persons. The balance involved in this achievement is perhaps the most important thing about it...The society is not a background against which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life. Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the general quality of life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms.<sup>30</sup>

While *The Rainbow* (1915) and *The Magic Mountain* (1924) measure up to this ideal, no contemporary work approaches it. Modern literature fails to deliver the 'balance', since either 'social-descriptive function is the shaping priority', or a 'particular (human) pattern is abstracted from the sum of experience.'<sup>31</sup>

The *Long Revolution* chapter on 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel' rejects the claims of a number of writers then understood as offering new and exciting fictional models.

Williams is particularly dismissive of the 'personal' novel that has degenerated into 'the fiction of special pleading' which takes 'only one person seriously, but ordinarily very seriously indeed.' John Braine's *Room at the Top* is labelled as 'crudity and self-pity.'<sup>32</sup>

Novels featuring attacks on middle class authority figures by socially mobile young men were then being hailed as 'progressive' and thirty years later Malcolm Bradbury would read *Lucky Jim*'s 'attack on upper-middle-class aestheticism and experimental posturing' as a 'class revolt'.<sup>33</sup> Without naming *Lucky Jim*, Williams rejected any claims it might have to carry a socially progressive message: any real tension and shock, he writes, is displaced by the 'phantasy release of swearing on the telephone, giving a mock-lecture, finding a type-figure on which aggression can be concentrated'.<sup>34</sup> Yet if Braine and

Kingsley Amis did not meet his demands for fiction that met the challenges of seeking a form capable of representing 'wider social formations', it is more surprising to note his silence on writers with whom one might have expected him to find some common cause.

Williams reviewed for *The Guardian* from 1959 until 1981 and was able, he says, to 'pick and choose'.<sup>35</sup> His choices are significant. In a list that is dominated by the overtly political and, during the 1980s, by Welsh history, Hardy and Lawrence are the only novelists whose names frequently recur. There are few works of fiction and of these almost all are not English.<sup>36</sup> When asked directly what novelists he chose to read he named Sartre, Kemal, Solzhenitsyn, Grass and Vonnegut.<sup>37</sup> As well as possessing social and political heft, this selection has in common a certain risk taking with genre and form. Yet surprisingly there is no apparent interest in Doris Lessing, who, after the radical analysis of the colonial experience in the *Children of Violence* sequence (1950-1968), essayed an adventurous range of genres. Her account of 'the poisonous, paranoid' atmosphere of the Cold War parallels the concerns of *Loyalties* and, although in some of her later novels leftist political stances are effectively reduced to individual neurosis, her use of science fiction as a mode allowing a more intense exploration of social relations would seem sympathetic to Williams's ambitions for contemporary fiction.<sup>38</sup> Another possible point of reference, of an older generation but still active as novelist and political figure, was the maverick Naomi Mitchison whose project of active socialism included writing across discourses (journalism, novels, politics and ethics), campaigning and subjecting herself to twenty years of, she said 'deadly boring' local politics in the Scottish Highlands.<sup>39</sup> Although the heady blend in her fiction of the personal – she claimed that



'for most of my life my love relationships affected my writing'<sup>40</sup> – and the political make them unlikely as models for Williams, they are informed by his own concerns: for a nationalist commitment and active internationalism; practical farming and the value of co-operative effort; unwavering belief in the possibility of a better future effected by collective will. Her historical novels deal with periods and issues that, in *Black Mountains*, Williams would later tackle: 'cultural and political margins and meetings in the ancient world, the edges of the Roman Empire, displacement, captivity.'<sup>41</sup> Yet Williams acknowledges no possible community of interest with either Lessing or Mitchison, despite the fact that both have the added advantage of not being English.

Another surprising silence centres on Margot Heinemann's *The Adventurers*, published in 1960, the same year as *Border Country*. An unapologetic fictional account of left-wing politics between 1943 and 1956, *The Adventurers* was surprisingly well-received by mainstream critics like Cooper and Walter Allen, and by the reading public: it was sold out and reprinted.<sup>42</sup> The novel's locations, principally a Welsh mining community and London, with a section at a Cambridge college, look forward to *Loyalties*. Heinemann commented that she decided to focus on 'the relation of the mining community to the country as a whole', and while using a small number of well developed central characters the novel refuses to over-simplify the political relations obtaining in the labour movement.<sup>43</sup> We know that she read *Loyalties*, and disliked it intensely, but there is no record of Williams's response to *The Adventurers*.<sup>44</sup>

But if he is negative or silent on any English or metropolitan-based contemporary

authors, in the later part of his writing career he becomes more consciously aligned with a particular Welsh tradition. In *Politics and Letters* he identifies the formation of this allegiance as occurring in the late sixties when:

I began having many more contacts with Welsh writers and intellectuals, all highly political in the best tradition of the culture, and I found this curious effect. Suddenly England, bourgeois England, wasn't my point of reference any more. I was a Welsh European....I want the Welsh people - still a radical and cultured people - to defeat, override or bypass bourgeois England.<sup>45</sup>

In terms of his fiction this point of reference focuses on the Welsh industrial novel which, he argues, resists the distinction between public and private spheres that is central to the English tradition.<sup>46</sup> His engagement with Welsh literature is highly specific. The contention that Welsh culture and identity are intimately and necessarily bound into the use of the Welsh language, does not appear to register strongly with Williams, although in *Politics and Letters* he comments on the post-Industrial Revolution 'elimination' of Welsh in the border areas as one aspect of the Anglicisation that was a conscious hegemonic move.<sup>47</sup> His argument is rather that 'Welsh literature in English' is distinct from English literature in that 'its writers have been shaped by Welsh culture, history, landscape and language.'<sup>48</sup> He resists, however, the practice of what he refers to as 'the extreme verbal exuberance' of the 'Welsh style.'<sup>49</sup>

Williams was always exercised by the *political* dimensions of linguistic choice. 'Style,' he argues 'is inseparable from the substance of the ideas and feelings expressed' and from the relationship between a writer and his intended reader or listeners.<sup>50</sup> The willed



austerity of *Border Country*, consciously distanced from the 'heady mixture of the demotic and the hyperbolic' of Gwyn Thomas or the violent verbal energies of a writer like Caradoc Evans, is a conscious choice that excludes him from important elements of the Welsh fictional traditions.<sup>51</sup> Eagleton's account of the English of Irish writers has some lively parallels with the Welsh experience, suggesting both the political weakness that provokes linguistic difference and the consequent delights of its defiance of that weakness:

In the Celtic Revival period before political independence, Irish prose was typically elevated, extravagant...laced with surreal fantasy or utopian symbolism...One could hear in this rollicking rhetoric the bluster of the underdog, as the Irish tried to compensate for their political marginality with verbal brio. If their language belonged to the English, then they would have to use it an estranging way, defiantly asserting their cultural difference.<sup>52</sup>

Williams sees the dangers of a Welsh style that functions as 'a form of cultural subordination, the only – slightly degraded if subtle – way the Welsh could present themselves to an English audience.'<sup>53</sup> Gwyn Thomas, whose writings more than meet Eagleton's criteria of extravagance, surrealism and 'utopian symbolism', flaunted his defiance. Smith says of Thomas's *All Things Betray Thee* that it 'puts the British working-class novel onto a different plane.' His voice 'was made by a culture. It was given weight by a history.'<sup>54</sup> Williams, while believing Thomas's novels to be a 'great creative achievement', understood the linguistic choices they represented as unavailable to him, whether for reasons of taste, an Anglicised education or long exile.<sup>55</sup>

One Welsh critic, James A. Davies, reads Williams's fictional oeuvre as a steady decline, attributing this directly to those linguistic choices that distance him from what he understands as the Welsh literary tradition. Central to Davies's reading is the establishment of a stylistic tension between a 'very English reserve' and 'an intense, emotional Welshness that from time to time breaks forth.'<sup>56</sup> If, however, one looks at Davies's examples, the 'sub-text of latent lyricism' that he identifies as Welsh is found to comprise images derived from Williams's early experience of rural life and of a heightened sensibility to natural phenomena that could equally be traced to the influence of the Romantic poets or of Hardy. Davies's Welsh/English opposition can readily be mapped onto the 'experience/abstraction' dialectic since 'lyricism' means direct, relatively unmediated, experience of rural Wales, while 'reserve' equals an academic distance and detachment acquired in England. Even the distance from the border is seen as crucial: 'The narrator of *Border Country* resembles a Welshman influenced by years of academic life *on the far side of England*.'<sup>57</sup> (added emphasis) The weaknesses that Davies perceives in the later novels are read as a consequence of Williams's absence from Wales and consequent inability to represent intensity and emotion: '[He] had been away from Wales for too long and misunderstood...the effects of exile.'<sup>58</sup>

Davies's understanding of a particular mode of emotional expressiveness as equivalent to the Welsh literary tradition is clearly unnecessarily limiting. There was for Williams another, less problematic, element of Welsh fiction which, in his search for forms of working-class fiction that offered a carefully historicised account of 'fully developed class relations', he found attractive.<sup>59</sup> Dai Smith, in his account of the Welsh industrial



novel, argues that the representation of this culture cannot be accomplished by a 'private' mode; this is 'a culture that requires politics in its art as well as its activity, for its social being to be made articulate.'<sup>60</sup> Williams agrees: Welsh writers 'cannot accept the English pressure towards a fiction of private lives.' This is not because they do not know or value privacy 'at those levels that are called individual' but because the 'painfully administered history of their own people' teaches that 'the deepest humanity of the self' is released by 'human involvement' of a broader sweep.<sup>61</sup> Here Williams recognises a fictional tradition that engages with his own writing practice and sense of the possibilities of realism. The tone of the lecture 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in Some Welsh Novels' is very much that of a personal and ongoing engagement with problems of the representation of the invisible and fictionally unrealised wider system and with the writer who moves out of the working class.

The issue that he explores, over and over, is that of how the novel of the working classes can move beyond a form that simply focuses on working people to a representation of class as 'consciousness' and 'organisation.'<sup>62</sup> The key is the presence of 'class relations'. As he points out in an essay on Robert Tressell, one way to demonstrate a class as possessing a common situation is at 'those very articulate and organised moments, hence the popularity of the strike, the dispute, as ways of showing them operating collectively.'<sup>63</sup> Many of the significant Welsh writers use this device: these include Gwyn Thomas's *All Things Betray Thee* (1949), which deals with a strike of ironworkers in 1831; Glyn Jones's novella 'I was Born in Ystrad' (1938) with its utopian workers' revolution; Alexander Cordell's series, each centring on a moment of industrial crisis,

beginning with the best-selling *Rape of the Fair Country* (1959) and the Chartist march on Newport. Of Williams's novels, with the inevitable exception of *Black Mountains* in which the most recent episode is dated 1415, only *Manod* does not feature an industrial dispute.<sup>64</sup> He does not argue that all, or most, of the Welsh industrial novelists have been able to make this difficult transition to class as 'consciousness'; he sees that the very 'intensity of the community' in areas of heavy industry can be 'self-enclosing' and block understanding of class relations.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless he understands these novelists as grappling with, and sometimes achieving, this crucial representation and identifies his own fictional challenges with theirs. This Welsh subject matter, if not the Welsh style, allows him to have a conscious and willed affiliation - willed in that it is the tradition of the novel of the industrial valleys that he chooses, a tradition that, as Chapter Four will clarify, echoes his father's political allegiance in his support for the miners in the General Strike.

The rejection of a 'fiction of private lives' in Williams's own fiction is unequivocal. The private weaknesses and public failures of men like Robert Lane in *Second Generation* and Mark Evans in *The Volunteers* are represented as inextricable. In *Manod* sibling rivalries are not merely 'personal' but strongly determined by economic forces. Williams's argument that for Hardy the 'personal history' is caught 'in the general crisis' is significant here. Raphael Samuel argues that Williams 'saw himself as a representative figure giving voice to common experience' and goes on to claim that in Williams's fiction there is 'no hint of separation anxieties in boyhood, nor yet of the torments of adolescent desire.'<sup>66</sup> The fiction, as I shall argue in later chapters, abounds with hints of 'torments' which,



while they may be part of the 'general crisis', are nevertheless highly personal in their reverberations, and which recurring plot devices attempt, with varying success, to marginalise or suppress. This interaction of the general/historical and the personal/private is critical to a reading of Williams's fiction. Question about the nature and parameters of the 'private' sphere and what was proper territory for moral approbation or disapprobation were being posed with particular force at the time that he was establishing himself as a novelist, and his responses do much to determine the nature of his fiction.

The appropriate boundaries of the public and private, and the particular relevance of this to matters of sexual morality, were being strongly contested during the early sixties when Williams was writing *Second Generation*, which engages directly in the debate. Stuart Hall notes that the 1960s saw 'a series of legislative changes involving both major parties which explicitly aimed to liberalise the spheres of public and private morality. Ceding whole areas of sexual and social conduct and freedom of expression to personal decision, what has been termed "the legislation of consent", a legal revision in the status of sexuality, morals and aesthetics was felt to be appropriate to a more advanced type of society.'<sup>67</sup> These changes, however, in homosexual law reform, liberalisation of abortion and divorce, were only enacted from the mid-sixties onwards. They followed a debate in the early years of the decade initiated by Lord Devlin's lecture on jurisprudence read to the British Academy in March 1959, wherein he questioned the nature and scope of morality, the extent to which such issues could be relegated to a 'private sphere,' and the role of the law in enforcing a consensual moral code.

The starting point for Devlin's argument was the recently published Woolfenden Report, properly called the Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution. His main opponent was H.L.A Hart, whose lectures, delivered at Stanford in 1962, were subsequently published as *Law, Liberty and Morality*. The terms in which their arguments, and those of the numerous academics and lawyers who engaged hotly with the issue, are couched focus on the integrity of society and the extent to which a 'private' morality is meaningful or desirable - precisely the territory of the moral arguments which structure *Second Generation*. Devlin declares that 'there are certain standards of behaviour or moral principles which society requires to be observed; and the breach of them is an offence not merely against the person who is injured but against society as a whole.' He further observes that: 'the suppression of vice is as much the law's business as the suppression of subversive activities. It is no more possible to define a sphere of private morality than it is to define one of private subversive activity.'<sup>68</sup> Hart questions whether it is morally permissible to enforce morality; he follows J.S. Mill in understanding the exercise of free choice as itself a value.<sup>69</sup>

Legislation in Britain followed the Mill/Hart line in allowing a plurality of practices in the sexual/moral sphere, causing the sexual morality that informs *Second Generation* to read strangely from the other end of the decade. Yet the intensity of public surveillance, scrutiny and judgement of matters arguably 'private' in that novel is not absolutely at odds with the practice of social control in certain left wing groups. The debate in *Second Generation* on the permissible limits of personal choice is explicit. Peter Owen debates the issue with Rose Swinburne with whom he is about to engage in adulterous sex. The



laws on homosexuality, divorce, censorship and drinking hours are, says Peter dismissively, 'the Magna Carta of the middle-aged kids.'<sup>70</sup> Rose argues for a 'private morality' but he insists that 'the law has to be the common morality of people.' While Rose contends that sex between consenting adults is always a private affair, Peter argues that 'There are always more than two people involved.' Rose easily cedes this point for adultery, but Peter pushes the argument further. Not only is adultery a 'social fact, a disturbance of relationships over a wide area', so too is the activity he refers to as 'fornication': 'Either the parents are involved, or the relationships each might go on to be affected. One way or the other, what starts as a personal relationship becomes social.'<sup>71</sup> While Peter Owen is no infallible arbiter on either the personal or social, the plot appears to endorse his contention that the personal is not the private. When his mother, Kate, has an affair with the academic, Arthur Dean, Williams offers us the reactions not only of Harold, the deceived husband, and of Peter and of Harold's brother's family next door, but even has May Lane, as the wife of Peter's thesis supervisor, urging him to accept a dinner invitation from Dean 'for Peter's sake' so that he can convince Dean to end the affair.<sup>72</sup> The actual, and by implication approved, extent of 'public' concern about the affair certainly breaks down the public/private binary. By the end of the decade, those on the Left would for the most part allow a more extensive and varied repertoire of sexual partnerships. The Jacobin view that 'all other facets of identity should be subordinated to that of the citizen' was nonetheless routinely practised among those most directly engaged in radical political practice.<sup>73</sup> Marge Piercy writes of the culture obtaining in the New York Movement of Students for a Democratic Society in the late 1960s:

Everybody's private life was considered fodder for discussion... All decisions -

the way you dressed, the way you spent money... what you ate and drank and smoked, how you behaved in every conceivable situation – everything was the stuff of group discussion, of sessions in which everyone's behavior or choices were up for scrutiny and painful dissection – criticism, self-criticism sessions.<sup>74</sup>

This strongly Jacobin view of how the intimate life should be lived, just as rooted in the mores of its own culture, has powerful echoes of the relentless public discussions of sexual choice that mark *Second Generation*.

Williams's concerns can, then, be read as strongly aligned to certain contemporary debates and to the traditions and concerns of the Welsh industrial novel, indeed of the working class novel in general. Yet, in terms of literary and critical fashion, to position oneself as a Welsh and a socialist writer was to place oneself at the margins. This marginality was exacerbated by a real isolation from contemporary mainstream fiction and critical orthodoxies. As discussed in Chapter One, the politics of form that obtained from the 1970s onwards identified the realist novel as essentially a conservative form structured by a hierarchy of discourses held in place by a dominant meta-language thereby establishing a dubiously reactionary political model. In opposition the work of James Joyce pre-eminently, but also such cinematic auteurs as Jean-Luc Godard, were identified as offering the potential for articulating contradiction and contestation.<sup>75</sup>

Williams, consistent in his staunch defence of realism, was positioned by contrast as complicit in the conservative failure to de-naturalise realism's assumptions. The sense of isolation in his writing and reading that he articulated as having possessed him during the 1950s had been self-imposed. What now occurred, as a result of Williams's hostility to



much post-structuralist theory, was the opening up of a critical abyss between himself and critics like Colin MacCabe, whose claim to a permanent Cambridge appointment he supported during the 1980 'MacCabe Affair' and with whom politically he might have expected to make common cause against the political and academic establishment.<sup>76</sup>

Analysis of critical commentary on his fiction since his death makes it clear that his allegiance to realism has continued to be a barrier to any exploration of his place in contemporary fiction.

Critical commentators on Williams's fiction use different approaches and evidence but have in common the need to recuperate his novels from the taint of a naïve political conservatism. It is notable, however, that they make little or no reference to the radical potential of the way in which he extends realism to an exploration of future alternative social structures, and the important links this has with his positive readings of the science fiction genre. His own critical work makes it abundantly clear that he admires those forms which balance reality and desire. In 'Tenses of the Imagination', an essay principally concerned with his own writing practice, he stresses that in *Manod*, he:

tried to include some of the relevant thinking and argument about a possible future...The whole point of the novel was the relation between necessary and desirable plans for the future and at once the ways in which they get distorted and frustrated, and the even more complex ways they relate to what is already known and lived and valued.<sup>77</sup>

The core of his lecture 'A Defence of Realism' is his argument that while *The Big Flame*, with its move into an hypothesised political action, is 'perhaps inconsistent with the

narrower definitions of reality', since 'it is not played through in a Utopian way' it should be read as an effective development of the genre.<sup>78</sup> Williams here appears to use 'Utopian' in the sense of an idealised and unachievable alternative state inimical to realism. His general approach to the Utopian impulse, however, is to understand it as valid when it operates not to provide some blueprint of a society but rather to de-naturalise a totalising hegemonic ideology and enable the reader to imagine alternatives. Like Jameson in the concluding chapter of *The Political Unconscious* and in the recent *Archaeologies of the Future*, in the 'dialectic of ideology and utopia', Williams understands Utopias as affording the hope of breaching closed structures.<sup>79</sup> To be politically enabling, Utopias must suggest a *means* whereby change can be effected, to be sensitive to the specifics of the current dominant social structures which demand transformation and to represent not only the end but the process, the 'crucial *transition* to utopia'. Such a Utopia can empower the imagination while retaining the necessary 'continuity' with a representation of existing conditions.<sup>80</sup>

His interest in the possibilities of the Utopian and science fiction genre began early in his career, with a short 1956 piece published in the Workers Education Association journal. As a Cambridge undergraduate Mullan remembers attending a Williams lecture on 'Ursula Le Guin and science fiction as political allegory', given 'at an obscure time', to a tiny undergraduate audience 'in a small room at the top of a deserted lecture block'.<sup>81</sup> An essay on 'Utopia and Science Fiction' appeared in 1978 with a shorter version of the same material used in *Towards 2000*. In the essay, utopian fiction and science fiction are linked in terms of their relation to realism, Williams commenting that although these forms



appear to be linked by '*otherness*' (original emphasis) as 'modes of desire or of warning in which a crucial emphasis is obtained by the element of discontinuity from ordinary "realism"', what is in fact most important in 'properly utopian or dystopian fiction is the *continuity, the implied continuity*, which the form is intended to embody.'<sup>82</sup> (added emphasis) His discussion of specific Utopias and Dystopias, such as Orwell's *1984* and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, stresses the need for them to be read in their historical context;

The utopian mode has to be read, always, within that changing context, which itself determines whether its defining subjunctive is part of a grammar which includes a true indicative and a true future, or whether it has seized every paradigm and become exclusive, in assent and dissent alike.<sup>83</sup>

In the most extended discussion, of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, published in 1974, he notes that its structures are marked by its period: 'the moment of renewed social and political hope, of a renewed alternative and social morality.'<sup>84</sup> The political motive of this 'general renewal of a form of utopian thinking' is key:

Its structures are highly specific. It is a mode in which a privileged affluence is at once assumed and rejected: assumed, and in its own way enjoyed. Yet known, from inside, as lying and corrupt...rejected...by learning and imagining the condition of the excluded *others*.<sup>85</sup> (original emphasis)

Le Guin herself has recently asserted that 'serious science fiction is a mode of realism not of fantasy' but this is not a challenge with which commentators on Williams have seriously engaged.<sup>86</sup> Nicolas Tredell does express regret that Williams did not write a science fiction novel as a riposte to Doris Lessing's *The Four Gated City*, and Patrick

Parrinder throws off (in brackets) the comment that 'it is a pity that he has not yet written a Utopian novel', but his critics have otherwise failed to engage with this crucial extension of his thinking on the novel form and the way in which it offers a much more powerful escape from the supposed reactionary incarceration of realism than the routes that most of them offer.<sup>87</sup> The models adopted by his critics as a way of understanding his relationship to realism are far more conventional than the highly suggestive one offered by an exploration of his reading of the Utopian.

Kevin Davey's 'Fictions of Familial Socialism' makes simple equations between politics and form.<sup>88</sup> He is anxious to identify and approve the more experimental elements of Williams's fiction, but his use of the idea of experiment is severely limited. It is the 'lisible' text that he admires, considering *Second Generation* a regression from *Border Country* as offering a 'deliberately reduced role' to the reader.<sup>89</sup> The only technique that he understands as 'empowering' the reader is what he defines as 'fragmented narrative': the rejection of linear chronology and the adoption of shifting time frames. It is on this basis that he approves *Border Country* and *Loyalties* and is dismissive of *Manod* where the chronology is linear, omitting any consideration of other techniques employed in that novel, such as shifts of discourse from the formalised to the dramatised, that do serve to disrupt and fragment the reading experience. That Kiernan Ryan's approach to Williams will be politically driven is signalled unambiguously by its appearance in *The Socialist Novel in Britain*. Ryan examines Williams, Mervyn Jones and John Berger for the 'fit' between their socialism and the models for possible change offered by their novels. Realism is perceived as essentially stabilising and politically conservative, leading Jones



to be taken to task for his adherence to a 'sparse, descriptive naturalism which hypostatizes the in fact processive reality it addresses, confirming and stabilising even when it would disrupt.'<sup>90</sup> The value of Williams's fictions is understood as being in their break from a deterministic naturalism to a representation of the enactment of change and a clear commitment to the future: unlike Jones, he demonstrates a 'relentless imaginative stress on the process and means of change.'<sup>91</sup> Ryan's foregrounding of the politics of form is useful but he demonstrates the limitations of a reading that appears to take the move from non-fiction to fiction as unproblematic. *Border Country*, *Second Generation*, *Manod* and *The Volunteers* he reads as offering a protagonist who 'emerges charged with a deeper understanding of his whole personal and social situation and with the renewed political energy and committed will to transform it.'<sup>92</sup> Such a general commentary ignores tensions and flattens out differences between the novels in order to achieve a consistently acceptable political stance.

The account of Williams's fiction offered by Nicolas Tredell is an altogether more nuanced account of the relation of politics and form. While maintaining the suspicion of the essentially 'bourgeois' nature of conventional realism, he appears more sympathetic to Williams's own position, asserting that:

It is important not to oppose Williams's view with a simple anti-realist position: that all fiction is text. It is more adequate to recognize that 'realism' involves a complex interaction between convention (both social and 'literary') experience, innovation and invention. Non-realist modes can co-exist with realism and, in major respects, enrich and subvert it.<sup>93</sup>

He continues, though, to use 'realism' in the way that Williams would consider as unacceptably narrowing, arguing that *The Volunteers* represents a 'significant development both in its partial break from realism and in its increasing sense of obscurity and ambiguity: of the difficulty of penetrating and connecting the processes of a complex, opaque, divided, mystified society.'<sup>94</sup> Since what Williams is seeking here is precisely to seek to represent those relations that both he and Tredell understand as operating in the contemporary social world, the techniques employed can easily be assimilated to the realist category. Tredell, however, like the other left wing critics, insists on reading realism as an incarceration and its practitioners as in need of 'non-realist' modes to supplement their deficiencies.

A different emphasis occurs in Pinkney's readings, both in his monograph on Williams's fiction (1991) and in the essay 'Raymond Williams and the "Two Faces of Modernism"' (1989).<sup>95</sup> Although he shares the concern to rescue Williams from a charge of unreconstructed realism, Pinkney offers very different evidence. He cites Williams's enthusiasm for avant-garde cinema, *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* and *Preface to Film*. He uses evidence from Williams himself, quoting his remarks in *Politics and Letters* that: 'the arrival of an articulate, newly organized and modern working class presented qualitatively new problems to the kind of integrated and extended social vision which had been the major achievement of the bourgeois realists.'<sup>96</sup> This he reads as proving that 'no socialist could, on this showing, be a realist novelist in any straightforward sense' since the 'realist paradigm of [Lukacs's] *Theory of the Novel* forces us painfully up against the objective limits set by the form itself on the *desire* of the individual socialist writer,'<sup>97</sup>



(original emphasis) Pinkney clearly rejects outright Williams's extension of realism to a form capable of celebrating desire in a hypothesised future state.

Much of what Pinkney writes on Williams's fiction offers an innovative and productive reading, always driven by an anti-realist agenda. He reads the novels as under-pinned by a powerful Gothic sub-text produced by Williams's oppressive austerity of language. It is hard to recognise in Pinkney's account the prosaic realist business of which Tredell disapproves, or Ryan's direct and correct political message. Pinkney insists on the 'dense textuality of these novels.' What emerges from his readings is a sense of the desirous, the fantastic and the excessive: 'images, fantasies, rhythms and structures of space, its nature, contents, metamorphoses, sexuality, utopias, its tiniest microscopic detail and its most massive geographical structures.'<sup>98</sup> He is, of course, conscious that any reading of Williams must comprehend the political dimension and, alert to the charge that his approach might attract the accusation of depoliticising the texts, argues that his excavations do not marginalise or minimise the power of their politics, but rather represent them as multi-layered in a way that carries a far stronger political charge than would a more unified text.<sup>99</sup>

With the exception of Ryan's comparison of Williams and other socialist writers, none of these critics seeks to situate the novels in terms of contemporary fiction. One can, then, find evidence for the isolation which Williams articulated as central to his reading and writing practice, although some of its elements, such as his silence on certain of his contemporary novelists, suggest a willed deafness. But Raymond Williams the Outsider

is also a figure produced by his writings and the partial and particular narrative of his life. That narrative may be re-constructed through the 'scrambled autobiography' of his critical writings as well as in his fiction. In both the emphases operate to produce a narrative that, by excluding much of his life, creates a figure inevitably oppositional to the culture of the Establishment and the metropolis.

It is significant that two writers whom Williams elects as demonstrating affinities are constructed by him in such a way as to reinforce that identification and are understood as playing the role of rural figures necessarily misread by the metropolitan centre. Of Richard Jefferies he writes that there is: 'a myth of Jefferies...the lifelong countryman...son of generations of yeomen farmers steeped in what is called "the moral importance of the underlying, ageless, agricultural pattern." The reality is different and more interesting.'<sup>100</sup> The more complex Jefferies is a man with 'a lonely intensity', powerful feelings for the physical world but one who senses that 'the working rural world' is 'decisively altering.' It is this Jefferies, whom he constructs by supplementing the autobiographical with the social history, of whom Williams writes that he 'more than anyone' offers him a way of 'self analysis.'<sup>101</sup> In Hardy Williams discerns the same pattern and makes the same identification. 'Hardy country' he understands less as a geographical space but as 'that border country so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change.'<sup>102</sup>

That Williams's Hardy is a partial perspective is an argument made by Peter Widdowson,



in a demonstration of how Hardy has been variously produced by different ideologically conditioned critical readings. He suggests that in Raymond and Merryn Williams's account:

The emphasis is almost exclusively on the 'rural' Hardy - his class origins and his concern with movements and changes in the rural community – and not with what we might call Hardy's 'real' class position when he became a successful novelist and poet i.e. that of 'professional writer', 'man of letters', and London socialite.

....Hardy's origins in a specific class fraction of mid-nineteenth century rural Dorset are, of course, important but only within the frame of the upwardly-mobile professional writer operating in a metropolitan, upper-class-dominated, social and literary culture. ...It is *this* Hardy who wrote, and not the ur-Hardy of Higher Bockhampton.<sup>103</sup> (original emphasis)

The Williams who wrote *Border Country* and the other novels was the active colleague and campaigner, the Cambridge professor and administrator, the political activist identified in Chapter One. Yet his fiction overwhelmingly takes for its material the places and communities of his youth. The central concern of the protagonist is to negotiate his relation to the primary experience of Welsh community and specifically his role as Son. Narrative coherence is achieved by marginalising or excluding most of his adult life, so producing the figure in the tradition of Jefferies and Hardy.

The crucial point in Williams's understanding of Jefferies and Hardy is that he reads both writers in terms not of individual pathologies but as produced by significant shifting historical relations. Yet the relation between the 'personal history' and the 'general crisis'

remains a central tension. The belief that the situation, and the responses it generates, are part of a wider social formation cannot suppress the powerful individual guilt inscribed over and over in the fiction. He is an Outsider because he is forever in the wrong place among those whose values and practices he often despises and who hold in contempt that which he holds dear. But can he employ the fictional form not only to explore this source of anguish but also to explain and expiate the guilt of the exile?

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> 'Raymond Williams', in Frederic Raphael (ed.), *Bookmarks* (Cape, 1975), 164.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 77.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.
- <sup>5</sup> Jan Gorak, *The Alien Mind of Raymond Williams* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 8.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>7</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Penguin, 1965), 305. Hereafter *The Long Revolution*.
- <sup>8</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Raymond Williams, Communities and Universities' in *Keywords* 1 (1998), 24. Williams 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?', in *Resources of Hope*, 75.
- <sup>9</sup> *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (Paladin, 1974) 90. Hereafter *The English Novel*. The same wording is used of Hardy in the introduction to *The Pelican Book of English Prose, Volume 2* (Penguin, 1969), 47. Hereafter *English Prose*.
- <sup>10</sup> Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (Routledge, 1991), 37.
- <sup>11</sup> Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (Fontana, 1971), 52.
- <sup>12</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 36.
- <sup>13</sup> Frederic Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Macmillan, 1986), 348.
- <sup>14</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 172.
- <sup>15</sup> 'Region and Class in the Novel', in *Writing in Society*, 231.
- <sup>16</sup> 'A Defence of Realism', in *What I Came to Say*, 226.
- <sup>17</sup> Williams's review of Solzhenitsyn *The First Circle*, *Guardian* 18 December 1968, reprinted in *Guardian Review* 5 March 2003, 24.
- <sup>18</sup> 'A Defence of Realism', in *What I Came to Say*, 234.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.
- <sup>20</sup> The central feature of the first edition of *Politics and Letters* (Summer 1947) was a debate on the relationships between writing and politics, with contributions from, *inter alia*, Leavis, Orwell and Christopher Hill.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Scriven, *Sartre's Existential Biographies* (Macmillan, 1984), 43. Scriven argues that Sartre's post-war biographies of Flaubert and Baudelaire 'are precisely this alternative to the traditional bourgeois novel. [They] are the textual site in which bourgeois culture is being critically examined and denounced.' 44.
- <sup>22</sup> Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967).
- <sup>23</sup> Robert Conquest, 'Commitment and the Writer', Conquest (ed.), *International Literary Annual*. John Mander, *The Writer and Commitment* (Secker and Warburg, 1961). 14-19.



- <sup>24</sup> 'Region and Class in the Novel', in *Writing in Society*, 232. 'The late bourgeois isolation of private individuals, whose lives can be closely and intimately explored as if there were no wider social life, is evidently dependent on the social existence of individuals in whom power or money has created the possibility of *practical* distancing or displacement.' (original emphasis)
- <sup>25</sup> William Cooper cited in Rabinovitz, *op. cit.*, 7. Rabinovitz points out the tendentious arguments used by C.P. Snow to link stylistic experiment and political reaction. 100. See too Williams on 'Man in society', *The Long Revolution*, 133.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 124. Accessibility is all important: a scientist addressing a room of his peers makes his paper 'explicit and easy...as though instead of addressing scientists, I was confronted by their wives.' *The Search* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition Penguin, 1965) 106.
- <sup>29</sup> *The Search, ibid.*, 262.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Long Revolution*, 304-305.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 306-307.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.
- <sup>33</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury* (Arena, 1987), 106.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Long Revolution*, 311.
- <sup>35</sup> *Bookmarks, op. cit.*, 162.
- <sup>36</sup> Alan O'Connor, 'A Raymond Williams Bibliography', in *Critical Perspectives*, 205-215.
- <sup>37</sup> *Bookmarks*. 164.
- <sup>38</sup> Lessing now speaks of the British Left's belief, during the 1950s, in a fast approaching socialist Utopia as 'mass psychopathology...It has absolutely nothing to do with what was going on in the world.' [Http://www.who2.com/dorislessing.html](http://www.who2.com/dorislessing.html). Accessed 3.7.2005. In *The Good Terrorist* (Cape, 1985) left-wing political stances are understood as neurotic individual psychology. The anger of the squatters is demonstrated as having its origins in childhood so making them 'incapable of the kind of analysis [of current class relationships] which would make coherent, meaningful political activity possible.' Jeannette King, *Doris Lessing* (Edward Arnold, 1989), 100.
- <sup>39</sup> Jenni Calder, *The Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison* (Virago 1997), 198.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>42</sup> Andy Croft, 'The End of Socialist Realism: Margot Heinemann's *The Adventurers*', in David Margolies and Maroula Joanou (eds.), *Heart of a Heartless World* (Pluto, 1995), 202-203.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.
- <sup>44</sup> Dai Smith, 'Left Historic', *New Welsh Review* (Spring, 2003), 15.
- <sup>45</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 296.
- <sup>46</sup> 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in *Culture and Materialism*, 218.
- <sup>47</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 29.
- <sup>48</sup> D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 270. 'Contemporary writers and critics often reject the term "Anglo-Welsh" because of its implications of a divided allegiance and acceptance of a colonial linkage to England...prefer the nomenclature "Welsh writer in English."'.
- <sup>49</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 279.
- <sup>50</sup> *English Prose*, 26ff.
- <sup>51</sup> For an account of Caradoc Evan's 'unique style' see Gwyn Jones, introduction to Evans's *My People* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Dennis Dobson, 1953). 'The perversely literal translations (which are therefore mis-translations) of Welsh idiom...the medium he wanted, compounded, he says, of the Book of Genesis in the authorised version and the narrative art of Marie Lloyd.' 8.
- <sup>52</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Mothering' *London Review of Books* 21:10 (14 October 1999). <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n20/print/eag101.html>
- <sup>53</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 279.
- <sup>54</sup> Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 274-275.
- <sup>55</sup> 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in *Culture and Materialism*, 228.
- <sup>56</sup> James A. Davies, 'Not Going Back But Exile Ending: Raymond Williams's Fictional Wales', in



- W.J.Morgan and P. Preston (eds.) *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education and Letters* (St Martin's Press, 1993), 203-204.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-208.
- <sup>59</sup> 'Region and Class in the Novel', in *Writing in Society*, 236-237.
- <sup>60</sup> Dai Smith, 'A Novel History', in *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 119
- <sup>61</sup> 'The Welsh Industrial Novel', in *Writing in Society*, 226.
- <sup>62</sup> 'Working Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in some Welsh Novels', in H. Gustav Klein (ed.) *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982). See too 'Region and Class in the Novel', 232.
- <sup>63</sup> 'The Ragged-Arsed Philanthropists', in *Writing in Society*, 243.
- <sup>64</sup> The representation of the working-class in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* is significantly different. Francis Mulhern comments that there is an absence of any representation of 'working-class self-organization in politics, work and education'. Politics is 'rendered unintelligible as a meaningful activity.' *Culture/Metaculture* (Routledge, 2000) 59.
- <sup>65</sup> 'Working Class, Proletarian, Socialist', *op. cit.*, 115.
- <sup>66</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'Philosophy teaching by Example', *History Workshop* 27 (1989), 148. The issue is entitled 'Past and Present in Raymond Williams.'
- <sup>67</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Reformism and the Legislation of Consent', in *Permissiveness and Control: the Fate of the Sixties Legislation*. Cited by David Glover 'Utopia and Fantasy in the late 1960s' in Christopher Pawling (ed.) *Popular Fiction and Social Change* (Macmillan, 1984), 193.
- <sup>68</sup> Basil Mitchell, *Law, Morality and Religion in Secular Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 3-5.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 10-11. Mitchell gives a full account of the Hart-Devlin debate and its commentators.
- <sup>70</sup> *Second Generation*, 167.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-168.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.
- <sup>73</sup> Charles Taylor, 'Democratic Exclusion (and its Remedies?)', in Peter Askonas and Angus Stephen (eds.) *Social Inclusion* (Macmillan, 2000), 96. Williams comments that 'the term Jacobin has its difficulties' and was used as a 'stigma' by 'enemies of reform': 'the parallel with some modern uses of Communist, or Bolshevik or Marxist is quite close.' 'The Fiction of Reform', in *Writing in Society*, 143.
- <sup>74</sup> Marge Piercy, *Sleeping with Cats* (Piatkus, 2002), 190.
- <sup>75</sup> See, *inter alia*, MacCabe and also Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (Methuen, 1980).
- <sup>76</sup> Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (Routledge, 1995), 278-284.
- <sup>77</sup> 'Tenses of the Imagination', in *Writing in Society* 264.
- <sup>78</sup> 'A Defence of Realism', in *What I Came to Say*, 234.
- <sup>79</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Methuen, 1981), 289-299.
- <sup>80</sup> 'Utopia and Science Fiction', in *Culture and Materialism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition Verso, 2005), 204.
- <sup>81</sup> John Mullan 'Rebel in a Tweed Suit' *Guardian Review* 28 May 2005, 37.
- <sup>82</sup> 'Utopia and Science Fiction', 198.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.
- <sup>86</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Magical history tour', *Guardian Review* 3 June, 2006.  
<http://books.guardian.co.uk/print,,329495527-110738,00.html> Accessed 22.08.2006
- <sup>87</sup> Nicolas Tredell, *Raymond Williams: Uncancelled Challenge* (Paupers' Press, 1990), 90. Patrick Parrinder, *The Failure of Theory* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), 74.
- <sup>88</sup> Kevin Davey, 'Fictions of Familial Socialism' in Tony Pinkney (ed.), *News from Nowhere* 6 (1989), 38-49.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.
- <sup>90</sup> Kiernan Ryan, 'Socialist Fiction and the Education of Desire', in *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, *op. cit.*, 172.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.
- <sup>93</sup> Tredell, *op. cit.*, 36-37.



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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>95</sup> Tony Pinkney *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), 'Raymond Williams and the "Two Faces of Modernism"', in *Critical Perspectives*.

<sup>96</sup> Williams cited in Pinkney, 'Two Faces of Modernism', 25.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> Pinkney *Raymond Williams*, 16.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> *The Country and the City*, 234.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>102</sup> *The English Novel*, 81.

<sup>103</sup> Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History* (Routledge, 1989), 130.

## Chapter Three

### The Ambiguities of Settlement

The previous chapter outlined Williams's understanding of the relations of 'public' and 'private', and emphasised the, for him, crucial importance of the sense in which 'the personal history' is 'caught' in 'the general structure and crisis'. This understanding informs his fiction, and explains the tensions of a class, familial and national psychodrama that structures the novels. The protagonist in each of the first five novels is required to negotiate the move from his original place and class without falling into collusion or despair. This move, seen at once as necessary, disabling and disloyal, is considered on the first page of Williams's first novel and is the subject of a pivotal episode in his last.<sup>1</sup> The move, from a childhood configured as culturally intimate, to adulthood in the cool 'abstraction' of the professional middle-class, is demonstrated as necessary in that it is part of 'the formative and typical historical experience.' Yet the move is at the same time part of a personal history and at this level triggers an anxiety of exile and guilt at abandoning the place and people of origin which establishes the pattern of Williams's fiction. A useful starting point for an examination of the vexed relationship between personal agency and determining historical structures and the pain this relationship engenders is through his use of the term 'settlement', and a set of opposing terms – the break, the escape, the run, the extrication. As Eagleton remarks, Williams 'ritual[ises] a cluster of key terms to the point where they seem less public concepts than private inventions.'<sup>2</sup> 'Settlement' and its oppositions are used compulsively over the period of eighteen years that covers the publication of his first four novels but in relational contexts which produce unstable, 'private', meanings. Is



settlement to be endorsed or is it, in the dominant culture, a sell-out? Throughout the fiction this remains a locus of contest.

Despite its frequency and the clear structural and normative import of its usage, 'settlement', however, is not a term that has attracted much attention in commentaries on Williams. In the first four novels, variants on settlement as a place or a state of mind, on settling up or down, settling for and having 'settled' eyes, permeate dialogue, free indirect speech and authorial narration. Jeremy Hooker is the only critic to acknowledge its central importance in the novels. Hooker's emphasis is on the 'persistent and flexible' use of the word and he understands its shifts and complexities as related to the pressures of changing social understanding of the term:

In Raymond Williams's thinking, 'settlement' is a key word whose full range of meaning he uses. It can mean both a particular and a general way of life, establishment in life's primary institutions, property or financial arrangements, the material and moral accommodations which people make....*Border Country* (and the other novels in the trilogy) realise the complex meanings of 'settlement' in a society which progressively complicates them, as the traditional kinds of settlement, as community and individual and family establishment, increasingly change.<sup>3</sup>

Hooker, who does not comment on the pervasiveness of the term in the non-fiction, stresses the complexity of Williams's usage, a complexity that arises legitimately from formal definitions which include the senses of 'establish abode, to establish a person in the matrimonial estate' and 'a settling of property'. He does not remark that the complexity is accompanied by an instability of value somewhat ironic for a term that emphasises permanence and fixity, an action which the dictionaries declare to be

putting 'beyond doubt or dispute.'<sup>4</sup> While stressing Williams's handling of its complexities in public discourse, he has nothing to say of the personal tensions and instabilities that inform the usage in the novels.

