

## Chapter Six: Williams's Novels

### 'A specifically Welsh structure of feeling'<sup>1</sup>

Williams attributed many of the difficulties which he thought existed in representations of the lives of working people in English literature to the dominant role of writers drawn from the middle class or the bourgeoisie, or from amongst those who could in some other sense be said to be outside, exiled, or alienated, from the life and formative experiences of working class communities. However, he did not believe that studying writing that originated from *within* the working class offered the prospect of any automatic or simple correction to these problems. The reason for this was the difficulty experienced by working class writers in developing literary forms suitable for the expression of their distinctive experience. Williams explained the problem thus:

From the beginning of the formation of the industrial working class — as indeed earlier, among rural labourers, craftsmen and shepherds — there were always individuals with the zeal and capacity to write, but their characteristic problem was the relation of their intentions and experience to the dominant literary forms, shaped primarily as these were by another dominant class.

(1978e: 8)

He identified the situation of working class writers during the nineteenth century as 'exceptionally difficult' because of the unsuitability of 'received conventional plots — the propertied marriage and settlement; the intricacies of inheritance; the exotic adventures; the abstracted romance' (1978e: 9). In verse the working class writer could perhaps draw support from traditional popular forms, street ballads or work songs, but in prose forms autobiography proved much more accessible than the novel for expressing what was distinctive about their class experience.

Williams was aware of attempts to insert working class experience into conventional novels of high romance,<sup>2</sup> but he

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<sup>1</sup> See 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' (1978e: 11).

thought that it was not until the development of the industrial novel, ‘the true industrial novel’, that working class fiction can be said to have emerged. This, perhaps paradoxically, occurred when working class writers embraced other forms issuing from amongst the dominant class; he thought that when working class writers embraced realist and naturalistic prose forms they were able to develop a distinctive, more independent practice:

Both the realist and the naturalist novel, more generally, had been predicated on the distinctive assumption — I say assumption, though if I were not being academic I would say, more shortly, the distinctive truth — that the lives of individuals, however intensely and personally realised, are not just influenced but in certain crucial ways formed by general social relations. Thus industrial work, and its characteristic places and communities, are not just a new background: a new “setting” for a story. In the true industrial novel they are seen as formative.

(1978e: 11)

In this way Williams thought a fiction was created in which work was not something that was observed, or speculated upon from afar, or regarded in a distanced or cold manner. On the contrary work was seen as immediate, pressing and personal: ‘Here, in the world of the industrial novel — as indeed in the best rural fiction; in Hardy for example — work is pressing and formative, and the most general social relations are directly experienced within the most personal.’ (1978e: 12) At its best, the industrial novel gave expression to the formation of individuals and communities within the distinctive pressures and rhythms of industrial manual labour.

This form of writing, resulted in Wales, in a creation of a distinctive kind of industrial novel; a kind of novel that gave expression to a specifically Welsh structure of feeling. Williams thought that it was the defeat of the General Strike in May 1926, and the lockout of miners’ that followed it, which gave particular impetus to Welsh writing. It was, he thought, during the nineteen-twenties and thirties, that working class writers produced texts

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<sup>2</sup> See Williams’s discussion of Joseph Keating’s *Flower of the Dark* (Keating 1917) in ‘The Welsh Industrial Novel’ (1978e: 9-11).

saturated with a pervasive and distinctively Welsh experience of defeat:

The defeat becomes fused with the more general sadness of a ravaged, subordinated and depressed Wales, but also, and from both these sources, there is the intense consciousness of struggle — of militancy and fidelity and of the real human costs these exact; the conflicts within the conflict; the losses and frustrations; the ache of depression and that more local and acute pain which comes only to those who have known the exhilaration of struggle and who know, having given everything, that they have still not given enough; not enough in the terms of this world, which has not been changed, which has only steadily got worse.

(1978e: 12)

Williams thought that from this experience of hope and defeat working class writers made some gains and experienced some losses.<sup>3</sup> They were also drawing on the resources offered by the distinctive topography in which Welsh industry was embedded within the life and work of rural landscapes, it was a landscape where not simply the pits, foundries, and mountains of slag provided a record of relentless toil; the ‘fields and hills’ were also ‘soaked with labour’ (1975b: 100-101).