Each of Williams's protagonists becomes a member of the analysing, observing professional middle-class, but to do so they must refuse to 'settle' in their place of origin: class relations are reproduced spatially. Inextricable from place, however, are the values of working-class community and of Father as originator: the Father who must both be honoured and repudiated. The profound unease that this narrative of leaving engenders in Williams has already been identified and much of his fictional energy is taken up in situating himself in relation to it. The conflicted senses of the term 'settlement', its shifts from positive to negative, from desirable to dead-end and back again are one illumination of this anxiety. Then the question of justification of the escape from the settlement is worried at incessantly, differently positioned and evaluated from circumstance to circumstance. Of D.H. Lawrence's rejection of his particular settlement Williams writes: 'He knew, none better, how the consciousness and environment were linked and what it cost even an exceptional man to make his ragged, breathless escape.'<sup>5</sup> Yet elsewhere 'escape' is positioned as self-indulgent, deluded, even treacherous. It is from the structures of identification with class, nation and father that the trope of betrayal, so central to the moral structure of the novels, emerges.

This instability and consequent ambiguity of 'settlement', even the centrality of its usage by Williams, may be linked to its importance in Welsh historical discourse. The subordinate legal status of Wales following the conquests of Edward I is known as the



Edwardian Settlement, while the Act of Union consequent upon the succession of Henry VII is standardly called the Tudor Settlement. Both were central events in Welsh history. The first effectively erased the historical existence of Wales while the later was more mixed in its consequences: the Welsh gentry flourished at the Tudor court but the country's social identity was weakened.<sup>6</sup> Certainly the possibilities of reading 'settlement' as a configuration of elements with a political motive beneficial to the more powerful party are strongly at play in both the Welsh experiences of 'settlement', the history of which would have been known to Williams.

The term is used extensively in his non-fiction, moving easily from the spatial/material to the political/economic and thereby identifying the relationship between the practices. To illuminate certain aspects of his fictional usage, it is helpful to examine two non-fictional texts: *The Country and the City*, where a focus on land and living conditions parallels major concerns in the novels, and *The Long Revolution*. The discussion in *The Long Revolution* of the relation between settlement and 'escape', or 'making a break' from earlier conditions informs the whole of the fiction, and, in its characteristic autobiographical stance, is richly suggestive for the covert loyalty/guilt narrative.

*The Country and the City* begins with a number of references to physical settlements: an apparently unproblematic use but a significant one. In the fiction Williams employs variant forms of 'to settle' that have the effect of privileging the material over the abstract. When, for example, in *Second Generation*, Peter Owen terms himself 'a child of the settlement', an image is evoked of a child at play inside the wooden wall that protects his community.<sup>7</sup> Matthew and Susan Price, in *Manod*, conclude that their

sons will continue to think of their parents' house as 'home' until such time as they 'make their own settlements.'<sup>8</sup> Here too the use of 'make' followed by the noun, rather than the more predictable verb 'to settle', conjures a picture of young men labouring to construct their walls and roofs. In *Black Mountains* it will be the material settlement that is the dominant sense of the word, but from the early novels a strong sense of the material rarely fails to inform the theoretical.

The main thrust of 'settlement' in *The Country and the City's* argument clusters around land ownership, competition in and between social groups and the way in which individual material bodies and emotions are manipulated as part of the acquisitive process. One can, though, trace a significant slippage of meaning. A settlement is a deal, involving the profit of one man or one social class at the expense of another and, often, a dishonest accommodation of principles. But it is too settling down, committing to another human being and to a place. In Williams's account of Restoration comedy he defines its credo as 'the settlement [that] has to be made, into an estate and into a marriage...What was going on, through the parades and the visits and intrigues of London society, was just this making of marriages which were also necessary property transactions.'<sup>9</sup> It is a 'matter of settlement, of ordered society' that has reduced men and women to 'physical, bargainable carriers of estates and incomes' and marriage to an institution not morally superior to 'the intrigues of the whores and fortune hunters.'<sup>10</sup> An opposing 'idea' does exist, a 'committed love,' the relation based on 'personal love and fidelity', but here is not clearly distinguished from the negative connotations of 'settled relationships'.<sup>11</sup> Throughout Williams's fiction both senses are kept in play, with consequent moral and political ambiguities. That there is a



contestation between settlement as bad faith and settlement as authentic commitment is clearly established in *The Country and the City*.

The shifts of usage in *The Long Revolution* are suggestive in rather different ways. The dominant sense in the introduction to the chapter 'Education and British Society' is of a practice that needs to be recognised as problematic.<sup>12</sup> This sense of settled is linked to the idea of the 'natural' and to the need for us to understand the freight of values this carries. 'Settle' here, then, is a term that suggests an attempt to naturalise which demands resistance. It is with the discussion of the realist novel that the valuation of 'settlement' becomes more difficult to establish. The tension here is explicitly between individual and 'common' experience. Comparing the 'characteristic experience' of the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries, Williams writes:

The characteristic experience of our century is that of asserting and preserving an individuality...as compared with the characteristic nineteenth century experience of finding a place and making a settlement. The ordinary Victorian novel, as every parodist knows, ends with a series of settlements, of new engagements and formal relationships.<sup>13</sup>

The characteristic movement of the twentieth century novel, he argues, is of a man leaving alone, having extricated himself from a dominating situation. 'This kind of extrication and discovery was,' he acknowledges, 'a necessary and valuable movement.' He is uneasy that this 'threatens to become the whole content of our literature' and believes that its only justification is if 'the recorded individual histories amount to a common history.'<sup>14</sup> Mobility, 'of which we have heard so much in our generation', must be situated historically.<sup>15</sup> The contemporary novel of upward social mobility Williams reads as a 'deadlock' as 'its focus remains firmly on individual

experience' rather than on the fact that 'the whole society is moving' and demands the 'creation of new and relevant institutions.'<sup>16</sup> It is not the 'extrication' – which he variously refers to as 'escape', 'run' – that is the fault, then. It is the failure of the novelists to represent it as part of an historical process and to construct their characters as seeking to achieve a renewed 'settlement.'

The 'mobile individual', more specifically the scholarship boy and his progress, is the repeated narrative of Williams's fiction, as of many of his contemporaries. Of the heroes of *Look Back in Anger*, *Lucky Jim* and *Room at the Top* he writes that the options available to them are mockery or rage at 'the institutions available for [them] to join' or if they 'acquiesce, suffering rapid personal deterioration.'<sup>17</sup> 'Extrication' here leads to individualistic anger or unlovely accommodations but not to new commitment. How then does Williams in his fiction seek to establish the trajectory of his own scholarship boys at a moral distance from those of the English writers whose understanding of contemporary social forces he believes to be so limited? The 'series of fictions of escape and flight' he reads as a 'direct inheritance from Lawrence' and as a mode that is 'still represented as "working-class fiction" *tout court*.' This is, however, an essentially *English* narrative as the Welsh industrial novel demonstrated that 'other moves were possible.'<sup>18</sup> Gwyn Jones is given as one example of a writer who resisted any move away from his class, while elsewhere Dai Smith comments that Gwyn Thomas's whole life can be read as 'a commitment against a more general social mobility.'<sup>19</sup> Yet, while challenging the English model and celebrating the Welsh gesture of resistance and commitment, the model of Williams's own fiction has clear parallels with the narratives of individual escape and flight. His recognition that Welsh fiction offered alternative models makes his exile's anxiety more acute and his



fiction is marked by the need to differentiate the 'escapes' of his protagonists from those of the English Angry Young Men.

It is in the valuations of the people and places left and of the institutions encountered that the distance from the English novelists is more comfortably achieved. Stuart Hall's comments on his 'elective affinities' with Williams situate the 'leaving' experience not as one involving the abandonment of one set of values and adoption of another, but as an experience that challenges the meaning and ownership of culture. Hall, noting the 'tremendous differences [with Williams] in temperament, character, background, ages and formation', declares that he felt 'close' to him by reason of their shared 'responses as "scholarship boys" from the peripheries of English culture to our first encounter with the institutions which were at its very centre of the dominant cultural system: Oxbridge.'<sup>20</sup> It is the need to tell *this* story, rather than that of 'local boy makes good', that is a driver of Williams's narrative. The majority of the English scholarship boy narratives are marked by a compulsion to erase the marks of history as swiftly as possible. One's past is sloughed off, with contempt by the heroes in Wain and Braine, with relaxed ease by Snow's more urbane Lewis Eliot – whom he declares in 'any serious and interesting sense' to be himself.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Raphael Samuel understands the 'central problematic' of Williams's fiction to be the need to bring the past into a 'productive relationship' with the present and this need determines content, structure and potential resolution.<sup>22</sup>

One of the conventions adopted by many of the English novels of the fifties is absolute disdain for the place and family of childhood and the marking of the protagonist as worthy of success by reason of the superior tastes that occasion that

disdain. Wain's *The Contenders* is characteristic: 'Being brought up in a town where everything was shabby, dirty, dwarfish, peeling and generally lousy was another thing that helped to make most of us competitive...You thought "If I don't do well I might have to end up staying *here*."' <sup>23</sup> (original emphasis) Joe Lampton, in Braine's *Room at the Top*, born in the same year as Williams, (his author was born one year later), makes an instructive contrast to Williams's Matthew Price. Although the two young men have little in common - Joe has less formal education, is more streetwise, more conscious of social distinctions and discriminations, far more materially focused - each is negotiating a route into a new class position in a new place and each is called upon to negotiate too the amount of baggage that he will carry into that new life. Joe, on a brief Christmas visit to his home town of Dufton expresses that same note of physical repugnance as, with an increasing hysteria of alliterative adjectives, he distances himself from his origins. This is 'Dead Dufton. Dirty Dufton. Dreary Dufton.' <sup>24</sup> The working class is perceived as living in dirt from which the heroes must cleanse themselves. Joe's aunt's home is 'small, dark and smelly and cluttered up' and the pub 'too small, too dingy, too working-class.' <sup>25</sup> The common impulse is 'we've got to get out of this place', onwards and upwards, always away, to other and better worlds.

The authors can choose, as does Braine, to make this move relatively painless for the hero. On this visit, Joe sees his family as 'foreigners...kind and good and generous, but they were not my sort of people any longer'. A brief flicker of guilt qualifies this assessment, 'half hating myself', but there is no sense of any moral or emotional obligation: these roots certainly do not clutch. <sup>26</sup> The narrative and structure of *Room at the Top* discourage the reader from believing that Joe's past has any importance.



His parents make no claims, being conveniently dead. Three pages of the Christmas visit chapter summarise information of their death in an air raid, the horrors Joe experienced as a young airman and of his father's 'outspoken' Labour principles which prevented his promotion.<sup>27</sup> The brief back story over, Joe can return to his 'room at the top' at Warley, where his emotional and sexual dilemmas are strictly of the moment. It is, he believes, 'a place without memories.' and the narrative colludes with him in disallowing any further space to the complexities and contamination of the past and the place abandoned.<sup>28</sup>

The biography of Snow, and the rationale of his *Strangers and Brothers* sequence, published between 1940 and 1970, have limited but interesting parallels with Williams. The central concern of the novels, the interface of public and private morality and the processes of power, lays claim to some of Williams's territory. Yet the structure of the sequence is an admission that no novel can represent the private and public adequately and simultaneously, each having one 'area' as its primary focus. In *Homecomings*, the action of which opens in the late Thirties and continues into the Fifties, Lewis Eliot is working in Whitehall and is much exercised by the tragedy of his first marriage, his subsequent love affair and second marriage. It is only a reference to 'the first post-war Labour government'<sup>29</sup> which alerts the reader to the 'public' fact that the war is now over. Lewis Eliot, like his author, rises from the provincial lower-middle-class to Cambridge High Table and, in the phrase which he coined, the corridors of power. There are no hysterical denunciations of Leicester or its population and his 'extrication', a matter of hard work and determination, is represented as occasioning no emotional pain. Although alert to gradations of social origins and nuances of class determined behaviour, he describes them with the

detachment of an anthropologist and appears perfectly at ease with his own origins. Indeed, it is his ease that marks him, despite his often acute criticisms of the great and good and the vacuity of their practices, as an Establishment man.<sup>30</sup> Although there are occasions when he declares himself 'on the other side', that of the dispossessed, he is, finally, impressed by the propriety and rectitude of other Establishment men.<sup>31</sup> Williams opens his essay 'My Cambridge' with the declaration, 'It was not my Cambridge.'<sup>32</sup> It is very much Snow's Cambridge and he is more than ready to accept that his place is at High Table. Leicester is but a distant memory.

The production of the relation of past and present, with its non-linear structure and shifts of focalising consciousness, marks *Border Country's* essential difference from both the Braine and the Snow models. As well as the alternation between the 'present' of Matthew's adulthood and the 'past' of his childhood, it is important that Matthew is not the primary focus of the 'past' material; the emotional, social and political lives of his parents' generation are dominant. Crucially too, while Braine, Wain and Snow employ first-person narration, allowing the reader no ironic distance from their 'boys', Williams's narrative method denies the comfort of this collusion. Even more significant is that in the *Border Country* chapters dealing with the return, the focus is the anguish experienced by Matthew as he seeks to re-locate himself. One aspect of this unease is linguistic. Given the British obsession with 'accent' as a social marker, Williams is not, of course, alone in using linguistic differences as an important element of tension in the mobility narrative, but its historical import is more strongly emphasised.



*Room at the Top* also demonstrates a concern with linguistic register as a class marker. While its details are for the most part predictable – Joe's anxiety that his vowel sounds may betray him – there is too Joe's response to the speech patterns of Susan, the factory owner's daughter whom he will marry. He remarks that 'her way of speaking with its touching childish affectations was a luxury no one of the working classes could afford.'<sup>33</sup> This is a lively but isolated incident, however, while for Williams choice of linguistic register is central to his fictional practice. George Eliot, Hardy and Lawrence he understands as facing a 'problem of language' specific to their time and class situation, the relation between the 'educated' language of the novelist and that of the people in their novels 'hitherto unwritten about, or at best observed from a distance.' Eliot, he says, had to 'resolve a conflict of grammars: a conflict of "I" and "we" and "they", and then of the impersonal constructions that in a way inevitably come to substitute for each.'<sup>34</sup> This, says Williams, is not 'only a matter of relating disparate idioms, though that technically is how it often appears. It is, basically a matter of living relationships; of the actual connections with others and with elements of ourselves.'<sup>35</sup> Linguistic choice, then, is a political act that can offer a way of negotiating between the values of settlement and of escape.

One method of negotiation, demonstrated in the linguistic moves of Matthew Price as a Cambridge educated, now London based, academic, returning to his Welsh border village, is to reclaim the language of the place. Briefly disconcerted on his arrival by a different discourse, Matthew falls at once into native speech rhythms so that 'ease' is established.<sup>36</sup> When, years later, in *Manod*, he again returns to Wales, an acquaintance notices that his voice has 'relaxed and roughened', and the dialogue shows that he has again adopted local speech patterns.<sup>37</sup> It is suggestive to read this in the context of

socio-linguistic studies contemporary with the earlier novels and centrally concerned with issues of language and social mobility, language and familial relationships. In Mary Douglas's *Natural Symbols*, an explication and expansion of the work of Basil Bernstein, her phrasing chimes closely with the dilemma explored by Williams. The child, says Douglas, as s/he moves from a socially restricted to a socially elaborated code, is 'freed from a system of rigid positions but made a prisoner of a system of feelings and abstract principles.'<sup>38</sup> It is interesting that this dynamic can be mapped onto the idea of 'settlement' as a static state from which one needs liberation, but that the escape can only be to a different prison. Ted Cohen, writing of the tendency of the figurative to 'be inaccessible to all but those who share information about one another's knowledge, beliefs, intentions and attitudes', entitles his paper 'Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy.'<sup>39</sup> Matthew's 'cultivation of intimacy', in his reclamation of the language of the old settlement, cannot, however, be an option available to Williams in writing his fiction and he adopts instead an austere, virtually metaphor-free discourse, a more readily accessible literal language that relates 'disparate' forms. It is debateable whether this attempt to negotiate his linguistic and emotional place in terms of place and past is successful: the frequent obscurity of his discourse, and the question that this raises as to who he understands to be his readership has been addressed in the Introduction. The conflictedness of language is inextricable from the ambiguous values of 'settlement' and 'escape' that make the latter not joyful release but anguished pain, the necessity of which the novels insistently and defensively repeat.

This narrative pattern of anxiety, of individual escape and consequent guilt and betrayal, opens his first novel but is given its least ambiguous and bleakest form in his last. In the episode 'The Coming of the Measurer' (hereafter 'Measurer'), those who



leave their own people for a life of supposedly disinterested inquiry are shown instead to misuse knowledge to establish the most brutal state apparatus.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that the experience/abstraction dialectic can readily be mapped onto settlement/escape and that the first terms are those privileged. The value structure of *Black Mountains*, however, is less schematic than this. Certainly reverence for the local and particular, what the novel calls 'the sweetness of place', is endorsed over the appeal to dominant supranational ideologies such as the Church or the Roman imperium. In 'Measurer', the Company of Mevandar abuse their powers of rationality to enslave the vulnerable. Yet, as the episode 'Earthstorm' demonstrates, the Measurer's perspective need not be exploitative, but can be used for practical good and to resist mystificatory ideologies.

'Measurement' is a key concept in Williams's fiction. *Border Country* begins with Matthew Price's concerns over the validity of the historical methodology that his discipline insists on his using: 'ways of measuring' that he perceives as deforming human relations.<sup>41</sup> At the end of *Second Generation* Harold Owen understands the methods of his academic son as inimical to the needs of his class: he wants 'just to measure.'<sup>42</sup> In 'Measurer', set in 2000 B.C., Dal Mered, old and making his way home to die in the Hills of the Bluestones, south west Wales, comes to the 'simple, well-ordered, well-provided' settlement of Lanoluc in the Black Mountains.<sup>43</sup> It is a moment when mythic ways of understanding natural phenomena are challenged by scientific observation, when human beings perceive themselves as detached from nature and so able to observe and to measure. Dal Mered is one of the new people, the Measurers of Mevandar, located at Stonehenge. The importance is 'not the place. It is the Company. It is the idea. The idea of true measuring.'<sup>44</sup> This way of living where 'we do not herd or grow but...measure the whole world', Mered understands as 'the

growing point of the world.' Nevertheless, like Matthew Price before/after him, ageing and physically exhausted, he craves the 'softer sweeter air of his birthplace.'<sup>45</sup> The Measurers' work can be of practical application to a farmer/hunter-gatherer community. Yet primarily this is knowledge not as instrumental but for its own sake. To pursue knowledge in a spirit of disinterested inquiry rather than directly to improve the human lot need not be, of course, morally suspect. The way in which the change is so situated in this story is one which is arguably the paradigmatic move in Williams's fiction.

The symbiotic division of labour, whereby the Company study the world while others bring them sustenance and benefit from the applications of that study, turns into crude exploitation. However much the material conditions of those who supply them with food and labour may deteriorate, the Measurers refuse to accept any compromise in their own quality of life. Faced with refusal from their 'workers', they use their knowledge of an imminent solar eclipse to abort a rebellion. They go on to enforce laws that oblige 'packs of men' to undergo training as if they were dogs and, in a rather ill considered phrase, 'make their movements together.' This new order is policed by a guard dressed in 'cloth dyed red' and armed with spears: '[they] would overawe and frighten the people. If the food was not brought they would go out and take it.' So the mental apparatuses of education and law are reinforced by that of brute force and the repressive state is in place. As Mered cries: 'Guards and signs! That is not measuring'<sup>46</sup> So, although he has not lost his love of his 'science', disillusion with its corruption has sent him westwards to his old home.



Young Karan of Lanoluc is, however, seduced by what he learns from Mered into leaving his mountain community, to follow the road eastwards to Mevandır and the life of a Measurer. In 'The Earthstorm', set four hundred years later, we find that he too returned to his mountains, bringing with him a rejection of old religious beliefs that terrified his people, but bringing too knowledge which allowed them, through taking measurements of the earth, to protect themselves and their flocks from earthquakes.<sup>47</sup> The Measurers in the earlier story are shown as bent on disclaiming the material conditions on which they are ultimately dependent. This is the 'disastrously wrong pattern' that in *Second Generation* Peter Owen, two millennia later (or twenty years earlier) identifies as academic life, alienation of learning from human need.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Peter sees academics as operating as a 'priestly caste'.<sup>49</sup> As well as such explicit assertions, and pieces of set opposition like 'The Measurer', the novels offer a series of dramatisations of the dangerous seductions of becoming a Measurer and the distances, spatial and moral, to which the move commits those who succumb. Driven by intellectual curiosity and the pressure of history, like Karan they move east, from the Black Mountains to the plains. Like Mered they are ill at ease, angry, out of place. The parallels with Williams's own trajectory are irresistible. His novels are continuously alert to the accusation that such a move may be opportunist escapism or even betrayal: the 'Company' joined is morally suspect. Yet 'Measurer' is not the last word on the practice of science and reason in opposition to an unexamined local experience. 'Earthstorm' demonstrates that measuring, uncontaminated by the abuse of power, may be brought home and placed at the service of the people. Williams remains deeply suspicious of the Measurers, and the uses to which their skills and knowledge are put. His sense of his own purpose must nevertheless depend on a belief that such knowledge is not irredeemably a tainted fruit but is one that he can bring

home and put to good use. As I argue in later chapters, the narratives Williams produces for Matthew Price and Gwyn Lewis, like this one for Karan, seek to justify their 'escape' and avoid the accusation of betrayal. An examination of the use he makes in his fiction of the actual terms of 'settlement' and 'escape/break' helps to demonstrate the complexity of the negotiation needed to keep the positive elements of both terms in play.

Matthew's father Harry is the first, and in many ways the strongest, 'settler' in the fiction, constructed through his allegiance to family, land and class and by his opposition to his fellow railwayman, Morgan Rosser. Harry, though, provides a rationale for mobility as innocent, perceiving change as habitual, not as a 'break' and a betrayal. Will, as the boy Matthew is known, is a potential candidate for a university scholarship and his father is called in by the headmaster to clarify the family response to such a 'serious commitment.' Harry's response is unequivocally positive but the headmaster warns: 'This is the local school, the boys come here and it helps them to get decent jobs. But that's just here, the world they know. Going away altogether, into a quite different world, that would be very much more difficult.' Harry is undeterred: 'As for going away, we all have to do that when our work makes it necessary.' The headmaster persists:

'Is it only that, though, Mr Price? Like me say, moving to a school in Gloucester, or you to a signal-box in Swindon or Merthyr?'

'It's moving,' Harry said. 'None of us is doing what our fathers were doing.

None of us is living quite as they lived.'<sup>50</sup>

The headmaster is polite but unconvinced that the case is so simple and Williams shares his doubts. Harry's commitment to his place, his family and his class operates



as a value against which all else is tested, not only in *Border Country* but throughout the fiction, and any refusal of such commitment is linked to a cluster of oppositional practices – restlessness and lack of nurturance, political compromise and sexual infidelity. Morgan Rosser in *Border Country*, Kate Owen and Robert Lane in *Second Generation*, Mark Evans in *The Volunteers*, Norman Braose and Alec Merritt in *Loyalties* and J.W. L. Parry in *Black Mountains* are all examples of the failure of fidelity, political and/or sexual, and are all, in varying degrees condemned.<sup>51</sup> The narrow range of their occupations is significant: following in the footsteps of Morgan Rosser, Kate Owen, Mark Evans and Alec Merritt are professional politicians; Robert Lane, Norman Braose and Parry are academics, the first two with strong political elements to their work. All are adulterous or more generally promiscuous and Kate Owen, Mark Evans and Parry have in practice abandoned their homes. Patterns of guilt by association are established. The thrust of these moves and clusters is very strongly in favour of the committed settlement.

While it is structured around a commitment/nurturance versus infidelity/cold opposition, *Second Generation* offers a rather different approach to the concept of 'settlement' than that of *Border Country*. Here the concept itself, and the idea of acceptance of it, or break from it, is central. The need for the son to defy the father is produced very differently from that of *Border Country*, evoking a far more overt inter-generational hostility. The ambiguities and tensions of the term 'settlement' are overtly interrogated with a stronger emphasis on its negative aspects. The central structural opposition between the adjoining homes of the two brothers, Harold and Gwyn Owen, is reminiscent of the division of values between Harry Price and Morgan Rosser in *Border Country*. But although a strong sense of approbation

attaches to the Gwyn/Harry pole, the problems attached to the acceptance of such a settlement are explicitly and continuously addressed.

Harold, exhausted by his years of service in the union at the car plant, is married to Kate, herself active in the city's Labour Party. Gwyn is politically indifferent and his solid marriage to Myra adheres to traditional gender roles: when the family eat Myra 'stood, serving, until the others had begun.'<sup>52</sup> Williams insists on the opposition between the cold darkness of the Harold/Kate household and the warmth, light and generous provision of food next door. Harold and Kate's son Peter arrives home to find that 'a dark house isn't easy to go into', while next door the light is streaming and there is food on the table.<sup>53</sup> In his own home his father complains 'it's so damned cold in this house,' while his mother shivers in the cold kitchen and eats nothing.<sup>54</sup> As well as this too easy contrast, the positive settlement of Gwyn is constructed by his role as nurturer of plants and land, a role that he shares with Harry Price. The smell in his greenhouse is 'of growth' and Peter 'feels the air as a kind of greenness.'<sup>55</sup> Gwyn, thinking of returning to Wales, tells Harold that he has always wanted to run a tree nursery. His concern is both nurturance and continuity: 'These chaps grow an apple and give their name to it and there it still is, after them.'<sup>56</sup> The contrast between the two households is highlighted in a dialogue between Peter and Robert Lane. Lane remarks:

'I've heard of your mother's [political] work. Thank God someone is doing it.'

'Yes, of course,' said Peter hesitating. 'Except that next door is just the opposite, everything that we write down in the notebooks as apathy. Only the place is warm and alive and it's like people living there, that's the difference.'<sup>57</sup>



Like George Eliot who comments that 'We all of us...get our thoughts entangled in metaphors and act fatally on the strength of them,' Williams is careful to demonstrate his awareness of the dangers attendant on the use of growth imagery.<sup>58</sup> Lane, while admiring Gwyn's gardening skills and achievements, comments that 'we get misled by metaphors of gardening.'<sup>59</sup> Yet while the opposition between the households as warm and living versus cold and deadly remains a central structural device in *Second Generation*, the novel marks a new complication in the use of 'settlement': it is frequently invoked in more directly political terms as suggesting a sell-out.

Here, in a novel where one of the main story lines is that of redundancies and protest at the car plant, settlements are directly those of labour bargaining, the details and terms set within a wider debate on the feasibility of any meaningful social changes. Arthur Dean, a Labour party activist, puts the case for the impossibility of change given the all-powerful control mechanisms that operate:

'The compromise is built in from the beginning....There will be no breaking point; that's what the system is for. Capitalism regulates, almost perfectly, the percentages it can afford and the unions then fight with this terrific militancy towards this compromise which is all they're ever really asking...And it will stay this way, because in fact they have no absolute demands.'

'What would an absolute demand be?' [Kate asked]

'I don't know. Nobody can know, in this kind of society.'<sup>60</sup>

In 'this kind of society', then, 'settlement' can only be resignation to an unacceptable status quo. As Kate cries at the end of the novel 'We've settled for so little and called it normal.'<sup>61</sup> To cultivate one's garden cannot be enough. Yet, as the novels

demonstrate, to use various repertoires of resistance to the settlement is to risk fatal damage, to oneself and to others.

It is Peter who is most intransigent in his interrogation of the settlement and whose refusal of its terms is offered as both necessary and appalling in its human consequences. One's reading of this is complicated by the novel's dominant narrative technique of a dialogue so innocent of idiolect that it is often difficult, in more extended passages, to identify the speaker. While the discourse is for the most part uniform, the positions taken by the characters named as speakers express multiple ideological viewpoints that, crucially, are not subject to any hierarchy. The authorial persona, flat and uninflected, is used principally to link the ideological confrontations or to take forward the industrial story line. This absence of hierarchy makes *Second Generation* a profoundly unsettled and unsettling novel, and makes the reading of Peter's response to 'settlement' an ambiguous one.

An important passage is that in which he reflects on social processes and the relations that obtain under the current system. While admitting to 'living badly in all his immediate relationships', he cannot accept that this is solely a 'personal inadequacy': it is a consequence of the settlement under which he is required to live:

The point of this, always, was the polite pretence that no enemy existed.

Naturally the enemy said so themselves; they were just normal people, doing what needed to be done. But also his own people said this: the fact of oppression was always softened and rationalized; it was easier that way to survive. And after so long an agreement, so long a settlement...no more could



be said of them than that they were inadequate as people, that their troubles lay in themselves.<sup>62</sup>

The method here, whereby free indirect speech and authorial interpretation are indistinguishable, provides Peter's discourse of 'oppression' and 'enemies' with a certain authority. He may possess a more informed understanding of the social structures, but he cannot escape them: 'At the very time that he saw beyond the limits of the settlement, he was still a child of the settlement'. It is his understanding that makes him unable to accept the compromises that makes life possible within the stockade: 'Everyone in [the settlement] was more capable of its kind of life.'<sup>63</sup> Much later in the novel, when he has decided to commit himself to marriage and a profession, he returns to this debate and the recognition that an acceptance of personal guilt is encouraged since it exculpates the dominant social structures:

He could take the confusions, the betrayals into his own person, and surrender to them, he would no longer criticize the life that engendered them and the system that sustained them. Having broken in himself, he would have made the system safe.<sup>64</sup>

This sense of the social instrumentality of personal guilt offers some insight into the confusion of the protagonists in other novels, particularly Matthew Price and Gwyn Lewis, in their rejection or acceptance of the guilt of exile.

At the end Peter is 'settling down' with Beth while his mother acknowledges her brief affair to have been politically and humanly irresponsible and her husband offers the compromise of a holiday in France rather than the usual wet Welsh caravan.<sup>65</sup> The implausibly positive ending has an oppressive 'significance' inconsistent with the method of the rest of the novel: the healing spring rain is blown from the west, more

specifically from Wales, seeking to persuade the reader that the unheroic adjustments of the central characters are valid strategies of resistance.<sup>66</sup> Yet when discussing *Second Generation in Politics and Letters* Williams does not suggest that such settlements as are offered in this finale can begin to answer the questions that the novel has posed. Of the distinction he wishes to make between Peter and Robert Lane he says:

I wanted to get the sense of a different and I hoped unidealized kind of commitment coming through – of someone who experiences various kinds of dreadful confusion, but ultimately makes another kind of choice, not an option that is sustainable where it ends, but at least one that is symbolically correct.<sup>67</sup>

Although Peter's social analysis is obviously very different from the Romantic egoism that drives the heroes of Jean Anouilh's dramas, he is like them in rejecting the hope, and happiness and small comforts of those who say 'yes' to life: the gardeners like Gwyn Owen.<sup>68</sup>

The explicit focus of *Second Generation* is on seeking to determine valid ways to confront and to 'break from' the accommodations of an unjust society. In the exploration of this dilemma the word 'break' occurs obsessively. Pinkney indeed comments that it is used so frequently as to be 'risible.'<sup>69</sup> Although the repetitions in the dialogue between Kate and Peter towards the end of the novel are particularly numerous and emphatic, the sense which they convey of a people under intolerable pressure is characteristic. The problem, Peter asserts, is 'making a contrast between potential and actual. In the end it breaks us'. 'We have', he goes on, 'lived in this break too long. All it's taught us is breaking away.'<sup>70</sup> Human beings are broken by the system or by particular instances of its operations: they accommodate or they seek to



break away. In the dour, repressive world of *Second Generation* it is little surprise that many of the characters seek some innocent, or less than innocent, escape. Yet these escapes are inevitably abortive and judged harshly, by the perpetrator and others, as individualistic self-indulgence based on false consciousness. Kate condemns her own attempt at a life of fulfilment in sexual love, conversation and decent wine as 'the fantasy of the personal break-out, through sex.'<sup>71</sup> Any rebellion against the settlement must be a collective one.

In most of Williams's novels the political motive of resistance to the settlement is 'contaminated' by its links to highly specific personal motives of spurned sons and unfaithful fathers. These elements are not altogether absent in *Second Generation*, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. Nevertheless, the focus, in a novel that has been labelled as 'intransigently militant', is more unambiguously on the class issue.<sup>72</sup> The model of class adopted by Williams, here and elsewhere in his writing, is the dichotomous, what David Cannadine refers to as 'Manichean': a vision of society that is collective and adversarial rather than hierarchical and consensual.<sup>73</sup> In such a model, one is either with one's 'own people' or with the enemy: there are no grey areas of gradation. It is this recognition that is the central focus of Peter Owen's distress as he understands his 'people' to be ignorantly colluding in their own oppression by recruiting their sons directly into the enemy armies:

People would rather see their own sons separated, going away from them into the rituals of another kind of life, than probe at all deeply into their own lives...There was no gaining of strength, there was only deliberate weakening while this other pattern persisted. It was really as if, oppressed by an enemy, a

people had conceived its own liberation as training its sons for the enemy service.<sup>74</sup>

This is the kind of settlement whose 'pattern' needs to be recognised and then resisted. Peter suffers because of his clear understanding of the way in which he is being trained as a measurer and the significance of this for his class position. The ending of *Second Generation*, when he refuses to submit his thesis in favour of working at the car plant with a view to producing a report and plans to marry Beth, suggests that he has made a valid accommodation in terms of class and commitment. He is keen to stress to his father that the starting point of his understanding is the car works, the focus of all Harold's reforming energies. Harold is dubious: they will, he says, 'be living different lives.' Peter responds: 'But inside the same form.'<sup>75</sup> It seems a possible way forward.

*Manod*, however, re-introduces a positive concept of settlement in a particularly strong form and Peter fails this test spectacularly. Beth judges him as 'incapable of love and bitterly hostile to all settled relationships. All his intelligence went into tricks of adjustment and of subtle explanation, but behind them all the time was a racing, destructive, annihilating anger.'<sup>76</sup> Unlike the polyphonic *Second Generation*, where Williams offers the reader a mediated account of Peter's pained self-analysis, in *Manod* the judgement is Beth's and her judgement is unchallenged and endorsed by her parents, Peter's mother, Matthew and Susan Price. As Peter and Matthew work together as consultants for a potential new town in mid-Wales, the pregnant Beth explains her need for stability and security. Peter says mockingly to Matthew:

'She demands an entire economy to support her child...Like if you and I said yes, let Manod be built, we could stay for ever, until the child has a child.'



'That's usually worked,' said Matthew. 'As a society I mean.'

'Well anyway, I want it,' Beth said firmly. 'I want some settlement for a change.'<sup>77</sup>

The child is born but Peter, abandoning Beth and the baby, rushes off to London and Brussels to research evidence for the political chicanery behind the development plans for Manod. Even before he leaves it is clear that he is denying Beth her settlement:

'That's it then', Peter had said. 'That's the end of their little game.' It had made sense [to Beth] in its direct reference, but there had been something else. He had looked around the flat, and out through the window at the bridge over the Afren, as if including them in the phase that was ending.<sup>78</sup>

The term used to represent Peter's action here is interesting: Beth sees it as 'his old kind of run.'<sup>79</sup> The use of the noun form suggests that, far from offering a valid escape route, Peter is incarcerated in a pen where fowls can move only in their allocated, very limited space. He offers no way forward since, as well as resisting settlement as dubious bargain, he rejects too settlement as 'committed love.'

The novels' insistent interrogation of what both settlement and escape may mean, separately and in relation to each other, is characteristic of Williams's own resistance to establishing a set position, and his need to return, over and over, to terms and to dialectical pairs, to re-examine, qualify and revise. The tensions established by this particular pair of terms, for the scholarship boy narrative with its clear autobiographical reference, are clear. Later chapters will examine the ways in which narrative structures work to represent and repeat these tensions through attitudes to place, class and betrayal. Throughout the fiction it is the filial relation which serves as

a focus of anxiety that comprehends these tensions and which will be the subject of the next chapter.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Volunteers* (Eyre Methuen, 1978), hereafter *Volunteers*. The class and spatial move of Lewis Redfern is not a central theme but is an important development in the novel's final stages, 195-196.
- <sup>2</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (Verso, 1978), 22.
- <sup>3</sup> Jeremy Hooker, 'The Dream of a Country: the Raymond Williams Trilogy', *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist* 49/50, 54.
- <sup>4</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1973), *Chambers Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1995), *Encarta* (Bloomsbury, 1999).
- <sup>5</sup> *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Penguin, 1961), 211. Hereafter *Culture and Society*.
- <sup>6</sup> Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, 'Under the Hatches', in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *The Expansion of England* (Routledge, 1996), 104. 'The clause of the legislation which formally annexed Wales declared that historically it had been united to England "for ever" which, if true, would have rendered the entire piece of legislation redundant.' J. Gwynfor Jones, 'The Welsh Gentry and the Image of Cambro-Britain 1603-1625' in *The Welsh History Review* 20:4 (2003), 61-68.
- <sup>7</sup> *Second Generation*, 138.
- <sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Fight for Manod* (Hogarth, 1988), 26. Hereafter *Manod*.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Country and the City*, 68.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Long Revolution*, 145-176.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 268
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> 'Region and Class in the Novel', in *Writing in Society*, 236.
- <sup>19</sup> Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993).
- <sup>20</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Culture, Community, Nation', *Cultural Studies* 7:3 (1993), 249-250.
- <sup>21</sup> C.P. Snow interview in *A Review of English Literature* 3:93 (1962). Cited in Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960* (Columbia University Press, 1967). 155.
- <sup>22</sup> Raphael Samuel, 'Philosophy Teaching by Example' in *History Workshop* 27 (1989), 143.
- <sup>23</sup> John Wain, *The Contenders* (Macmillan, 1958), 5.
- <sup>24</sup> John Braine, *Room at the Top* (Penguin, 1959), 97.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-95.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.
- <sup>29</sup> C. P. Snow, *Homecomings* (Penguin, 1962), 239.
- <sup>30</sup> C.P. Snow, *The Affair* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Penguin, 1962), 74. Cambridge dons are not 'distinguished men. Just men who confer distinctions upon one another.'
- <sup>31</sup> *Homecomings*, 318.
- <sup>32</sup> 'My Cambridge', in *What I Came to Say*, 3.
- <sup>33</sup> Braine, *op. cit.*, 138.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Country and the City*, 209 and *The English Novel*, 65. The account of the political import of linguistic choice in these texts, and in the Introduction to *English Prose*, uses much of the same material, in the same terms.
- <sup>35</sup> *The English Novel*, 66.
- <sup>36</sup> *Border Country*, 15.
- <sup>37</sup> *Manod*, 151.
- <sup>38</sup> Mary Douglas. *Natural Symbols* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Penguin, 1973), 80-81.



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- <sup>39</sup> Ted Cohen, 'Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy', in Sheldon Sacks *On Metaphor* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 1-10.
- <sup>40</sup> *The Beginning*, 151-187.
- <sup>41</sup> *Border Country*, 9.
- <sup>42</sup> *Second Generation*, 345.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Beginning*, 157.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 161-163.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Beginning*, 210-223.
- <sup>48</sup> *Second Generation*, 137.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.
- <sup>50</sup> *Border Country*, 211.
- <sup>51</sup> In *The Beginning* Glyn's father, J.W.L. Parry, historian, 'trailed his first book, to Pittsburgh...found there another job, another woman.' 'He was now...most often encountered in footnotes.' 9. *Second Generation*, 24.
- <sup>52</sup> *Second Generation*, 24.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 and 32..
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.
- <sup>58</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Penguin, 1994), 85.
- <sup>59</sup> *Second Generation*, 81.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-101.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 138.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.
- <sup>67</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 288.
- <sup>68</sup> Jean Anouilh, *Eurydice* in *Pièces Noires* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1947), 360. The 'yes' sayers are 'une race nombreuse, féconde, heureuse...les gens pour tous les jours.' The no sayers: 'Ceux qu'on imagine très bien étendus, pâles, un trou dans la tête.'
- <sup>69</sup> Tony Pinkney, *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), 67.
- <sup>70</sup> *Second Generation*, 339.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.
- <sup>72</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 286.
- <sup>73</sup> David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (Penguin, 2000), 59.
- <sup>74</sup> *Second Generation*, 137-138.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.
- <sup>76</sup> *Manod*, 68.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Four

### Fathers and Sons

'His whole mind seemed a long dialogue with his father – a dialogue of anxiety and allegiance, of deep separation and deep love. Nothing could stop this dialogue.

Nothing else seemed important.'<sup>1</sup> So Matthew Price situates himself at the beginning of *Border Country* and the dialogue that he here identifies as all consuming remains a crucial structuring element throughout Williams's fiction. Although Harry Price dies at the end of this novel, the Father lives on, in Matthew's memory in *Manod* and in other guises in *Second Generation*, *The Volunteers* and, even more centrally, in *Loyalties*. The Father is inextricable from each of the thematic concerns which I have identified as structuring my reading of Williams's fiction. As the Good Father, he represents both the positive aspects of 'settlement' and its ambiguities. He is also the essence of a concept of masculinity around which Williams's narrative of gender, the subject of Chapter Seven, is played out. The fiction's central trope of betrayal is linked strongly to rejection of the Father, a response which can be recognised as specific to a particular working-class generation and represented, if differently inflected, by other scholarship boys such as Richard Hoggart and Dennis Potter.

Matthew Price speaks of his essential 'dialogue' with his father, yet what the fiction offers is less a dialogue between generations than an emphasis on the son's need to explain and to justify his 'Measurer's move' into a world of abstraction and analysis.

It is ironic that Williams was identified by a younger generation of critics as the Good Father: Jeff Wallace, in his editorial to the first edition of the journal *Keywords* comments that its formation involved 'varying degrees of Oedipal anxiety', and Jane



Miller declares that for her, 'as for some other feminists', he is the 'quintessentially beguiling father.'<sup>2</sup> Yet Williams's concern is rather to construct himself, through those fictional protagonists with whom he might in part be identified, as the Good Son, innocent of treachery. To this end he employs a range of structural devices and enormous textual energies.

A simple but crucial device is the according of such centrality to the father/son relationship.<sup>3</sup> It is not merely that, predictably, fathers and sons feature as characters, but that the protagonist plays the role of son rather than of lover, husband or father. Matthew in *Border Country* has a wife and two sons, but, although the novel encompasses his life from birth, the structure of the novel conceals his acquiring of a new family and allows Susan, in London, only a brief appearance before the scene moves to Wales. It is clear that it is on Matthew's ability to negotiate a relationship with Harry that his future depends. The centrality of the father-son relation in *Second Generation* is less marked, but is nonetheless an important element of conflict. In the back story of brothers Harold and Gwyn, it is the break with their father which is the focus. When Harold's son Peter, a post graduate in his early twenties, takes his father's car and drives from Oxford to Wales, his aunt and uncle treat him as an errant child and accuse him of behaving 'like a spiteful kid.' He has, they say, 'spited everyone' but 'his dad most of all.'<sup>4</sup> In *The Volunteers* it is hostility towards his father, Mark, whom he perceives as having compromised his principles, that drives radical activist David Evans. The opening lines of *Loyalties* have Jon Merritt denying any connection with either his biological father or his mother's second husband: a double repudiation. Neither David Evans nor Jon Merritt is given any commentary on his feelings for his mother. Gwyn Lewis, also in *The Volunteers*, like Matthew has a wife and child, but his

relationship to Jill and Lynn carries none of the emotional weight of his response to his two father figures, his natural and his adoptive father. The importance of fathers and sons is made more emphatic by the tight economy of the family units. As has been remarked in Chapter Two, only children feature in significant numbers in Williams's fiction. Such siblings as do exist, like Matthew's sons, who appear very briefly in both *Border Country* and *Manod*, are mere spear carriers.

Williams appears not to interrogate this absolute centrality of the father/son relationship, and indeed his own role as son. For Williams it is 'normal' that it should be the father who is the source of a son's 'notion of identity and life', an assertion that is uncharacteristically universalist.<sup>5</sup> His central narrative, like that of Apollo in the *Eumenides*, is one in which the mother is erased.<sup>6</sup> The absolute claim that he makes for the father/son relation, and the powerful representations of that claim in his fiction, offers an interesting contrast with the same role in the fiction of C.P. Snow, the fictional representation of whose upwardly mobile trajectory offers some provocative parallels and contrasts with that of Williams. In two novels in the *Strangers and Brothers* sequence, narrator Lewis Eliot offers a sustained account of his father and his response to him. It is in *The Sleep of Reason*, published in 1966, that the '*Border Country* moment,' the call of the son to the father's deathbed, occurs. The tone employed by Lewis Eliot in the representation of his father is disengaged, objective. This detachment appears mutual: early in the novel Lewis remarks of his father that he 'was the most self-sufficient man I had ever come across. He was amiably and genuinely uninterested in his grandchildren.'<sup>7</sup> When Lewis is about to undergo a risky eye operation that arouses in him an 'atavistic desire' to see his father beforehand, the old man is, he notes wryly, 'not overwhelmed by anxiety.'<sup>8</sup> When his father dies



unexpectedly, having spent his last night holding the hand of his lodger, Lewis is conscious that to him this 'seemed like an act of nature'. He feels that while it may be a pity 'that he died without any of us', he is unconvinced that his father would have desired his son's presence – and the account given by the lodger does nothing to undermine this belief. At the same time he acknowledges that his own wife would be 'desolated' by the death of her father: responses to death, he implies, are highly specific and not dependent on an 'atavistic' universal bond.<sup>9</sup> Yet this is not offered simply as the response of the rational scientific mind which Lewis Eliot represents. The novel sequence shows him as no stranger to the darker aspects of human identity and relations: it is against reason and experience that he loves his first wife, a young woman suffering from profound mental disturbance. More pertinently here, he admits, in relation to his son Martin, the existence of the 'obsessive parental love' that 'the antique Japanese phrase calls "the darkness of the heart"'.<sup>10</sup> Snow is clearly attached to this concept which is used in a later novel, *A Coat of Varnish*, by another father of another son: 'The young man wasn't bright, wasn't amusing, but Humphrey loved him. Fatherhood, as the Japanese used to say, was a darkness of the heart.'<sup>11</sup> Yet Snow's fiction demonstrates that, in his understanding, this intensity of attachment is not, as Williams assumes, the defining relationship and one which is 'normal' and absolute.

Snow negotiates the scholarship boy's rejection of his father, by his very acceptance of higher education and its consequences, with his accustomed urbanity, but Williams is not alone of his generation in focusing on this as an area of intense emotion. For Dennis Potter, another son of the border country between England and Wales, the 'notion of betrayal' is, claims his biographer, 'a lifelong reflex' and his relationship with his father marked by 'the intertwining of betrayal and guilt.'<sup>12</sup> In Potter's work,

though, the charges of disloyalty to one's origins are made by the rejected family, whereas for Richard Hoggart, as for Williams, the punishment is self-inflicted.<sup>13</sup> The title of the chapter in the 1957 *Uses of Literacy* which contains the account of the 'Scholarship Boy' is 'Unbent Springs: a Note on the Uprooted and the Anxious.' Hoggart's emphasis is on the chasm that separates the academically endowed child from his community: ' "E's got brains," or "E's bright," he hears constantly... He is in a way cut off by his parents as much as his talent which urges him to break away from his group.'<sup>14</sup> Williams distances himself from this account of upward mobility, telling the *Politics and Letters* interviewers that his own experience of a working-class community's attitude to academic achievement is very different:

Years later I talked to Hoggart about his sense in childhood of being described as 'bright' with the implication of something odd. My experience was quite the opposite. There was absolutely nothing wrong with being bright, winning a scholarship or writing a book.<sup>15</sup>

'Once I was sent to Cambridge,' Williams says, 'I had a very strong sense of having my people behind me in the enterprise'. Yet Hoggart shares with Williams and Potter the sense that it is the relationship with the father which is critical. The 'test' of the 'real education' of the scholarship boy is, he writes, whether he is able 'by the age of twenty-five to smile at his father with his whole face.'<sup>16</sup>

The father/son conflict is, of course, the traditional stuff of narrative, whether understood in terms of the novel form or at a more fundamental level. Peter Brooks identifies paternity as 'a dominant issue' in the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century novel, 'a principled embodiment of its concern with authority, legitimacy, the conflict



of generations and the transmission of wisdom.<sup>17</sup> For Roland Barthes the Father is not simply a subject of narrative but its impetus:

Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred?<sup>18</sup>

Writing of *Death of a Salesman* Neil Ascherson says that Arthur Miller here 'blasted open the door which protects the feelings of sons about fathers – feelings in which pity, guilt, contempt and love are compressed into a single fearful compound.'<sup>19</sup> Williams, though, is uneasy with the negative elements of this dialectic/compound: is it legitimate for the Good Son to hate or kill the Father? The technique in his fiction, I shall argue, is to seek to evade the 'fearfulness' of this compound by splitting it into its constituent and more manageable parts.

That the compound contains elements of 'hatred' and 'contempt' is not denied, as throughout the fiction there is a powerful thread of hostility and repudiation of the father. Its overt expression, however, is allowed only to minor characters with dishonourable fathers, such as Jon Merritt in *Loyalties* who says of his politician father, Alec: 'He's my father. I don't see him.'<sup>20</sup> An articulation of nakedly Oedipal aggression is given to another minor character, David Evans, in *The Volunteers*, the son of another politician, Mark Evans, who has both compromised his earlier radical political position and left David's mother for a much younger woman. David tells the journalist Lewis Redfern that 'My father's dead, Lewis. You must know that.' The reasons he offers for this ritual parricide are significant:

He decided to die... Marrying Sarah was that: a familiar form of suicide. The man in his fifties, his project, his identity, collapsing inside and outside. There's either death or disappearance....Or there's this simpler cancellation...He marries a young woman as if, brightly hoping, he were still himself a young man.<sup>21</sup>

The son thus declares the father to be dead but as still, perversely, using his powers as a tribal elder to obtain fresh young flesh and seek to regain his potency. Both these fathers are, however, understood as examples of the Bad Father. Alec Merrit is called by his father-in-law a 'worthless man' who has been 'quite intolerably promiscuous. As perhaps even in his politics.'<sup>22</sup> What, though, of the Measurer son confronted by the Good Father? It is when this occurs that the fiction is marked by an obsessive consciousness of guilt and betrayal. This consciousness is, however, accompanied always by a strenuous effort to produce a counter-narrative of justification that will itself produce the Good Son.

The justification in these novels is hard won. Coming back to their Welsh villages from London, both Matthew Price and Gwyn Lewis experience guilt. They live, as Gwyn says to his mother, 'in the wrong place.'<sup>23</sup> Matthew, also speaking to his mother, protests 'I feel that I'm being blamed. Blamed for something that is quite inevitable.'<sup>24</sup> But, through a series of devices, Williams offers these sons the justification for which they yearn. Even as overt aggression was 'split off' and projected onto minor characters, so the exculpatory narrative is organised around two sets of 'doubles.' The first pair is that of the 'social' and the 'personal' father, a concept with which the novels engage directly. Matthew explains this concept to Morgan Rosser thus:

A part of a whole generation has had this. A personal father and that is one clear issue. But a father is more than a person, he's in fact a society, the thing you grew



up into....We've been moved and put into a different society. We keep the relationship but we don't take over the work. We have, you might say, a personal father but no social father. What they offer us, where we go, we reject.<sup>25</sup>

In 'Tenses of the Imagination', Williams writes of 'the loved physical father' who 'in a time of exceptional social and especially educational mobility' could not take on the 'real father's functions: passing on knowledge and experience and judgments and values in this differently constituted and discontinuous social situation.'<sup>26</sup> 'Loved' he may be, but found wanting in the functions of a 'social father' he must be. It is the social father in Harry that Matthew rejects, but he does so in common with many of his generation. Indeed, it is scarcely a rejection at all. The subject of Matthew's own studies is 'population movements into the Welsh mining valleys in the middle decades of the nineteenth century': these are migrations motivated by economic pressures and not by personal whim and rejection of paternal values.<sup>27</sup> The pressure of this insight is maintained throughout the novels, but there are moments when it does not serve wholly to contain the sense of guilt consequent on the very concept of rejection.

*Second Generation* is significant in that, while insisting on the socio-economic and political pressures and motivations that drive the son to reject the father's 'settlement,' it offers a demonstration of rejection that is not fully explicable in these terms. The novel's subject is the generation that formed 'the second Welsh diaspora', which 'had blown out the Owens from the ironworks of Brynllwyd...to the light industry and car factories of the south-east and Midlands.'<sup>28</sup> The journey east of Harold and Gwyn Owen to new work and the founding of new family units is given as necessary. Although in leaving Wales Harold leaves 'his own people', he continues to work 'hard and bitterly in politics and in his union.'<sup>29</sup> He has been driven from his place of origin by economic

necessity, but he remains firmly bound to his class. It is, though, interesting that Williams chooses to reinforce this clear motivation by another element of rejection: the sons are hostile to the 'Christian teaching' that provides their father Mervyn with 'meaning and dignity' and thus 'a way of accepting the hardness of his life.' The father's Christian belief, and its practice in his role as a lay preacher, 'cut him off from his sons' and, even before the lack of work drives them away definitively, religion leads to a 'deliberate break, against their father'.<sup>30</sup> This practice of religion can, of course, operate as a 'social' rather than a 'personal' constituent of the father, as part of that 'narrow nonconformist community' which Williams, in *Politics and Letters* reproves for its 'hypocrisies' and condemnation of 'sexual error and deviance.'<sup>31</sup> The insistence on a rejection as well as that of economic pressure is, nevertheless, a significant addition to the fiction's assumption of an intense level of filial hostility that needs to be countered strenuously by the narrative of the Good Son.

There is no Good Son in *Second Generation*. Although the self-awareness and rejection of Harold's son Peter is constructed as intensely politicised, the occasions of his multiple 'rejections' are presented as infantile and excessive. Having witnessed a 'primal scene' of quasi-sexual violence between his parents, he rushes from the house, relying on 'counting the paving stones for security, to keep away disaster.'<sup>32</sup> When he returns to the house and 'borrows' his father's car, this is very much more than a simple taking and driving away: 'He knew, as he looked, that he wanted to take [the car]. Even the idea of taking it came through with the force of desire.'<sup>33</sup> Pinkney, whose emphatically Freudian reading of the novel focuses on fantasies of curling into enclosed spaces, writes that Peter here achieves 'what minor Oedipal retaliation he can by stealing his father's car and violating its sealed space.'<sup>34</sup> Peter too has a second father, his research



supervisor Robert Lane, a father whom he has chosen to adopt and subsequently to repudiate. He berates Lane, whose father was a composer,<sup>35</sup> for his 'surrender' to middle-class mores: 'Did you have to become like them? Did you have to change your whole voice, your body, every bit of yourself?' Lane counter attacks: 'You're taking me as a parent and rejecting me. Always, Peter, you're looking, unconsciously, for another family, and you must ask yourself why...This is simple displacement.'<sup>36</sup> This is the novel's only implication that Lane is another example of the upwardly mobile scholarship boy.

In *Manod* Peter again takes flight, this time abandoning his wife Beth, their baby and, in Matthew Price, another surrogate father. Although the apparent reasons for this flight, to go to London and then to Brussels to discover more of the international political connections that govern the fate of the planned new city, are justifiable, it is the careless manner of his going, his failure to communicate his intentions or whereabouts, and the anguish it occasions which are emphasised.<sup>37</sup> The multiple and excessive nature of Peter's flights from fathers and from settlement suggest that the Matthew Price model, whereby it is the 'social' father only whom the son rejects, is not wholly adequate to explain and to contain the power of the son's repudiation. Various narrative structures are employed in *Border Country* and *Loyalties* to justify the excess and to produce a Good Son.

In both *Border Country* and *Loyalties*, sound reasons are offered for the sons' 'rejection', which is positioned as a move occasioned by irresistible social pressures. The general social pressure is reinforced in both cases by specific 'local' circumstances. One notes from Matthew's account of the distinction between social and personal

fathers that the son is not perceived as an active agent: 'We were moved and put into a different society.'<sup>38</sup> Both Gwyn and Matthew, like Dal Mered and Karan, move eastwards, away from their fathers, and it is clear from the way that Williams represents these moves that economic migratory patterns do not in themselves provide adequate justification. By the time of the writing of *Loyalties*, Wales had become an important element in Williams's configuration of values, so that Gwyn is leaving not only his father but the Land of His Fathers. His defection must therefore additionally be justified in terms of place and nation.

For Gwyn the move from the mining village of Danycapel to a Cambridge college is less a decision and more a kidnapping. Having grown up in Wales with his mother Nesta and adoptive father Bert, he has been, Bert tells his aunt, Emma Braosé, 'advised for Cardiff.' Cardiff, Emma, the Communist Party activist, make clear, is inadequate for her nephew: 'I want him to go to Cambridge. I really want him to fly'.<sup>39</sup> In conversation with both his parents she pursues this preference: 'It would make a world of difference to him. To be there with the best of his generation.' Bert comments only that 'it's for him to say in the end.'<sup>40</sup> There is no textual representation of Gwyn's 'saying', and the next episode is of Emma accompanying Gwyn to Cambridge for his, successful, interviews. Although Gwyn appears briefly in the episode of Emma's visit to Wales, he is absent from the discussion about his future and in the Cambridge episode he is effectively absent from his own interview. The sense of inevitability, almost of the pre-determined outcome of a fairy story, is enhanced by Bert's deathbed analysis of the control exercised over Gwyn. 'Letting Emma come and watch over you...to turn up when you was ready and get you back to Cambridge where you belonged.'<sup>41</sup>



For Matthew there is no English fairy godmother with friends at the Cambridge court. But there are the naturalised assumptions and aspirations of the Gwenton Grammar School where the headmaster advises Harry that his son is a strong candidate for a university scholarship. The possible option of an academically highflying pupil applying to one of the Welsh university colleges is nowhere mentioned. In *Politics and Letters* Williams raises and effectively answers the question on which *Border Country* was silent:

Why didn't my headmaster send me to a university in Wales? That would have been an orientation that would have suited my life much better. ..But this is what he was there for – to find boys like me and send them to Cambridge. I don't say this in any spirit of hostility to him; he thought he was doing the best for me.<sup>42</sup>

The parallels between Matthew's experience and that of his author here are not in question. More significant perhaps is the shared sense of lack of agency. In the essay 'My Cambridge' Williams writes: 'In each of the three periods (at Cambridge) I didn't ask or apply to come here.'<sup>43</sup> It is as if he too were kidnapped, by the aspirations and assumptions of others.

But as well as the reiterated insistence on lack of agency, *Border Country* and *Loyalties* share another device which operates to save the protagonists from a sense of guilt consequent on their rejection of the father: the creation of a second father. Even as Matthew could reject the social father and cleave to the personal, so Matthew and Glyn are allowed to commit to the Good Father and reject the Bad. The similarities are important: the doubling of the father allows both men to avoid any ambivalence about the father, to avoid in effect Barthes' dialectic of 'tenderness and hatred'. But the difference between Williams's techniques in the two novels is crucial, since in *Border*

*Country* the doubling allows him to evade his *own* ambivalence. The construction of Harry Price, and the relation of the character to the historical father Henry Joseph Williams, is a significant issue and one strangely under-interrogated by critics.

There are, unarguably, striking parallels between Williams's life and family and those of Matthew Price. These parallels have led some commentators on *Border Country* to elide Williams with Matthew and his father with Harry. A particularly striking example of this slippage is made by Laura Di Michele. Calling *Border Country* Williams's 'first autobiographical novel' and Matthew 'his fictional self', she continues:

It draws upon his boyhood and adolescence in Wales and upon his remembrances of the General Strike of 1926 as it is recalled time and time again in the novel through the voices and recollections of *his father, Harry Price*, and his friend Morgan Rosser.<sup>44</sup> (Added emphasis)

To some extent Williams invites this elision, making it clear that he understands *Border Country* as his struggle for the representation of his father's identity and his own response to his death. In a 1987 interview with Eagleton, Williams talks of 'the crisis that came to me on the death of my father – who was a socialist and a railway worker – I haven't been able to explain to people properly, perhaps I explained it partly in my novel *Border Country*.'<sup>45</sup> Twenty years earlier he had begun *Modern Tragedy* with the introduction of an unnamed man who the reader, familiar with *Border Country*, and recognising the personal anguish of the commentary, assumes to be Henry Williams:

I have known tragedy in the life of a man driven to silence, in an unregarded working life. In his ordinary and private death, I saw a terrifying loss of connection between men, and even between father and son: a loss of connection which was, however, a particular social and historical fact: a measurable



distance between his desire and his endurance, and between both and the purposes and meanings which the general life offered him.<sup>46</sup>

What he says about *Border Country* in *Politics and Letters* sets up inescapable echoes of this 'tragedy':

Harry Price has not set himself a life, he was set into a situation where he goes through a process of adaptation and integration....The central thrust of the novel is actually that the kind of strength which that apparently integrated view of moral value gives is insufficient....It fails in the end when death approaches.<sup>47</sup>

Yet he goes on in the same interview to offer an account of the life and characteristics of Henry Joseph Williams. And the man that he describes is not Harry Price. It is a part only of Harry Price and the absences and emphases are significant.

His interviewers have claimed that Harry is someone with 'a wholeness of character that commands an absolute respect' and that he is 'seen as a figure virtually without contradiction.' Williams's response is to explain that the way in which he constructed 'the character of Harry Price' was arrived at only after several re-writings and 'was not based on my own experiences.' Harry, he says:

Is not my own father because a lot of him went into Morgan [Rosser] too. It would have been possible to combine his contradictory impulses in the same character. I tried that but in the end decided to separate them out by creating another character who represented the much more restless, critical and self-critical side of my father's nature.<sup>48</sup>

Williams here defends his decision as simply a novelist's strategy, a point that he had made earlier in *The Country and the City*, where he argues that the reason for the division was to establish a relationship which would enable him to dramatise the

internal conflict in his father.<sup>49</sup> The split, however, is clearly one that demands interrogation.

His *Politics and Letters* interviewers on this occasion offer no such challenge and the only critic who has engaged with Williams's explanation of his method is Eagleton. Responding to the explanation offered by Williams in *The Country and the City*, he comments:

It is far from my intention to suggest that Williams is misreporting his purpose; but it is clear how one effect of this division of qualities in the novel is to render Price an almost wholly admirable representative of the best values of the rural community, disassociating him from those rather less praiseworthy characteristics displayed by Rosser. The 'border' between two conflictive sets of values was internalised within the community, sure enough, but it was not carried to the (historically accurate) point of internalisation within the community's major representative.<sup>50</sup>

Eagleton is, I believe, right to insist that the separation of the father's 'impulses' allows the negative ones to be projected onto Morgan Rosser. Indeed by establishing the binary opposition of the two sets of impulses, the 'Rosser' set are inevitably judged more negatively. Not that, *pace* both Eagleton and the New Left interviewers, Harry Price, with his unexamined cruel obduracy to his wife's wishes over their home and the naming of their son, is a 'wholly admirable' man who 'commands absolute respect.'<sup>51</sup> It is rather that the principles for which he stands, in opposition to those of Morgan Rosser, are consistently privileged, so establishing a particular value system for the fiction as a whole. What Eagleton's point omits, and what is central to my argument



here, is any discussion of the importance of this 'split' father in determining the responses of the son.

Throughout *Border Country* Harry is identified with the positive virtues of settlement: loyalty to family and to class, integrity and wholeness. Positioned against him, structurally and in a number of set piece dialogues, is Morgan his fellow signalman: emotional lightweight, union activist who, becoming a sharp and successful businessman and Labour councillor, turns Establishment figure. He, nonetheless, plays the role of an often sympathetic and persuasive devil's advocate. The dying Harry, the sense that his life has been a failure, is the book's centre and both the adult Matthew and the ageing Morgan seek to define themselves in terms of this. Morgan tells Matthew: 'Why do you think I come out here? It's not just to ask about him, or to see you. I come because my life is in question.'<sup>52</sup> Even before the crisis of self-consciousness provoked by Harry's illness, while Matthew is still a schoolboy, Morgan perceives his distance from Harry as loss: 'He was often aware, now, of how much of himself he had left behind in those early days when Harry and Ellen lodged with him.'<sup>53</sup> Given Williams's comments on the division that generated Morgan, there is of course some irony in the phrasing here.

The emphasis on the opposition between the two men is insistent. Of Morgan, Matthew says to his father 'You're so different', and their physical difference, implicitly brought about by their different life choices, is consistently emphasised.<sup>54</sup> One important opposition between Harry and Morgan, signalled in the early stages of the novel, is their very different attitudes to home and family. Around Harry cluster variations of the term 'settle'. It is Morgan who foregrounds the term as a significant descriptor of Harry:

'Everything with him was to settle. He took his own feelings and built things from them.'<sup>55</sup> It is Harry who, antagonistic to the idea that the Rosser-Price household can be a 'family' <sup>56</sup> insists, against Ellen's distressed resistance, on renting a separate house. It is Harry who makes 'his settlement in Glynmawr', Ellen who 'saw and accepted the pattern.'<sup>57</sup>

The associations of settlement with the generation and nurturance of children and, through the extended gardens that Harry cultivates, the raising of crops, is a conventional enough cluster, repeated for Gwyn Owen in *Second Generation*. The sense here is of settlement both as place and as mental state, of an acceptance and consolidation that is vital to life. Against this are set Morgan's attitudes to family, to fidelity and commitment. Morgan's first wife, Mary, having died in childbirth, Mrs Lucas, who had nursed the child Mary, now acts as his housekeeper and looks after the baby, Eira. Although she is not a neutral witness, her hints to Ellen that he was a less than loving husband are supported by the rest of the text. She tells Ellen that Mary had 'loved too much' and, in response to Ellen's hesitant 'I expect he loved her' goes on: 'Rosser? Yes, as his girl. He had plenty of girls. Mary was his best girl. That's how he is.'<sup>58</sup> His feelings for his child too are less than wholehearted: 'He was interested in his daughter but with a certain reserve. "The women understand this business and I don't," he said in the box to Harry. "To lose a wife and get a baby strands you really; you have to remind yourself that it's yours.'" This confidence is made to Harry at work, in the signal box, for 'the house, since his wife's death, had been little more than a base.'<sup>59</sup> For Harry his home is his centre – not the building, not his wife but, crucially, his son:

The work in the box was only part of his life. The cottage too, which was now so pleasant, seemed also only a part. But Will was four, and increasingly



drawing his interest. Gradually, in the winter evenings, he moved back, through Will, into the home.<sup>60</sup>

Morgan's attitude to re-marriage is seen to reinforce Mrs Lucas's strictures. The farmer Edwin Parry, aware that Harry is a 'mate' of Morgan, questions him about the latter's character and whether his attentions to his relation Edie Davies are likely to result in a marriage proposal. Edie, says Edwin, is 'taking it serious' but her male relatives are suspicious of Morgan: 'What Jim said was this talking, you know. I reckon he goes up there and lays it on a bit. Thinks he's making an impression.' In contrast to the suspicious verbal fluency of which Morgan stands accused, Harry's defence is innocent of any flourishes: 'I get on with him alright. He's a good mate.'<sup>61</sup> Time shows Edie Davies to have been misguided in taking Morgan 'serious': she is quietly dropped and appears later as the wife of a preacher. Morgan does eventually marry, but his choice is a property settlement indistinguishable from those of the 'immoral' Restoration dramas that Williams excoriated in *The Country and the City*.<sup>62</sup> Janie is presented to Morgan and to the reader as 'tall and ungainly but carefully and attractively dressed.' Her aunt, wife of the 'leading shopkeeper in Gwenton', offers Janie with a very clearly written label of eligibility: 'When her poor mam and dad used to live, right up the mountain, I said to her when it was hers, didn't I? Now you sell, girl, get the money in the bank. I wasn't wrong, now was I? Nine hundred pounds she cleared, mind.' Poor Janie's response at being put up for sale like the cattle at Gwenton market could not be more clearly signalled. Avoiding Morgan's 'interested eyes' she 'twisted her body helplessly, as if she wanted to make herself smaller and less noticeable.'<sup>63</sup>

The distinction between Harry and Morgan is also, and crucially, structured in terms of the experience/abstraction dialectic. It is Harry who signifies the quotidian, the material, whose actions and values sustain the fundamentals of life: bread and water. In dialogue with Edwin Parry he blocks a piece of extremely mild sexual banter by a question to Edwin's wife Olwen about her baking, the religious overtones of bread being foregrounded by her response that it is "'Better'n stones anyhow.'<sup>64</sup> When, in the early days in Glynmawr the Prices are still lodging with Morgan, a problem occurs with the water tank that feeds the household supply. Morgan, arguing that this is the landlord's responsibility, takes no practical action, leaving Harry to carry out the repairs that involve four mornings' work.<sup>65</sup> Against this insistence on the material is Morgan who talks so fluently as to charm his first wife, Mary, and to deceive Edie Davies. The contrast between his discourse and that of Harry is demonstrated in their dialogue that immediately precedes the NUR's declaration of support for a General Strike.

Morgan is concerned that the railwaymen should 'know what we're doing.' For Harry commitment is given as straightforward and instinctive:

'We're with the miners, isn't it?'

'Aye, but with them why? Because we're the working class, Harry, united for common action. The miners are fighting their own battle against the employers. We're not, mind. We're not fighting the companies, we're fighting the government.'

'The country, they said', Harry answered, half to himself. He wanted, in one way, to hear Morgan talk, yet the real argument was in his own mind and in different terms.<sup>66</sup>



The terms used by Morgan in this exchange and in his response to Harry – 'The country, Harry! We're the country!' – are very close to those used by Williams himself in his writings about the General Strike.<sup>67</sup> Morgan is seeking, carefully and properly, to denaturalise and expose the ideological use of 'country'. Harry's terms, never articulated but implied in his assertion that he will 'stand by the miners if it comes to it', are those of an untheorised class loyalty.

In a later discussion with Morgan, Harry is said to be 'listening now, but still warily. He was waiting for terms that he could feel'.<sup>68</sup> Harry is about feeling, not intellect: this is visceral not abstract. The primacy of feeling is linked causally to silence. Morgan watching Harry 'saw what he had so often before seen in this man: an extraordinary tension between what was felt and what could be said.'<sup>69</sup> The authenticity claimed for this absence of articulation is further endorsed by Harry's being persistently represented by darkness, often in terms of his eyes. In this exchange with Morgan his eyes are said to be 'very dark and withdrawn'. The mountains too are regularly described as dark and this, with its suggestions of the 'natural' and of an inexpressible profundity, is privileged over Morgan's easily articulated theory. The text encourages the reader to a suspicion of Morgan's vocabulary as a merely learned response when set against Harry's authenticity. Morgan is, in all senses, the false suitor. Already in this first novel the fluent, the knowing, the abstract are identified as suspicious, an identification which, with promiscuous politicians and compromising academics, becomes a powerfully inscribed pattern in the later novels. Important too is the production of gender whereby strong silent Harry, linked to the landscape and natural world stands for masculinity, while fluent Morgan, interested in Ellen's taste in furnishings,<sup>70</sup> is marked as thereby feminised. The contradictions in his 'real' father that Williams decided to deal with by

the device of splitting off certain characteristics have been used to construct an alternative father, one who is shown continuously as the embodiment of a choice. It is, as will be discussed below, a matter of choosing not across a range of options but between alternatives. Traditionally the narrative choice offered to the female protagonist is a choice between two suitors: Williams's male protagonists must choose between the two fathers.

Morgan Rosser is not presented as an admirable character, but his move from radical politics into small scale capitalism is demonstrated as motivated not by selfishness and desire for status but by the bitter disappointment of the end of the General Strike. Until this time 'his life had been centred on an idea of common improvement' and his bitterness, anger and 'loss of his bearings' arise from a sense that 'the world of hope and ideas' is, when confronted by 'a grey, solid world of power and compromise', no more than 'a mark in the margin.'<sup>71</sup> Although he embraces success in the food and the marriage markets, he continues to perceive Harry's principled integrity as a site of value. He is constructed through a series of oppositions that establish him as morally inferior to Harry, but he is nonetheless a flawed rather than a villainous character. The two fathers between whom Gwyn Lewis of *Loyalties* is offered a choice are far more strongly distanced.<sup>72</sup>

In this instance the two men are more properly father to Gwyn: Norman Braose his biological father and Bert Lewis the man who marries his mother, Nesta, and adopts him. This doubleness is picked up and elaborated at a number of points. The novel does not use the structure of *Border Country* to establish the opposition of the two men, through showing them in a series of discussions and disagreements over points of



policy and practice; but the differences between the ways of life that each represents is strongly emphasised throughout. They meet only once, in the novel's first episode, a Communist Party political camp in South Wales, where they stand with Nesta between them. While Norman is 'tall, fair haired', 'confident', dressed casually in an 'open-necked white cricket shirt', Bert, an unemployed collier, has 'much broader shoulders and a very thick reddened neck' and is 'smartly dressed, his gleaming white shirt buttoned at the collar.' It is Bert who is a speaker at the camp: he has seen action 'in the struggle against the scabs at Bedwas'<sup>73</sup> It is Bert who continues to be the one who, quite literally, puts his body on the line and whose commitment is inscribed on his body: in 1937 he is a member of the International Brigade, fighting and captured in Spain; and then as an artillery sergeant in Normandy in 1944 is lamed, badly burned and facially disfigured in a tank battle with SS soldiers. Meanwhile Norman spends the time of the Spanish Civil War working in an administrative capacity in Marseilles and, in 1944, is said to be 'in some hush-hush job.... to do with his maths.'<sup>74</sup> Over the next twenty years, until Bert's death in 1968, Bert is shown suffering, in Norman's words, 'the long strain of struggle', a struggle both physical and political.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile Norman inherits the country estate of Westridge, moves smoothly in Establishment circles, is knighted. Gwyn, in the novel's final episode in 1984, explicitly contrasts the values and fates of his two fathers. In Spain, says Gwyn, Bert 'fought beside poor people and for poor people. And then he fought the SS Death's Head. It made his face ugly.' It is Bert who 'carried the cost.' What, he asks his other father, 'have you to put beside that?'<sup>76</sup>

Direct references to the fact of Gwyn's double paternity serve to remind the reader of its significance. His aunt Emma reminds Mark Ryder, the don who conducts Gwyn's Cambridge interview, of his own presence in the first act of this drama:

'You were there at the farm, with Bert Lewis and Norman...'

'You mean there with his two fathers.'<sup>77</sup>

That Bert recognises Gwyn as his son is clear in the death bed scene when he bequeaths to him the binoculars he took from the body of a young man who died at his side in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>78</sup> Gwyn is the son who, through the possession of the object, inherits the duty of remembering the young man. But as well as the son's duty of memory, Bert passes to Gwyn the information that during Nesta's pregnancy Norman claimed that Bert must be the father of the child. By denying his son even in the womb, the Bad Father has denied his own role. When, after Bert's death, Gwyn eventually agrees to meet Norman, they debate the question of the 'true' father.

'You said, just now, that your father had died....you meant Bert of course?'

'Yes. He was both actually and legally my father'.

'When you say actually, you mean he brought you up'.

'Yes. Isn't that what a child knows?'

'Of course. And is loyal to...The biological paternity then being..?'

'Insoluble' Gwyn said, sharply.

'You can't really mean that.'

'I mean that any problem it creates is insoluble.'

'Because it's over and done with? Surely not.'

'Because it's over, anyway.'

'Exactly. It's over, but it isn't done with'.<sup>79</sup>



Norman here begins with an uneasy suspicion that Gwyn's 'dead father' might be himself – a suspicion that recalls the example above, when David Evans consigns his father, Mark, to a premature grave. He is correct, though, in his assertion that the question of Gwyn's paternity is not yet 'done with.' By his visit Gwyn himself has made the point that the issue is ongoing. In leaving the mining community to study at Cambridge, Gwyn, like Matthew Price, has rejected Bert, his 'social' father. As a scientific Civil Servant, he has moved to the world of abstraction. Yet he is determined to assert his loyalty to the values and place that Bert signifies. It is therefore important to him to establish that Norman is indeed his father in order to give himself the opportunity to deny him. Norman is a ready made target for rejection: seducer, deserter and class enemy. As in *Border Country*, the existence of a second, inferior, father, allows the ambivalence of the son's feelings to be evaded.

The final interview between Gwyn and his Bad Father ends with a decisive break. Norman has sought to make a connection between them which in effect excludes Bert. Of Gwyn's allegiance to the South Wales mining community and its dominant socialist values he says: 'Your world? ...A world I visited and left, a world you grew up in and left. It's there, yes, but not for either of us. Why don't you admit this? Why can't you be honest?' But Gwyn insists that this world, the world of his Good Father, is still for him a valid one: 'It isn't just an inheritance....It isn't only an obligation. It's a position now. It's a contemporary direction. It's a way of learning our future.'<sup>80</sup>

This offer of association and complicity on the part of the Bad Father has an interesting parallel in *Border Country*. Here Morgan Rosser explicitly seeks to move the schoolboy

Will into a quasi-filial role and allegiance to his values by offering him a job in his expanding business:

'You've got the education, Will, and you know the country, you know the people here...Even this, though it's more than I expected, is only the beginning. And there you are, Will. Not as anybody's employee, but getting ready when the time comes to take things over. That's what I'm offering you, Will.'<sup>81</sup>

To Will's mother, he declares that 'I had him and Eira in mind.'<sup>82</sup> Will, supported by his father, declines the offer and makes it clear that, if he wins a scholarship, he intends to go away to university. After a scene in which Morgan declares himself 'insulted' by the rejection, ease is restored and tea and Welsh cakes consumed. Yet Will recognises the importance of what has occurred: 'The quarrel had been only superficially about the job. The real substance, and its roots, seemed to lie far back. This was a border defined, a border crossed. It felt like a parting, whatever might actually follow.'<sup>83</sup> Thus Will is given a clear, and clearly significant, choice between leaving to make his own way in a presently uncertain future or becoming the son-in-law and heir apparent of the jam-making mogul. Like the Devil with Christ in the wilderness, the Bad Father offers what does not truly tempt. But what we should register is the option not offered – that of cleaving to the Good Father. The career path mapped for Will by his headmaster and father rules out the possibility of his following his father's trade. It is, though, Williams's own decision in his splitting of the Father that has created this silence. A father politically active and articulate would have offered a stronger counter challenge than Harry or Morgan individually, a challenge which would have needed to be acknowledged.



In *Politics and Letters* Williams talks of the railwaymen in the village as strongly politicised:

They read a lot. They also talked endlessly....because signalmen had long times of inactivity between trains, they talked for hours to each other on the telephone...so they were getting news directly from industrial South Wales, for example. They were in touch with a much wider social network and were bringing modern politics into the village.<sup>84</sup>

His father has arrived in Pandy 'totally radicalized' by his experience as a soldier in the First World War and by his first job 'right down in the mining valleys which were very politicized, with a fairly advanced Socialist culture.'<sup>85</sup> He became active as a member of the parish council and 'running the Labour Party branch in the village.'<sup>86</sup> The profoundly feeling but inarticulate Harry Price is, of course, a father shorn of these characteristics which are given to Morgan, but given in a context that calls for their, at least partial, rejection. While the schoolboy Raymond Williams too was intensely politically active, campaigning for Labour Party candidates - *faute de mieux*, as he always had a 'very reserved attitude to the Labour Party'<sup>87</sup> - Will is innocent of any directly political engagement. This silence on the political potential of a life in Wales, and absence of a positive political 'father figure' are further examples of the text's insistence on the necessity of the son's exile.

In his final bitter interview with Gwyn that concludes *Loyalties*, Norman Braose accuses the Welsh socialist working class of ignorance, illusion and rhetoric. Bert Lewis's fight in Spain was, he says, 'for a social order of which he knew nothing.' While Gwyn angrily defends Bert and his values, his argument is made in terms of 'an actual society, under pressure and hardship but still with its own bonds, its own loyalties.'<sup>88</sup>

At no point does he argue that Bert, and men like him, do have an understanding of international relations, of socio-political structures, of historical process. He links Norman's treachery to his country to his class position, but does not go on to point out that Norman's claim to an understanding unavailable to Bert and his community is an appropriation of knowledge based on arrogance and an ignorance of the educational ambitions and achievements of the working class in the industrial valleys and elsewhere. Yet Williams's essays and speeches abound with acknowledgements of the educational work of the Welsh valleys in the early and mid-twentieth century. His critical works offer examples of particular 'working-class heroes' such as the nineteenth-century historian Joseph Ashby whose life was marked by 'remarkable intelligence and an impressive self-teaching.'<sup>89</sup> He attacks those who regard 'boarding school and Oxbridge' as the very definition of education and label George Eliot, Hardy and Lawrence who fall outside that category as mere 'autodidacts.'<sup>90</sup> Yet Gwyn allows Norman's assertion of Bert's ignorance to pass unchallenged.

The committed working class in Williams's fiction are honourable but, like Harry, unable to comprehend the abstractions of political structures. At the time of the miners' strike in 1984, Gwyn Lewis's half brother, Dic, still perceives the industrial battle as face-to-face direct conflict. Gwyn warns:

'There's a whole mobilisation against you.'

Dic squared his shoulders.

'Then let the buggers come. We'll see in the end of it.'

'They don't have to come, Dic. They can do it from where they are.'<sup>91</sup>

The significant absence at the heart of Williams's fiction is the working-class activist defined not solely in terms of commitment and integrity but of an understanding of the



relation of local, national and international processes, an activist capable of engaging and besting Norman Braose.<sup>92</sup> Nor does Williams offer any representatives of an alternative Welsh tradition: the scholarship boy who takes a degree at Oxbridge, but, crucially, rejects its seductions and returns home. In Glyn Jones's novella 'Born in Ystrad'(1938), a work with which Williams was familiar, the narrator attends an English university and delights in 'listening to the charming, disinterested professors telling one about beauty and form and literary content'. He was 'one of their very nicest little doctored toms, a collier's son with the outlook of a French aesthete.'<sup>93</sup> Jones's protagonist, in a narrative shift into the stunningly surreal, becomes a leader in a failed socialist Welsh revolution. Williams, however, does not offer us even a less aspiring working-class hero. Such a figure might have been, at least partially, represented by a Good Father who ran the local Labour Party with a son whose choice did not lie between Morgan Rosser's jam factory or Cambridge and permanent exile.

The absence of such a figure serves to justify the role of the Measurer son. Dic and the people of Danycapel are brave, solid in their support for each other but apparently incapable of understanding the processes that govern their lives. Carlyle wrote that 'the speaking classes speak and debate each for itself; the great, dumb, deep-buried class lies like an Enceladus, who in his pain, if he will complain of it, has to produce earthquakes!' Carlyle searches, therefore, for 'a clear interpretation of the thought which at heart torments these wild inarticulate souls.'<sup>94</sup> It needs, in his perception, the educated hierophant to articulate that pain. In Williams's novels, that hierophant is not an absolute stranger: he is, as Eira says of Matthew, the one who is 'studying Wales and has gone to London to do it.'<sup>95</sup> He is one literally distanced from his people, continuously seeking to negotiate a narrative position that will justify the dangerous

distance between the place left and the place arrived at. The novels' compulsion to return and to rework the construction of the Father demonstrates how crucial a figure he is in that negotiation, and the very insistence of the repetition suggests the lack of any achieved position.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Border Country*, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Wallace, Editorial *Keywords; A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 1 (1998), 5. Jane Miller, *Seductions* (Virago, 1990) 4. See also Terry Lovell, 'Knowable Pasts, Imaginable Futures' in *History Workshop Journal* 27 (1989), 136.

<sup>3</sup> An interesting counter narrative of class and gender, focusing on mothers and daughters, is offered by Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> *Second Generation*, 224.

<sup>5</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 282.

<sup>6</sup> Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Penguin, 1959), 169. 'The mother is not the true parent of the child/Which is called hers. She is a nurse who tends the growth/Of young seeds planted by the true parent, the male.'

<sup>7</sup> C.P. Snow, *The Sleep of Reason* (Macmillan, 1966), 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>11</sup> C.P. Snow, *A Coat of Varnish* (Penguin, 1980), 60.

<sup>12</sup> W. Stephen Gilbert, *Fight and Kick and Bite: the Life and Works of Dennis Potter* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 128-130. Potter was brought up in a mining community in the Forest of Dean, a few miles from the Welsh border. See his *The Changing Forest* (Secker and Warburg, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> See Potter's television play *Stand Up, Nigel Barton*, broadcast 8.12.1963. When Nigel, an Oxford educated miner's son, talks about Britain and class on a television documentary he is perceived by his watching family as disloyal. The brief account of the play on the Potter website uses the word 'treachery' three times.

<http://www.yorks.ac.uk/potter> Accessed 1.7.2006.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Penguin, 1958), 294.

<sup>15</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Hoggart, *op. cit.*, 292-293.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 63. Brooks notes paternity 'as central and identifies a number of canonical European novels as 'structured by the conflict.'

<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Cape, 1976), 47.

<sup>19</sup> Neil Ascherson, 'Arthurian Legends', *The Observer Review* (26.10.2003), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Williams, *Loyalties* (Chatto and Windus, 1985), 3. Hereafter *Loyalties*.

<sup>21</sup> *Volunteers*, 170.

<sup>22</sup> *Loyalties*, 270.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>24</sup> *Border Country*, 269.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>26</sup> 'Tenses of the Imagination', in *Writing in Society*, 264.

<sup>27</sup> *Border Country*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 288.

<sup>29</sup> *Second Generation*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> *Second Generation*, 213.



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- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.
- <sup>34</sup> Tony Pinkney, *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), 61.
- <sup>35</sup> *Second Generation*, 83.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.
- <sup>37</sup> *Manod*, 149 and 156.
- <sup>38</sup> *Border Country*, 271.
- <sup>39</sup> *Loyalties*, 146.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.
- <sup>42</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 37.
- <sup>43</sup> 'My Cambridge', in *What I Came to Say*, 4.
- <sup>44</sup> Laura Di Michele, 'Autobiography and the Structure of Feeling in *Border Country*,' in Dennis Dworkin and Leslie G. Roman (eds.), *Views Beyond the Border Country* (Routledge, 1993), 21.
- <sup>45</sup> 'The Practice of Possibility', in *Resources of Hope*, 311.
- <sup>46</sup> *Modern Tragedy*, 13.
- <sup>47</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 281.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.
- <sup>49</sup> *The Country and the City*, 299.
- <sup>50</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (Verso, 1976), 30-31.
- <sup>51</sup> *Border Country*, 44 and 55.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 274
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 145 and 225.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 65
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.
- <sup>62</sup> *The Country and the City*, 69.
- <sup>63</sup> *Border Country*, 153-154.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 64
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 82
- <sup>67</sup> 'The Social Significance of 1926', in *Resources of Hope*, 107.
- <sup>68</sup> *Border Country*, 172.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.
- <sup>72</sup> Glyn in *Black Mountains* chooses loyalty to his grandfather, a 'settler', in preference to the father who left his home and family.
- <sup>73</sup> *Loyalties*, 17-19,
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-255.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 365-366.
- <sup>81</sup> *Border Country*, 241.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-245.
- <sup>84</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 24.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>88</sup> *Loyalties*, 359.
- <sup>89</sup> *The Country and the City*, 232.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Loyalties*, 341.