This distinctively Welsh experience of struggle and of what we might call a specific *terrain* of struggle also gave rise to a specific experience of community where a quite definitely parochial rural experience was complicated by the more intense and perhaps more bitterly fought struggles to create meaningful communities, and the institutions that could sustain them, in the industrial districts of South Wales. Williams understood well the important differences that existed between the life of the village in

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<sup>3</sup> See ‘The Social Significance of 1926’ for an interesting discussion of the way in which defeat could also coincide with a ‘remarkable self-realization of the capacity of a class, in its own sufficient social relations and in its potentially positive social and economic power.’ This essay was first published in *Llafur* 2:2, 1977, and was originally an address to the commemorative conference, ‘The General Strike and the Miners’ Lockout of 1926’ organized jointly by *Llafur* and the National Union of Mineworkers at Pontypridd in April 1976. The quotation is taken from p.108 of *Resources of Hope* (1977: 105-110).

which he grew up and that built up amidst the collieries and iron works lying to the south of Pandy:

The connections between these very different kinds of community — rural and industrial — have still not been sufficiently explored: how much of one went into the other, the very complex interlocks inside those struggles, the very complex conflicts inside them, in the earlier stages, between the older tradition and the new. I think probably we are still in the early phase of understanding this.

(1977f: 114)

Williams believed that the Welsh experience and particularly the contribution of South Wales to the development of ‘a much more collective community’ was as strongly realised as ‘anywhere in the world’; it was a community in which institutions were cast ‘in collective forms’ giving rise implicitly, if not automatically, to notions of a total society formed in ‘mutuality and brotherhood’. (1977f: 115)

Williams was gripped by the tangle of commitments and possibilities presented by this distinctively Welsh experience. He was gripped by the tension between the maintenance of purely local commitments and those with the wider world; he was gripped by the tension between industrial life and rural and agricultural rhythms, and by the inevitable tension between the collective obligations and solidarities which emerge in the life and labour forged in local communities, and the more private or personal needs of the individuals who compose them. It was to explore the problems presented by these tensions, and perhaps, to explore some of the formal difficulties experienced by working class writers<sup>4</sup> that Williams devoted much of his time and energy to writing novels.

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<sup>4</sup> In ‘The Welsh Industrial Novel’ (1978e) Williams discusses: Gwyn Jones, *Times Like These* (Jones 1936); Lewis Jones, *Cwmardy* (Jones 1937) and *We Live* (1939); Jack Jones, *Rhondda Roundabout* (1934) and *Black Parade* (Jones 1935); Richard Llewellyn, *How Green Was My Valley* (1939); T. Rowland Hughes, *Chwalfa* (Hughes 1946); Gwyn Thomas, *All Things Betray Thee* (Thomas 1949). See also Andy Croft’s essay ‘Authors Take Sides: Writers and the Communist Party 1920-56’ (Croft 1995).

### Future Sadness

Williams expressed his desire for emancipation most intimately in his fiction. In striving towards the articulation of a new social reality he explored the nature of the obstacles that he thought littered the path to the free acceptance and enjoyment of communal loyalties and social obligations. The seriousness of his novels — their engagement with social and moral conscience — together with their ponderous style and uneven quality did not result in wide interest. Consequently, critical engagement has been limited. However, there has been a critical literature and a few useful attempts have been made to indicate illuminating ways of reading his novels.

In writing about the trilogy, *Border Country*, *Second Generation*, and *The Fight for Manod*, J. P. Ward noted a unity of tone in Williams's fiction arising from the seriousness of its concerns and the way in which his characters interact. Ward does not want to speak of people 'sparring' with each other or of 'warily circling' around each other:

It is rather that Williams' characters never meet by chance just to pass the time of day, lose their tempers or gaily order more drinks to the accompaniment of joyful meaningless banter. People meet, quietly though usually with some tension, to think through their positions; sometimes their strong differences. At other times they are sharing a deep, careful brooding about where they stand in the community and the action with which that community is currently involved.