<sup>92</sup> Jonathan Rose's research has shown the extent to which 'especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries...working-class culture was saturated by the spirit of mutual education.' *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2001), 83.

<sup>93</sup> Glyn Jones, 'Born in Ystrad' in *The Blue Bed* (New York: Dutton, 1938), 20-23.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* Volume xxix Centenary edition, 185 and 122, cited by Chris Baldrick *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 92.

<sup>95</sup> *Border Country*, 260.



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## Chapter Five

### The Land of His Fathers

The Welsh national anthem, *Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau, Land of My Fathers*, is interestingly reminiscent of the central concerns of Williams's fiction. It suggests both the complexities of the relationship between 'land/*gwlad*' (with fifteen references) and the symbolic formation of the nation, 'Wales/*Cymru*' (one mention only) and the equally problematic relation between the 'personal' father and the 'fathers' who are the Welsh people.<sup>1</sup> This links strongly to questions already addressed of Williams's role as exile and his actual and perceived relationship to place, father and people. The chapter examines the different constructions of 'people' offered in the fiction, and their political implications. It focuses too on whether one can identify significant changes in the politics of place in Williams's fiction as he moves from a representation of people and places highly specific in focus and austere in discourse to that of a wider imagined community constructed in part through what I term a rhetoric of desire. It is in the context of his writing on Wales that he has been most vulnerable to 'reiterated charges of romanticism and murky nostalgia', and the justification for these accusations will be explored.<sup>2</sup>

A useful starting point is the account of *Black Mountains* that he gives in 'The Practice of Possibility.' Here are bound together his belief in the essential continuity of community through place over time and the assertion that the 'defeat' of his father should be understood as the most recent example of the fate of a victimised people:

The crisis which came to me on the death of my father...was the sense of a kind



of defeat for an idea of value...It was very difficult not to see him as a victim at the end. I suppose it was this kind of response that sent me in the end to the historical novel I'm now writing... about the movements of history over a very long period, in and through a particular place in Wales. [It is] a record of...defeat, invasion, victimisation. When one sees what was done to the people who are physically my ancestors, one feels it to be almost incredible.<sup>3</sup>

*Black Mountains*, then, is an act of reparation that seeks to give voice to the victimised.

But this account raises many questions, about the definition of a 'people', the consequences of situating them unequivocally as victims and the relation of this people of the Black Mountains to the wider category of the Welsh.

In his non-fiction, and in *Manod*, Williams makes it clear that he understands the Welsh as a people formed through waves of immigration consequent upon the huge numbers necessary for industrialisation. He derides the 'myths' and 'illusions' that 'we are physically distinct, a specific race, the last of the old Britons hanging on in the west.'<sup>4</sup>

The assertion in 'The Practice of Possibility' is bizarrely inconsistent with this derision.

The experimental evidence on which Norman Davies, in *The Isles*, bases his narrative of pre-history gives some vindication to Williams's claim of an unchanging people. This evidence, available only a decade after Williams's death, 'would indicate that a substantial proportion of people in modern Britain form part of local kinship groups which have had a continuous existence for three or four hundred generations.'<sup>5</sup> But is the evidence of DNA relevant here? Williams's identification is with the place and with the losers. In each turn of the wheel of fortune, it is with the oppressed, the anachronistic rather than

the historically ascendant group, that the reader is invited to identify. The 'people' of one epoch are ousted or enslaved by those injected in the next wave of immigration. At very few points is there even a limited sense of negotiation, of an achieved hybridity between victor and defeated. Since the narrative is one of conquest and genocide where some earlier groups of settlers lose not only their territory but their claim to be human, it is hard to see how the sense of a continuous 'people' could be established. For Williams, in this context, the constant is the suffering and 'my people' the recurrent victims. Writing of nationalist territorial claims which continue to plague Europe, Patrick Geary makes the point that these are based on a 'moment of primary acquisition [after which] similar subsequent migrations, inversions or political absorptions have all been illegitimate.'<sup>6</sup> For Williams there can be no such moment of primary acquisition: his is a myth of origins with no defined starting point.

The insistence on victimhood is an uncomfortable one with its own freight of Welsh history. The Welsh, asserts Gwyn A. Williams, are eager participants in a victim culture. Writing of Dic Penderyn, hanged as a leader in the Merthyr Rising of 1831, he notes how any re-telling of the story emphasises the 'martyred' Penderyn while the second leader, Lewis Lewis, a 'more violent and heroic figure'; is ignored.<sup>7</sup> Why, Gwyn Williams asks, are the events referred to as 'the Merthyr Riots'? He berates the Welsh for their: 'terrible reluctance to say that the workers were the attackers, the aggressors. No matter how fully events are described, it is the Rising that is spiritually absent. There is a repeated collapse into the victim syndrome.' He ends, 'We need to understand that choice.'<sup>8</sup> A different choice was made by Naomi Mitchison, in her pre-history narrative of the Orcadians of



6,000 years ago, published two years before *Black Mountains*.<sup>9</sup> Their lives are brief and tough but Mitchison offers them agency. The chosen, episodic, form of *Black Mountains* makes the people, fixed in one place and subject to the pressures of other peoples into and across that space, inevitably passive recipients of the agency of the new arrivals. In *Early in Orcadia* some of the Orcadians are aspirational: they construct a boat and set out for the brightness on the horizon that they call the Shining, where they establish a settlement.

As well as constructing a group identity by reason of the habitation of a spatial location over millennia, Williams was concerned to construct the identity of the Welsh as a people and has been criticised for offering a distortingly narrow perspective. His Wales, claims James Davies, is 'a concept of limited geographical and social range...Commercial Wales, intellectual Wales, bourgeois Wales, urban and suburban Wales hardly feature in Williams's vision.'<sup>10</sup> The totalisation that he claims is practised by Williams also has its own peculiarly Welsh history. In the nineteenth century, says Prys Morgan, the Welsh rewrote themselves and Wales became the Land of the *Gwerin*:

*Gwerin* in Welsh means a mass, so the word means the masses of the common people, as opposed to the aristocrats or clergy. Non-conformists and Radical publicists came to use this word more and more frequently as the century advanced, excluding the aristocracy from the Welsh nation entirely, and most Anglicans for good measure, and the nation became a nation of the *Gwerin*, poor labourers, craftsmen, merchants, even capitalists, together with their printers, preachers, publicists, performers, all united in their Welsh self-consciousness as expressed in

the life of the chapel.<sup>11</sup>

Williams's focus on rural and industrial Wales to the exclusion of other categories allows him to construct a Welsh people whom he can make a strong case as being defined by 'the practice of community.'<sup>12</sup>

In 'The Importance of Community' Williams explains his understanding of the term and his sense of places where he understands it as practised. He gives an account of, as an undergraduate, attending a lecture by L.C. Knights who contended that 'no twentieth century person' could understand the use of the word 'neighbour' in Shakespeare since it 'signified a whole series of obligations and recognitions over and above the mere fact of physical proximity.' The young Williams challenged such an assertion:

I knew perfectly well what 'neighbour', in that full sense, means...This was not to idealize my own place...I do not mean that people all liked each other. I do not mean that people didn't play dirty tricks on each other sometimes...I mean that there was nevertheless a level of social obligation which was conferred by the fact of seeming to live in the same place and in that sense have a common identity. And from this sense there were acts of kindness beyond calculation, forms of mutual recognition.<sup>13</sup>

This early contestation of established meanings, then, was based on the need to assert his early and continuing experience of such community in practice in the face of establishment denials. He notes too the existence of another form of community, one that 'didn't depend at all on this sense of relative stability, relative custom' but one that 'had been hammered out [as the] eventual positive creation of struggles within the



industrialization of South Wales.<sup>14</sup>

In the novels both the people of the border villages and those of the mining valleys are represented as adhering to a value of mutual help that overrides political disagreement or personal animosity. In *Border Country*, Mrs Hybart, owner of the Prices' cottage, disapproves of the railwaymen's part in the General Strike, but will not accept Harry's rent money at a time of hardship: indeed she rejects the very idea of a 'debt' in their community: 'Debts? Here?'<sup>15</sup> Although the farming community of Manod is riven with family and inter-family tensions, when Ivor Vaughan is trapped and injured in a tractor accident immediate and unquestioning help is provided, not only in his rescue but in continuing help with the work of the farm.<sup>16</sup> In *The Volunteers* the 'outsider', journalist Lewis Redfern, comments on the harshness of the South Wales valleys: 'What really got through to me was the stark contiguity of the otherwise empty landscape – the bare and barren hills – with this crowded, dirty, unfinished and abandoned development.' Yet, he feels, although 'people had to live between two inadequate worlds, each harsh and unspectacular' there was nevertheless 'the talk, perhaps the practice, of community.'<sup>17</sup> The 'practice' is demonstrated here in the community response to the shooting of the worker Gareth Powell and in *Loyalties* by the conduct of the miners' strike. 'Down here we stand by each other', Nesta says sharply to Gwyn, who no longer lives 'down here.'<sup>18</sup> The strength of Davies's attack on this representation of Wales is not that it offers a falsified and idealised construction of Welsh social relations, but that, by too tight a focus on particular socio-economic formations, it erases much of what is important in contemporary Wales.

Another danger of this formation is that noted in Chapter Four, whereby the absence of the articulate working man is used to justify the role of the educated hierophant – effectively the sympathetic exile. But is this a whole or partial account of what is happening? In the final novel, are the people of the Black Mountains being spoken *for* or is it they who are given voice? As Glyn moves across the mountain top in the search for his grandfather, he hears 'a strange word, a distant word...a sound suddenly distinct but not his own word.'<sup>19</sup> The mode through which Glyn receives the stories is not clear: 'A story opened' and 'More stories of the past related to each place arose in turn'.but the reader understands that voice has been given to strange, because hitherto silenced, people.<sup>20</sup> The need to provide the dead with the opportunity to tell their stories, and their eagerness to speak, is a theme as ancient as Homer, where Odysseus pours the libations that will give them voice.<sup>21</sup> In *Black Mountains* the sense is of a decentring of dominant discourses and of hitherto marginalised or silenced voices appropriating utterance. Looking again at Williams's explanation of the motive force of this novel of distant millennia as lying in his response to his father's death, this reads as the giving of voice to all the 'dark' men of the mountains.

Nicolas Tredell, however, understands the techniques adopted in *Black Mountains* as politically suspect. Despite 'its anti-imperialist aim,' writes Tredell, *Black Mountains* practices what Lyotard calls a 'soft imperialism'. Its style, moving between the lyrical and the pedestrian, remains largely uniform and works to efface difference, to draw its diverse stories into a totalizing, homogenizing, narrative of people who



are, *mutatis mutandi*, not unlike Williams himself...The 'imperialist' impression is reinforced by the sense that 'knowledge' lies in the totalizing consciousness of the 'impersonal narrator.'<sup>22</sup>

It is unarguable that the political assertion made by *Black Mountains*, of the value and dignity of lives unacknowledged by official written history, is necessarily at odds with its form as a written text as Pinkney acknowledges: 'It is...employing the very compromised medium it is aggressively analysing; and the question then arises: can it escape the very processes of domination that it is seeking to define and dislodge?'<sup>23</sup> He argues that *Black Mountains* does make good this escape, not only through its employment of a 'Babel of tongues, with Latin, Norman-French, English and Breton all battling for semantic predominance', but through a recognition that 'its own spare, lucid prose' is compromised and cannot be appealed to as a 'disinterested metalanguage.'<sup>24</sup>

Pinkney's argument is the more persuasive. Certainly *Black Mountains* employs a more varied range of discourses than Tredell, with his reference only to the 'lyrical' and the 'pedestrian' would suggest. Continuing a technique adopted in Chapter Two of *Manod*, where different discourses, each contained in its numbered section, do not 'talk to' each other, but offer different and sometimes hostile modes of apprehension, so in *Black Mountains*, we find the rhetoric of the opening address to the reader followed by the more conventional introduction of the contemporary characters and the landscape in which they operate, then the episodes themselves, with their range of voices and languages interspersed by linking sections of historical explanation. It is a *dialogue* that is set in play rather than, as Tredell would argue, a hierarchy of discourses which privileges the

voice and perspective of the 'impersonal narrator.' The ability of the dark men of the mountains to speak to some extent counters the sense that they can be understood only as victims whose concerns and voices have been erased by the historical process. *Black Mountains*, however, in its apparent retreat into the deep past, remains a problematic text. It is important both to examine its representation of place as a development of the representation of 'land' in earlier novels and to consider how this may be read in terms of contemporary debates on time/space.

In Williams 'land' is always understood as a site where power relations are played out, whether in the negotiations of smallholders and tenant farmers, the machinations of multi-national corporations or, in *Black Mountains*, brute physical force. While Jan Morris's *Wales: the First Place*, is illustrated with photographs of wild mountains, moors and lakes, devoid of any human presence or much sense of human activity,<sup>25</sup> when Williams looks at rural Wales he sees 'fields and hills soaked with labour'.<sup>26</sup> *Manod*, a novel of his 'middle period', is a crucial text because it marks the move between a representation of place as existing primarily in a matrix of socio-economic forces, and a recognition of the additional power of the national symbolic formation. In 1983 Dai Smith produced a series for BBC2 entitled *Wales! Wales?* and in 1985 *When was Wales?* was published by Gwyn A. Williams.<sup>27</sup> *Manod* should be read as in dialogue with these historians who were interrogating the concepts of Wales and the Welsh, explicitly through the novel's argument and implicitly in certain of its structures. The 'fight' of the title can be understood as a struggle to find an adequate coherent textual representation for the diverse perspectives, one of which is the discourse of nationhood, which produce



a specific piece of land.

That Wales was not on the agenda in his earlier writings, he explained as 'revulsion against what I saw and still see as the extreme narrowness of Welsh nonconformism' reinforcing the effects of 'the Anglicization' of his grammar school education. This he did not 'work through until well into my thirties, when I began to read the history and understand it'.<sup>28</sup> His silence on the issue is profound in the 1958 essay 'Culture is Ordinary', which traces a bus journey from Hereford into the Black Mountains and to the industrial valleys of south-east Wales. As the bus moves from fertile agricultural land into relatively untamed country of 'bracken and heather and whin', Williams notes the underlying rock change, to limestone, and the consequent changes in employment which bring about, 'the line of the early iron workings along the scarp.'<sup>29</sup> He tells the reader that he 'was born and grew up half way along that bus journey' and relates the work of his grandfather and father to the landscape through which he has travelled.<sup>30</sup> It is an essay highly conscious of movements, physical and social, across geographical and educational borders. But the border across which the bus journey has taken him, from Hereford into Wales, is erased.

In *Border Country*, there are a number of references to Wales and England as culturally distinct, and the names, of places and of people, emphasise that distinction. The question of Welsh identity, however, is subsidiary to that of class allegiance, as demonstrated in the General Strike. While the adult Matthew experiences a strong sense of exile and alienation, it is of exile from very particular places and communities rather than a

homeland. Again in *Second Generation* it is the class divisions that are privileged over those of national identities, although the ending, in which a spring rain blows from Wales to England, offering a healing and reconciliation scarcely justified by the text, looks forward to occasions in later novels which situates Welsh origins as salutary.<sup>31</sup>

Both these early novels demonstrate, specifically through the experience of industrial dispute, the way in which a locality is only one point in a nexus of national and international economic power relations. But it is only with *Manod* that a consciousness of a Welsh national interest is figured into these power relations. Here Matthew, as an industrial historian and specialist in Welsh population movements, has agreed to act as a government consultant on a proposed scheme to build in rural mid-Wales a new kind of city. Since the village where Matthew originates is just across the mountains, he is known to some of the Manod inhabitants by name and repute, and, as the farming economy has elements in common with his own 'country', he feels a certain knowledge of its shape and workings. In *Manod*, though, it is not Matthew's credentials as a familiar that are to be proved but specifically his credentials as a Welshman. Nationalist politician Tom Meurig challenges him: 'You're an exile. Perhaps, I don't know, a voluntary exile. So that none of us yet knows your commitment to Wales.'<sup>32</sup> Meurig believes the proposed new city will be an English 'colony.' Matthew demurs that 'it could be more complex than that', but his qualifications acknowledge that Meurig has a case. The establishment of Welsh/English as the important oppositional terms, rather than distinctions based on occupation and class affiliation, as in the earlier novels, is new. The idea of Matthew's identity as partially constructed by his origins in a nation rather in a local place is also emphasised



by the invitation that he receives to become Director of a new Institute and Library of Industrial Wales. The letter of invitation declares that: 'We feel that it is wrong that after so much struggle you should still be out of your own country, and especially out of it now, when so much is happening here.'<sup>33</sup> The shift from the earlier novel is that 'your own country' is now understood not as the familiar shapes of the land around Glynmawr, but rather as the wider 'imagined community' of Wales. A new community and a new sense of country are being offered as a reference point.

*Manod* is a useful starting place for a discussion of the 'doubleness' of land/country and of 'the people' as a face-to-face group and as a nation: the plot demonstrates these tensions and the arguments sometimes explicitly interrogate the terms. It is the novel where the difficulty of the move from the micro to the macro perspective of land, from the material to the imaginary, is foregrounded. The problem of the shifting focus is represented in the novel's form, as different perspectives are represented through different modes of discourse: the second chapter, for example, is divided into seven sections, and these are discontinuous not only in time but in style. In the first section, where Matthew is looking at 'the country' through his window at night, the language is designed to represent the intensity of his responses: 'What he saw in this country, which he believed he knew, was very deeply unfamiliar, a waiting strangeness, as if it was not yet known what world would come out of these shadows...'<sup>34</sup> Following this heightened response of someone interacting with, rather than simply observing, landscape, is a flat, textbook account of the topography: 'Manod stands on a plateau, almost hidden from below by its sheltering trees...To the west...rise the successive long whaleback ridges...and below

them scattered meadows and pastures cleared to a thousand feet.<sup>135</sup> These distinct and irreconcilable methods of representing the same place demonstrate what Matthew comes to understand as the problem for Manod: those 'interested' in the plans for the city have different perspectives which cannot be held together to form a coherent picture. This, too, is the problem for the author, who here demonstrates the irreconcilable differences of view by their representation in sections which lie uneasily next to each other.

In its emphasis on worked land, the novel's approach is consistent with that of *Border Country*. The proposed new city would be: 'a city of small towns...one of the first human settlements, anywhere in the world, to have been conceived, from the beginning, in post-industrial terms and with a post-electronic technology.'<sup>136</sup> But the villages and land of the proposed city are already sites of community and working relations. For those making a living here, Manod is not a Utopian conception, the 'land' not an imaginary but a materiality produced in a discourse of highly specific knowledge of the 'land' itself and of lived relations. When the farmer Gethin Jenkins works to rescue his young neighbour Ivor Vaughan, who has become trapped under his tractor, 'The angle at which the holding rope would run was exactly related to the complicated slope and to the way that the tractor was lying. It was as if he could feel every inch of the ground.'<sup>137</sup> The plot of the novel demonstrates that the 'ground', the land on which the new city may be sited, needs to be understood not only in the intimacy of working knowledge but also as existing within a configuration of power relations. Matthew, newly arrived in Manod and surveying the area from a mountain ridge, registers the 'history of his country' in 'the shapes of the land,' an emphasis on shapes and shaping being a trope characteristic of the



fiction.<sup>38</sup> Matthew's recognition is of the ways in which power moulded those shapes, the domination of the Norman castles and, towards the industrial valleys, 'the line of the ironmasters.'<sup>39</sup>

The relation between the 'ground' known to Gethin, the valley with its complex of intra- and inter-familial relationships, and Wales as a country with needs not necessarily compatible with those of a centralised British state, is explicitly interrogated. Towards the end of the novel, when the shining vision of the new city has been tarnished by the knowledge of petty and of grand scale manipulation and self-interest, Matthew's American friend asserts:

'You want that city to be built.'

'Well, I want that country replenished.'

'That country? You mean Wales, or that valley?'

'Well, I could even say Britain, if you pushed me. I want the pattern to break, to some new possibility'.<sup>40</sup>

The last sentence is crucial. The 'place' is 'that valley', but the possibility for its 'replenishment' lies outside the valley and outside Wales. The novel represents the unease and ambiguity of the move from the land necessarily understood in its smallest detail to the macro-perspective of the land understood as the nation state whose resources are determined by bodies operating externally and with a different agenda. At the same time, it suggests that such a move may be ultimately beyond representation. Having made an official report on his findings of insider dealings, Matthew and his wife Susan drive out of the valley: 'the long valley lay below them, the river silver under the sun. From the

height it seemed quiet and empty. It was difficult to imagine the lodged papers that now effectively determined it. It was too great a disparity for any single perspective.'<sup>41</sup>

*Manod* is Williams's most detailed fictional representation of the relationship between a defined area of country as a specific site of history and labour practices and the power relations that have produced it. Writing of Hardy he says that, 'the social forces within his fiction are deeply based in the economy itself.'<sup>42</sup> This is the model of understanding that structures *Manod* with its careful delineation of the history of land tenure and its effects on the lives of the farmers. The land is classified as 'marginal'. It is this economic category which drives the plot, with its sibling conflicts, and situates frustrations, resentments and meanness and the unconsidered help given to neighbours in distress. It is the limitation of resources that determines sibling relations and gender issues.

The Vaughans who farm Pentre, unusual in owning their land rather than being tenants, are nevertheless beset with problems. There are five children, each of whom has in justice and tradition to be provided for. 'It was normal, in the district, for the youngest son to inherit the family farm with money adjustments to the others.'<sup>43</sup> Now that Ivor, the youngest son, is preparing to marry the daughter of a neighbouring farmer and set up home with her at Pentre, his older sister Gwen, who has for many years cared for him and the home, should be able to claim her 'money adjustment.' But: 'All she had got was her nineteen hundred pounds in the farm. Nineteen hundred on paper, because Ivor couldn't repay her, not without selling stock, and that would be stupid'.<sup>44</sup> The situation of Trevor Jenkins and his wife, Modlen, demonstrates the tensions arising from the austerities of an



economy where there is no slack for wages. When Trevor asks his brother Gethin for the money adjustment to which he, like Gwen Vaughan, is entitled, Gethin claims, honestly, that 'there was no money to spare' and Trevor takes a job on the railways. When the railway line closes, Trevor is forced back 'to the old arrangement working the farm together, but now with Trevor on a regular wage' which, working with Modlen, he supplements with a smallholding and breeding ponies for trekking. But: 'It had not been easy...Gethin had got into the habit of putting off Trevor's wages against the promise of a bonus when the lambs or the young cattle or the store ewes were sold.'<sup>45</sup> Later Gethin, rejecting Modlen's demands for the money owed to Trevor as necessary to buy herself a new coat, claims that farming here is not and cannot be a money economy: 'You was never born to this life, you don't understand it. In the towns, aye, it's all money, money. Just hold out your hand at the end of the week. Up here it's different. We've not got it to spare. We live by the farm and we live as a family.'<sup>46</sup> The contempt for Modlen which Gethin demonstrates is a display of masculine power but one constructed to represent relations as dependent too on economic pressures.

*Manod* shows Williams interrogating the terms both of 'place' and of 'people.' The 'place' to be replenished cannot be, Matthew tells his American friend, just 'the valley' and in the same way he disputes Meurig's categories of English and Welsh. The Welsh, he argues:

[have] not stayed exclusive. Any more than the making of industrial South Wales was a return. It was always a mixed immigration yet it led, didn't it, to one of the strongest autonomous cultures in Europe? A culture people made, not inherited.<sup>47</sup>

The argument between Meurig and Matthew needs to be quoted more extensively since it

is the crux of the debate over possible futures for Wales, of which a central issue is the Welsh identity. Welsh culture, Meurig says in response to Matthew's emphasis on its being 'mixed' and 'made' has, 'Very strong native elements'. But, argues Matthew, it is still 'transmuting', is in 'a new historical phase.' They agree that it is 'a culture with its base breaking up', but then, asks Matthew:

'Where do we go? Back to traditional rural Wales?'

'Which you think I'm attached to? Which you think is all we're offering?'

Fortress Gwynedd!'

'That's the risk, isn't it? Just because it's a real short-term option. And because it isn't a fortress, it's a matter of the heart.'<sup>48</sup>

While the heart is not denied, *Manod* is a demonstration that, even without the new city, the process of transmutation continues. On a visit to the small town of Nantlais, Matthew is conscious that the old properties are being bought by:

a new kind of settler who saw in mid-Wales one of the last accessible places of calm: a place to work in new ways, to practise crafts, to experiment in life styles.

Along the main street there were already nine of these new enterprises: a bookshop, a print and map shop, three shops selling antiques, a pottery, two woollen craft shops and a health foods store.<sup>49</sup>

Matthew does not comment on this settlement but the emphasis of calm and on creativity implies a measure of approbation. The essay 'Between Country and City' suggests Williams's positive response as consistent with that of Matthew. It records 'the first occupations of my neighbours within five miles of my house in the Black Mountains.' Sheep farmers predominate, followed by those jobs that have historically existed in the



countryside such as small contractors, tradesmen, council workmen, doctors and teachers: 'But it is the rest of the list that shows the change: weavers and knitters; potters; cabinet-maker; pine-furniture maker; booksellers; book-illustrator; antique clock restorer...writers, sculptor, restaurateurs...' <sup>50</sup> These 'comparatively recent immigrants' Williams sees as vital in 'restoring a genuine fabric of rural society.' Significantly, this essay, written six years after the publication of *Manod*, is silent on the issue of national identity foregrounded by the argument with Tom Meurig. Here Williams's discrimination between the various groups of the new settlers rests on his sense of those who 'are working with the grain of the actual rural economy' and with valid 'country knowledge and lore' against those whose creations employ 'false or weak pastoral and landscape images' and who indulge in such 'highly irrational and unhistorical' practices as leylines. What is approved is a continuing pattern of 'mixed immigration' so 'transmuting' to a 'new historical phase'. <sup>51</sup> Consistent with *Manod* too is the insistence on work as the defining value: the important distinction is between those for whom the country is 'a place of first livelihood' and those for whom it is a place of 'alternative employment and consumption for those whose first livelihood is elsewhere' and who can be 'intolerant of others at work in areas that they have chosen for withdrawal and rest.' <sup>52</sup>

A significant statement of belief near the end of *Manod* suggests that, even in a novel where the 'dream of a country' is a central concern, essentialism must be denied. <sup>53</sup>

Matthew, attending a meeting at which the details of the proposal for the new city are put forward, insists to the Minister: 'The crucial factor – you must really appreciate this – is who the people are to be'. <sup>54</sup> His discrimination here is not between Welsh and non-Welsh.

'Are you saying that this city should be confined to Welsh?' the Minister asks, to which Matthew replies: 'I don't mean nationality' but rather a privileging of: 'the interests of that country, and those interests, primarily, are the actual people now there, caught between rural depopulation and industrial decline.'<sup>55</sup> 'Between Country and City' gives an account of the rural economy in an area like Manod, packed with detail on the Common Agricultural policy, the 'linkage between grain surpluses and intensive livestock feeding' and the value of those incomers whose ways of earning a living have 'very interesting implications for the future of a balanced rural society.'<sup>56</sup> This is consistent with the emphasis in *Manod* which demonstrates the central importance for Williams of challenging fabricated myths of Wales and the Welsh.

The complexities of 'Wales' and 'the Welsh' are most fully explicated in the 1975 essay 'Welsh Culture.' The insistence is on history as process. The Welsh, he asserts, have 'invented and tolerated many illusions'. The simplest to dismiss are the 'things invented in the bad scholarship or the romantic fantasies of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - versions of bardism and druidism.'<sup>57</sup> Thinking of the myth of the Welsh 'Celtic temperament' of radical dissent, he inquires ironically from what position they are dissenting. 'Think of Catholic, Royalist Wales, as late as the Civil War. Are these the same people as the radical nonconformists and later the socialists and militants of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?' He affirms, 'It was not the race that changed; it was the history.'<sup>58</sup> It is 'the history' too, rather than any essential national quality, that explains: 'The dark and brooding magical imagination; the nation of poets and scholars; or the cut-down English version: the people with that endless gift of the gab.'<sup>59</sup> The



history that Williams understands as offering an explanation for the 'magical imagination' is 'Welsh literature with its very marked and distinct classicist and romantic tendencies.'<sup>60</sup> He is predictably suspicious of this mystification even as, in 'Between Country and City,' he shows himself as less than welcoming to new settlers who grow magic mushrooms and trace out ley lines.<sup>61</sup> Yet while Williams here and elsewhere challenges essentialising myths of Welsh identity and Welsh geography, his fiction is not unmarked by the pull of the 'dark and brooding magical imagination.' Having identified its role in the construction of a Welsh identity he is at pains to re-situate it, but the fiction nevertheless offers a privileged role to darkness and the numinous.

It is in the last published episode of his final novel that Williams enters into direct dialogue with the myth of Wales of 'magical imagination'. This representation of Wales as dangerous and Other has its place in poetry and in popular fiction but Williams's engagement here is with the Shakespearian version of the myth in the Welsh scenes of *Henry IV Part 1*.<sup>62</sup> Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin identify the Wales of this play as 'a place of dangerous difference, a marginal site and home of "otherness."' It is at once a place of 'dangerous allure', of glamour and magic, and of 'savagery and female power' Its 'liminal location at England's geographic border makes it psychologically disturbing.'<sup>63</sup> In 'Oldcastle in Olchon', the fugitive Sir John Oldcastle, the historical figure on whom Falstaff is based, comes to the valley of Olchon, pursued for his heretical Lollard beliefs. To the native Caradoc, he says:

When I was a boy in my father's house I could look every day at your mountains.  
That strange black wall attracted me and I had dreams of making discoveries

beyond it. When I asked my elders they said only that it was a place of magic and danger.<sup>64</sup>

To which Caradoc replies austerely, 'You were looking at a distance and without knowing.' Oldcastle, like Falstaff but rather more effectively, has fought alongside Hal in the war against Glyndwr and, with a clear reference to the claims of Shakespeare's Glendower, comments that, 'We all believed that he was a magician and had spirits in his power'. But Caradoc again speaks for the 'actual people...there', when he responds simply, 'We saw none.'<sup>65</sup> The emphasis on the actual and the material is not relaxed. The perception of Wales as 'psychologically disturbing' is the perception of those for whom it is 'liminal', not for those who live in its centre. It is with this emphasis that the fiction indeed ends: the Welsh as a people provided with certain historically determined characteristics but resisting the temptation of myth and acknowledging the necessity of engaging with ongoing identity formation.

Caradoc may resist Oldcastle's 'romanticising' of a place and culture strange to him, but elsewhere in Williams's fiction 'darkness' is privileged in significant ways. The discussion of Harry Price in Chapter Four drew attention to the device whereby the reader's sense of his authenticity is constructed in part by his association with the silence and darkness of the mountains, and the significance of the cluster of mountains/the unspoken/darkness in Williams's construction of gender will be explored in Chapter Seven. The insistence on the darkness of the mountains, in particular of the mountain that Williams refers to as the Holy Mountain, is strongly marked throughout *Border Country* and in the Welsh episode of *Second Generation*.<sup>66</sup> In Anne Stevenson's 'Green Mountain, Black Mountain', a poem



which interleaves her responses to Vermont and to the Welsh border country, a Welsh section of the poem opens with a description of Dai Morgan, the horse farmer, haltering the 'caked/anxious head of the mare' and leading her 'up the piebald track/snowdrift deep in places/tyre-churned with red mud': this is the Manod of Ivor Vaughan in his fields. But 'These are the Black Mountains/where the drenched sleep of Wales/troubles King Arthur in his cave' and Stevenson sees Dai as 'fixed without shape or time/between the ghost pull' of Annwyfn, the Welsh otherworld 'feathering/green Wales in its word-mist' and the world of Ivor Vaughan, 'the animal pull of his green dunged boots.'<sup>67</sup> Williams's fiction can be read as demonstrating a 'pull' of this 'otherworld' that his non-fiction can easily resist.

In the later novels one finds a discourse that, while it does not wholly displace that of place as historically determined, and of every aspect of human relations as deeply embedded in that historical process, sits uneasily within the same conceptual framework. The new discourse, which I have identified as a 'rhetoric of desire', is marked by an assignment of value, to places and to peoples, which is asserted rather than argued for, and produced in a form of direct address new to the fiction. There is, in *Loyalties* and *Black Mountains*, a sense that Williams is tempted by a representation of Wales and the Welsh that at once idealises and victimises, as demonstrated in the quotation from 'The Practice of Possibility' with which the chapter opens. To explore the extent and significance of this representation, and to consider whether it subverts the 'political' model, I examine the construction of place in *Black Mountains*, focusing on the newly adopted rhetoric of address, on its practice for the naming of places and the relation of

this to naming in earlier novels.

It is a novel marked by the materialising of those terms, such as settlement, which in earlier novels functioned as ideas, albeit ideas which, by reason of the semantic tortuousness of their expression, drew attention to themselves. Here in *Black Mountains* are settlements built of mud and stone, and an enemy who is not the unactualised class enemy of *Border Country* or *Second Generation*, but a brute presence waving staves and swords. In *Manod* Peter Owen mocks that Matthew is 'sitting on a hill, waiting for the legions to arrive.'<sup>68</sup> In *Black Mountains*, the legions, in all their destructive arrogance, have indeed arrived. The novel's insistence on land as livelihood, and human relations as structured by economic ones, are absolutely consistent with the representation of place in the earlier fiction. It is a novel in which the present and material are invariably privileged over the distrusted absent and abstract. There is, however, in the elements of the new discourse which Williams adopts, a pull towards the mystificatory, a sense of a spell being cast, the pull towards the Otherworld.

A central element of this 'desiring' discourse can be exemplified in the concept of 'the good' or 'the sweet' place' which operates as a value independent of human agency, a new way of conceptualising the 'experience' that opposes 'abstraction.' There is a reiteration, through stories in both volumes, of the idea of the 'sweetness of the place.' The final words of Joy Williams's postscript concern the plan for the concluding section where: 'Elis would have argued that people can only survive if they live in harmony with each other and with their land...'for the sweetness of the place.'"<sup>69</sup> In the story to which she



refers, the slave Karan argues against the lord who intends to punish an act of defiance by death, as a necessity of upholding the law. Karan asserts that the law offers an inadequate model:

'Which wisdom must still interpret. For the sweetness of the place.'

'You are talking in riddles. What sweetness?'

'Of our earth, wise one. Of this place, in our earth.'<sup>70</sup>

It is the natural elements that hold the 'sweetness'. In 'The Samain of the Yellow Death', the Wise Man, Glesni, marginalised in a newly Christianised society, holds a ceremonial blessing of 'the sweetness of the water and the sweetness of the grass on the mountains from which the water sprang.'<sup>71</sup>

Both stories debate explicitly the opposition between old ways, that honour the local, particular and natural, and the new, which insist on a transcendent truth. In both the 'local' is the perspective of the powerless. In a number of the stories the experience/abstraction debate is played out in terms of religious belief systems, and it is a mark of disapprobation of those creeds as they are here represented that, in their insistence on the unseen, they deny the glories of the known place. The powerful employ the language of dominant supranational ideologies, the Church or the Roman imperium, while the oppressed appeal only to the particular and the local since, says Glesni, 'we are of this land and only of this land.'<sup>72</sup> In *Black Mountains* the appeal to the abstract is associated consistently with a sense of exploitation of language used to bolster self interest and to cloak the brutality of power. When experience encounters abstraction it is with the grinding clash of the absolutely incompatible. *Manod* has suggested that the move from

the specific place and the face to face encounter towards an imaginary nation is a matter for subtle but always necessary negotiation and that the shifts between the different perspectives that this necessitates is, perhaps, ultimately impossible to represent. Gwyn in *Loyalties* acknowledges, albeit unhappily, the need for an abstract language unavailable in what his father Norman contemptuously refers to as a merely 'tribal discourse'.<sup>73</sup> *Black Mountains* appears to make any move from the specific material place to the abstractions of place an impossible one, linked as it is not to a continuum of positions, but rather to a polarity of power and the absence of power. As well as the refrain of 'sweetness' which drifts through the mountains over the ages, there is, however, another and new emphasis here, that of the foregrounding of the naming of places. How significant is this device and what is its import for Williams's fiction in the production of the concept of place?

In *Black Mountains* the title of the sequence clearly foregrounds place and its significance is insisted upon by the provision in each novel of two maps. One, following the title page, is a sketch map of castles and abbeys set in the river valleys, and the second, an end piece, omits the seats of secular and ecclesiastical power but names the main mountains. Both the published volumes of the unfinished sequence open with the same evocation to the place, a recital of the names of rivers and mountains:

See this layered sandstone in the short mountain grass. Place your right hand on it, palm downward. See where the summer sun rises and where it stands at noon.

Direct your index finger midway between them. Spread your fingers, not widely.

You now hold this place in your hand. The six rivers rise in the plateau towards your wrist. The first river, now called Mynwy, flows at the outside edge of your



thumb. The second river, now called Olchon, flows.....This is the hand of the Black Mountains, the shape first learned. Your thumb is Crib y Gath. Your first finger is Curum and Hateral...<sup>74</sup>

The pounding of the imperative form of the verbs, the direct address that implicates the reader in the claiming of the place, these employ a rhetorical discourse wholly new in Williams. The effect is that of an incantation, of a bardic spell, reminiscent of the oral rhetorical Welsh tradition that, until now, he had consciously rejected. Yet although the devices are a departure for Williams, his use of place names to do more than merely to differentiate locale has been a notable feature of his construction of place and one that has been unexamined in accounts of his fiction. From *Second Generation* onwards a symbolic structure is established that looks towards the last novels. An important issue is his use, or rejection, of received place names, and the political implications of these choices.

The political significance of naming is the subject of essays by two critics who have written extensively on Williams, although in these pieces neither takes Williams's fiction as its subject. In 'Naming Names: Beyond a Fricative History', Dai Smith quotes passages from Ron Berry, writer and miner, where Berry names the men with whom he 'slaved in dust and water', and tells the fate of each – the most common being 'dust, dead.'

The Berry quotation is dense with place names:

A blend of two brooks, Nant yr Ychain and Nant Berw Wion, flows past [the Working Men's Institute] entering a stone arched culvert to join Selsig over the far side of Blaenycwm Road...Blaenycwm football field hasn't yet been levelled at the

base of Pen Pych mountain. Gorllwyn tip behind Hendrewen Road is black.<sup>75</sup>

Of this example, and other pieces of 'naming the names of lives which are otherwise lost on the wind, whistling between the stolid consonants of mere existence', Smith comments that they represent 'a reaching out past autobiography to a biographical impulse which connects. The significant memory is always of others.'<sup>76</sup> The impulse here is to a collective discourse, rather than one in which society functions as the enabling field of operations for the individual.

The significance of the naming of places has formed the basis of some recent critical writing in the field of eco-criticism and the terms of the debate are relevant to a consideration of Williams's fictional practice. Pinkney's essay 'Naming Places: Wordsworth and the Possibilities of Eco-Criticism' is a direct response to Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, and in particular to Bate's chapter 'The Naming of Places.' Bate celebrates Wordsworth's achievement in 'his naming poems' as the development of 'a highly original sense of specific place and of the relationship between self and place...through a new intensity of association between particular places and particular moods or moments, and an unprecedented boldness in actually taking possession of a place.'<sup>77</sup> Bate does allow that: 'One has to confront the possibility that the poet is so busy identifying with the place that he ignores the inhabitants.'<sup>78</sup> Pinkney, however, reads these naming poems as guilty of 'an individualist violence of names'. He would, rather, endorse the practice of *Lyrical Ballads*, of using names that are 'anonymous and collective, modestly local but stoutly enduring'. This practice Pinkney reads as avoiding the 'imperious' form of 'I name': 'Such names must be



evoked in the passive – "was named", "was called".<sup>79</sup> Individualistic naming he reads as presumption: if the name is unknown to the poet: 'Then one would have thought that some humble research into local maps, work practices, dialect forms, history and customs might be the 'ecologically holy' thing to do.'<sup>80</sup> While Bate celebrates Wordsworth's individual specificity in naming, Pinkney applauds those works, such as 'Home at Grasmere' and 'The Excursion' that are 'governed by [the] nominative modesty' of 'local naming practices.'<sup>81</sup>

Pinkney's argument is suggestive for Williams's practice, which is, over the course of the fiction, notable for the employment of a range of different devices: changes of place names with no clear pattern underpinning the changes; retaining the names of geographical features where those names are functionally resonant; researching the wildly changing names that mark changing patterns of settlement through history. One name is consistent: from *Border Country* onwards he always refers to the most prominent mountain visible from his village of Pandy as 'the Holy Mountain'. While on O.S maps, and indeed in the map that appears in *Black Mountains*, it is named as Skirrid Fawr, there does exist a strong local tradition that the Skirrid's shape, with a split summit, derived from being rent in twain at the hour of the death of Christ. Local people still sometimes refer to it as the Holy Mountain, although now more often citing the ruined chapel near the summit as explanation for the name. Although the name is justified by local usage, Williams's choice here seems in part that 'pull' of the 'otherworld', constructing as it does the mountain as part of a dark inaccessible power. It has always seemed to me that it is the 'official' name, Skirrid, 'from the Welsh *Ysgyrid*, a derivation of *Ysgariad* meaning

divorce or separation', which would have been more appropriate for Williams's representation of his relation to the place and people of the Black Mountains.<sup>82</sup>

The use of place names in *Border Country* is marked by an inconsistency that suggests little interest in their role. Thus the market town of Abergavenny, with its distinctive Welsh sound, becomes the more neutral Gwenton and Williams's home village of Pandy becomes Glynmawr, achieving an emphasis on Welsh identity at the price of the loss of a name signifying the labour practice that constituted the original settlement. A pandy marked a:

fulling mill where the old process of bleaching cloth was carried on. The replacement of this practice by gaseous bleaching with chlorine had a disastrous effect on the woollen industry in Wales and Monmouthshire where it was one of the oldest and most important human activities.<sup>83</sup>

It is in *Second Generation* that a new and significant element of naming is introduced.

The back story of the brothers demonstrates a mixture of devices:

[Harold] and Gwyn had been born in Brynllwd, a grey huddle of cottages, little more than a hamlet, perched on a limestone scarp beyond Black Rock, looking down into the valley of Gwenton... To the north and east were the green farming valleys of the border country, under the blue broken peak of the Holy Mountain. Back in the 1830s, Brinley Owen, then a farm servant in the Golden Valley, had walked through this country and up Black Rock for a job in the ironworks where his descendants were still employed.<sup>84</sup>

Harold is made redundant at the ironworks and, 'on the first day of what could have been



his honeymoon, got a lift down the Black Rock into Gwenton, and went on east, through the border country, to find work in England.<sup>185</sup> So, here we find invented names that are plausible – Gwenton, as in the earlier novel, and Brynllwd for the village of Clydach – and names – Black Rock, Golden Valley – that suggest they have been invented to carry a freight of symbolic, even allegorical, meaning. Yet it is these names with their Bunyan like resonances which are the names of both popular and official usage, cartographically legitimated.

Although 'Black Rock' and 'the Golden Valley' are unarguably received place names, Williams uses them to establish a strong pattern of meaning. The Black Rock, the road from the industrial valleys and *blaenau* (heads of the valleys) which runs to Abergavenny/Gwenton and hence to the agricultural countryside leading into England, is named over and over, and always in a negative context. Harold's brother Gwyn is married to Myra, whose first husband was 'killed on Black Rock, on his motorbike.'<sup>186</sup> An embittered Harold employs the road as a signifier of the way in which a capitalist economy denies choice to the working classes: 'Anyhow, in the end there's never the choice. It's down Black Rock after work and a wage.'<sup>187</sup> At the end of *Manod* he repeats the charge, the destruction of any possibility of community and settlement: 'Up and down the Black Rock, that's our family history, get settled to one thing and they start up another, leaving our homes and their rubbish behind them.'<sup>188</sup> So Williams moves from the practice of neutral, invented place names to this tempting opposition of the Golden Valley, the place of origin, and the Black Rock, the hard rocky road of disruption and alienation. How should this be read? Does the change represent a relaxation of the

precisely delineated economic pressures that motivate plot and character? Is the Golden Valley a Fall in the face of a temptation towards a myth of purity of origin?

The text does offer some support for being attracted to a myth of origins. An early piece of dialogue in *Manod* foregrounds the concept of origin as a significant identifier. It is the first meeting of Matthew and local solicitor Bryn Walters:

'They tell me you come from Glynmawr, Mr Price.'

'Yes, originally.'

'Originally. Exactly.'<sup>89</sup>

At the end of the novel Matthew and Susan stand together looking onto 'a border in the earth and its history', conscious of 'the pressure for renewal' in a 'land and through lives that had been deeply shaped, deeply committed, by a present that was always moving, inexorably, into the past'.

'Are you ready to go on?' Susan asked

'Yes, love. We must.'<sup>90</sup>

The references here to Milton's Adam and Eve leaving Paradise seem clear. The Golden Valley, under the name of the Valley D' Or features too in *Black Mountains*. In the Postscript to the second, posthumously published, volume Joy Williams sketches the stories that her husband had planned for further volumes. This postscript includes the story of Roland Vaughan whose history again makes play with Paradise and Fall.

Vaughan, a courtier of Elizabeth I, 'came back to the Golden Valley to develop an ideal community in the "Paradice of the backside of the Principallitie." He proposed to irrigate the valley with the help of four thousand "mechanicalls", to improve the land and relieve



poverty.<sup>91</sup>

While the significance of the Golden Valley is only lightly touched on, that of Black Rock, with its accessible resonances, is over-insisted upon. In a section of an essay where Williams discusses the human consequences of the breakdown of the Welsh rural and industrial bases, he asks: 'And how will the Welsh live, those at least who haven't followed their fathers down the Black Rock?'<sup>92</sup> The Black Rock here is evidently significant as more than a geographical feature that has given its name to the road between Brynmawr and Abergavenny, for if you are leaving Wales, even South Wales specifically, there are other routes that could be taken. Yet there is no serious fracture between the subtext of a Fall and the more overt insistence on the political processes that shape place and people. There is no relaxation in the emphasis on the primary motivators as economic: it is, by implication, the promise of better pay and conditions that drives Brinley Owen, a farm 'servant', from the Golden Valley. Six generations later, it is layoffs at the iron works which push Harold Owen back down the Black Rock. The fortuitous names are exploited by Williams, as their repetition makes clear, but the temptation that they offer of supplying an implied narrative of the Fall is countered consistently by reference to the workings of the capitalist system as it operates to mobilise labour in this place at this historical moment.

The adjectives – Black, Golden, Holy – are a risky strategy but they are finally held in place by the fact of their collective usage. Even their mythic resonances are justified, in the political terms that Smith and Pinkney establish, as a response to a collective rather

than a personal mythology. In *Black Mountains*, it is crucial to the text's politics that the names of settlements, valleys, mountains and rivers, names should be those of local practice. Throughout the two volumes, as new settlers appropriate the land, they reinforce possession through the act of renaming. An index provides the reader with the historical variants and for the author to insist on any new names would clearly be an act of further violence. This move to a collective usage should therefore be read as an important element in the production of place in the later fiction. *Black Mountains* can certainly be defended as a work of 'nominative modesty' where naming plays an important role in producing the 'shapes' that form the material basis of the lives of its people.

It remains, though, an uncomfortable text. In the detail of the separate episodes and in the weight of reiteration of similar 'messages', it has an overtly didactic force not found in the earlier novels. The reiteration of the 'sweetness of place' does not convince. The project itself, with its narrative of defeat, makes heavy emotional demands on the reader. The decision to focus on the victims of ancient days looks like a retreat: now not only, as James Davies complained, is there a silence on the work and social formations of much of the population of Wales, but there is a silence too on the fate of those areas of which he had previously written: the post-industrial valleys. One does, however, gain more sympathy for the project that is the *Black Mountains* by positioning it historically and remembering that it is only a partial text.

In *Manod*, written during the 1970s, Matthew offers this depressing account of South Wales to the ministerial committee that is examining the proposal to build a new city: 'the



rural areas are bled dry by prolonged depopulation. Not far away, in the valleys, there is a ravaged and depressed old industrial area.<sup>93</sup> To this, certainly not over-stated, analysis of economic misery were added the consequences of the 1984-85 miners' strike and its aftermath. It is in this historical context that the 'victim' culture of *Black Mountains*, and the determinism that marks *Loyalties*, the harsh binary oppositions between rulers and ruled, needs to be read. But in *Black Mountains* Williams chose to adopt a scale of time and space capable of generating a different understanding of the miseries and defeats of the 1980s. Harvey has pointed out the powerful political implications of concepts of space, and the way in which theoretical configurations are used to legitimate action, as, for example, when space is 'demonised', so that it is understood to need 'discipline.' In considering the politics of space, we need to begin, he says, with a consideration of what 'space/time horizon we are using. What metric? What scale?'<sup>94</sup> *Black Mountains* uses, simultaneously, a dizzyingly huge time scale and a space which is, as Glyn says in the opening pages, 'stubbornly native and local.'<sup>95</sup> Such a model omits the nation state in favour of a localism demonstrated as having to exist within a global framework. Harvey reads the novel as: 'A story of wave after wave of migratory influences and colonizations that situate the history of the Black Mountains in a matrix of spatiality, constituted by the flows and movements pulsing across Europe and beyond.'<sup>96</sup> Social relations are demonstrated to be further and further deformed by a divorce from the specificity of place. The last section of *Towards 2000*, 'Resources for a Journey of Hope', issues the same call for change in different terms, although in its exploration of the 'energies and the practical means of an alternative social order' to replace the current 'deformed' one, it can readily be seen as a parallel text to *Black Mountains*.<sup>97</sup> It echoes the novel's claim for the

value of those living in earlier social and economic formations: 'It was common to see human history before specialist intervention production as a mere prehistory, almost in effect pre-human.'<sup>98</sup> Williams writes too of 'the hunting and gathering societies' who had 'developed high social and technical skills' before the moment of 'the abstraction of production.' He argues that it was 'the sense of a connection with constituted nature', 'of continuing interactive observation, within both a physical and a social world' that generated even 'those major interventions that we now close as technological -from metal working to modern chemistry and physics.' The decisive and negative break comes only when 'these processes are abstracted and generalised as "production", and when production in this sense is made the central priority over all other human and natural processes and conditions.'<sup>99</sup>

Neither 'Resources for a Journey of Hope' nor *Black Mountains* is framed as a lament of the Fall. Williams's discussions elsewhere of ecological imperatives make clear that he is not recommending a reversion to a romanticised pre-industrial state. He declares that a Williams Morris ideal which associates 'deliberate simplification, even regression, with the idea of a socialist solution to the ugliness, squalor and waste of capitalist society has been very damaging.'<sup>100</sup> It is, rather, a call for a return to more appropriate relations as the proper way forward for western society as it approaches the millennium. These late texts continue to set out, and to develop, a case for the absolute value of the specific, the material, the local, where human welfare is understood as intimately connected with the good of the animate and inanimate with which it shares space. This belief is not some vague, unexamined hippy vision. While the main enemies of a proper sense of place are



the proponents of deracinated liberalism, Williams is willing to take on too those who lay claim to a more ecologically sound way of living without subjecting themselves to any of the physical or mental rigour that it demands. Joy Williams's postscript tells us that the final section of the *Black Mountains* sequence was to have been a debate between Elis, the old man who has always lived in and knows every track and stone of the mountains, and a group of 'neolithic hippies' who have camped there:

Elis's argument was to have been that the way the hippies used the place as a parking lot and source of liberty cap mushrooms, while drawing their means of life from the whole society, was quite unlike the life of the Neolithic people who had lived... within the limits of their own resources, with full awareness.. of what they could do to nature and nature could do to them.<sup>101</sup>

The version of Williams's 'ideal' of Wales offered by his biographer Fred Inglis is of yearning for blue remembered hills and a land of lost content: 'Williams names that in all of us which longs for that lost beatitude...the remaking of a happy land.'<sup>102</sup> Certainly Williams wishes to 'remake' the deformed society but the soft focus that Inglis suggests has little to do with the anger and militant toughness of his last books. They are better understood, in the terms raised in Chapter One, as counters in the re-positioning of place as a positive term, with 'location' acknowledged as crucial both for identity formation for the vast majority of the world's population and for a proper consideration of ecology. The need for a radically different perspective is established but the way forward is unclear. Doreen Massey points out the 'two romances which are simply opposed to each other', that of 'bounded place' versus the romance of 'free flow' prevent 'serious address to the

necessary negotiations of real politics.<sup>103</sup> Harvey acknowledges the extreme difficulty of situating 'localism'. The 'dialectics of socio-ecological change', he says, offer the challenge of how 'to confront the deracinated politics of neo-liberalism without falling into particularist local neo-fascism.' We need 'ways to think about this which are at the same time liberating and antagonistic to neo-liberalism. We need an emancipatory geography.'<sup>104</sup> As the discussions of realism in earlier chapters have made clear, the need to negotiate the representation of the relation of the particular to the wider networks had always been central to Williams's work. With the time/space horizon adopted in *Black Mountains* he was trying more specifically to 'think about this'. The results are not satisfactory, in part because of the truncated nature of the planned sequence and also because here he is pushing at the boundaries of the novel form in a search for a representation of new patterns of relationship. It is, however, a significant contribution to the dialogue on the contestation of time/space that eco-critics, geographers like Harvey and Massey and anti-globalisation activists are continuing.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Harri Webb, 'Our National Anthem', in Meic Stephens (ed.), *A Militant Muse: Selected Literary Journalism 1948-1980* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Dai Smith, 'Relating to Wales', in *Critical Perspectives*, 36.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Practice of Possibility', in *Resources of Hope*, 321.

<sup>4</sup> 'Welsh Culture', in *Resources of Hope*, 102.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Davies, *The Isles* (Macmillan, 1995), 4-5. See too David Miles *The Tribes of Britain* (Phoenix, 2006), technical appendix on historical genetics pages 478-482.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: the Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, *The Welsh in their History* (Croom Helm, 1983), 147-148.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>9</sup> Naomi Mitchison, *Early in Orcadia* (Glasgow, Richard Drew, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> James A. Davies, 'Not Going Back but Exile Ending: Raymond Williams's Fictional Wales', in W. J. Morgan and P. Preston (eds.) *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education and Letters* (St Martin's Press, 1993), 203.



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- <sup>11</sup> Prys Morgan, 'Keeping the Legends Alive', in Tony Curtis (ed.), *Wales: the Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Press Wales, 1986), 35.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Volunteers*, 94.
- <sup>13</sup> 'The Importance of Community', in *Resources of Hope*, 114.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Border Country*, 117.
- <sup>16</sup> *Manod*, 79.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Volunteers*, 94.
- <sup>18</sup> *Loyalties*, 349.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Beginning*, 13.
- <sup>20</sup> *Eggs*, 3.
- <sup>21</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E.V. Rieu, (Folio Society, 1974), 134-147.
- <sup>22</sup> Nicolas Tredell, *Uncancelled Challenge* (Paupers' Press, 1990), 87.
- <sup>23</sup> Tony Pinkney, *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), 134-135.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.
- <sup>25</sup> Jan Morris and Paul Wakefield, *Wales: the First Place* (Menai Bridge: Island Books, 1998).
- <sup>26</sup> 'Welsh Culture', in *Resources of Hope*, 100-101.
- <sup>27</sup> Smith's television series was published in a revised form as *Wales: a Question for History* (Bridgend: Seren, 1999). Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (Penguin, 1985).
- <sup>28</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 25.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Culture is Ordinary', in *Resources of Hope*, 3.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> *Second Generation*, 347.
- <sup>32</sup> *Manod*, 135.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 36
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.
- <sup>42</sup> *The English Novel*, 81.
- <sup>43</sup> *Manod*, 45.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 49
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.
- <sup>50</sup> 'Between Country and City', in *Resources of Hope*, 233-234.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 228 and 230..
- <sup>53</sup> *Manod*. 98.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.
- <sup>56</sup> 'Between Country and City', in *Resources of Hope*, 234-237.
- <sup>57</sup> 'Welsh Culture', in *Resources of Hope*, 102.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 103.
- <sup>61</sup> 'Between Country and City', in *Resources of Hope*, 234-235.
- <sup>62</sup> There is a recurrent idea of Wales and the Welsh language as representing the non-rational. A. P. Foulkes suggests that in Emyln Williams's *The Corn is Green* (1938) 'Welsh serves as a symbol for pre-individual

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consciousness; it represents a mysterious and anarchistic realm which can be organized and controlled only through the medium of English.' *Literature and Propaganda* (Methuen, 1983), 52. A popular fifties novel, dealing with the reign of Edward 11, explains the threat of Marcher baron Roger Mortimer in terms of his Welsh blood. 'Mortimer is Welsh in part. His head whirls with ghostly fantasies.' The language of his followers also signals danger: 'I could not understand the words but I caught the savage melancholy and untamed violence of the song.' Alice Walworth Graham, *Vows of the Peacock* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1956), 233 and 256.

<sup>63</sup> Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: a Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (Routledge, 1997), 168-172.

<sup>64</sup> *Eggs*, 310.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Henry James was impervious to the 'brooding darkness' of this mountain which he describes as 'bright, breezy...good humoured' – and English. 'English Vignettes' in Leon Edel (ed.), *English Hours* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 139-140.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Stevenson, 'Green Mountain, Black Mountain', in her *A Report from the Border* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2003), 58-59.

<sup>68</sup> *Manod*, 66.

<sup>69</sup> *Eggs*, 323.

<sup>70</sup> *The Beginning*, 299.

<sup>71</sup> *Eggs*, 91.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>73</sup> *Loyalties*, 361.

<sup>74</sup> Section entitled 'First' in both volumes of *Black Mountains*.

<sup>75</sup> Dai Smith, 'Naming Names: Beyond a Fricative History,' in his *Wales: A Question for History* (Bridgend: Seren, 1999), 17-18. Ron Berry (1920-1997) was a Rhondda miner, novelist and playwright. His novel *So Long Hector Bebb* was, with *Border Country*, one of the first four selected for publication in the Library of Wales series.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (Routledge, 1991), 99-100.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>79</sup> Tony Pinkney, 'Naming Places: Wordsworth and the Possibilities of Eco-criticism', Pinkney, K. Hanley and F. Botting (eds.), *News from Nowhere* (1995), 62-65.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>82</sup> Owen Sheers, *Skirrid Hill* (Bridgend: Seren, 2005), v.

<sup>83</sup> James Davies, *The Chartist Movement in Monmouthshire*, Newport Chartist centenary pamphlet (1939), 7.

<sup>84</sup> *Second Generation*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>86</sup> *Second Generation*, 231.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>88</sup> *Manod*, 176.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>91</sup> *Eggs*, 319.

<sup>92</sup> 'Welsh Culture', in *Resources of Hope*, 101.

<sup>93</sup> *Manod*, 193.

<sup>94</sup> David Harvey, 'Geographical Knowledge/Political Powers', (Lecture at the London School of Economics, 7.3.2002).

<sup>95</sup> *Black Mountains*, 12.

<sup>96</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*, 167.

<sup>97</sup> 'Resources for a Journey of Hope', in *Towards 2000* (Penguin, 1985), 266-267.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-265.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.



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<sup>100</sup> 'Socialism and Ecology', in *Resources of Hope*, 217.

<sup>101</sup> *Eggs* 323.

<sup>102</sup> Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (Routledge, 1998), 214.

<sup>103</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 175.

<sup>104</sup> David Harvey. LSE lecture, *op. cit.*

## Chapter Six

### The Traitor in the House

The printed card reads '*Nid Oes Bradwr yn y ty hwn*' – there is no traitor in this house. '*Bradwr*', traitor, is twice the size of the surrounding words and boxed off from them by strong black lines.<sup>1</sup> These cards were issued to the striking slate quarrymen of North Wales during the bitter strike of 1900-1903 in the Penrhyn quarries. The quarry dispute created a deep division in the community between the strikers and the strike breakers. The majority of the cards remained in the windows of Bethesda for over two years: when a card was removed from the window it was a sign that another quarryman had returned to work.

A recent reproduction of the card has an odd double significance for the study of Williams's fiction.<sup>2</sup> It appears in a pamphlet campaigning for the establishment of a Museum of People's History in Wales, a place eerily reminiscent of the Institute and Library of Industrial Wales which Williams invented in *Manod*, with the purpose of offering its directorship to Matthew Price.<sup>3</sup> More interestingly, the accusatory '*bradwr*' not only has a significant place in *Loyalties* but the trope of treachery dominates the novels. Although they offer narratives of the traitor as the alien who breaks trust with his guests, his lover or his country, Williams's novels are haunted by the bitter knowledge that there is in fact a 'traitor in this house', and by the fear that their author is that traitor. His fiction continuously seeks for an appropriate cultural form and narrative that will mediate the realities of contemporary political and social relations, and the desire to



identify and lay the ghost of treachery can be read as an important impetus towards the adoption of the variety of different genres that characterises his work.

When, in the first two novels, the working-class protagonists move into a professional middle-class world, thereby abandoning their 'origins', this is presented as enforced by historical changes but nevertheless experienced by the central characters as a painful, personal guilt. As argued in Chapter Four, it is a guilt which, by his production of the narrative of the double father, Williams demonstrates an obsessive need to exculpate. In later novels the idea of betrayal continues to resonate but, by his adoption of different novel forms, is differently inflected and structured. The use, in *Manod* and *The Volunteers*, of the conspiracy and political thriller genres, allows the trope to be channelled in ways appropriate to the genre and the focus of guilt moves decisively away from the 'Measurer' sons whom the earlier novels sought to justify. In *Loyalties* and *Black Mountains*, each of which again employs a different form, a new narrative of treachery is introduced, based on an historical event, the Abergavenny Massacre of 1175. The details of this episode of bloody local history allow the guilt attendant on the betrayal of the values of class and father that marked the first two novels legitimately to be projected onto the Outsider, the oppressor, the class enemy. While in the 'middle period' novels the genre conventions operate to discipline the compulsion of the treachery theme and its highly personalised foundations, the use of the historical treachery narrative in the later fiction highlights the extent to which Williams is caught inextricably in a trope that highlights his own sense of guilt and need to deny it.

*Manod* is a conspiracy novel, the conspiracy operating both on a local stage, where landowners and developers misuse information on proposed land use to make deals for their own material interest, and at national and European level with government, commercial and statutory bodies using power to deflect interrogation and delude all but the most determined interrogators. Written more or less in parallel with *Manod*, *The Volunteers* is a political thriller with an explicit detective element as the investigative journalist searches for the perpetrator of an act of violent political protest and for the truth behind the action that incited that protest.<sup>4</sup> The title of *Loyalties* directs the reader to the idea of treachery while its framing narrative, of research for a television programme on espionage, explicitly uses metaphors of the labyrinth and plays with the existence of the hidden secret essential to the detective form.<sup>5</sup>

The concepts of betrayal, and of treachery, with their connotations of the breaking of an established allegiance, suggest violation of trust rather than the exercise of power against an acknowledged enemy. What is unexpected in *Black Mountains* is the extent to which, in a narrative of brutal power exercised by outsiders, the term 'treachery' continues to reverberate. The discourse of ancient and of recent Welsh history is, however, suffused with references to treachery. 'From the beginning there was treachery' claims a mediaeval Welsh historian. Citing this, J. Beverley Smith comments:

Many are the references to the 'oppression and treachery' of the Normans in the territory of the Welsh people, but there was an acknowledgement too that foreign intervention exacerbated internal strife and frequently provoked desertion and betrayal.<sup>6</sup>



This emphasis is still in place in a recent account of mediaeval Welsh history. The robber barons of the Marches, writes Norman Davies, 'held sway through force, fear and treachery.'<sup>7</sup> A more direct influence on Williams was the discourse of the General Strike and its long echoes. Anne Perkins has commented on the 'language of betrayal' that pervaded South Wales following the decision of the non-mining unions to return to work.<sup>8</sup> Neither was this sense a merely historical detail: Patrick Hannon says that during the 1984-85 strike a new generation of miners were bitter at the way 'the other unions had let them down in 1926.'<sup>9</sup> In 1984 the language of treachery also underpinned Margaret Thatcher's identification of the miners as 'the enemy within'.<sup>10</sup> *Border Country* and *Loyalties* demonstrate the profound impression made by both strikes on Williams's political consciousness.

Betrayal, of friend or country, is a staple of the political thriller and conspiracy novel. The conventions allow, even insist upon, social structures as necessarily concealing secrets. Their readers are trained to interpret all connections between events or participants not as benign or neutral but as designed to engender suspicion of acts of betrayal, personal or political. The investigator may be threatened or thwarted, misled by internal or external factors, but is correct in believing in the existence of a secret. While in Williams's two earlier novels the central characters, however conscious of the force of historical process, are tormented by a sense of personal betrayal, figured most powerfully in the fraught relation between son and father, in these later novels, the formal conventions of the genres adopted serve to demonstrate that treachery is not a matter of *personal* history only. The conventions allow the author to escape the trap of the

psychological discourses that Williams perceives as reductive of social and political explanation. It is in the novels which make the extensive use of the genre disciplines, *Manod* and *The Volunteers*, that he is most successful in negotiating the relation between the personal and the political.

The conspiracy in *Manod* adopts many of the genre conventions. There are organisations, names dripping connotations of civic goodwill, whose apparent purposes and players hide other names and darker purposes; shifty characters evidently driven by self-interest; others, seemingly honest and well-intentioned, but who incite suspicion. There is a plot to buy off the 'detective', suspicion that cannot be proved and a stain that cannot be removed. So, at the local level, Matthew Price attempts to uncover the source of a leak of official information on development plans, confronts the local solicitor, is reassured by him, then pushed back into a state of doubt, is made a tempting offer by the principal local villain. Meanwhile, at international level, Peter Owen chases threads of ownership and influence to London and thence to Brussels: the classic move of the search for a single origin. Thus far, the classic conventions are observed. The triumph of the confrontation scene, in which the detectives triumphantly produce evidence of wrongdoing in high places, is, though, thwarted by the knowledge that, rather than unmasking aberrant plotters who can be expelled so that the good may be restored, this plot is shown to be part of a wider normative structure. This model situates *Manod* on the cusp between old and new conventions of conspiracy novels: the new convention being what Theo Tait scoffs at as: 'one of literary fiction's musty standards: the detective novel that gradually implodes as the real world around it proves too complex'.<sup>11</sup> Versions of that 'standard'



become mainstream from the late '60s onwards, among the most famous being the television series *The Prisoner* (1967) and *Edge of Darkness* (1985) and the 1982 film *Blade Runner*.<sup>12</sup> But while both *Manod* and *The Volunteers* have plot elements in common with this claustrophobic all-imprisoning model, in neither does the 'implosion' threaten a despairing admission that, in the face of the omnipresence and omnipotence of the enemy, all action is useless. At this stage of Williams's fiction, the insistence that agency remains possible even in the face of the coercive normative structure is central.

A very different model of representation is employed for the power structures in each novel: while in *Manod* power is embodied in buildings, in *The Volunteers*, a novel of telecommunications, it is in the very air. In *Manod* power is exercised in 'the street of the Ministries'. While the initial description of the place foregrounds the hard - metal, stone - the austere façade conceals the real place of power, a 'glittering, dazzling' glass tower, which, as in a fairy story, may be reached only by crossing a bridge.<sup>13</sup> Again as in the fairy story, the brilliant structure is a place of danger, both physical and moral. It is here that Matthew and Peter's quest is baffled and blocked, first by government adviser Robert Lane, and then, in a fine scene of obfuscation and frustration, by the structures of government: its minions, major players and the very fabric of the building. The arrangement of the room where a critical meeting is held leaves Matthew jostled, with no space, and when he complains of being unable to hear crucial new information on development plans, the Minister responds blandly, 'This has always been a difficult room.'<sup>14</sup> Matthew's attempts to bring a wider, humane perspective to the proposals are foiled by the systems and structures operated by these smiling public men. In this context

there is no need for them to threaten him with the painful death that is the fate of the heroes of the Ludlum school of conspiracy novels. When he is trapped in the stifling, deafening tower, where the voices of ordinary people simply cannot be heard, Matthew's heart collapses.<sup>15</sup>

The conventions employed by *The Volunteers* are consistent not only with those of the political thriller but also of the detective story. The novel, published in 1978, and set in the 1980s, opens with the shooting and wounding of Buxton, the Secretary of State for Wales, while on an official visit to St Fagan's Folk Museum, near Cardiff. This is a world where the hottest news is that of international terrorism, and Lewis Redfern, employed by Insatel, an 'international television satellite service', as a 'consultant analyst', effectively a specialist journalist on the political underground, is immediately dispatched to cover the story. The attack on Buxton is predictable since:

To let [him] go to Wales, within four months of the events at Pontyrhiw (where a worker had been killed and eight others wounded, as the army moved in to occupy a power depot; moved in, it was widely suspected, on direct orders from Buxton) was provocative in anybody's language.<sup>16</sup>

He has been the focus of an angry demonstration, but it is quickly established that the shots were fired by a 'young man in an orange cape and a blue cap...Dark glasses, long fair hair and a beard and a moustache.'<sup>17</sup> The police receive a note claiming the shooting signed 'Marcus, Volunteer', the blue denim cap is recovered from an abandoned rented car in Cardiff and the hirer traced to a London address. When Redfern and the rest of the press see the room it is:



What everyone had been looking for: a stage-set, in effect, of a young revolutionary's 'hideout.' There were the portraits of Marx, and of Lenin, the posters from Iran and Bolivia and the Yemen, the calendar from China, the bookcases full of revolutionary classics and pamphlets. I had seen scores of such rooms.<sup>18</sup>

The police are 'clearly satisfied', the room's occupant is a German radical named Marcus Tiller: case solved. Redfern of course - it is only page 63 - recognises 'this trail of planted clues' as 'embarrassing': 'it didn't make sense that the skill of the operation could coexist with this unbelievable sequence of carelessness.' It makes sense only as an 'elaborate distraction and disguise.'<sup>19</sup> So Redfern continues his solo search for the connections that lead him back to Pontyrhiw and the death of the young worker Gareth Powell and, seemingly in quite another direction, to the person and politics of Mark Evans, a former left-wing writer and junior minister in a Labour government, now older, mellow, compromised. Yet, given the conventions of the genre, there must of course be a connection.

Redfern is recognisably a hard bitten, tough talking guy in the Dashiell Hammett/ Raymond Chandler tradition. His easy assumption of an understanding superior to that of the plodding police is that of virtually every fictional detective other than those who are professional police officers, what Auden called 'The feud between the local common sense/And that exasperating brilliant intuition/ That's always on the spot by chance before us all.'<sup>20</sup> In such a 'feud' one might expect Williams to be on the side of the local and the collective, but the tradition of the detective novel privileges the loner, an individual with

superior knowledge and powers of analysis rendered effective by a detachment from the constraints of local culture. Like the detective of the Hammett school, Redfern's intuitive understanding is based on knowledge of the criminal mind and motive. His past in radical politics makes him familiar with the interlocking and overlapping groups of the political underground. His contacts and his experience support his intuitive leaps. Writing of the urban detective novel as a form, Simon Dentith says that:

[From *Bucket to Holmes in the 1890s*] the detective offered a figure whose specialised vision could penetrate the social and criminal mysteries of the city, who could walk its most dangerous streets with impunity...The detective is a surrogate social explorer.<sup>21</sup>

Redfern is this detective with specialised vision. As a media professional he can articulate the relationships between medium and message. As a narrator constructed as a specialist both on his subject area of terrorism and on its media representation, he is acutely conscious of the connections between event, spectacle and news. Connections made through phone calls, calling in favours, meetings in bars and obscure parks, door-stepping, are familiar to readers of detective fiction. This is the conventional accretion of train timetables, aliases and alibis that serve to bring the perpetrators together with their event. But the connections that Redfern is making in order to establish responsibilities, to clarify the workings of the political system, co-exist with the connections being spun by those in control of the political system - including, of course, the media - to distract attention and deflect guilt. In the last pages of the novel Redfern summarises the connections that have been made public, the coherent narrative which in many novels would serve as the vindication of his investigation. But he knows that there can be no



definitive closure:

In a matter of hours or days...the whole action would again be in movement and there would be no end to it: no simple end, and perhaps no end at all. All the rush and the change of reality would bear in, necessarily, on what had been temporarily isolated as a particular action, a particular truth.<sup>22</sup>

Yet the conclusion is not one of angry or apathetic despair but, as in *Manod*, rather of the potential of action and agency. Following his heart attack, Matthew Price recovers enough physical energy for the novel to end with his insistence to his wife that they 'must...go on.'<sup>23</sup> There is a restrained sense of winning through to a fragile possibility.<sup>24</sup> At the end of *The Volunteers* the valley community has experienced a limited victory. Redfern leaves alone, but not to return to his cynical hack ways, and his resolution suggests a more generalised hope. The source of his new found integrity is not explicated but understood to derive from the experience of community and from the acknowledgement of his own history, his family roots in Wales and the connections between the death of Gareth Powell and that of his father as a national serviceman in the colonial war in Kenya.<sup>25</sup> The ending manages to marry this muted celebration of community with the Hammett tradition: Redfern remains the 'loner whose triumphs were always tinged by loss.'<sup>26</sup> He resists the sentimentality of regressing into the 'warm Welsh embrace' of the valley community that is seeking justice for Gareth Powell. His role, he believes, 'had been precisely selected for me and there was nothing comradely about it. My job, quite simply, was to do my job: to complete the inquiry on Buxton.'<sup>27</sup> His final response, 'I'll find my own way back', is the classic voice of the dissident, the outsider, trudging off alone into the night to discover the next mission.<sup>28</sup> One may see curious

parallels between this truth seeker, on his solitary road yet representative of a community ideal, and Williams's self-representation in his essays and interviews.

In terms of the theme of betrayal and conspiracy, and their enactment through use of particular genres, *Manod* and *The Volunteers* demonstrate important parallels that do not obtain in the novels that follow. While both construct the Welsh location as the place acted upon by outside powers careless of its good, in neither novel are the Welsh solely innocents and victims. In *Manod* there are a number of locals only too ready to manipulate the potential of development in their own self-interest. The Pontyrhiw community in *The Volunteers*, with its class solidarity and protection of the vulnerable, functions as what Auden, in his essay on the classic English detective story, called 'the Great Good Place.'<sup>29</sup> But its innocence is read by a more articulate Welsh radical, David Evans, as dangerous ignorance. The inhabitants, he tells Redfern, think of this district as 'an enclave; its own little self-sufficient world.'<sup>30</sup> While in Auden's model, the guilty can be expelled and innocence restored, Pontyrhiw is not, as it believes, self-sufficient but 'open and penetrated.' Yet, unlike the mining community in *Loyalties*, whose resistance in the miners' strike of 1984/5 is seen as brave but useless against the power of absent men who have no need to resort to face-to-face confrontation, power in *The Volunteers* is not all exercised in a single direction. Here, as in *Manod*, there is a sense that strategies of resistance are not doomed.

Near the end of *Manod* comes the official ministerial meeting at which decisions on the future of the development plans will be made. The final episode of *The Volunteers* is the



official inquiry into the events at the Pontyrhiw depot when Gareth Powell was killed. Both events are highly formalised, with participants playing set roles in a space organised on hierarchical principles: both Matthew Price and Lewis Redfern are conscious of the importance of the spatial relations. These official structures are strategies of containment, but in neither case do they adequately contain. In *Manod* the Minister and his officials may not hear what Matthew has to say, but, as Peter Owen declares, 'We can find these other places where we can really fight.'<sup>31</sup> Matthew will return to Wales, supported by a sense that a Welsh political practice exists that allows for operations other than those that we have seen doom the Manod project to failure. Peter will publish details of the dubious business deals, as a book and in a Sunday newspaper.<sup>32</sup> The ending is far from optimistic, but the possibilities of agency and change are not closed.

In *The Volunteers*, with its focus on the media as the dominating force in the construction of reality, the forces of containment would presumably block Peter's 'publish and be damned' tactic. But here too individual agency is able to resist official power, as 'the truth' is made public by an individual conscious of community backing. It is interesting to compare the political implications of *The Volunteers* with Williams's thinking on television published five years earlier, in 1974, where he discusses the relation between 'television discussion and orthodox political process.' He is clear that television's representation of the process blocks the possibilities of independent judgement:

A public process, at the level of response and interrogation, is *represented* for us by the television intermediaries. Not only the decisions and events, but what

are intended to be the shaping responses to them, come through in a prepared and mediated form...In any large and complex society this mediation of representation is especially important, since in its speed and general availability it tends towards the monopoly of the reactive process.<sup>33</sup> (original emphasis)

There is, though, no sense that political process is exhausted by the representations of television and centrally controlled media:

Oppositional elements who are outside the existing structures of representation have to find other ways to present their views: by petition or lobbying directed towards existing representatives; or with much more difficulty, by actions and demonstrations directed towards the already 'represented' people.<sup>34</sup>

The problem of direct action, Williams points out, is that it is itself susceptible to representation as 'apparently unreasoned, merely demonstrative' and 'emotionally simplifying' in contrast to the 'serious informed responses' of the 'arranged studio discussion.' The most general interpretation of 'informed', in this context, Williams adds, is 'having access to real sources.'<sup>35</sup> The 'oppositional elements' in *The Volunteers* are well aware of the constraints in their tightly organised media society. While the orthodox mass demonstration against Buxton channels community anger, the televisual nature and powerful symbolism of the shooting demonstrate an awareness that effective action in the 'society of the spectacle' is necessarily image driven.<sup>36</sup> This 'propaganda of the act' leads directly, with the re-establishment of the official inquiry, to access to formalised structures of investigation and hence, one assumes, to participation in discussions perceived to be serious and informed. The acknowledgement that the structures of the media marginalise or deny voice to oppositional views, but that the blockage is not



absolute, is very much the argument that is made by the ending of *The Volunteers*. The dead worker's brother declares to Lewis Redfern that the inquiry 'had been a victory' and even the politically case-hardened Redfern finds that he 'couldn't disagree.'<sup>37</sup>

*Manod* and *The Volunteers* offer evidence for Harvey's assertion that in Williams's work 'possibility is always lurking in the margins'.<sup>38</sup> An important aspect of Williams's critique of Orwell, in particular of *1984* is that Orwell denies 'possibility', what Williams in this instance terms 'the spring of hope':

Under controls as pervasive and as cruel [as the regime of 1984] many men and women have kept faith with each other, have kept their courage, and in several cases against heavy odds have risen to try to destroy the system or to change it...It would be right to acknowledge that many of these risings were defeats, but Orwell goes further, cutting out the spring of hope. He projects an enormous apathy onto the oppressed: a created mood if ever there was one.<sup>39</sup>

This Williams explains in terms of Orwell's sharing of the contemporary 'dominant structure of feeling' and he goes on to say that Orwell tried to 'transcend it', recognising that this was 'a historical crisis, not a human condition, or a metaphysical fact.'<sup>40</sup> Yet the development of his own fiction in the novels that follow *The Volunteers* suggests that the historical crisis of the Left during the 1980s engendered its own essentialist despair. The configuration of treachery in the last novels is a key element in the shift away from 'possibility' and towards determinism.

In *Loyalties* the springs of hope have indeed been blocked. The sense of claustrophobia is stronger, with much of the action set in the Cold War atmosphere that Doris Lessing called 'poisonous and paranoiac.'<sup>41</sup> Certain detective novel devices are used but there is a more emphatic play with the sign systems of the national and international conspiracy genre. Its uncertainties are constructed by the use of such familiar devices as the black car that sits outside the house of Norman Braose, who may or may not be handing information to the Soviet Union; the junkie sitting at the doorway of the exhibition of 'left-wing' paintings who morphs into a polite sober guest at the celebration that follows the Grosvenor Square demonstrations against the Vietnam War.<sup>42</sup> Does either of these markers signify surveillance, plots and 'trade'? Or is to suspect them to risk the trap of paranoia? Who, if anyone, can be trusted? Is the brilliant computer scientist Monk Pitter merely a man who revels in making serious money? Is he a Soviet sympathiser and traitor to the West? Or is he a double agent acting in the US interest?<sup>43</sup> Even more disturbing is the suggestion that radical activist Tom Meurig of *Manod*, now a television researcher, may be a 'security' agent. At the very least the change of his name to 'Tommy' hints at collusion and compromise.<sup>44</sup> Everywhere there are watchers and spies. In Spain during the Civil War, Braose, under an assumed name, works with the Russians to 'reassess and determine people's loyalties.'<sup>45</sup> The spies are for the most part in the pay of the Establishment and are panoptical in their abilities to perceive actual or potential dissent. When Gwyn, a scientific civil servant, is vetted for a senior and sensitive post in a government establishment, his Security interlocutor makes it clear into what far corners and concerns government tentacles may reach: to the discussions in a hotel bar in mid-Wales following a protest meeting against a proposed nuclear waste deposit site.<sup>46</sup> The



spooks too were 'keeping track' of militant miners in 1936: 'A complete espionage system was started in the pit. Each conveyor, each heading, had its spy. Away from the pit, where the workmen lived, each village had its management spy.'<sup>47</sup> But are these watchers and listeners the cunning control devices of the Right or the fantasies of the Left?

*Loyalties* is a novel of allegations, claims and counter claims, leaks and 'guilt by association.'<sup>48</sup> All human activity takes place in a general atmosphere described as 'bad.'<sup>49</sup>

The novel's framing narrative, in which a young television researcher, Jon Merritt, begins work for a programme dealing with the Cambridge spies, makes use of the metaphor of the labyrinth and Theseus's thread.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the novel, Jon Merritt, like Lewis Redfern, stands as an isolated figure, declaring that he has 'questions to ask.'<sup>51</sup> There is, however, no sense that any forum exists to which his questions can be addressed or that the 'pretty thread' given to this Theseus will lead him out of the labyrinth.

*Loyalties*, like *The Volunteers*, uses the conventions of the thriller genre to explore the concept and practice of betrayal in a world of unequally distributed power. Here, however, there is an important shift: power is not only all pervasive but unassailable. Opposition is an act of futility. The structure of the novel, where the 'real story' is framed by an account of the imperatives of television programming, structures the reader's interpretation and enacts the impossibility of escape. The relation of *Loyalties* to *Black Mountains* is an odd one. Ostensibly very different in discourse, they are in effect different versions of the same story: the betrayal of the Welsh by alien invaders. While the two preceding novels used forms of fiction which engage with a conventional and generic patterning of betrayal, Williams now moves to forms which take him away from

the safety net which structured his intense response into more obviously personal territory. Each of the later novels offers a version of the Abergavenny Massacre, the brutal episode in Williams's home town that is standardly described as one of 'treachery'. In *Loyalties* the story of political betrayal by the incomer is complicated by the return of the Oedipal in its most powerful and insistent form and the opening of the novel foregrounds the complex relation between the personal and the public. In the framing episode Jon Merritt argues against the tendency of television programming to 'reduce political opposition to personal eccentricities.'<sup>52</sup> This is an argument which Williams would be expected to endorse, but in making the central narrative device the choice between two fathers, each representing an opposed class, nation and way of fighting the established system, the difficulty of avoiding such a reduction becomes acute.

The use of the historical narrative might be argued to operate as a distancing technique in the same way as the detective form. The detachment here, however, is less successful; although the conscious Williams believes himself to be in control of the more emotive material, he is, despite his own intentions, caught inextricably in a particular trope. His reading of the Abergavenny Massacre constructs a narrative that reinforces his reading of class and familial relations as shown in *Border Country* and *Second Generation*. The trope of betrayal is readily available to him, not only in the local story of the Abergavenny Massacre, but as a dominant narrative pattern, which, as will be outlined below, constructs the Welsh as a people formed by an experience of treachery. Williams's dialogue with this construction of the history of Wales, like his dialogue with the Welsh discourse of victimhood discussed in Chapter Five, serves to produce readings that



support his need to challenge the suspicion that his own history marks him as the 'traitor in the house.'

Betrayal, says J. Beverley Smith, is 'a trenchant theme' from Modred's treachery towards Arthur, told in Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae: History of the Kings of Britain*, onwards. This work, says Smith, had an 'overwhelming and oppressive influence upon Welsh historical consciousness for several centuries to come.'<sup>53</sup> Myths are, of course, responsive to political need. Glanmor Williams, in his account of medieval and Tudor Wales, emphasises 'how a people may brood in centuries of defeat on their traitors, creating a mass of mythical lore and prophetic legends to compensate for their losses and sustain their hopes.'<sup>54</sup> Prys Morgan remarks on the way in which the Welsh used the narrative of the Treason of the Long Knives to 'comfort themselves that the Saxons had only come through a plot, that the Almighty would never bless them, and in time the Welsh or British would regain overlordship over the whole island.'<sup>55</sup> Incidents of betrayal haunt recorded Welsh history too, as in the instance of the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffyd in the struggles against Edward I, well rehearsed by Welsh school children. An account by Harri Webb, a late twentieth-century literary and political journalist, insists on the elements of treachery: 'Llywelyn fell, isolated, deserted, betrayed, hardly more in death than in life.'<sup>56</sup> The tribal leaders were 'unreliable, faithless, treasonable', the villages 'eager to denounce neighbouring villages for their treachery.'<sup>57</sup>

Neither did the power of the discourse of treachery diminish over the centuries. When in 1847 three government commissioners reported on the state of Welsh education 'and the

moral condition of the people of Wales', their findings both censured Welsh education for its narrow Biblicism and cast doubts on the chastity of Welsh women. The reports being bound in blue, a contemporary satirical play on the ensuing Welsh outrage christened the publications 'the Treason of the Blue Books', *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*. Clearly this terminology, even if satirical in intent, accorded with national feeling as it was popularly and formally adopted and, as Prys Morgan comments is 'a term that every Welsh schoolboy knows': references to the reports in school histories and other texts continue to use the 'T word.'<sup>58</sup>

What is Williams's recorded reaction to this version of Welsh history? It is one of unambiguous rejection. In *Politics and Letters* he declares that the history he was taught at primary school was a 'poisonous brand of romantic and Welsh chauvinism...nothing but how such and such a Welsh prince defeated the Saxons and took from them great quantities of cattle and gold. I threw up on that. It wasn't only that it didn't connect. It was absolutely contradicted by how we were now.'<sup>59</sup> Yet in *Border Country* the response of the boy Will to just such a story is altogether more nuanced. The schoolmaster William Evans tells the children the story of 'the good Gruffydd ap Llewellyn, the head and shield of the Cymri [who] fell by the treachery of his own men.' It is an account rich in the metaphor and details that Williams says outraged him with their irrelevance and false positioning of his country and its people: 'The man who before was invincible stood now in the glens of desolation, after taking vast spoils and victories without number, and countless treasures of gold and silver, and jewels and purple robes.'<sup>60</sup> Yet Will is drawn in and 'years later...was to remember it word for word.' The grandiose claim and



exhortation on which the story ends: 'The body of the brave Gruffydd ap Llewellyn died, but his memory will live for ever in the hearts of the sons and daughters of Wales' is, ironically, borne out in the body of the boy Will.<sup>61</sup>

Characteristically, Williams offers no explanation for the power of this memory. The boy finds the 'cadences' irresistible, even as later he will respond viscerally to the power of the choirs in the local Eisteddfod.<sup>62</sup> Although the rational Williams scoffs at the falsity and banality of the inventories of spoils that these stories list, the boy, we assume, hears not an ideology of demeaning materialism but an epic, a Homeric roll call of the honours accorded to courage. Yet the point of the story itself is its account of treachery, again a betrayal 'by his own men.' Its placing in *Border Country* is suggestive, coming in the chapter that follows the account of the General Strike and what is perceived as the 'shameful' sell-out by the Railway Union of its own members and of the miners.<sup>63</sup> In the episode immediately before the schoolmaster reads his story, Will and the other schoolboys refuse to betray one of their number and, in the face of authority and violence, support each other as the 'cymri', the comrades, should properly do. It is possible to read the history of the death of the Welsh prince in this directly political way. Yet the response of the boy experiencing the super-rational power of particular language forms, as they inscribe the story 'word for word', is in excess of such a reading. One notes that in his comments in *Politics and Letters* on this form of historical narrative, Williams makes no acknowledgement of the power he has accorded it in his own earlier fictional representation. This silencing is another demonstration of the control he seeks to exert, even as, as was noted in the Introduction, bursts of anger or suggestions of sexuality are

routinely silenced. Here language patterns and memory exert a power that his rational mind rejects.

It is to stories of treachery that the adult Will, now known as Matthew, opens his eyes on the first morning of his return to the village of Glynmawr to see his dying father. The instances here are contained within the flat official discourse of a 'county history' and, it is suggested, unlike 'the living country' and the relationships that Matthew will have to negotiate, it offers a version of the past that is 'safe to handle.'<sup>64</sup> There is also a clear disjunction between this detached, confident 'history' and the account of 'population movements into the Welsh mining valleys in the middle decades of the nineteenth century' which Matthew, uneasy with the techniques of the professional historian and their relation to experience, is struggling to write. The reader here is guided to a response consistent with the account of school history given in *Politics and Letters*. The book, which he has fallen asleep while reading, tells him:

That the church of Glynmawr is distinguished by its relics...The whole book is in this style: the county history. That there is a Norman roodscreen and an ancient camp and the bloodiest of the border castles and the Stone of Treachery and the gown of the reputed mistress of Robin de Braose.<sup>65</sup>

In *Border Country* no more is heard of this de Braose, his mistress or the stone. The link of Braose with 'treachery' and the bloody castle has, however, been made and a later mention of the Braose family situates them as violent oppressors. The family is listed among the Lords of the Marches whose castles, alien structures of power, are now



'decayed hollow teeth, facing the peaceful valleys into which their power had bitten.'<sup>66</sup>

The emphasis is on the power as long gone, but it is too on the ineradicable memory of violence in these decayed shapes. This reading of the border castles as sites of oppression is consistent with that of other Welsh historians. An official guide on medieval Abergavenny comments that the border castles were constructed less as defensive structures, rather as 'symbols of lordship and government: they were hated because the Welsh were forced to construct the instruments of their own subjection.'<sup>67</sup>

The castle at Gwenton/Abergavenny shares in the general opprobrium attached to oppressive Norman strongholds, but *Border Country* offers no explanation for the castle being rated as the 'bloodiest': the reference to the 'Stone of Treachery' is linked to the bloody castle merely by the same non-causal conjunction that links the 'ancient camp' (also to be reprised in *Black Mountains*) and the dubiously attributed gown. The Braoses and the blood, their possible treacherous role, are as yet mere traces, distant from the novel's central concerns. But, having been raised as textual powers these repressed ghosts threaten to return. Williams's phrase 'the bloodiest of the border castles' echoes that of the sixteenth-century William Camden who wrote that Abergavenny 'has been oftner stained with the infamy of treachery than any other castle in Wales.' An early twentieth-century historian refers to it as 'that Abergavenny Cawnpore'<sup>68</sup> and the author of the Abergavenny Local History Society guide to the massacre declares it to be 'one of the most terrible events in Welsh history.'<sup>69</sup>

The massacre itself is attested by a terse twelfth-century annal entry for 1175: 'Seisyll ap

Dwynfal and Geoffrey his son (and many others of Gwent) were treacherously slain by William de Braose at Abergavenny.<sup>170</sup> Embellishments, provided by a chronicle which is a translation of a lost Latin text based on the annal, include the French riding to Seisyll's court and slaughtering his young son and the declaration that 'after that treachery, none of the Welsh dared place trust in the French.'<sup>171</sup> This version of events, with the treacherous French attempting a wholesale slaughter of the indigenous leaders of the country, reads as suspiciously parallel to the treachery of the Saxon invaders in the Long Knives incident. Developed later versions of the story also echo the method of the Saxon crime as the treachery consists in inviting the Welsh to a feast and ensuring that their weapons are left outside the hall. J. Beverley Smith, however, defends the authenticity of the story: 'This is an authentic historical source, reaching as closely as we can get to the annalistic material that would have been set down in the twelfth century. So it is not tradition or myth.'<sup>172</sup>

'The Abergavenny Murders' episode in *Black Mountains* emphasises the specific cynicism and brutality of the events but subdues them to the shape of the overall narrative of the sequence, the repeated and determined oppression of the weaker by the powerful. While a number of versions, including that on the information board within Abergavenny Castle, are anxious to explain the outrage as motivated by personal animosities and brought about by a 'rivalry of longstanding' between de Braose and his neighbour Seislyt, Williams sees it as an incident determined by the particular set of power relations and different customs of landholding. In Williams, as in all accounts later than the initial annal, after the killings at the castle, de Braose's men ride to Seisyll's home at Castel Arnallt where, in the presence of his mother, they kill his young son, Cadwaladr.



Williams adds an account of the destruction of all the nearby settlements and sources of food:

The disputed mill was thoroughly broken down and its big grindstone wheeled to the river and sunk. The winter granary beside it was burned. The troop then rode onto each tref on Seisyll's estate. At each place they burned the huts and the barns and the pigs in their sties. As they left each tref, the knight... shouted:

'After treason, starvation! Learn and obey!'<sup>73</sup>

This is not the wounded personal pride of the de Braose who features in some narratives, but the calculated erasure of a community's economic base and cultural practices.

Williams's version, of course, rejects the easy moralising that reads the, historically recorded, fate of William, starving in France, and of his wife and eldest son murdered by King John, as a late but 'just' end.<sup>74</sup> There can be no comfort within this particular paradigm. Tomos, serving man to one of the Welsh lords slaughtered and himself blinded in a later revenge attack on Abergavenny Castle, concludes: 'Still the evil order flourishes, the greater over the lesser. In my darkness I cannot say with the prophet: now I die in peace. For there is no peace and no Saviour. Now I die in darkness.'<sup>75</sup> While 'The Abergavenny Murders' has at last given full voice to the story that has haunted the earlier texts, the echoes and traces in earlier novels are more significant. The use of the Braose story in *Loyalties* is far more suggestive in terms of Williams's understanding of treachery and its relation to class and to national and international formations. It is in *Loyalties* that his need to deny 'the traitor in the house' is demonstrated most acutely and in its least resolved form.

*Loyalties*, like *Black Mountains*, is episodic in form, if with a less ambitious time span: it opens in 1936 and concludes in 1984. From the first episode, a summer school in the Black Mountains organised by the Communist Party, the issue of names is foregrounded, as upper-class English Emma comments to working-class Welsh Nesta that her name is 'very unusual.'<sup>76</sup> The point that here, in Wales, it is rather Nesta's name that should be considered as the norm, is at once picked up by Emma's brother, Norman: 'My sister is an incorrigible chauvinist', he declares. In the next chapter, however, both brother and sister choose to call Nesta 'Birdie', denying her particular identity even as plantation owners infantilised and rendered their slaves less strange by a process of renaming.<sup>77</sup> Yet *Loyalties* centres on a far more striking issue of naming, to which none of the characters makes reference and which will remain a bizarre silence throughout the novel. Emma and Norman have the family name Braose, scions of 'an old diplomatic family.'<sup>78</sup> Not only does their family name mark them as invaders, perpetrators of massacres, but their role is further determined by their first names: Norman is a clear enough label, while Emma's marriage reveals her second name to be Matilda, one of the versions of the name of the wife of William de Braose.<sup>79</sup>

Twentieth-century Norman is not guilty of the treacherous slaughter of Welsh men or the dashing to death of babies before their mothers. But, as a computer scientist who passes information to the Soviet Union, he is a traitor to his country and is also guilty of betraying the trust of Nesta, whom he seduces and abandons. In his actions he manages to combine the various actions defined under 'betrayal' and 'treachery' – the violation of trust, the leading astray and seduction, the desertion in time of need, the attempts to



overthrow the state to which the offender owes allegiance – fairly comprehensively. This insistence that the male Braoses are predestined across the centuries to commit acts of despicable treachery offers a strange but irresistible parallel with a popular romance, Barbara Erskine's *Lady of Hay*, published a year after *Loyalties*.<sup>80</sup> Erskine has since written a number of novels whose plots turn on reincarnation and the regression of a beautiful, successful late-twentieth-century woman to an earlier life. In *Lady of Hay* Jo, a young woman journalist, recognises herself as Matilda, wife of Braose, and, together with the several men in her life, finds herself bound to relive the betrayals and horrors, including being an appalled witness of the Abergavenny Massacre, which is the traumatising material of her first 'flashback.' For none of the characters can there be any escape from re-enacting their destined roles. While the parallel with *Lady of Hay* is presumably one that Williams would have resisted, it is undeniable that his Norman Braose is no less a hapless pawn of destiny than Erskine's twentieth-century de Braose, Dr. Sam Franklyn.

One has to question Williams's intentions in his use of this somewhat crude device. It is unclear what proportion of his readers Williams would have expected to recognise the significance of the Braose name. This is a particularly powerful example of the problem raised in the Introduction, the nagging question for readers of his fiction: for whom is he writing? That the Braose siblings are the class enemy and that, while they may align themselves with the Left and initially demonstrate the same allegiances as the Welsh mining community, their political interpretations are alien, is clear without recourse to an insistence on them as the enemy determined across the centuries. The over-determination,

the insistence on the continuity and repetition of power and vulnerability, has a particular irony given the historical evidence of the fate of the descendants of both William de Braose and his main victim, Seislyt.

The William de Braose who held Abergavenny in 1175 was a direct descendant of a William who came with the invading armies of 1066, and the de Braose marriages up to and including that of William are to women whose names suggest impeccably Norman lineage.<sup>81</sup> But Norman's ancestral line would have been lost in the Welsh mists as, like many other of the Marcher lords, William married his children into the Welsh princely families, and genealogical websites for the de Braoses show the male line as becoming extinct within four generations.<sup>82</sup> It is Seislyt whose descendants have been in the triumphant ascendant since the sixteenth century. In his account of Dr John Dee and the Tudor 'British imperial project', Gwyn A. Williams writes of 'the major Welsh migration to the centre of power.' Among those who went off to London was Dafydd Seislyt 'from the Welsh speaking region of Herefordshire', that is the land east of Abergavenny, very close to Raymond Williams's own village of Pandy.<sup>83</sup> Going to London 'as a sergeant of [Henry VII]'s guard, he bought land and installed his son as court page. His grandson was William Cecil, Lord Burghley', Chief Secretary of State to Elizabeth I. Although Gwyn A. Williams's account of the Welsh identity of William Cecil is somewhat imaginative, the origins are undisputed, Cecil's grandfather spelling his name as Sysell.<sup>84</sup> Gwyn A. Williams comments wryly that the 'transfigured' Cecils are 'as we all know, too much with us, late and soon.'<sup>85</sup>



Raymond Williams was familiar with this account of the Cecils as he reviewed *The Welsh in their History*, in which the essay on John Dee appears, for the *Guardian* of 9 September 1982.<sup>86</sup> He has, then, chosen to re-write history in such a way as to insist on the enduring strength of the oppressor and to ignore the irony by which a descendant of the Welsh victim becomes an absolutely central figure in the formation of the English state. The naming device adopted insists that this is not simply a family arrogant with inherited confidence but that, even as the people of the Black Mountains discussed in Chapter Five retain an identity through the millennia, these siblings carry the same DNA as their murderous forebear. Particularly given the esoteric quality of the historical parallel, it is an odd and unnecessary emphasis. The point that these are strangers in the land, their class and English assumptions alien to Welsh working-class values and practices, can be, and indeed is, made by other means. The insistent identification of the alien as the betrayer of the local is at the heart of *Loyalties* – the betrayer from without, not from within the house.

Initially it is the Braose siblings who insist on the Welsh as Other. As well as commenting that Nesta's name is 'very unusual', Emma finds her face with its 'finely marked sharp features and high prominent cheekbones' to be 'very strange.'<sup>87</sup> Norman too is determined to situate Nesta as a member of a different people, the Silures, who stood against the Romans and so 'shocked' them by their defiance.<sup>88</sup> Nesta resists this positioning: she declares that she knows nothing of the Silures' opposition to the invaders and that her name is simply 'after an auntie.'<sup>89</sup> The Braose assumptions are of their own appearance, values and practices as normative, and they hardly register the mild

challenge of Nesta's simplicity. It is in the novel's final scene that this assumption is turned back onto them, as Gwyn, Nesta's son by Norman, attacks his father's principles and practices as 'alien'.<sup>90</sup> He has already categorised his natural father as a 'traitor.'<sup>91</sup> In Gwyn's country, who are the 'foreigners' and what is the relation of treachery and the alien?

The issue of treachery is further complicated by the strongly Oedipal plot and the problematic link between personal and public betrayal: Norman Braose passes information to the Russians both during the time that they are Britain's allies and during the Cold War period, and as a young man he seduces, impregnates and abandons Nesta. This is consistent with Williams's 'Jacobin' position on personal and social behaviours as inextricable. It is a recurrent feature in his fiction (both Robert Lane of *Second Generation* and Manod and Mark Evans in *The Volunteers* show private weakness in parallel to public compromises) and one which he has to defend against the 'misgivings' of his *Politics and Letters* interviewers, who remark that 'to identify the presence of social reaction with the absence of sexual integrity appears to be dangerous aesthetic simplification.'<sup>92</sup>

In *Loyalties*, which gives such a central role to Braose's son Gwyn, and his response to the acts and values both of his adoptive and his natural father, the collapse of the personal/political binary is inevitable. Yet that collapse poses a serious problem for a novel which, in its framing sequence, opens with an insistence on the distinction being preserved since its loss reduces the integrity of the social dimension. The sequence opens



with discussion of a planned series of programmes on 'British dissidents' and Jon Merritt is uneasy to hear this recast as 'quirky individuals.' He argues that:

There's still an essential difference between dissidents and quirky individuals...The upper class radicals - Burdett, Hyndman, Beatrice Webb, Cripps and so on. None of them seem to me quirky at all. Individuals, yes, but mainly with different principles, different ideas of society...If the dissent is only a quirkiness, everything important is devalued...it would be gutter stuff to reduce political opposition to personal eccentricities.<sup>93</sup>

It is arguable that the construction of Braose, who manages to be both seducer and, in an echo of Clifford Chatterley, sexually dysfunctional, itself performs just this reductive manoeuvre.<sup>94</sup>

The tension set up by the framing sequence rests on this 'public-private' binary. The ideas of loyalty and treachery are established in a moral framework as yet innocent of ambiguities. Allicon, the series director, tells Jon Merritt that, in addition to the already known material on the Cambridge spies, there is 'new and extraordinary' evidence of 'substantial espionage...on computer design and encoding. Espionage here, by British scientists. The file actually includes a name.'<sup>95</sup> The name is Monk Pitter, but it is rather with the interrogation of the motives and actions of his comrade Norman Braose that the novel is concerned. The conspiracy model on which Williams's narrative is partially dependent dodges and weaves through suspicions that Braose's proclaimed defection from his 1930s Communism to a mild liberalism is a front for a continuing and active Party loyalty. Pieces of evidence for his presence in Spain under a false name are

scattered through the text, but are countered by the knowledge that he has survived suspicion and interrogation to rise to Establishment honours. A detailed defence is offered by Emma's son, Bill, who piles guilt and opprobrium solely on to Pitter.<sup>96</sup> There is, however, little real suspense in the 'outing' of Braose: he has given enough hints, both to Emma and to Gwyn, of his belief in the necessity of fighting in ways 'beyond legitimacy.'<sup>97</sup> Interest is rather in discovering how Williams chooses to situate those actions. The actions of Braose and Pitter could be interpreted as straightforward political calculation: why is it offered as a narrative of class doom? Are we directed to read Braose's actions as driven by loyalty or treachery? How, given that the opening sequence alerts us to the problem of reductive depoliticising, will Williams seek to distinguish Gwyn's political rejection of his father from anger based on the betrayal and desertion of his mother and himself?

It is never suggested that Braose's political activities are simply to be condemned. In his first interview with his natural son, he raises the question of 'divided loyalties' and modes of fighting that are legitimate or 'beyond legitimacy': although the nature of these loyalties and the meaning of legitimacy remain unexplored, the sense is of a man exhausted by interior debate.<sup>98</sup> The defence offered by Emma and her son is concerned not to defend his motives in passing information but, through rigorous attention to dates and names, to deny that he ever undertook any actions that could be considered as treachery. He is the innocent who has suffered for his past commitments in order to cover for the double dealings of Monk Pitter to whom the deceptions were simply an intellectual game, uninformed by any moral or political beliefs.<sup>99</sup>



It is Monk Pitter himself, in an interview with Gwyn, who simultaneously admits to the treachery and mounts the strongest direct defence of the position adopted by himself and by Braose during the war and the post-war period. He situates actions and decisions very carefully in their particular historical moment, suggests that concepts of loyalty and treason are themselves historically constructed, and seeks to convince Gwyn of the complexity of the 'endgame.' He identifies his friend's 'political counter-espionage under a false identity' in Spain as determining 'the rest of his life' and recounts the decision to continue to 'act deceptively', 'under direct instruction and control from the Russians.' This he decided, says Pitter, in the context of the 'extending and terrible war' against fascism, a decision made although he was well aware of 'political doubts' and 'the moral problem' that there were other ways of fighting fascism.<sup>100</sup> Later, he tells Gwyn, their passing of information was not done for political motives:

We did not see ourselves as communists. It had begun there, of course, but it was now in a wholly different dimension...This was a dynamic conflict within a highly specialised field. It was vital to prevent it, through imbalance, reaching that exceptionally dangerous stage in which, by its own logic, it passed beyond nations and classes and beyond all the loyalties that any of us had known. Except...a simple loyalty to the human species.<sup>101</sup>

During the discussion, the word 'traitor' is used repeatedly by Gwyn and, with important qualifications, accepted by Pitter. 'We said treason. We said traitors.' But the concept is not, he claims, a stable one:

Traitor, without doubt, is a definable quality. There are genuine acts of betrayal of

groups to which one belongs. But you have only to look at the shifts of alliance and hostility, both the international shifts and within them the complex alliances and hostilities of classes, to know how dynamic this definable quantity becomes.

There are traitors within a class to a nation, and within a nation to a class.<sup>102</sup>

Gwyn's response to these conflicting accounts is a 'dazed uncertainty.' He rehearses, to himself and to Jill, his wife, 'an interrupted uncertain, always scrupulously qualified narrative' which interleaves the alternative readings, concluding only that the narrative is 'obsessive in its continuing uncertainty.'<sup>103</sup> Yet he has, prior to hearing the case put by Pitter, unequivocally denounced Norman Braose a traitor: he will do so again in their second interview, which forms the final section of the novel proper. The terms in which he makes these denunciations are significant for a reading of the nature of treachery in *Loyalties*.

In both instances it is the Welsh dimensions, personal and social, that spark the denunciation. Both episodes are also marked by a strong awareness of class conflict: this ranges from, in the earlier episode, Gwyn's attack on the linguistic habits of the brashly confident Bill, to his declaration in the final interview that his father's whole class are 'betrayers.'<sup>104</sup> Following Bill's confident explanation and exculpation of his uncle's activities, Gwyn remains suspicious and uneasy. When Bill tries to negate Gwyn's resistance by explaining it as merely personal – 'Of course we all understand that you have other reasons for thinking badly of your father' - Gwyn's condemnation becomes overt:

*'Braose bradwr'* Gwyn said angrily.



'What does that mean?' Bill asked coolly, moving away.

'He doesn't mean it,' Mark said.

'Mean what?' Emma asked....

'*Bradwr* is Welsh for traitor.' Gwyn said.<sup>105</sup>

The use of Welsh in this exchange is bizarre. The implication throughout the novel is that Welsh is not the first language for Nesta or Bert Lewis and that Gwyn's education at home and at school has been in English. Gwyn's experience of Welsh would be likely to parallel that of his author:

We were not Welsh speaking...a minority of families [were] bi-lingual and a majority spoke only English. However, a certain number of Welsh expressions survived and also affected the speaking of English. Characteristically, these were everyday greetings and swearing.<sup>106</sup>

It is implausible that such 'everyday' expressions would include the word for 'traitor' – and, even more oddly, why would Mark Ryder, a man with no Welsh links, understand its meaning? The use of '*bradwr*' here serves to give exceptional force by defamiliarisation. At the same time it connects Braose's actions to Wales, and to the consequences that his actions have had in Gwyn's own community. Further, for those aware of the history of his family name, it insists on an essential link between that name and the act of betrayal. At this point, however, Gwyn makes the bald accusation but does not explicate his understanding of the concept: that must wait for the second interview with his father, which follows that with Pitter.

When Gwyn confronts Norman Braose at Westridge, his Gloucestershire estate, the

arguments are set in very different terms from those justifications offered by Pitter. While Pitter had situated their actions in their historical context and argued that for the instability of such concepts as 'treachery', Braose defends himself by reference to the integrity of the private life. In liberal mode, he accuses Gwyn of speaking in generalities that deny the integrity and complexity of the individual: 'The shout of the barbarian... announcing the triumph of public language, public record, public power, over each and every personal reality.'<sup>107</sup> His second defence is a dismissal of traditional political discourse when considered in the long-range ecological perspective of natural growth.<sup>108</sup> The narrative produced by the earlier interview with Pitter had left Gwyn in a state of uncertainty, convinced only of the necessity to recognise complexity and the need for 'qualifications.' There is no sign of any uncertainty in the interview with his father: he is full of rage and rejection. He rejects his father as a traitor to all the values for which other men, notably Bert Lewis and the people of the mining valleys, have suffered and are suffering.

The specific terms in which Gwyn represents that treachery are significant. The rejection is made in terms of class and of an alien power that has deformed a native growth. His, says Gwyn, has 'always been a class of betrayers.' Braose has acted in a way that was alien to his class, yet that class has a history of 'lining up with some alien power.'<sup>109</sup> In the interview the concept of the 'alien' is configured within a discourse of landscape, soil, growth and a time horizon conscious of ecological balance. Here Williams draws on discourses of current environmentalism and of the history of British Communism. Driving to Westridge Gwyn, child of the industrial valleys and long time Londoner,



distinguishes colours and classes of trees with the sharp awareness of a country dweller.

He:

looked at the passing trees: at the rich yellow and reds of the horse chestnuts, in leaves hanging ready to fall; at the light yellows of beech and field maple and sycamore; at the sharper, almost metallic yellow of a stand of larches; at the sudden surprising green of a line of ash that had not yet turned.<sup>110</sup>

Braose is found in his 'new wood'. He bought it, his daughter Alex tells Gwyn, 'to protect it. He spends most of his time there.'<sup>111</sup> He positions himself not as lord of the manor, possessing the land by right of inheritance and adherence to traditions, but as one whose stewardship will justify his life:

In that wood I learn more in an hour than in all the labelled, alienated, arguments of the world. And I put myself into relationship to it, understanding reason and civilisation in quite new ways. In a hundred years none of that other part of my life will matter, but the trees I have planted will be growing, the clearings I have made will be nourishing life.<sup>112</sup>

As Inglis points out, 'The traitor in *Loyalties* gives his loyalty in the end to the new ecology and to cherishing an experimental plantation not so unlike Williams's coppice at Craswell.'<sup>113</sup>

Gwyn, however, is unimpressed by the ecological time frame defence. Indeed he pre-empted it by his own use of metaphors of soil and growth. Attacking Braose's class in general and his own actions specifically he says:

[Your class has] always fought your internal battles by recruiting and using genuine popular interests or by lining up with some alien power. Or in your case,

both. All that is new is that you damaged something authentic. Something that had grown under the weight of you and your own soil....Your special betrayal was that you involved and damaged the only substance, the only hope, of our people.<sup>114</sup>

In an earlier discussion with his miner half-brother, Dic, Gwyn has argued that British socialists, in having at least the appearance of supporting an 'alien power', were handing a weapon to the enemy, designated as 'the whole social order': 'They've used everything, right back to the Cold War...They got this story around that there were communists everywhere, all working for Russia and doing this country down.'<sup>115</sup> His argument, that socialism can then be presented by its enemies as an external threat rather than a native formation, has been made by a number of writers on the left. In 1932 John Middleton Murry indeed used the same metaphor of native growth. Expressing the belief that 'although communism in some form was inevitable for England it would be the greatest folly to follow the footsteps of Russia', he appealed to the idea a communism that would be an 'indigenous national growth.'<sup>116</sup> The 'soil' metaphor is hinted at too in Orwell's labelling of communism as 'the patriotism of the deracinated.'<sup>117</sup> Doris Lessing, while not using the 'indigenous growth' image makes the point that the adherence to 'foreign' models has been a disaster for British socialism:

That's why socialism is, for our time, dead. Because young people say 'Right, all you Reds - look what you were supporting. China and the Soviet Union.' The interesting thing is to ask yourself this question: why were the Europeans bothered about the Soviet Union at all? It was nothing to do with us. China was nothing to do with us. Why were we not building, without reference to the Soviet Union, a good society in our own countries?<sup>118</sup>



Writing of the radical English novelists of the period following the French Revolution Williams had made a similar point. The conservative attacks made on these writers positioned and castigated them as followers of an alien Jacobin political model. Williams points out that their values 'were based on a native formation which, politically and philosophically, preceded 1789.'<sup>119</sup> What is specific about Gwyn's attack on Braose is his insistence that support for Russia was an alien and *class* intrusion into the 'native formation' of Welsh politics. It is interesting to see whether such a distinction can be justified historically.

The Communist sympathies of the so-called 'Red Rhondda' were never in dispute: the issue is the extent to which that Communism can be directly linked with support for the Soviet Union and whether it was sustained during the later part of the twentieth century. Mardy, in the Rhondda Fawr, was famed for being dubbed 'Little Moscow', but the epithet, coined by *The South Wales Daily News*, was presumably intended to provoke hostility rather than affection for the town's political programme precisely by associating it with alien powers.<sup>120</sup> Attitudes towards 'Moscow' changed in line with general shifts or with responses to specific situations. In the 1930s 'there was a feeling of solidarity and gratitude dating back to the Russian support for their cause in 1926.'<sup>121</sup> During the Second World War, when Churchill announced that 'the Russian danger is our danger' and Kingsley Martin commented that the Russian resistance had 'engendered an immense enthusiasm everywhere irrespective of party', the South Wales mining communities were among the thousands enthusiastically raising funds for the cause:

Nantymoel in South Wales was just one little mining village where a Medical Aid for Russia Committee was established which organised fund-raising activities like boxing displays. The anniversaries of the Anglo-Soviet alliance were now occasions to be

celebrated, in Onllwyn, South Wales, for example, with silver bands and male voice choirs.<sup>122</sup>

The same source notes that at this time Mrs Churchill 'founded a Help Russia Fund' but certainly the Communist sympathies of the Rhondda were sustained for longer than those of the English upper classes. In 1979, during the Thatcher years, Annie Powell, a councillor in the Rhondda, became the first ever Communist mayor in Great Britain.<sup>123</sup> During the 1984-85 strike, the 1926 gratitude for Soviet support was rekindled when the colliers of the Rhondda received a delegation from the Soviet Union of former miners bringing 'money and food parcels.'<sup>124</sup> Certainly Williams, through Gwyn, is here making an over simple distinction between the class and national responses to the Soviet Union in the period covered by the novel. Gwyn's point that the history of the Soviet Union damaged socialism elsewhere is a valid one: 'socialism and Russia were inter-related ideas and the discrediting of one damaged the other'<sup>125</sup> Less sustainable is the argument that the guilt for the damage can be laid firmly at the doors of the Cambridge traitors.

The distinction Gwyn makes between the alien and the local, between the choices available to landed classes and the working classes, is insisted upon by the structure of the last two sections of the novel. In one, 'Danycapel, October 1984', the families of the striking miners queue for food parcels paid for by sympathisers, in the other, 'Westridge, November 1984', Braose stands with his gun in his luxuriant piece of English countryside offering invitations to lunch. The juxtaposition of the two is as stark as the contrast between Nesta's two paintings of Gwyn's two fathers, which she shows him for the first time in the Danycapel section. The young Norman stands golden in 'a burst of sunlight and sky' while Bert's face is depicted as horribly damaged,



'still being broken and pulled apart.'<sup>126</sup> Danycapel is united in its desperate pride. Westridge is a hierarchical society. Alex, Gwyn's half-sister, is friendly to him but her tone when addressing the Spanish housekeeper is 'crisp': the housekeeper has introduced herself to Gwyn as 'Mrs Martinez' and, while Gwyn and the author repeat this usage, Alex calls her by her first name.<sup>127</sup> Lady Braose and her 'tough Tory lady' friend are at Chepstow race course.<sup>128</sup> For a reader aware of the location of the racecourse, the contrast is of the English rich at play in Wales, not so distant from the desperate activity at Danycapel.

The confrontation between Gwyn and Braose, then, is established primarily in terms of class. The son allies himself firmly with his adoptive father and the dispossessed. When his father taunts him that he is seeking to maintain an allegiance that, because of his education and his profession, is no longer available to him, he responds that his values are not 'just an inheritance' but a 'contemporary direction.'<sup>129</sup> Like Matthew Price, Gwyn has left his 'social father', but there is little sense that he suffers from the guilt of the deserter of class, family and nation. As discussed in Chapter Four, the narrative works to protect him from responsibility for his career choices. He inevitably finds it painful to negotiate the tensions of the circumstances of his birth and the occasionally fraught relations between his mother and adopted father and his aunt as representative of another world. But there is no evidence that he shares the analysis of Peter Owen that working-class sons who move into the professional classes have thereby enrolled with the enemy. His mother may berate him for not understanding fully the trials of the community that he has left but his connections with them remain well defined and strong.<sup>130</sup> There are frequent visits, family holidays together, his marriage to Jill, an unreconstructed class warrior. Of the Braoses and their class she says: 'They have always been our enemies, whatever

they professed. If not our enemies, then our actual or prospective controllers. And always they've lived on our blood,'<sup>131</sup>

Following Gwyn's interview with Monk Pitter and before his visit to the stricken Danycapel, he has been constantly revising and qualifying the narrative of his father's treachery.<sup>132</sup> The reader assumes that he has supplemented Pitter's explanation with his own knowledge of the complexities of the Cold War and, as, Pitter's account had encouraged, an assessment of the actions in their historical context. Yet the 'stand off' in this final interview is stark: the narrative for Gwyn appears to have attained total coherence and the dialogue that Williams constructs strips Braose of effective defences. His attempt to persuade Gwyn that only misplaced loyalty makes him 'cling' to outdated ideas of a world from which he is 'in practice removed' has some force. It is, however, undercut by the arrogance with which he appropriates 'knowledge and reason' to himself and his class and the contempt with which he dismisses the 'inadequacy' and 'common ignorance' of the people among whom Gwyn grew up.<sup>133</sup> Neither does Williams allow his appeal to the critical importance of his tree planting to preserving the long term future of the world to offer a strong defence. It is true that Gwyn's dismissal of this emphasis as merely a 'frame for your ego. For your indifferent self and for its interests' can be read as a refusal to engage with the ecological argument, but the reader is offered little reason to accept the integrity of Braose's position. The argument he puts forward, that this work helps him to understand 'reason and civilization in new ways', is couched predominantly in terms of his own self-understanding rather than the more general good.<sup>134</sup> There is nothing here of the wider political programme which engaged ecologists at this time – the more equitable distribution of resources as a fundamental requirement for global sustainability. Williams himself, as was



discussed in Chapter One, was engaged in this debate but he leaves Braose to put only a weakened version of the ecological argument, one which not only Gwyn but also the reader can readily dismiss.

We are left with Braose, representative and descendant of an oppressive class, who is not simply the enemy but who has in his own person usefully combined various acts of betrayal. On him the guilt of the centuries can readily be heaped. Gwyn's final words to Braose are a warning that 'there is still some public danger...It's still very probable that it will all come out and be published.'<sup>135</sup> But we read this as temporary human softening, not as any indication that Gwyn reconsiders his total opposition. He angrily refuses the invitation to lunch: 'Do you think I would enter your house?' Braose's final action is the slamming of his door. Gwyn is thereby left angry but guilt-free outside, with the traitor immured within the house.

The treachery that has haunted the novels and its protagonists has successfully been 'nailed' as a class, and perhaps too a national, moral failing. Yet this version of an ending is highly unsatisfactory. I have commented in Chapter Five on the necessity to read Williams's last novels within the context of the political crisis for the Left that marked the 1980s. In his lead up to a discussion of *Loyalties* Inglis offers an account of the miners' strike 'against a government of class warriors determined not to break just their spirits and their bank, but their existence as a social and productive force.' When they were forced back to work 'behind their union banners and their local brass bands, they went back to the certain loss of everything: jobs, neighbourhood, union, culture, everything.'<sup>136</sup> He writes too of the extent of Williams's investment of hope in the political practice of these communities: '[He] names and tries to

grasp the condition of the governance of England for what it is, venal, poisoned, hateful and obtuse, while always searching for a counter condition in which to live, in Wales, in a politics of opposition.<sup>137</sup> The absolute nature of the confrontation between Gwyn and Braose, coming as it does immediately after the account of the privation of the mining community, is strongly marked by that experience, an immediate one for Williams as well as his protagonist. Here, in the way that Williams has chosen to structure and situate Braose, we feel that he is riding roughshod over the complexities and ambiguities that his own text has produced.

In the 'frame sequence' that follows, however, as the researcher Jon Merritt, grandson of Braose, confronts the television director Allicon, a sense of shifting perspectives and problems of interpretation is restored. Jon resists the seductions of being employed on a large-scale, glamorous series on 'The English Radicals and Romantics during the French Revolution.' He wants to examine 'the shape and pressure' of the lives of men like his grandfather and Pitter, of 'people in real and uncertain situations.'<sup>138</sup> This project, while offering none of the sense of possibility that marks the endings of *Manod* and *The Volunteers*, functions to disrupt the smooth, coherent narrative of treachery and loyalty that Gwyn produced in his interview with his father. It suggests that Williams, despite the heavy weight of authorial will that he has expended to designate the true enemy, is not, finally, convinced by Gwyn's unequivocal identification of the traitor in the house. He continues to agree with Jon Merritt that there are 'questions to ask.'

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *The Welsh Slate Museum Handbook* (National Museum of Wales, 2002), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Huw Lewis, *The Campaign for a Museum of People's History for Wales* (Cardiff: Welsh Assembly



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pamphlet, 2005), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Manod*, 131.

<sup>4</sup> Williams was 'surprised' when he saw the jacket describe the novel as a political thriller. *Politics and Letters*, 297. His earliest public writing was as co-author of a 'detective play which yet uncovers a social villain.' *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> The structure of the television centre is called a 'labyrinth' and the researcher directed to 'take this pretty thread and see where it leads you.' *Loyalties*, 3 and 12.

<sup>6</sup> J. Beverley Smith, *The Sense of History in Medieval Wales* (Aberystwyth University College, 2001), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Norman Davies, *The Isles* (Macmillan, 1999), 283.

<sup>8</sup> *Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 10.4.2006. Anne Perkins, *A Very British Strike* (Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> *Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 31.7.2006. Patrick Hannon's *When Arthur Met Maggie* (Bridgend: Seren, 2006) identifies a number of other perceived traitors: Ramsay Macdonald (leading National Government in 1931 – 'never forgiven'), 96; Roy Jenkins (re-inventing himself in English image), 98. Aneurin Bevan escaped censure by never wearing the dinner jacket purchased for him by Jennie Lee: this 'might have seemed to him a treacherous act. Like putting on the uniform of the opposing army in the class war.' 119.

<sup>10</sup> Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: Thatcher's Secret war Against the Miners* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Verso, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Theo Tait, 'Hit the Circuit', *London Review of Books* 22:14 (20 July 2000).

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v22/no14/print/tai101/html>. Accessed 21.3. 2001

<sup>12</sup> *The Prisoner*, created by Patrick McGoochan and George Markstein, ITV series 1967-1968. *Edge of Darkness*, directed Martin Campbell, script Troy Kennedy Martin, BBC serial 1985. *Blade Runner*, directed Ridley Scott, film 1982.

<sup>13</sup> *Manod*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>16</sup> *The Volunteers*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. There is an interesting post 9/11 parallel: 'A flight instruction video, Arabic aviation manuals and a fuel consumption calendar were found in abandoned cars at Boston airport, the departure point of the two flights which crashed into the World Trade Centre.' *Guardian* 13 September 2001.

<sup>20</sup> W. H. Auden, 'Detective Story' in Edward Mendelson (ed.), *Collected Poems* (Faber, 1994), 151-152.

<sup>21</sup> Simon Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England* (Macmillan, 1998). 118.

<sup>22</sup> *The Volunteers*, 206.

<sup>23</sup> *Manod*, 207.

<sup>24</sup> Jane Miller argues that the end of *Manod* sees Matthew and Peter 'routed' and sees Peter's position as 'disgusted withdrawal.' This ignores Peter's combative final appearance and the insistence of Matthew and Susan that it is essential to 'go on.' *Seductions* (Virago, 1990), 61.

<sup>25</sup> *The Volunteers*, 207.

<sup>26</sup> Sara Paretsky, Introduction to Dashiell Hammett *The Maltese Falcon* (Folio Society, 2000), 8.

<sup>27</sup> *The Volunteers*, 179.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>29</sup> W. H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', in *The Dyer's Hand* (Faber, 1963), 146-158.

<sup>30</sup> *The Volunteers*, 191.

<sup>31</sup> *Manod*, 184.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Forms* (Fontana, 1974), 52.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>36</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Zone, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> *The Volunteers*, 207.

<sup>38</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 170.

<sup>39</sup> *Orwell*, 78.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Doris Lessing, *Salon Interview*.

<http://www.salon.com/books/feature/1997/11/lessing.html> Accessed 30.10.2004

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<sup>42</sup> *Loyalties*, 175, 210, 237.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 301, 324.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 12, 378.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> J. Beverley Smith, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'Prophecy, Poetry and Politics in Medieval and Tudor Wales', in H. Herder and H.R. Lyons (eds.), *British Government and Administration* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), 86.

<sup>55</sup> Prys Morgan, 'Keeping the Legends Alive', in Tony Curtis (ed.) *Wales: the Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), 21.

<sup>56</sup> Harri Webb, 'At the Ford of Irfon', in Meic Stephens (ed.), *A Militant Muse* (Bridgend: Seren, 1998), 45

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>58</sup> Prys Morgan, 'From Long Knives to Blue Books', in R.R. Davies *et. al.* (eds.), *Welsh Society and Nationhood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 1984), 199.

<sup>59</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 28.

<sup>60</sup> *Border Country*, 163.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 199,

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>67</sup> Gwyn Jones, *Medieval Abergavenny*. (No publication details given), 3.

<sup>68</sup> O. Morien Morgan *The Battles of Wales* (Liverpool: Salesbury Hughes, 1920), 277.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Davies, 'The Abergavenny Massacre' in *The Official Abergavenny Tourist Guide* (Abergavenny: Local History Society, 1987), 33.

<sup>70</sup> J. Williams ap Ithel (ed.), *Annalles Cambriae* (1860). Copies of this and the following annal courtesy of J. Beverley Smith.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Jones (ed.), *Brut y Tywsogyon Peniarth Ms 20* (Cardiff, 1952), Ms 20.

<sup>72</sup> J. Beverley Smith. Personal letter to Elizabeth Allen, 23.7.2002.

<sup>73</sup> *Eggs*, 213.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>76</sup> *Loyalties*, 21. Nesta, while not a common Welsh name, is not a remarkable one: mediaeval Welsh history has several celebrated examples. Pinkney, whose account of Williams's fiction identifies a 'deep spatial fantasy of nests' reads the choice of name as part of that fantasy. *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), 111. *Manod* has a non-speaking secretarial role for a Nesta, 31-32.

<sup>77</sup> *Loyalties*, 27.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>80</sup> Barbara Erskine, *Lady of Hay* (Michael Joseph, 1986).

<sup>81</sup> K.S.B. Rohan-Keats, *Domesday Descendants 1066-1166* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002), 346.

<sup>82</sup> A number of US based genealogical websites exist for William's wife, Maud/Matilda. Their geography is dubious, locating the Sussex Castle of Bramber in Breconshire and conflating Corfe with Windsor, but all agree that the male Braose line became extinct. There is contemporary annalistic evidence of the marriage of the eldest Braose daughter: 'That year [1210] on the fest day of St. Thomas the Martyr Maud de Braose, mother of the sons of Gruffydd ap Rhys, died at Llanbadarn Fawr and was buried with her husband



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at Strata Florida.' From the *Brut y Tywogyon*

<http://freespace.virgin.net/doug.thompson/BraoseWeb/Maud>. Accessed 14.7.2004.

<sup>83</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, *The Welsh in their History* (Croom Helm, 1982), 18.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. William Cecil was born in Stamford and educated at Eton and Cambridge. Williams nevertheless gives him 'that hooded eyed Welsh suspicion that I normally associate with Aberystwyth but which came appropriately to a man from the Welsh-speaking district of Herefordshire confronted by one from English speaking Radnorshire.'

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Alan O'Connor, 'A Raymond Williams Bibliography', in *Critical Perspectives*, 214.

<sup>87</sup> *Loyalties*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>92</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 287.

<sup>93</sup> *Loyalties*, 6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 300-305.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-269.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 315-316.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 318-319.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 305 and 359.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 305. The only other use of Welsh is the bi-lingual motto on the banner of the miners' lodge, carried at the vesting of the pit in 1947.120.

<sup>106</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 25.

<sup>107</sup> *Loyalties*, 364.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>113</sup> Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (Routledge, 1995), 291.

<sup>114</sup> *Loyalties*, 359.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>116</sup> John Middleton Murry, *The Necessity of Communism*, cited in Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (Gollancz, 1959), 67.

<sup>117</sup> George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters: Volume 1* (Harcourt Brace, 1968), 515.

<sup>118</sup> Doris Lessing, *Salon Interview*, *op.cit.*

<sup>119</sup> 'The Fiction of Reform', in *Writing in Society*, 143.

<sup>120</sup> 'Mardy Colliery' <http://www.Rhondda-cynon-taff.gov.uk/libraries.maerdy>. Accessed 20.12.2004.

<sup>121</sup> William Jones, *The Russia Complex: the British Labour Party and the Soviet Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 24.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>123</sup> Annie Powell. <http://www.genesis.ac.archive>. Accessed 21.12.2004

<sup>124</sup> Communist Party of Great Britain <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Communist> Accessed 20.12.2004.

<sup>125</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, 216.

<sup>126</sup> *Loyalties*, 344-346.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, 365.  
<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.  
<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.  
<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.  
<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.  
<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.  
<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.  
<sup>136</sup> Inglis, *op. cit.*, 289.  
<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 290-291.  
<sup>138</sup> *Loyalties*, 374.



## Chapter Seven

### Purity and Danger

Happiness is not a word that comes readily to mind in connection with Williams. What indeed could be the source of happiness in his texts? Earlier chapters have identified the unease, guilt and anger that pervade his novels, and, in the later period, the use of structures which imply the loss of possibility and of agency. In his fictional world people come together not to take joy in each other's company but to 'think through their positions, sometimes their strong differences.'<sup>1</sup> The possibility of, and hope for, a measure of social regeneration is rendered in muted terms and its achievement understood as demanding rigour and endurance. Those who seek short term pleasures, usually understood as sexual, are superficial beings incapable of achieving even their limited goal of individualistic happiness.

J. P. Ward writes of *Border Country* that the sexual and 'the potentially disruptive' are routinely 'erased or withheld', and this comment may be applied to Williams's entire fictional oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> Yet the very strength of the apparatus invoked to disallow representation of the sexual and the disruptive suggests their potential power. Counter-intuitive as it may seem, I want to argue that *Second Generation*, a novel confrontational and dour even by Williams's standards, is evidence of a dream of the body that offers the possibility of social and sexual salvation. The desire to articulate this dream, and the blockage of that articulation, offers an explanation for the occasional eruptions of violence and distress that mark the novels' surfaces. These are then understood less as

private psychodrama but rather in terms of liberation at once political and libidinal.

*Second Generation's* expression of yearning for a society in which the repressive bonds of late capitalism could be released can usefully be read in the context of 'the learning of desire'<sup>3</sup> that Williams understands as characteristic of the sixties and its aftermath and has interesting parallels with the ideas of Herbert Marcuse, cultural guru of that decade.

There are particular affinities with Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, published in 1964.

Williams and Marcuse both understand capitalism, or what Marcuse calls 'the administered world', as disallowing any realisation of happiness.<sup>4</sup> Culture, says Marcuse, is 'postponed, methodically controlled satisfaction which presupposes unhappiness.'<sup>5</sup>

Williams's only recorded response to Marcuse occurs later than *Second Generation*, in a 1969 review of *Negations*, where he writes of 'the marvellous moment of intellectual liberation' which occurred as he recognised the congruence of their concepts of culture.<sup>6</sup>

Yet as well as this congruence, one may note in Marcuse's 1937 essay 'The Affirmative Character of Culture', published in *Negations*, the powerful emphasis on 'happiness' and the recognition of the fight which would be necessary to achieve it, a struggle which informs the seemingly more prosaic industrial and familial disputes of *Second*

*Generation*. Marcuse's essay is suffused with references to 'happiness' and 'beauty':

Stendhal's assertion that beauty is 'une promesse de bonheur' is cited. 'Materialist philosophy', Marcuse writes, 'takes seriously the concern for happiness and fights for its realization in history.'<sup>7</sup> In *Border Country*, as Ward suggests, the text demonstrates an

unequal struggle between the potentially 'disruptive' and the status quo, with the former, whether manifested as anger or joy, swiftly isolated and damped down. In that novel, the



relation of displaced anger to sexual repression is clear. But it is *Second Generation* which engages more directly with the longing for 'happiness' and represents most strongly the power of the forces of repression. The text performs the oppositional function of articulating and representing the disruptive as well as the repressive role of disempowering by dispersal and containment. The challenge of libidinal release is made, but it is a challenge muffled by narrative structures and by a construction of class and gender which operates to undermine the more subversive analyses of central women characters. It is, however, a novel that is extremely significant for a reading of Williams's representation of gender and sexuality.

The standard reading of Williams's representation of gender focuses on the inadequacy of his response to its political implications. While the strength of the accusation must be acknowledged, it is now possible to re-situate the response within a structure of desire and repression. Women in his fiction are positioned as colluding with the repressive apparatus of the state. His writings demonstrate an inversion of Julia Kristeva's model, wherein the symbolic order is understood essentially as masculine and the semiotic as the feminine principle.<sup>8</sup> For Williams, the woman embodies the rule-governed symbolic code. The social aspirations of working-class women, and the false allure of the sexuality of women of a higher class, are constructed as subverting the possibility of both political and libidinal liberation: class remains a crucial category in the discussion of gender. Women, willingly or not, agree to perform ordained social roles while men inhabit the margins and transitional states which are regions at once of release and of psychic danger.<sup>9</sup> The term 'borders', so frequently invoked in discussions of Williams's life and

work, and usually understood in terms of nation and class, thus takes on new meaning.

This positioning of women has profound implications for their representation in the fiction. It generates hostility to working-class women guilty of social aspirations, whether, like Ellen Price in *Border Country*, expressed through the purchase of consumer goods, or like Kate Owen in *Second Generation* by an affair with an academic which gives her 'a new ease and confidence.'<sup>10</sup> As Carol Watts says: 'Kate's disgrace is really her disruption of, and lack of responsibility to, the fully developing narrative of her class.'<sup>11</sup> Middle-class women, whose sexuality is seen as used for purposes of social control, are also objects of suspicion. Rose Swinburne in *Second Generation* is a major culprit in this category, as is Juliet Dance in *Manod* and Sarah Evans in *The Volunteers*, each of whom is seen to exercise her sexual charms to beguile men and distract them from the radical or working-class narrative. The only women to escape censure are those, like Susan Price in *Border Country* and *Manod* and Jill Lewis in *Loyalties*, who are effectively de-sexualised and who do not register as a category whose concerns are differentiated from those of their men. This strongly controlling super-narrative, with its foundation in a belief in women's role as essentially repressive, helps to explain why the representation of women in Williams's fiction demonstrates a slackening of the insistence he demonstrates elsewhere on situating the 'personal' in rigorously historical terms. In examining the limitations of his writings on gender, and the consequences of this for the fiction, it is useful to analyse, in more detail than has been the case in earlier commentaries, the relation between this and his socio-political positioning.



What is the basis of the case that Williams, so alert to the claims of other oppositional categories, ignores or marginalises the claims of women? His perceived weakness in this area is regularly challenged by interviewers and noted, sometimes more in sorrow than in anger, by feminist critics who are sympathetic to his political project and admire his writings.<sup>12</sup> The central challenge made is to Williams's failure to register women as a differentiated population, and, more specifically, that such differentiation as he allows acknowledges solely their role in the reproductive process rather than also as having economic significance as paid workers. 'Family' remains the controlling concept, with women subsumed into that category. Mulhern declares that 'A socialism that does not address the specific oppressions of women workers...is in its own terms incompetent.'<sup>13</sup> In a 1984 interview, Philip Cooke comments on the extent to which the insistence on the class bond as primary leads to the 'analytic suppression' of other kinds of bonding mechanism: the experience of 'the women's movement' is referred to specifically.<sup>14</sup> Women, say the *Politics and Letters* interviewers, represent the 'great silent area' in the cultural survey that Williams undertakes in *The Long Revolution*. Williams, ready to acknowledge that in this text at this time he failed to give adequate attention to women's social role, comments, interestingly, 'I also wish that I understood what had prevented me from doing it'.<sup>15</sup> The 'silence', though, is not confined to *The Long Revolution* and other early writings: the simple disappearance of women into an undifferentiated class or community is an erasure that permeates his non-fictional writings, and one which can be identified at a number of points in his major critical works.

It is useful to begin with some account of the nature of the suppression in the non-fiction

as it is suggestive for the limits of the fictional representation. Jane Miller in *Seductions* adopts the phrase 'great silent area' as the title for her chapter on Williams.<sup>16</sup> Confronting this challenge more forcefully and extensively than do the *Politics and Letters* interviewers, Miller, grappling painfully with the difficulties it poses for a feminist who admires Williams, examines *Culture and Society* and *The Country and the City* as sites where women's historical role in the economy is effectively silenced. Behind the re-establishment to history 'of whole generations of people [to] a land which had been stolen from them', Miller perceives Williams's own sleight of hand whereby women 'are only vestigially present...what is left out, reduced to an insensible stump in this reseen landscape, is the mental life of the women who were destined to see themselves only within this shadowy, dependent relation to men and to marriage.'<sup>17</sup> Miller comments, as his male interlocutors do not, that the problem is not simply that Williams offers an insufficient analysis of women and families, but that there is:

A difficulty about invoking women solely in relation to family life....as if half the population were in some sense equivalent to the family and to the bringing up of children....Men are identified with their families too, after all. Nor can there ever have been a time in Britain's history when a large percentage of women were not also part of the workforce.<sup>18</sup>

The deformation of an analysis that denies the significance of women's role in the wider economic sphere is emphasised by Bea Campbell's response to *The Road to Wigan Pier*, quoted in an essay in the Williams 'memorial' volume, *Critical Perspectives*. Campbell writes:

Orwell makes miners the core of his chronicle, they are the essential man and the



essential worker, but the equation between work and masculinity depends on an exclusion – women. The suppression of sexuality which is material both to his affinity for and his analysis of coal mining is also a suppression of history.<sup>19</sup>

This limiting emphasis, and the value system that underpins it, will be evident in any examination of the role of women in Williams's fiction, where working-class women who dare to differentiate their concerns from those of their families become the enemy in the class war.

There is one area of Williams's critical writing where, evidently, women are named and celebrated: in his writings on the English novel. Miller comments that Williams 'wrote at length and well about women writers like Jane Austen and George Eliot.'<sup>20</sup> Williams himself, in a late interview with Eagleton, cites his account of the Brontës as a partial defence against the charge that he ignores the specific oppressions of women. 'I describe [them] as representing interests and values marginalised by the male hegemony.'<sup>21</sup> His account of the Brontës insists on gender as an important element in 'a particular and general repression.'<sup>22</sup> The more general argument that Williams makes about the Brontës, however, is a fascinating example of how specifically female concerns are again reabsorbed into a wider framework. He celebrates the 'commitment to what we must directly call passion' in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, where 'the intensity of the feeling is decisive.'<sup>23</sup> Commenting on the 'intense affirmation of love and desire and an intense often desperate apprehension of isolation and loss' in the greatest of the Romantic poems, Williams declares the achievement of Charlotte and Emily Brontë to be that 'in different ways they remade the novel so that this kind of passion could be directly

communicated.' This affirmation was made against a new 'rigidity', a 'tightening world in which men learned not to cry in public'. It is an affirmation made by group of women novelists - here extended to include Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. The values that they affirm, however, are not specifically those of a 'woman's world': it is 'On the contrary: in certain vital ways simply a human world.'<sup>24</sup> It is this point which he takes up and reinforces in the Eagleton interview: the Brontë sisters should be understood as 'representing human interests of a more general kind which showed up the limits of the extraordinarily disabling notion of masculinity.'<sup>25</sup> The virtues of the Brontës' 'intensity', then, are not, and should not be marked as, a women's concern.

While in *Politics and Letters* Williams declared himself interested in understanding what 'prevented' him from offering an appropriate analysis of women's social role, even in the inadequate terms of family, reproduction and nurturing, in none of his published writings does he seek to explore the particular cultural configuration which might explain this blockage. At least a partial explanation is, surely, offered by any examination of his historical situation, in terms of class politics and practice, his own class move and generation and Welsh national cultural imagery. This failure to subject his own understanding of gender to any historical positioning, to examine his own configuration in terms of dominant discourses of class or nation, appears as a second 'great silent area.'

Miller's account of Williams's silence on women focuses on class and movement between classes. Her analysis situates his response to gender in terms of the narratives available to a man of his generation, specifically for a son moving away from a work culture in which



men engaged in physical labour. This clearly resonates with the Father-Son relation which dominates the fiction. Miller understands Williams as engaging in a 'Romance' that is 'always with his father, and with a male world like his father's.'<sup>26</sup> This, she claims, is a 'male romance that was available to men of Williams's generation and background (both his backgrounds really)' and excluded women. 'It was a romance with and about men, which was at the same time profoundly homosexual and profoundly homophobic; always bound up with physical labour, with men's bodies and the solidarity amongst those of them who worked together.'<sup>27</sup> For men who abandoned the dignity of physical labour for pen or paintbrush, it was a romance tense with anxiety and desire to prove one's value: Miller cites the novels of David Storey and Seamus Heaney's poem 'Digging.' *Border Country*, I would argue, offers a significant example of what happens to women in this romance. The account of Will's early childhood excludes any material centred on the house and the bond within it of mother and child. Until Will is four years old, the novel focuses on his father extending his 'digging' activities: helping a local farmer in return for land for planting, developing his own garden. His work and the home are 'only a part' of his life. But then the growing boy 'increasingly draw[s] his interest. Gradually, in the winter evenings he moved back, through Will, into the home.'<sup>28</sup> The home only becomes a centre of narrative interest when dignified by the Father/Son dyad.

Of his mother's role in local politics, Williams comments that she was in 'the classic situation of a Labour Party woman: she makes the tea, addresses the envelopes, she takes them round - she does not have many political activities in her own right.'<sup>29</sup> This political disempowerment took place in a country where, as Deirdre Beddoe comments, 'Welsh

women are culturally invisible' behind the powerful massed ranks of miners, rugby players and male voice choirs. Beddoe notes the 'extremely narrow base' on which this 'picture of Welshness' is constructed 'with reference to only one sex, to only one class and to only one sector of the Welsh economic base: the industrial sector.'<sup>30</sup> There is, she acknowledges, a limited range of images available for the understanding of the other sex, and of these the dominant, and certainly, I would argue, the important one for Williams, is the Welsh Mam. It is the Welsh Mam who, as the men, husbands, sons and lodgers, come home from the pits on Fridays, sits in the doorway to receive their wages in her capacious lap: an image engraved into Welsh consciousness by Richard Llewellyn's enormously popular 1939 novel *How Green was My Valley*.<sup>31</sup> But this figure, economically absolutely dependent on her husband in a society of gendered labour divisions, needs to be located historically: Gwyn A. Williams comments that: 'Two archetypal and quasi-mythical figures loom through the mist of our memory of Wales; the Welsh miner and the Welsh Mam. Both were invented by the nineteenth century.'<sup>32</sup> The Welsh Mam, in the person of Nesta, is very much present in *Loyalties*: in the 1984-5 miners' strike she is not out on the picket lines but organising the distribution of food parcels and making sandwiches for the men who perform that duty.<sup>33</sup>

Williams, usually so alert to the invention of tradition and the determining influence of historical circumstances on the 'personal crises' of actual and fictional people, relaxes this pressure in his analysis of gender and family. Watts notes how much 'stronger' than that of Williams is the analysis offered by Juliet Mitchell, in her 1966 *Women: the Longest Revolution*, which examines the family's 'historically changing role as an



institution in relation to the state, and as a site of process in the dynamics of the construction of social identity'.<sup>34</sup> In an interview in 1984 Williams comments that 'the old socialism excluded the reality of women and families' and remarks on 'the curious attitude towards the family on the part of some socialists'. There is no sense here of 'the family' as an evolving set of relationships between men, women and their children, but rather of an essential stable concept.<sup>35</sup> The consciousness of the pressure of the social and general on the individual life is also curiously absent in the treatment of many of his fictional women.

In *Manod Juliet Dance*, starving herself in her grand house, is clearly a sick woman, yet this is offered as an individual pathology rather than as a symptom which needs to be related to its cultural context for the constitution of its meaning.<sup>36</sup> *Second Generation*, by contrast, is the novel in which gender is most carefully historically situated. The relentless commodification of sexuality is identified in the opening scene when Peter, walking in the city streets at night, observes a 'bedroom event': a sale of bedroom furniture.<sup>37</sup> The situation of Beth, with her painted face and clothes that hobble natural movement, is explicitly related to the moment in late capitalism where, as Marcuse notes, 'without ceasing to be an instrument of labour, the body is allowed to exhibit its sexual features in the everyday work world...The sexy office and sales girls, the handsome, virile junior executive...are highly marketable commodities.'<sup>38</sup> Peter, waiting to meet Beth in her lunch break from the bank where she works, draws the same conclusion from his observation of female fashion:

The elaborate hair, the brightly painted eyes, the short flaring skirts, the patterned

emphasis of the tightly enclosed breasts and legs...The whole action of sex seemed formalized, now, in this bright public manner...These were the girls that men had created, to act a single role in public. It was all very pure and abstract in its single emphasis: the whole act of sex reduced to looking and being looked at.<sup>39</sup>

Such an act of creation, of course, makes women cultural dupes and Beth, catching her smart dress on the edge of a car and with her walk 'on the very high heels...like a long stumbling fall', quite literally a 'fashion victim.'<sup>40</sup> This is eerily prescient of the image that was to appear on the cover of Rosalind Coward's 1985 *Female Desire*, a pair of stiletto heels on a plate, trussed like a chicken.<sup>41</sup> With *Second Generation's* analysis one can concur with Watt's argument that 'Williams's work intersects with key feminist concerns' which include 'theories of representation and object relations...in terms of...a theory of reification.'<sup>42</sup>

The extent to which Williams situates Beth within an analysis of the commodification of the sexuality of her gender, however, is unusual in his fiction. The 'blue eyelids, white cheeks' and caked lips which Peter excoriates as unnatural in Beth are 'excused' by the knowledge that she is conforming to a stereotype determined elsewhere. When other young women, like Juliet Dance, or Sarah Evans in *The Volunteers*, enhance their allure Williams presents them as individually and culpably unnatural. Sarah Evans is scarcely human: she 'will last for twenty years, quite as long as her [opulent] furniture...flesh can do this much if it's really cosseted.'<sup>43</sup> Juliet is the apotheosis of the unnatural: 'a rare prototype, which human features only occasionally achieve, of the beauty of the figurine or doll.'<sup>44</sup> This is femininity as performance and Juliet colludes in this ghastly 'dance'. In



one episode, her husband, whose proposed development of the area for commercial advantage needs the support of two local farmers, Gethin Jenkins and Ivor Vaughan, encourages their co-operation by assiduous re-filling of Ivor's whisky glass. Juliet's role in this plot involves a literal 'handling' of Ivor in a scene of bizarre, quasi-sexual suggestiveness. She fascinates, casts a spell: 'Very slowly, as if in a timed rehearsal, Juliet walked down the steps leading Ivor beside her.'<sup>45</sup> These women are shown not as representative of a specific historical construction of femininity which *requires* them to play pre-allocated roles, but as unnatural beings who beguile men with their performance of female sexuality. Their malign powers, however, are gained not, as is the convention for witches and enchanters, by making a pact with the anarchic powers of darkness but rather with the destructive 'light' of social convention.

Pinkney sees the willed austerity of Williams's novels, with their abolition of metaphor, as marginalising desire, sexuality and fantasy. The Utopian imagination thereafter becomes its 'turbulent Gothic subtext.'<sup>46</sup> While agreeing with Pinkney's model of a 'turbulent sub-text', I would radically reconfigure his sense of the structural role played by the female principle. His implication is of female power residing in the asocial repressed. Gwen Vaughan in *Manod* is, he argues, a 'witch' appearing out of the smoke and giving the evil eye to a doomed litter of kittens.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, there is a case to be made that the fiction offers us a whole coven of witches. The texts are haunted by women with cheeks which, bulging, heavy or merely plump, suggest some Grimm forest of witches grown fat on meals of their victims: children or men? Jill Lewis's 'plump red cheeks' are remarked by her affectionate husband while Kate Owen, whose 'tiny body'

and 'girlish demeanour' are emphasised, nevertheless possesses 'pale heavy cheeks.'<sup>48</sup> But head of the coven is Pippa in *Loyalties*, described thus: 'What [Norman] noticed was the high bulging of her cheeks. It was as if curved slices of apple had been applied over them, and this had compressed the eyes which, brown, small and hard, seemed far back...There were a few brown, small, hairs on the edges of the upper lip.'<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless it is not as witches that women function in Williams's fiction. Their threat is precisely in their denial of the darkness. Robert Lane declares that he left his wife because the 'light was so fixed and certain.'<sup>50</sup> Rather than drawing back into the semiotic they threaten as creatures of the hyper-symbolic order, drawn, whether by biology or socialisation, to improved social status through performance on the social stage. Their threat, socially and sexually, is to the 'natural' man. Both the condemnation of female performance and a certain kind of sexual disgust to be found in Williams's fiction is very much in the D.H. Lawrence tradition.

At a number of points in his fiction, Williams's account of the different relation of men and women to the 'natural' is extremely close to such Lawrentian pronouncements as: 'The colliers had an instinct of beauty. The colliers' wives had not. The colliers were deeply alive, instinctively'<sup>51</sup> Lawrence firmly establishes the home and women as 'nagging material necessities...The woman almost invariably nagged about material things. She was taught to do it; she was encouraged to do it.' From this insistent nagging the collier escapes to the countryside and the garden where he looks at flowers not, as women do, possessively, but with an 'odd, remote sort of contemplation which shows a real awareness of beauty.'<sup>52</sup> Miller points out the extent to which Williams, in *The*



*Country and the City*, appears to endorse what she refers to as Lawrence's 'nonsensical separation' of male physical and female mental activity.<sup>53</sup> Williams writes: 'This feeling is already entangled with class: the lives of the vicar and the curate, the squire's lady, which the woman sees as superior.'<sup>54</sup> Miller glosses this as a belief that 'A separated and unrooted mentalism, out of touch with the authentic sources of life, becomes a feminine principle and glides into the experiencing of class only as the most superficial snobbery.'<sup>55</sup> The sense of female concern with presentation then becomes both an opposition to the natural and a class betrayal.

This concern with presentation is demonstrated in *Border Country* and is the subject of recurrent discussion in *Second Generation*. When Eira plays a piano solo in the local Eisteddfod, Will berates her habit of 'holding your hands and pulling at them' before she begins to play. He rejects her argument that this is necessary to keep the fingers flexible; it is, he says, 'just for the adjudicator to see.'<sup>56</sup> At the tea party following this exchange, he notes that she is 'very conscious of her manners at table' and 'how in this the women divided from the men. His father and grandfather might have been eating, self-absorbed, in the fields. But the women, somehow, seemed to be eating for each other, showing each other what they were doing.'<sup>57</sup> In *Second Generation* Rose is perceived as performing a style: 'She still looked in many ways adolescent, though this was largely deliberate, a conscious adoption of a quite common style.'<sup>58</sup> There is a certain ambiguity as to whether women are acting or whether it is their very selves which are inauthentic.

Against the unnatural woman, whether victim or conspirator, is set the natural man. In his

account of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Williams makes an explicit link between sensitivity to the natural world and 'good' sexual relations. Mellors, whom he aligns with Tolstoy's Levin, 'is strong and alive but he also has a deep tenderness, and... an intimate and deeply respecting connection with the world of natural growth.'<sup>59</sup> Harry Price is cast in the Levin mode, his masculinity and reticence, privileged over the feminised fluency of Morgan Rosser, linking him to silence and darkness of the mountains. The dark powers are not sexualised in the text but are represented as a male prerogative, linking men to their mountains and the source of power. For a man like Mellors the honest expression of sexual feelings represents the natural. Lawrence's beliefs about sexuality are echoed very distinctly in Williams's fiction. Despite the blatant difference between Lawrence's insistence on speaking the forbidden in sexual matters, and Williams's apparent Puritanism and textual reticence, they share a fierce dislike of a contemporary sexuality that they perceive as cold, willed and essentially destructive. Lawrence wrote:

If there is one thing I don't like it is cheap and promiscuous sex. If there is one thing I insist on it is that sex is a delicate, vulnerable, vital thing that you mustn't fool with. ..I deplore heartless sex. Sex must be a real flow...of sympathy, generous and warm, and not a trick thing, or a moment's excitation.<sup>60</sup>

Williams objects to 'the ideological reduction of sex to consumption which is now so common.'<sup>61</sup> Like Lawrence, he deplores sex that lacks 'the real flow' and is merely a 'trick thing.' It is women whose sexuality is constructed as a willed and passionless performance who block that 'flow.'

Of Williams's novels it is *Second Generation* which directly engages with the sexual and



social identity of women and with the specific moral issues that they are called upon to negotiate. Eagleton argues that the novel offers 'as searching a study of the relations between work, politics, sexuality and the family as one could envisage.'<sup>62</sup> 'Searching' is an accurate term: the characters comment, continuously and judgementally, on each other's values and behaviour, as if living in some moral boot camp. The focus of much of their debate is centrally and explicitly concerned with women's sexual attitudes and practices, and the consequences of these for contemporary society. It is this compulsive scrutiny of sexuality, however, which effectively regulates its power: the novel demonstrates a classic Foucauldian model whereby desire is controlled by its systematic analysis.<sup>63</sup>

*Second Generation* is saturated with the discourse of sexuality. Sexuality is continuously constructed in dialogue: the place and timing of the possible consummation of Peter and Beth's love is discussed not only by the young couple but by her parents and his parents.<sup>64</sup> When the consummation finally occurs, Beth returns home to tell her mother of it.<sup>65</sup> The possibility and the actuality of Kate's affair with Arthur Dean is offered as a proper subject for discussion not only by the lovers, and later by Kate and her husband, but between every possible permutation of her family – her brother and sister-in-law, her son and his girlfriend, her son and his uncle.<sup>66</sup> Neither is the topic contained by the extended family. The relationship is discussed by her son's academic supervisor and his wife and consequently argued over by the supervisor with his colleague, Kate's lover.<sup>67</sup> Myra's sexuality too is interrogated. Kate demands information on Myra's sexual feelings at the time of her pre-marital 'lapse' with Jack, Beth's father,<sup>68</sup> and Myra's husband discusses

with their nephew her revulsion at her sexual passions.<sup>69</sup> The weakening of the power of sexuality through public discourse is compounded by a textual reticence that frequently frustrates. The confusions of the characters are performed textually and no controlling narrative voice elucidates. Denunciations and confessions are clear in outline but obscure in detail. When Robert Lane makes a confession to Peter Owen, its substance is clear: his mother was dying, he was frightened, he had an affair, his wife took him back.<sup>70</sup> But what exactly are we to understand of the world of 'darkness' he entered, 'where others are present but there are no persons?' Is this a world of sexual depravity in which the integrity of others is not acknowledged? The more sexuality is articulated, the more dense the fog that obscures it. The face of the god of love cannot be looked upon directly.

The novel is structured around the sexual and political disillusion and frustrations of Kate and Peter Owen, mother and son. While the motives of Kate, and the relation between the political and sexual frustrations that lead her to embark on an adulterous relationship, are clear, the connections between the various areas of Peter's unhappiness are less easily grasped. While the separate sources of his misery - his political unease, his sense of betraying his class through his pursuit of academic success, his sexual frustrations with Beth, who refuses to have sexual relations without the promise of an imminent marriage, his suspicion that Rose, a young married woman who does sleep with him, lacks a proper sense of serious commitment – are reasonably clear, the relation between the sexual, emotional and political elements is not. He is himself all too aware of this: 'Peter could not explain to himself his increasing sense of wrongness at the heart. The things he could name as wrong seemed quite inadequate, for so deep and frightening a feeling.'<sup>71</sup> It is in



the nature of this relation between political and sexual 'block', I shall argue, that the heart of Williams's beliefs around gender and its social and political meaning, which are most centrally addressed in this novel, should be sought. The more explicit analysis of women's role that is offered, although extensive and intensive, remains severely limited in political terms.

Although Kate's role as wife, as political helpmeet and as political activist is central, and her intelligence acknowledged, the questions raised by the underemployment of that intelligence are relatively unexplored. Rose has the additional advantage of an Oxford degree, but, like Emma Bovary, both women expend their underused energies in afternoon adultery. Although their underemployment is not unrepresentative of women at the period in which *Second Generation* was written, the novel does not question it or seek to relate it to the frustrations articulated. *Second Generation* was published in 1964, one year after Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*.<sup>72</sup> Married young women graduates were not all, like Rose, bicycling around town seeking distraction through seducing their ex-boyfriends. Many assumed that it was appropriate for them to seek paid employment. Some, indeed, were reading Friedan and, according to Joan Bakewell, finding in the text 'a moment of epiphany' such as in 'the twentieth century most women experienced at some time...when the truths of feminism touched their own lives.'<sup>73</sup> While no-one would expect Williams to offer a proto-feminist analysis, the absence of any woman asking even moderately radical questions limits the novel's claims to be the 'searching analysis' of the relations between sexuality, work and family that Eagleton claims. In *Second Generation* married women do enter paid employment: Myra works in the canteen at the car factory.

Yet rather than subverting Myra's role as homemaker and nurturer of the beleaguered male, this job contrives to reinforce that role. In the 'crowded warmth of the canteen' she demonstrates her care by pouring the gravy over Harold's 'mashed potato and sausages' and offering a few comforting words.<sup>74</sup>

It is not that women's capacities are ignored. Both Kate's intelligence and the way in which that intelligence has been and is being used are acknowledged. When Harold took correspondence courses to advance his trade union career, 'Kate wrote the exercises and essays but Harold copied them out and they were submitted in his name': a blatant case of plagiarism of which it is by no means obvious that the author disapproved.<sup>75</sup> Her lover Arthur Dean, an academic and writer, is:

surprised by the range of her intelligence. He had known that she was much more intelligent than her background would have led him to believe and she was still limited by lack of training. But what he found increasingly – it was an odd admission to have to make – was an intelligence quite equal to his own, capable of the last surprising reaches and insights that couldn't be taken for granted anywhere.<sup>76</sup>

Yet the text suggests no links between Kate's underused and thwarted intelligence, her desperate attempt to escape the limitations of her routines through an adulterous liaison and the male prejudices expressed by both her husband and her lover. Miller, while acknowledging that Kate offers 'a determined attempt by Williams to enter the life of a working-class woman who is a wife and a mother, and the practical and moral possibilities and constraints she encounters', is clear that the novel is bent on aborting her



explorations:

Kate is firmly reprimanded and punished....She has a role: to devote her intelligence and love to her husband's life and political work and warmly and uncritically to nurture him sexually. One is bound to recall William's sense of family life as 'unproblematic' in the light of this exorbitant expectation.<sup>77</sup>

The Kate who appears as a marginal figure in *Manod*, published in 1979, lies on the other side of a decade that had seen Friedan's insights succeeded by the more abrasive tones of Germaine Greer, Kate Millett and Gloria Steinem.<sup>78</sup> While she is still being punished by her extended family for her earlier misdeeds, there is little evidence that she has in fact submitted to those 'exorbitant' demands of which Miller writes. Having progressed from her work for the local Labour Party branch to the status of a noted figure in the national party, she spends time in a borrowed flat in London and when in company with Harold, Gwyn and Myra 'seems to be holding herself in against great waves of pressure.'<sup>79</sup> While Harold is now 'thin', 'tired' and 'inert', Kate exudes energy and demonstrates influence, offering insider Labour Party help to Matthew in his dealings with the problematic *Manod* development consultancy and arranging for Peter the book deal that will reveal the 'conspiracy' behind the development.<sup>80</sup> She offers too a knowing irony of what is the fiction's only comment on the establishment response to 'the women's movement': 'I'm the statutory co-optable woman...It's an adaptive strategy. And by the way they don't even listen. It's just a limited natural break. Like the tea being brought in.'<sup>81</sup> The limited freedom enjoyed by Kate is perhaps seen as achieved at the expense of Harold, but also as part of a political change in the nature of Labour and Left politics which, between the

publication dates of the two novels, has side-lined the manufacturing industry which is the base of Harold's influence and skills in favour of a 'professionalised' political caste with an ironic metropolitan eye.

Kate is certainly the most complex of the few 'independent' women in Williams's fiction, and the only one likely to attract sympathy. Helen, the former lover of Robert Lane, expounding her political views on post-colonialism, is made to sound simplistic and patronising.<sup>82</sup> Even in the late *Loyalties*, professional or actively political young women are represented as abrasive or potentially sexually voracious. Petra, a BBC researcher, repels human contact, staring with 'blank' eyes and 'buttoning her jacket.'<sup>83</sup> At a party that follows the anti-Vietnam demonstration of 1968, Alex and Jill, young mothers who were child minding rather than on the front line in Grosvenor Square, 'sit on a deep sofa...talking quietly.' Meanwhile Marie talks politics to Alex's M.P. husband, an activity sexually charged by the mix of aggression and flattery – 'that's crap....And Alec, really, only you' – and the tossing of her long black hair.<sup>84</sup>

The weight of approval in Williams's fiction remains very strongly with those 'traditional' women who threaten no disruption and pose no awkward questions and the novels' structures operate to disallow disruption. Will and Eira in *Border Country*, Peter and Beth in *Second Generation*, are effectively siblings and their closeness in each case offers the boy, who is the younger, an escape from the dangers of sexual experimentation in unknown regions. The structure of *Border Country* means that Matthew's courtship of, and marriage to, Susan and the birth of their children, take place 'off scene'. The structure



of *Loyalties* also allows Gwyn Lewis to move between episodes from the status of undergraduate to that of scientific Civil Servant - and husband to Jill and father of Lyn. These marriages to women whose nurturing and supportive qualities are incontestable, and whose politics are impeccably in line with those of their husbands, are effectively desexualised. The good marriage is, quite explicitly in *Loyalties*, playing doctors and nurses:

'Alec. Look who's come. Gwyn Lewis and Jill'.

'Mr Lewis,' Alec said, turning and extending his hand.

'Dr Lewis, if you please,' Emma said...

'And Jill, did I hear?' Alec said easily. 'No more doctors?'

'No,' said Jill, still carrying Lyn, 'Just the nurse.'<sup>85</sup>

Susan and Jill are women of sound principles, for the most part inseparable from those of their husbands: like the Brontës they stand for values that are 'human', like the women labourers in *The Country and the City*, they are effectively silenced as women by their consolidation into the category of the good, left-wing human being.

*Second Generation* is significant in allowing Kate, as a sexualised woman, a sympathetic central role and the ability to articulate arguments about women's sexual feelings. In a confrontation with her sister-in-law Myra, she accuses her of seeking to make sexual relations a frightening prospect for her daughter, Beth. A girl does not have to be provoked into fear, Myra retorts, 'she starts frightened.'<sup>86</sup> Kate seeks to situate this not as natural but as a perversion of a woman's 'own deepest feelings' rendered necessary by dominant social structures. Crucially, she presents a devastating critique of the appalling

effects of a culture where sexual relations are based on an understanding of virginity and chastity as marketable commodities.<sup>87</sup> Women are thereby dehumanised and relations between women and men fatally impoverished. She tells her sister-in-law, Myra:

The woman's never there, as a woman, as herself. She's just a bit of portable property, that he's going to take possession of. But of course, since she is property, she's got to bargain...Let her sell herself dear, because selling is all it can be...You still live in the eighteenth century, like all the women in this street, the women all over the estate. You're bits of property, and you've got your own cunning about it. But you'll never consider a man on really equal terms. You'll never go to him as yourself, for your own reasons.<sup>88</sup>

But Kate's anger and analysis are fatally undermined, partly by her apparent lack of sympathy for Beth who enters weeping at Peter's cruelty, and, more significantly, by the reader's suspicion that a woman on her way to her first adulterous encounter may be seeking justification for her behaviour. The affair itself is disallowed the excuse of passion: it is this absence of the 'warm flow' insisted on by Lawrence that is the basis of much of the condemnation by other characters, a judgement which Kate seems to endorse.<sup>89</sup> Robert Lane, whose ability to analyse the private motives of a woman he has never met is one of the novel's more bizarre elements, asserts that she had wanted 'not to be challenged by love' but a 'political and intellectual adventure with a man who would not seriously challenge her.'<sup>90</sup> As Watts says, the issues that concern Kate 'are effectively closed down as soon as they are raised.'<sup>91</sup> In rather similar terms to those of Kate, Rose too condemns the 'long melodrama of virginity and bargaining' and argues for a society in which 'there could be more tenderness, more natural loving, and society could grow from



that.<sup>92</sup> Yet Rose, a middle-class woman bent on the seduction of Peter, is also suspect.

The *ad hominem* argument is made to subvert these powerful challenges to the social and sexual status quo.

Sexuality in this society, even when legitimated by marriage, is not the tender, warm connection that Rose and D. H. Lawrence would endorse. Rose's marriage is, she implies, without love; Myra's to Gwyn is based on her denial of passion; Robert Lane is 'killing' his wife.<sup>93</sup> When Kate makes a sexual approach which Harold rejects it is because desire is blocked by 'too much consciousness.'<sup>94</sup> In Williams such 'bad sex' evokes a powerful disgust. Harold's response is constructed as fear of ingestion, fear of a regression to a primal state: 'Her lips were wet and moving and seemed to be drawing him into her, changing the feel of his skin. Like the first moment under water.'<sup>95</sup> The excess of Harold's response here, with its production of disgust, evokes Kristeva's notion of abjection, wherein the subject seeks to expel 'the improper, the unclean and the disorderly elements of its corporeal existence that must be separated from its "clean and proper" self.'<sup>96</sup> But is this need for expulsion of the sexual peculiar to Harold or one shared by the whole textual performance of the novel? An early reflection by Harold's brother Gwyn suggests the former. Of Harold's preference for a new car, he comments: 'Harold's [car] is new, but that's the difference between us. He never wants to look under the bonnet, scared of it there like a woman.'<sup>97</sup> While the probable intention here is no more than a casual dig at female mechanical incompetence, the image is highly suggestive of a more primal fear, and one now associated with Harold. Although Harold, and his unremitting, principled work for his class, is treated sympathetically, there is a strong element of the dead in his

construction. Certainly the representation of this aspect of working-class life is in direct opposition to the yearnings later expressed by his son Peter. Harold is repelled by the disorderly and the danger represented by sexuality. His dysfunctionality is, however, marked within wider social patterns throughout Williams's fiction.

Pinkney comments that *Manod*, where the local newspapers chronicle only 'deaths', 'is a novel written under the sign of apocalypse, of the dies irae or last days.'<sup>98</sup> But the entire fictional oeuvre is thin on generation and plagued with sexual dysfunction. Ellen Price in *Border Country* weeps and tells her husband that she wants no more children.<sup>99</sup> In *Second Generation* Rose and her husband are unable to have a child - a failure that Peter, in another of the novel's bizarre assertions, explains as her inability to feel love.<sup>100</sup> Norman Braose in *Loyalties* is impotent.<sup>101</sup> There is a, surely statistically significant, number of only children: Matthew, Peter, Beth and in *Loyalties* no fewer than three: Lyn Lewis. Alex Braose and Jon Merritt. The sub-fertile suffer bodies inscribed in pain and deformity. As well as being marked by an insistent articulation of sexuality, *Second Generation* is obsessed by the concept of the body. It is a novel in which bodies abound: the bodies of the cars being formed from their 'raw grey shells' and the exaggerated bodies of theatrical promotional photographs.<sup>102</sup> When the metaphor 'blown up' is used of these photographs, it is not its technical meaning that one hears, but brutal action. The bodies of the characters are awkward and suffering. The emphasis is on the eyes, repeatedly noted as 'dry' or 'dry and cold'. Although particular instances are often given a specific reason - Myra has been weeping, Peter and Beth have eyes sore from walking in the cold, Peter's mouth and eyes are dry after driving in the 'exhausted air' of the car - the



repetition operates to reinforce a sense of this society as arid and sexually dysfunctional.<sup>103</sup>

There is little sense in Williams's fiction of people at ease in their bodies: they are constructed in pain and, at the margins, this registers in elements of physical deformity. Here too the sexual is presented indirectly. Although deformity may render a character sexually repulsive, it is represented as relating to non-sexual body parts, usually the face. Pinkney reads the 'disfigured face' as a 'key Williams motif', arguing that 'we are in the presence here of pure textual obsession.'<sup>104</sup> Of *Loyalties* Pinkney remarks that it 'is full of mutilated, deformed or just freakish bodies'<sup>105</sup> Although there are certainly at least two instances that support this claim, the severe mutilation to the face of Bert Lewis in a tank battle in Normandy, and the physicality of Monk (Monkey) Pitter, who inspires visceral revulsion, especially in women, equally interesting are the instances of disfigurement constructed by peculiar textual emphasis rather than plot, a technique to be found in *Second Generation* as well as in *Loyalties*. The insistence in both novels on the plump cheeks of women has already been noted, but there are other instances where an unexpected emphasis produces unease. Myra Owen is introduced conventionally enough by reference to her height, her hair colour and the coarsening of her skin. Williams then goes on: 'The curves of the ears were very bright, as if the blood was at the surface.'<sup>106</sup> The introduction of such emphatic detail, seemingly pointless and jarring, is, however, consistent with the sense produced by *Second Generation* of a world out of joint, where the banal is oddly threatening. It is tempting to read these unhappy bodies as a metaphor for the body politic. But I would argue that *Second Generation* defies the reduction of

one term to another and that this effort to achieve parity between the social and physical bodies underpins the concepts of sexuality and of Utopian politics that the novel struggles to represent.

This emphasis on the body and its dis-ease is consistent with a range of discourses which render the body as the site of relations of power. Bryan Turner comments that 'the dominant concerns and anxieties of society tend to be translated into disturbed images of the body.'<sup>107</sup> Elizabeth Gross points out that: 'For writers as diverse as Lyotard, Irigaray, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, the body is conceived as a fundamentally historical and political object, [even] the central object over and through which relations of power and resistance are played out.'<sup>108</sup> Mary Douglas asserts that 'there is a continual change of meanings between 'the social and the physical body 'each reinforcing the categories of the other.'<sup>109</sup> *Second Generation* follows convention in offering a social and political explanation for the bodily pain suffered by its characters. Its extent and intensity are, however, in excess of the political analysis offered, even as Peter Owen recognises his profound angst to be in excess of 'the things he could name as wrong.'<sup>110</sup> The social explanations offered use conventional enough metaphors which nevertheless strike the reader as having literal force. 'Every job shaped a man and sometimes crippled him', Gwyn believes.<sup>111</sup> For Kate the streets are full of Dantesque shadows 'of what could have been men and women, the huddling survivors of a generation that had seen every chance of a new life deferred, and had acquiesced in that deferment.' They have no proper bodily presence: 'the least stirring of life' is 'an intolerable rebuke to them, and they would have to stamp it out.'<sup>112</sup> Peter feels the shame at what he perceives as the conflict between his



class and his educational attainments as 'quite physical' and feels 'in the bodies of others' the 'disturbance' attendant on living in this society.<sup>113</sup>

The intimate and necessary relation between a dysfunctional social body and a diseased practice of sexuality is structurally central to *Second Generation* and consistent with Williams's other representations of society and expressed views of contemporary sexuality. Less predictable is the novel's positing of a physical and social body, one and inextricable, which offers the possibility of salvation. Such a concept links Williams more closely with the hedonistic impulses of 'soixante huitards' like Deleuze and Marcuse than one might expect, although the dour *Second Generation* seems an unlikely forerunner of the excitements of '68. It is true that the possibility of the body's redemptive potential is raised only to be denied, the impulse dispersed over the text: it is, to use the body metaphor, effectively dismembered. The dispersed references nevertheless articulate a desire that is highly suggestive.

The exploration of the exchange of meanings between the physical and the social bodies offered by *Second Generation* is couched in terms of interrogation and tentative possibility. Peter walks in a world where 'all the doors are shut', where he yearns for 'some other rhythm, some particular flame.'<sup>114</sup> What he is experiencing is, explicitly, death. 'For to feel like this was a kind of death, and only the dead could accept it complacently.' He acknowledges simultaneously the necessity and the impossibility of a total change, called obsessively throughout *Second Generation* 'the break': 'All that mattered... was the break, and yet to break from death into life was always

impossible.<sup>115</sup> There are significant parallels between this and the writings of Marcuse during the 1960s. In *One Dimensional Man* one finds: 'Freedom of thought in the only sense in which thought can be free in the administered world – as the consciousness of its repressive productivity, and as the absolute need for breaking out of this whole.'<sup>116</sup> In the 1966 Political Preface to *Eros and Civilization* he comments that although 'liberation is the most realistic, the most concrete of all human possibilities' it is simultaneously 'the most rationally and effectively repressed.'<sup>117</sup>

Peter is allowed at least to conceptualise the possibility of liberation in his memory of a picture of the new kind of artificial respiration, the bringing back from death by mouth to mouth; the breathing lips on the unbreathing lips...How many, now, could kneel and do this? Kneel by the body of a stranger, and breathe, widening the mouth, over the cold lips. A man who could kneel and do this, to anyone, was alive in some different dimension, old or new. To be able to do this, not technically but wholly, seemed the only living worth trying for. Breathing another to life, or taking the breath of this stranger, and the body moving again.<sup>118</sup>

The choice of image is suggestive. 'Mouth to mouth' is inevitably sexual in its connotations, but the sexuality of the kiss is partially silenced by the practicalities of resuscitation and the making of its recipient not a responsive lover but a passive stranger. Yet the suggestiveness of the phrase is such that the trace of sexuality cannot be erased. Ten pages later Peter uses it again, this time in a discussion with Robert Lane and Kissler, an American academic, on his sense of 'nullity' both in social thinking and consequently in his sense that his thinking and career are blocked: 'It's just that we are afraid to put



mouth to mouth.' The meaning here is clearly political, yet when Kissler responds politely that he 'doesn't get the analogy', Peter replies: 'I discover a barrier and I discover that it's my own barrier.'<sup>119</sup> Here, with Peter's refusal of the distinction between private and public meanings, the physical sense of 'mouth to mouth' moves back to the centre, to Peter's sexual as well as his social anguish and his sense of their essential inter-relatedness.

The 'breakthrough' of mouth to mouth cannot be achieved in this society. Even its most ardent proponents, like Marcuse, express anxiety about the concept of a parity between the political and the physical bodies: 'Can we speak of a juncture between the erotic and the political dimension?'<sup>120</sup> The late '60s were a moment when activists believed that his bringing together of political and sexual liberation constituted a desirable and possible political practice. Marge Piercy's *Vida* offers an account of such belief in action, as in 1967 New York the anti-Vietnam war activists seek to link up with the pot-smoking hippies. 'Now,' *Vida* believes, '[we] knew that...[we] must speak to everyone, through the poetry of the act, through the theater of the streets, through the media, the music, irrationally and rationally and subliminally.' But she recognises the challenge of meshing the two impulses: 'How could [we] educate the dancing children?'<sup>121</sup>

In *Border Country* the sense of social and sexual suppression is strong, but there is none of the public scrutiny of sexuality or the explicit connection of political and erotic liberation that marks *Second Generation*. It is indeed the absence of articulation of crucial areas of experience that angers the young Will. 'Everything in this house is kept so much

under,' he declares, 'It needs shouting.'<sup>122</sup> What he identifies as 'kept under' is authentic feeling and, following from his identification of women as public performers, 'showing each other what they were doing', rather than, like men, unconsciously 'self-absorbed', he understands this suppression as exercised principally by women.<sup>123</sup> He berates Eira for 'being like my own mam, getting at me... If anyone feels anything, tell them they don't...or in any case they oughtn't to. Then rub it all out. Be a good boy. Be someone else'.<sup>124</sup> That this suppression is sexual is strongly implied by the context, immediately following an episode when eighteen-year old Eira and seventeen-year old Will rest on the mountainside after a walk. The sexual tension is explicit. 'Eira sat spreading her legs, her hands cupped in the billow of her wide yellow skirt.' They both drink from a stream, she resisting at first 'shocked by the cold.'

'Go on,' Will said, gripping her shoulders.

'Yes. Only it's so cold. Hold me.'

Her hair fell loose as she strained to the sharp white water. Will felt under his hands her quick breath, and saw the water splashing on her face and hair.<sup>125</sup>

But then she stands up, brushes 'down her dress' and declares 'We'd better get on down.'

Will responds, 'Yes. If we must.' As they walk he becomes irritable, aggressive and in response to her protests admits that his anger began:

'When we came off the mountain.'

'We had to come down.'

'Did we?'

Eira suddenly remembered the cold of the water against her mouth. She looked away, confused.<sup>126</sup>



Will's anger here is represented not only as sexual frustration but as directed by their inability to articulate the nature of the tensions between them: he and Eira, he tells her, do 'damn little else' other than 'pretend.'<sup>127</sup> And it is Eira who, like his mother, seeks to deny authentic feelings and continues to operate within the allowed social pattern of hikes and tea parties. The role of gender in containing the potentially disruptive is here very strongly inscribed.

Unlike Eira, Will is able to identify the forces of repression. Yet he does little shouting of his own: his overt rebellion is limited to the isolated and unexplicated occasion when he flings a book, his Sunday School prize, into a stream: 'I don't want their old book.'<sup>128</sup> At the Eisteddfod there is a powerful sense of his desire to destroy the 'ceremony of identification and memory' which is 'centrally, the meaning of life.'<sup>129</sup> The conductor identifies each child performer by reference to an intricate web of family relationships: Elinor Watkins is the daughter of Mary Rees, 'Mary with red hair, red to her shoulders, singing here where I am standing, eleven years old', who 'married John Watkins, the son of my very old friend John Watkins the Bridge.' It is this settled meaning that Will yearns to destroy. He longs for 'some extraordinary blunder: the child given to the wrong mother; the parents mixed up; bastardy and confusion flung across the valley by that compelling voice.'<sup>130</sup> Yet the ceremony which inscribes this settlement continues to work its powers without any intervention from Will and, crucially, the entire text performs the reticence of which he complains. Potential conflict is routinely averted, as when, at the beginning of the General Strike, the railwaymen's political disagreements are smoothed into the planting of the station flowerbeds.<sup>131</sup>

The moment of release and real connection achieved in the novel is safely desexualised. For Jack Price, Harry's father, 'the end of work seemed to have released his spirit.' When Jack moves in, Harry finds in himself 'a movement where for years there had been deadlock', with laughter and 'extravagant' talk.<sup>132</sup> It is Jack's presence that causes the bees to swarm and allows the whole family to seize 'the zinc pans and [begin] a furious drumming and clattering', accompanied by 'excited shouting.' Will understands that the bees 'seemed only an excuse.'<sup>133</sup> It is significant that this single instance of 'exultant' physical joy is linked not to Utopian potential but to domestic economy, family and tradition.

The threats to social forces offered by *Second Generation* are stronger. The anger displayed by Peter when, in a children's playground with Beth, he displaces his frustrations onto the 'horse', which he rocks 'until it suddenly seemed to come alive, the painted head jerking violently', is reminiscent of Will's adolescent fury.<sup>134</sup> Other examples are more radical but are positioned in the text in such a way as to divert the challenge they could have offered. One important element of this diversion is structural. References to disruption and excess are dispersed over the text so that their force is dissipated. Major challenges to the status quo, the love-making of Peter and Rose and Peter's experience on the mountain top, are so positioned as to weaken the impact they might make.

At the margins of the story lurks a figure of potency and danger: Jack Evans, Myra's first



husband, killed on a motorbike on Black Rock 'within a year of their marriage.'<sup>135</sup>

Everything in this sub-plot reads as excessive: the way in which random violent death is associated with the dark powers and male potency, the absolute nature of Myra's denial of her own sexuality. The actuality and symbolic suggestiveness of Black Rock has been discussed in Chapter Five and the danger of motorbikes recurs in *Loyalties* where Georgi is killed on his motorbike.<sup>136</sup> Jack is absent but his male power, the noise and danger of his bike and the horror of his death haunt the text. He is a figure with strong sexual charge: he fathered a child, conceived before marriage; with him Myra was 'wild' and now, in her childless second marriage, is 'tame'.<sup>137</sup> The sexual power is made clear by the intensity of Myra's rejection of it. Gwyn, her second husband, tells Peter that it 'was tearing her in pieces. She'd got to hate what she was and what she'd done.'<sup>138</sup> Myra is the good woman, who warms the home and the family while the adulterous Kate's home is cold. But it is Myra whose sexuality is deformed, not by adultery, but by terrified denial.

The text recognises both the attraction and the threat of the figure of Jack in a series of dispersed references which operate metonymically to link him to horror and death. Early in the novel Harold refers to the death of a dog in a road accident: 'the lorry right over him, And his scream and the brakes screaming. It was filthy to see.'<sup>139</sup> The account seems gratuitous and excessive but dog and motorcycle later come together when, as Peter and Gwyn walk through the fields to collect leaf mould, 'a dog was barking...and there was the revving of a motorbike.'<sup>140</sup> Peter and Gwyn's later dialogue, at the time of Peter's flight to Wales, focuses on the sexual relationship of Jack and Myra.<sup>141</sup> While Jack lurks at the margins, *Second Generation* offers more central examples of the delights and

dangers of battling with repressive social practices.

While the breakthrough in *Border Country* was the excessive, but socially sanctioned activity of the dance with bees, *Second Generation* offers a more risky strategy, of crossing the barriers into places of danger, a 'dark, neglected region' at the edge of experience.<sup>142</sup> This offers the possibility of liberation, of release, but also danger and death. Libidinal liberation is offered by Rose. The terms in which Peter describes their love-making isolate it from all other experiences represented in *Second Generation*. It was, he says, 'like being born. The release and the strangeness, but in the end the delight, so intense a delight. So intense a joy.'<sup>143</sup> Yet the novel refuses fully to confront this joy. The acknowledgement of 'delight' is not made by Peter to Rose; in the contemporaneous account neither of the lovers speaks. This passionate declaration is, in yet another of the novel's bizarre partnerships of speaker and subject matter, made by Peter to Beth. The intensity of the emotion represented is controlled and qualified by the passing of time and traumatic incidents that have occurred in the interval, and by Peter's changed attitude to Rose. The account that he offers of his memory of the event does not merely qualify but belittles and denies:

It's quite gone now....She wasn't involved. I can remember that now. At the end she laughed, because she was the stronger... I was back like a child on her body. She was quite beyond me, and it was as if nothing had happened, though to me it had happened.<sup>144</sup>

Both Peter and the text refuse to engage fully with the challenge of Rose. Like Kate, she



is allowed to argue that sexual relations in this society are deformed by the 'nagging' of convention and the need for a woman to 'bargain.'<sup>145</sup> She tells Peter, with apparent sincerity, that 'once I wanted you, I wanted your child.'<sup>146</sup> She claims that she has offered him growth and escape from 'a narrowness of guilt and anxiety.'<sup>147</sup> One metaphor that she is given suggests an understanding of, and support for, a society that lives by 'mouth to mouth.' She accuses Peter: 'You don't touch anything. Isn't that the trouble?'<sup>148</sup> That her sexuality is authentic rather than willed is reinforced by the scene that precedes their love-making, where Peter finds her at home painting. 'At the open door, Rose was sitting with her legs apart and the pot of paint between her ankles, leaning forward and painting one of the lower panels.'<sup>149</sup> This recalls Gaston Bachelard's rhapsody on Doors: 'The door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open.... the very origin of a dream that accumulates desires and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings...'<sup>150</sup>

Yet despite the promise that she appears to hold for Peter, the text insists on framing Rose as highly manipulative. A key pointer here is again the interface of gender and class. Rose complains that he sees her not as a person, but as representing her class, a class of 'disintegrated people who'd even substituted sleeping around for adultery', and the text offers no perspective whereby this class degeneracy can be differently situated.<sup>151</sup> The reader is encouraged to interpret her invitations to Peter as solely self-indulgent, to follow Peter in understanding the sexual encounter that gave him such joy as merely an exercise of power. Yet the challenge articulated by Rose, and Peter's belated acknowledgement of the power of their sexual encounter, cannot be so easily dismissed.

In the subsequent episode, Peter's flight to the Welsh mountain top, this 'reticent being' does indeed risk the dangers of 'the wide open door.'

The destination of Peter's flight, the valley where he and his family have spent annual holidays, is under-determined. He tells Wyndham Evans, the father of Jack, that 'I came where they came from. I wanted to see how it had all happened.'<sup>152</sup> Yet his parents come not from this lonely farming valley but from a grey, industrial village.<sup>153</sup> Rather than Wyndham's home, Peter's true destination is the mountain top, known as Hay Bluff, which marks the border between Wales and England, the Black Mountains and the plains of the Wye Valley.<sup>154</sup> Mary Douglas writes that 'To have been at the margins is to have had contact with danger' and 'danger lies in transitional states because transition is indefinable.'<sup>155</sup> The mountain is for Peter a place of danger by reason of its nullity. The emptiness and silence are reiterated and 'pass through into his mind,' Here his life is stripped away: 'it was a cancelling, an annihilation'. Here his isolation is total and no idea or emotion from elsewhere has any power: 'No other thought could enter now....There were no points of reference outside.'<sup>156</sup> The impulse of self-annihilation is strong: 'It would be easy, now, just to swing the wheel and go down over the edge of the unfenced road to the dark north-facing gully where the snow was still lying.' But equally powerful is fear. 'He was held sharply in the tension between them....each opposing force was intense and active, and seemed alive in his hands.' It is his hands on the driving wheel, the instinctive pressures that they exert to keep the car on the road, which make the decision for him. Coming to a cattle grid, he sees its bars as 'danger'; although the grid is 'easy to cross' it is in that very ease that danger lies. What lies on the other side of this



border is a 'harsh and tearing and inarticulate feeling' which he cannot name and cannot understand: 'He did not know what was happening to him. He could feel only the trembling, and the tears on his hands.' The sensation is represented in terms of the mountain terrain and of an oppressed people: '[It was] as if some unknown, neglected region had broken suddenly into revolt.'<sup>157</sup> Peter has come to this moment in a state of incomprehension and despair. He has, in this state, inflicted pain on others: he is one of those of whom Douglas writes: 'The person [in a transitional state] is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.'<sup>158</sup> But Peter chooses to leave the 'formal structures' and spaces, to travel into the place of danger and to confront the experience it offers. 'The man who comes back from these inaccessible regions brings with him a power not available to those who have stayed in the control of themselves and of society' says Douglas: 'To have been in the margins is to have been...at a source of power.'<sup>159</sup>

Yet the potential of this experience of the borders, for a regeneration of Peter and a redefinition of the challenges he has identified, is dissipated. More than a third of the novel follows this episode of disintegration and rebirth. He comes down from the mountain not with tablets of stone but only to resume the flagellating monologues and dialogues of confusion, guilt and accusation. The ending, when a reconciled Peter and Beth plan their marriage and a subdued but affectionate Kate and Harold plan a holiday in France, while a healing rain blows in from Wales, is a soft and unconvincing compromise. *Second Generation* has articulated Kate's analysis of the deformed economic and sexual relations that underpin contemporary marriage, and the Lawrentian pronouncements of Rose on the need to privilege 'tenderness' over 'nagging'. It has

allowed Peter to experience sexual 'delight' and 'joy' with Rose. But it has worked simultaneously to subvert and dismember these articulations by situating both women in terms of a class narrative of degeneracy and self-indulgence, of an attempt at a 'break' based on an inauthentic sexuality of the will rather than of passion. While offering a more developed account of the construction of female sexuality than do Williams's other novels, *Second Generation* is consistent with them in its positioning of women as colluding with the repressive apparatus that fights against what Marcuse calls the realization of happiness in history. It is only men who can go to the borders, to the places of danger. The novel has articulated the connection of the social and sexual bodies and the potential disruptive power of both joy and terror. Yet while this recognition cannot be silenced, the text itself works in collusion with an apparatus of containment and repression to position and so weaken those powers. The 'administered world' has denied the dream.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Ward, *Raymond Williams* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>3</sup> 'Utopia and Science Fiction', in *Culture and Materialism*, 211.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Societies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 253.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics and Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 100.

<sup>6</sup> 'On Reading Marcuse', *The Cambridge Review* 90 (30 May 1969), 366-368.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Marcuse, 'The Affirmative Nature of Culture', in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 94-32.

<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Penguin, 1970), 117-118, 145.

<sup>10</sup> *Border Country*, 57; *Second Generation*, 133.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Watts, 'Reclaiming the Border Country: Feminism and Raymond Williams', *News from Nowhere* 6 (1989), 97. Susan Pederson, reviewing Selina Todd's *Young Women, Work and Families in England 1918-50* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) comments that: 'It would be too much to say that interwar young women unmade the working class, but their values and behaviour encouraged the economic flexibility, mass consumption and cross-class cultural aspiration that marked the 20<sup>th</sup> century.' 'A Girl's



Right to Have Fun', *London Review of Books*, 5 October 2006, 37. Williams would presumably read this as confirming his suspicions.

<sup>12</sup> Watts, *ibid.*, 89-106. Jane Miller, *Seductions* (Virago, 1990), 38-69.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Mulhern. 'Towards 2000 or News from You Know Where', in *Critical Perspectives*, 82-83.

<sup>14</sup> 'Decentralism and the Politics of Place', in *Resources of Hope*, 241-242.

<sup>15</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 148.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, 47-50.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>19</sup> Bea Campbell, cited in Lisa Jardine and Julia Swindell, 'Homage to George Orwell,' in *Critical Perspectives*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> 'The Practice of Possibility,' in *Resources of Hope*, 319.

<sup>22</sup> *The English Novel*, 51.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>25</sup> 'The Practice of Possibility', in *Resources of Hope*, 319.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, 54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> *Border Country*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Deidre Beddoe, 'Images of Welsh Women', in Tony Curtis (ed.), *Wales the Imagined Nation* (Bridgend: Poetry Press Wales, 1986), 227-229. A 2004 survey of the self-perception of national identity among BME (black, minority, ethnic) groups in Wales finds a significantly higher proportion of men than women identifying as Welsh. The author speculates that this difference occurs because 'Welshness' in South Wales, where most BMEs are located, 'has many masculine connotations which exclude women. These include those connected with work, including the heritage of the mining and construction industries, and sport.' Jonathan Bradley, 'An Inclusive Identity?', *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist* 168 (2005), 73.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Llewellyn, *How Green was My Valley* (Michael Joseph, 1939).

<sup>32</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, 'Women Workers in Wales', *Welsh History Review* 11:4 (1983), 530.

<sup>33</sup> *Loyalties*, 342.

<sup>34</sup> Watts, *op. cit.*, 98.

98. Eric Hobsbawm comments that 'most of the public discourse on the relations between men, women and their offspring is both unhistorical and deeply provincial.' It is hard to exonerate Williams from this. 'Retreat of the Male', *London Review of Books* 27:15 (August 2005),

[http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n15/print/hobs01\\_html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n15/print/hobs01_html). Accessed 30.9.2005

<sup>35</sup> 'Decentralism and the Politics of Place', in *Resources of Hope*, 241-242.

<sup>36</sup> *Manod*, 118. See Sigal Gooldin, 'Fasting Women', *Body and Society* 9:2 (2003), 28-29.

<sup>37</sup> *Second Generation*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*

<http://cartoon.iguw.tuwien.ac.at:16080/christian/marcuse/odmi.htm>

<sup>39</sup> *Second Generation*, 148.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>41</sup> Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire* (Paladin, 1985).

<sup>42</sup> Watts, *op. cit.*, 105.

<sup>43</sup> *The Volunteers*, 76.

<sup>44</sup> *Manod*, 111.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>46</sup> Tony Pinkney, 'Williams and "the Two Faces of Modernism,"' in *Critical Perspectives*, 20-21.

<sup>47</sup> Pinkney, *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991), 80.

<sup>48</sup> *Loyalties*, 234; *Second Generation*, 54.

<sup>49</sup> *Loyalties*, 196.

<sup>50</sup> *Second Generation*, 247,

<sup>51</sup> D.H. Lawrence, 'Nottingham and the Mining Country', in A.A.H. Inglis (ed.), *A Selection from Phoenix* (Penguin, 1971), 107.

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- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.
- <sup>53</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, 53.
- <sup>54</sup> *The Country and the City*, 318.
- <sup>55</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, 53.
- <sup>56</sup> *Border Country*, 194.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.
- <sup>58</sup> *Second Generation*, 145.
- <sup>59</sup> *Modern Tragedy* (Chatto and Windus, 1966), 128.
- <sup>60</sup> D.H. Lawrence, 'The State of Funk', in *A Selection from Phoenix*, *op. cit.*, 370.
- <sup>61</sup> *Politics and Letters*, 199.
- <sup>62</sup> Terry Eagleton, Introduction to *Critical Perspectives*, 6.
- <sup>63</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: an Introduction* trans. Robert Hurley, (Penguin, 1976).
- <sup>64</sup> *Second Generation*, 20 and 59-60.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 229, 237, 242,
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 254 and 263.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.
- <sup>72</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Penguin, 1962).
- <sup>73</sup> Joan Bakewell, *The Centre of the Bed* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2003), 126 and 161.
- <sup>74</sup> *Second Generation*, 41.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.
- <sup>77</sup> Miller, *op. cit.*, 59.
- <sup>78</sup> *The Female Eunuch* (1970), *Sexual Politics* (1969), *Ms*, (1972).
- <sup>79</sup> *Manod*, 156 and 176.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 177 and 185.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.
- <sup>82</sup> *Second Generation*, 314.
- <sup>83</sup> *Loyalties*, 6-7.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-234.
- <sup>86</sup> *Second Generation*, 122.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-209 and 271.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.
- <sup>91</sup> Watts, *ibid.*, 96.
- <sup>92</sup> *Second Generation*, 168.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 78, 120.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.
- <sup>96</sup> Elizabeth Gross, 'Abject Bodies', in John Fletcher and Andrew Berryman (eds.), *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: the Work of Julia Kristeva* (Routledge, 1990), 86-87. 'The subject must disavow part of itself in order to gain a stable self, and this form of refusal marks whatever identity it has as provisional and open to breakdown and instability... The subject's recognition of this impossibility provokes the sensation and attitude that [Kristeva] calls abjection.'
- <sup>97</sup> *Second Generation*, 56.
- <sup>98</sup> Pinkney, *op. cit.*, 76.
- <sup>99</sup> *Border Country*, 58.
- <sup>100</sup> *Second Generation*, 159.
- <sup>101</sup> *Loyalties*, 314.
- <sup>102</sup> *Second Generation*, 86 and 46.



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- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 135, 215.
- <sup>104</sup> Pinkney, *op. cit.*, 76.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.
- <sup>106</sup> *Second Generation*, 14.
- <sup>107</sup> Bryan Turner, 'Social Fluids: Metaphors and Meanings of Society', *Body and Society* 9:1 (2003), 1-2.
- <sup>108</sup> Gross, *op. cit.*, 81.
- <sup>109</sup> Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (Penguin, 1978), 93..
- <sup>110</sup> *Second Generation*, 137.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>116</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 253.
- <sup>117</sup> Marcuse, Political Preface to *Eros and Civilization*.  
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/eros-civilisation/preface.htm>. Accessed 30.12.2004.
- <sup>118</sup> *Second Generation*, 152.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.
- <sup>120</sup> Marcuse, Political Preface to *Eros and Civilization*.
- <sup>121</sup> Marge Piercy, *Vida* (Women's Press, 1980), 107.
- <sup>122</sup> *Border Country*, 230.
- <sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.
- <sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.
- <sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.
- <sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-194.
- <sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-98.
- <sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.
- <sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-190.
- <sup>134</sup> *Second Generation*, 19.
- <sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>136</sup> *Loyalties*, 140.
- <sup>137</sup> *Second Generation*, 119-120.
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.
- <sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.
- <sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.
- <sup>142</sup> *Second Generation*, 222.
- <sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.
- <sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.
- <sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.
- <sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.
- <sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.
- <sup>150</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 222.
- <sup>151</sup> *Second Generation*, 157.
- <sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.
- <sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>154</sup> John and Lizzie Eldridge write that 'Peter drives to the Holy Mountain, a prominent landmark in the trilogy.' *Raymond Williams* (Routledge, 1994), 152. This is neat but inaccurate. The topography makes

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clear the identification of the Llanthony Valley and Hay Bluff.

<sup>155</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 115.

<sup>156</sup> *Second Generation*, 220-221.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>158</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 116.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.



## Conclusion

### A Dislocated Mind

The mountains were too open, too emphatic, to be reduced to personal recollection: the Madeleine, the shout in the street. What moved, if at all, in the moonlit expanse was a common memory over a common forgetting. In what could be seen as its barrenness, under this pale light, there might be the sense of *tabula rasa*: an empty ground on which new shapes could move, Yet that ideal of a dissident and dislocated mind, that illusion of clearing a space for wholly novel purposes, concealed, as did these mountains, old and deep traces along which lives still moved.<sup>1</sup>

This passage, from the opening episode of Williams's final novel, is highly suggestive in bringing together issues identified in earlier chapters as central to a reading of the fiction and in pointing to ways in which these texts may be read as engaging with contemporary debates. The context of the passage, where a young man, Glyn, returns to his Black Mountains home, finds the grandfather who has served as his father figure absent and goes out onto the mountains to search for him, is the paradigmatic narrative of Williams's fiction. Here too are the emphases that have been identified in preceding chapters: the tension between the 'personal' and the 'common' experience; the anxious need to negotiate the relation between 'old and deep traces' and the individual ideal of some new and specific purpose, a tension which maps onto the experience and abstraction dialectic which is a fundamental structuring principle of Williams's writing. The 'dissident and dislocated mind' with its alien illusory ideals is another form of that treacherous individual who has failed to honour the lives that move among the mountains.

The idea of return is central to a reading of Williams. The account that he gives of his reading practice opens with the comment that 'there were very few books in our house when I was a child'. All these he read:

with the kind of over-and-over reading, I have never, with certain books, lost as a habit. What it meant, of course, as I can now see, is that I acquired a

particular attitude to reading which in spite of everything I have not much changed.<sup>2</sup>

Later, in his 'systematic reading of all the modern European drama I could find', he read Ibsen 'like the childhood reading: over-and-over, as if no other books were available.'<sup>3</sup> The same pattern of return marks his writing. His commentaries on those writers with whose situations and responses he finds most affinities, such as George Eliot, Hardy and Lawrence, re-use the same terms and ideas.<sup>4</sup> These echoes and partial echoes convey not the sense of a writer saving intellectual effort by giving a quick brush down to a set of old notes from the filing cabinet, but rather of one who needs to revisit those writers and issues which are of primary importance, to re-examine earlier responses and to re-cast them in a form marginally more effective or exact. A finished structure of ideas is alien to his practice: Andrew Milner remarks that his 'cultural materialism was not so much a doctrine as a research project.'<sup>5</sup> He goes back over-and-over because it is *this* that matters.

Earlier chapters have identified ways in which Williams the novelist revises and reworks, through different structures, genres and emphases, the narrative of the son who abandons his place of origin but, unable to make that 'escape' permanent, returns to the settlement which is, in some instances, the site of an act of betrayal. That return is enacted principally in spatial terms, but also temporally: only *Manod* and *The Volunteers* employ a linear chronological structure. The novels may be organised, like *Border Country*, as a sequence of interleaved accounts of a present and a past which is both familial and individual, or like *Loyalties* which offers a simple device of a present framing a series of discontinuous episodes of mid-twentieth century political crises. The trope of return is reinforced in *Loyalties* by the fate of twentieth-century Norman Braose, destined to re-enact the treacheries of his mediaeval forbear. In *Black Mountains* the present serves not only as a framing device for the episodes of a distant past but is also used to provide interpolated explanatory historical information. In each novel the protagonist, or a central character, returns to the place of origin – even if, in the cases of Peter Owen and Lewis Redfern, the return is made to the place of family rather than individual origin. In each novel the relation of that time and that place to the present must be negotiated, and, more specifically, the leaving must be justified by a number of different arguments and devices. The relation between the



'individual' and the 'common' which is the heart of Glyn's experience on his night on the bare mountain is fundamental to the challenge of making a justification.

The strongest element of the case made by Williams as a justification for the 'escape' is an insistence that his characters are, as Hardy was, 'caught by their 'personal history' in 'the general and structural crisis of the relation between education and class.'<sup>6</sup> Specifically, they make what I have termed the 'Measurer's Move', away from a culture of intimacy to one which privileges objective distance and abstraction, since such a move is required by the time and place in which they find themselves. The argument that this move is explained as representative of a generation of working-class boys – the differently inflected experience of girls who make a similar move is never interrogated – is a powerful one. It is, however, fraught with tension, since the history of his main characters runs so closely parallel with that of Williams, and the explanations and structural devices that he uses to justify the lives of his fictional scholarship boys risk reading as self-justification for his own.

While Eagleton's commentary in the first edition of the journal *Keywords* in 1998 refers to the tensions in Williams engendered by the move between classes and places as 'the formative and typical historical experience,'<sup>7</sup> his more aggressive earlier account of the writing is more suggestive. In *Criticism and Ideology* (1976) he focuses on what he understands as the sheer oddity of Williams's conviction of 'his own experience as historically representative' when his discourse is characterised by a 'closed private idiom...edgily defensive, private and self-absorbed'. This, says Eagleton, 'rests on a rare, courageously simple belief – Wordsworth and Yeats come to mind as confrères- that the deepest personal experience can be offered, without arrogance or appropriation, as socially "typical."<sup>8</sup> While this reading needs to be considered as forming part of Eagleton's attack on Williams's 'passionate premium upon the "lived"', discussed in Chapter One, its emphasis on Williams's writing as a simultaneous form of 'self-confession' and 'self-concealment' is valuable as an approach to the over-and-over subject matter of the fiction. The narrative structures of Williams's novels are pervaded by a deep unease which demonstrates an inability to accept that the representative crisis is an altogether adequate motive for his scholarship boys. The very repetition of the story of the exile has the paradoxical effect that, while reinforcing the sense that this is the exemplary story of a generation,

simultaneously suggests that it is a narrative which is personal and compulsive. Williams's own commentary on Ibsen's drama suggests a parallel. He writes that the 'very persistence' of the 'strangely consistent' pattern that 'underlies and persists through all the varied periods of [Ibsen's] development' makes it clear that 'the pattern was a deeply personal one.'<sup>9</sup>

That Williams cannot allow himself to be convinced by the strength of the argument of the representative is demonstrated by the devices that the novels use to reinforce it. There is the argument, as put by Matthew Price in his interview with Bryn Walters, where the Manod solicitor asserts the priority of experience:

'I see social method in the raw. It cuts down my time for books.'

'The rawer the practice,' Matthew said, 'the more need for theory.'<sup>10</sup>

The 'raw' experience of rural Wales, that is, needs the application of a theoretical understanding imported by the different experience of Matthew, the educational exile. Further justification, as earlier chapters have identified, is offered by exculpatory narratives which deny agency to the scholarship boys, Matthew, Peter and Gwyn, showing them as swept along by the pressures of school, family and social expectation. Even more marked is the erasure of any role models in their own communities who might offer an alternative to the flight eastwards. Yet none of these justificatory devices eases the guilt they experience. Matthew Price may insist that what has happened is 'not his fault'<sup>11</sup> but he, like Peter Owen and Gwyn Lewis, feels that he is 'in the wrong place.'<sup>12</sup> The pervasiveness of this guilt, and of the attendant trope of betrayal, has been explored in Chapter Six, and its power as a driving force in Williams's fiction cannot be underestimated.

The perceived betrayal, as discussed in Chapter Four, focuses on the father/son relationship and exile is typically rendered in spatial terms: exile, however, is not only from place but from the working class and its practices. Widdowson remarks that 'Hardy never "really belonged" to one class, but was precisely one of the "metamorphic classes" he mentions in *The Hand of Ethelberta*.'<sup>13</sup> Williams and his protagonists experience this same sense of unbelonging: Matthew Price returning to his village cannot readily adjust to its language and practices<sup>14</sup>; in Manod he is distrusted as an exile and an incomer;<sup>15</sup> the London-dwelling Gwyn Lewis is instructed by his mother on how the people in the valleys behave in a time of crisis;<sup>16</sup>



Lewis Redfern may have Welsh roots but knows that he cannot accept the 'warm Welsh embrace' of the valley people but must make his 'own way back.'<sup>17</sup> They are what Williams terms, in the passage with which this conclusion opens, 'dislocated minds.' But is the mind that has been 'dislocated' by exile thereby disabled?

A crucial question for a reading of Williams is whether it can be argued that the historical conditions that gave life to his concerns have come to an end. Is the dislocation that he identifies specific to a generation and of historical interest only? Williams's discussion of Hardy draws parallels between Hardy's experience of 'the border country that so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change', but relates it to the historically specific experience which he and his cohort have undergone. 'This', he writes 'has a special importance to a particular generation, who have gone to university from ordinary families and have to discover, through a life, what that experience means.'<sup>18</sup> The radical changes in educational expectations and the nature of university education since Williams's own experience of Cambridge risk making such a specific formulation of his concerns damagingly limiting. Yet the image of the in-between, of the 'border country,' fundamental to the experience of Williams's fictional characters has a different and wider contemporary application. In an age of migration and displacement there is great and growing interest in what has been termed 'the inter-cultural narrative', whose authors are experiencing 'in-betweenness' with the 'metamorphic' and self-exile understood as characteristic of contemporary society.<sup>19</sup> Dennis Feeney has recently remarked, rather acidly, that 'the relentless expansion of scholarship' on exile has transformed Ovid's poems of exile from a 'niche' concern to a major area of academic interest.<sup>20</sup>

In discussing *Loyalties* and *Black Mountains*, I have identified ways in which these novels can be read as closing down options, extinguishing 'possibility'; which Williams argued elsewhere should be celebrated as 'the most profound need.'<sup>21</sup> Certainly both novels employ structures which serve to position the Welsh, or the group that Williams terms 'my people,' as pre-determined victims. Yet the passage from the opening of *Black Mountains* suggests a resistance, an opening of possibilities that operates in tension with that determinism. This resistance in effect builds on characteristics which have been recognised as important in the discussion in earlier

chapters. Williams, in this unfinished sequence of novels, is both exploring the role of the novelist as historical materialist, an emphasis consistent with his sustained celebration of the achievements of those realist novels that achieve a 'balance' of the social and the personal,<sup>22</sup> and focusing more explicitly upon the concept of space that is present throughout his fiction but particularly marked in *Manod*.

The passage initiates a suggestive play on 'novel. The ideal of the 'dislocated mind', to clear a space for 'wholly novel purposes,' is necessarily abortive: space cannot be cleared as it is always and already inhabited by the lives of the people still moving across the mountains. But it is filled too by the baggage carried by the very practice of the novel, exerting as it does the pressure of a cultural institution which 'always gives priority to individual change over and above social transformation.'<sup>23</sup> With *Black Mountains* Williams is exploring the potential of a novel form which builds on the concerns of his earlier works but abandon their focus on the destiny of an individual. In the last paragraphs of *Manod* Matthew and Susan Price stand alone on the hillside making their commitment to 'go on';<sup>24</sup> like all classic detective loners, Lewis Redfern walks away alone;<sup>25</sup> Jon Merritt's declares that he has 'open questions' but the declaration is thrown into the open space that follows the final full stop.<sup>26</sup> *Black Mountains* too opens with a single figure on a personal quest. Its episodes are concerned with individual, if representative, histories. But the overall purpose is to offer a narrative of the collective, to articulate the 'deep traces' inscribed in the spaces of the mountains. In a lecture on the Welsh working-class novel, Williams had expressed his sense of the need for examples of the historical materialist novel: 'We have many period novels. We have a few historical novels. We have only the beginnings of a historical, materialist novel, yet it ought to be [a] major form.'<sup>27</sup> In his final novel sequence he is seeking to face this challenge.

The duty of the historical materialist, says Walter Benjamin, is to 'disassociate himself as far as possible' from standard accounts of history since 'there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a record of barbarism'.<sup>28</sup> He should be concerned to defend not only the living but the dead as 'only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.'<sup>29</sup> (original emphasis) The historical materialist must be committed to 'the fight for the oppressed past.'<sup>30</sup> In



*Black Mountains* Williams engages in that fight through an articulation of the voices and stories of the oppressed and forgotten people of the mountains. Such a decentring of the dominant discourse has been a feature of the discourse of colonial experience, from the celebrated example *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys's re-writing of *Jane Eyre*.<sup>31</sup> What Williams is seeking here, however, is, through the weight of time and numbers, to construct a collective experience and history. More crucial, though, to *Black Mountains*' value as an example of the potential of the historical materialist novel is its concept of space as produced through the practices of material engagement.

While space cannot be 'cleared' neither can it be completed: the production is open and ongoing, always becoming and never achieved. *Black Mountains* re-addresses the concerns, important in *Border Country* and in *Second Generation* but particularly strongly marked in *Manod*, of space as produced in a matrix of socio-economic forces, through labour and struggle. This focus on space in process makes *Black Mountains* a more significant experiment in possibility than the narrative structure, with its repetition of defeat and victimhood, would suggest. It is interesting to map Doreen Massey's recent account of the political significance of 'recognising spatiality' onto the passage from *Black Mountains* and to note the ways in which Massey's account suggests the possibility of a positive political reading which demonstrates the continuing relevance of Williams's central concerns.<sup>32</sup>

Her argument involves an understanding of spatiality as recognition of the possibility of 'dissonant narratives', of 'trajectories which have at least some degree of autonomy from each other.' The crucial point is that these function as sites of opposition to the 'one linear story', the homogenised narrative of globalisation which it is vital to disrupt:

How easy it is to slip into ways of thinking that repress the challenge of space; and how politically significant spatial imaginaries can be. 'Globalisation' told in this way...denies the possibility of multiple trajectories; the future is not held open.<sup>33</sup>

The demand to re-imagine space in ways which resist the dominant narrative of globalisation echoes Bauman's defence of the materiality of place discussed in Chapter One, and the relevance of both Bauman's and Massey's readings of the

discourses of globalisation to Williams's concerns is clear. The specific terms and values employed by Massey, however, are significant to a reading of Williams both in the passage and more generally. The central idea on which I wish to focus is that of 'dislocation'.

Throughout *On Space* Massey uses 'disruption,' 'disturbance' and 'dislocation' as positive terms. She argues that the 'unconnected narratives' and processive nature of the spatial 'constitute it as one of the vital moments in the production of those dislocations which are necessary to the existence of the political.'<sup>34</sup> Such dislocation is a counter to the discourses of globalisation which work to abolish 'Left and Right' and establish 'political closure around a discourse which doesn't allow for dislocation – what Chantal Mouffe has called a "politics without adversaries."<sup>35</sup> The concept of 'novelty' is also accorded value: 'Places, rather than being locations of coherence, become the foci of the meeting and nonmeeting of the previously unrelated and thus integral to the generation of novelty.'<sup>36</sup> Williams's own understanding of dislocation and disturbance is more conflicted. The reason for this is not hard to find given the pattern established by the thesis. The very fact of the exile chosen by the son undermines the values and practices of his community of origin and, by strengthening the powers of the alien forces, increases the threat of his community's disintegration. Yet at the same time, it is necessary for the son to distance himself from the community, to learn the skills of the enemy and so understand the extent and power of 'the deformed social order' in which that community exists.<sup>37</sup> Dislocation and disturbance are both dangerous and necessary.

In his commentaries on those novelists with whose situation he identifies, Williams registers disturbance as positive: he writes of 'the creative disturbance which is exactly George Eliot's importance: the disturbance we shall see also in Hardy.'<sup>38</sup> Yet in *Towards 2000*, where he is attacking the way in which capitalism, while exploiting patriotic and local loyalties, has 'disrupted and overridden natural communities', it is the wholly negative meanings of disturbance which dominate. 'Dislocation', sometimes in conjunction with 're-location', is repeated over-and-over. It is the central term in a lexicon of exploitation and loss: dislocation, dispossession, depreciation, depression, disappearance and disruption.<sup>39</sup> In his critical works Williams separates the motives and consequences of the individual 'creative' impetus



from those of cynical and exploitative social disturbance. The fiction, though, sees them as necessarily related and it is this insight that drives the recurring narratives of guilt and exculpation.

*Black Mountains*, like the earlier fiction, is haunted by the need to establish the identity of the traitor in the house. The guilt of the individual exile, who has, however unwillingly, aligned himself with the enemy powers, is re-inscribed as, in episode after episode, the powers of 'abstraction' invade and oppress the vulnerable and local. In this passage from the opening of the novel the 'dislocation' of the individualised mind is further reinforced as the text constructs that mind as floating free of any identifying name and body. Yet *Black Mountains* nonetheless demonstrates the potential of a form capable of taking forward the idea of the novel as actively engaged in oppositional politics. The narrative form, with its insistence on the value of place and its articulation of the voices of the disempowered dead, accepts the challenges mounted by Benjamin, Bauman and Massey to defend the dead and the living from practices that would erase them discursively. At the end of *Manod* Williams writes of the inadequacy of any one discourse of the land that lies before Matthew and Susan as they leave the valley: 'It was too great a disparity for any single perspective.'<sup>40</sup> *Black Mountains*, with its episodic structure, and the stark disjunctions that mark the episodes from the sections of historical background, fulfils even more strongly Massey's call for 'dissonant narratives'.<sup>41</sup> Although the thesis has identified the strong drive in the fiction towards the production of a story which will justify Williams's own history, and questioned the extent to which he is producing this story for himself rather than a general audience, his themes of displacement, dislocation and unease are, finally, those of contemporary society. It seems appropriate that, like all his writings, *Black Mountains* is unfinished. It is all part of the work in process.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Beginning*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Bookmarks*, 162.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>4</sup> See for example *The English Novel*, 78-79, *The Country and the City* 208-209 and *English Prose* 42-44.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Milner, *Cultural Materialism* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 101.

<sup>6</sup> *The English Novel*, 90.

<sup>7</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Raymond Williams, Communities and Universities' in Roger Bromley *et al.* (eds.), *Keywords: a Journal of Cultural Materialism* 1 (1998), 34.

<sup>8</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (Verso, 1978), 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, 108.

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- <sup>10</sup> *Manod*, 32.
- <sup>11</sup> *Border Country*, 269.
- <sup>12</sup> *Loyalties*, 247.
- <sup>13</sup> Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History* (Routledge, 1989), 173.
- <sup>14</sup> *Border Country*, 70.
- <sup>15</sup> *Manod*, 135.
- <sup>16</sup> *Loyalties*, 349.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Volunteers*, 208.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Country and the City*, 81.
- <sup>19</sup> Robert Crawshaw and Alice Tomic, 'Editorial' *Language and Intercultural Communication* 4:1 (2004)1-9.
- <sup>20</sup> Dennis Feeney, 'I Shall be Read' in *The London Review of Books* 28:16 (17 August 2006) <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n16/print/feoi/html> Accessed 30.8.2006
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- <sup>22</sup> *The Long Revolution*, 304-305.
- <sup>23</sup> Lennard J. Davis *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction* (Methuen, 1987), 217.
- <sup>24</sup> *Manod*, 207.
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- <sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Pimlico, 1999), 248.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.
- <sup>31</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).
- <sup>32</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 71.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>37</sup> *Towards 2000*, 266.
- <sup>38</sup> *The English Novel*, 70.
- <sup>39</sup> *Towards 2000*, 184-190.
- <sup>40</sup> *Manod*, 173.
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