(Ward 1981: 38-9)

In phrases redolent of Williams's style, Ward describes the 'disabling limitations' that arise from a 'too even realization of tone, and a strange lack of plurality of human emotions' (Ward 1981: 36). It is a tone of profound moral questioning and absorption that seems to make the smallest action pregnant with inchoate significance. Williams's characters appear to be paralysed by the significance of their own thoughts about their thoughts and their own contemplated actions. It was this tone that

prompted Terry Eagleton's wicked lampoon of *Second Generation*:

'But it isn't', said Gwen, moving to the french windows in her blue sweater. 'It's the energy you give that breaks you. Don't you see? You take it this way and you see both ways, but in the end it comes down to the hard thing, that hard loss, the bitterness. And the growth pushes through that, but it isn't the same, not in the body it isn't. I fought and fought till it drained me but Dad wouldn't see it, he wouldn't make that bridge. It was a hard place to cross, to bridge that crossing, and in the end he couldn't, it was too much the other, he fell in. He fell in and you fell in with him, Peter, that's what I'm trying to say, don't you see it? You took the hard road and he took the soft road but you both came out together where they meet, where history meets. You can push the desire back and it will break you but it's all you've got, all Dad ever had, the hard thing at the crossing, that bitter growth.'

Peter moved quickly to the sideboard.

'Your growth, Gwen? Your bitterness?'

'All our growth, Peter. You, Beth, Daffyd, Dai, Jojo, Queenie - all of us.'

'And if we die, pushing back?'

'Then we'll push back, dying, Peter. Why else are our hands empty when that cold stream stirs quickly in the blood? You said it was desire, and so it was - but not that desire, not now, not in this place, in Wales.'

He turned slowly towards her, seeing the thin shoulders beneath the blue sweater, the dark hair sparse on the neck.

(Inglis 1995: 191-2)

This passage, cited by Fred Inglis, continues in similar vein for another 25 lines sending up the elliptical intensity of Williams's dialogue. Inglis describes this parody as not only 'lovingly hostile' but as 'hilariously accurate'. Eagleton has indeed captured, albeit with comic intention, the preternatural seriousness of Williams's characters which provide the novels with their most distinctive claim to critical attention.

During the 1979 interviews with Williams published as *Politics and Letters* his interlocutors noted that the central figure of *Border Country*, the railwayman Harry Price, appears to be a man without contradictions, a man without conflicting desires, impulses and aspirations. They note that:

In effect, Harry is seen as a figure virtually without contradiction; even the physical descriptions of him emphasize a singleness of being which appears to have a normative force in the novel . . . . Such a moral integrism — character either given as one bloc, or if not, fissure seen as a flaw — is not persuasive novelistically or in real life.

(1979b: 280-1)

Williams's response acknowledges the difficulties inherent in the solid undivided personality, but he does not see this as volitional. Harry did not opt for a life without apparent contradiction. It was bequeathed to him:

Harry Price has not set himself a life, he was set into a situation where he goes through a process of adaptation and integration as well as clearing a certain space for living in which he can feel that more of himself is there. The central thrust of the novel is actually that the kind of strength which that apparently integrated view of moral value gives is insufficient. In Harry's case, it fails in the end when death approaches, which sets a term to any perspective. There is a sense of total bewilderment in this otherwise very strong and confident man, when he becomes ill, when he can no longer work, when he's dying. What had seemed like a connection between an integrated view of life and a force of character falters once the conditions which were carrying it really go, his own physical strength, health, and the place to which he's got used. The effect of the scene where his mind is almost disintegrating is that the meanings which had seemed so powerful are losing their power. His son sees not only the physical nearness of death, but also the confusion and withdrawal of interest as it approaches. This is the reason for the son's great difficulty — he is bound to respect his

father's example, and yet he is bound to feel that it isn't complete. That is the crisis in his response.  
(1979b: 281)<sup>5</sup>

It is possible here to see that we are not only witnessing the final physical deterioration and death of a single man but of a whole way of living in the world. Harry's death in *Border Country*, which could perhaps be taken as the dissolution of an individual in 1960, by the time of the *New Left Review* interviews in 1979, speaks of a wider social disintegration. And, in the years that have followed — through the eighties and nineties of the last century — the conditions that were carrying Harry's integrated view of life have not merely faltered, they have entirely disappeared. It is a disappearance anticipated in the much more restless, uncertain, and perhaps fractured personalities of the second and subsequent generations.

In *Politics and Letters* Williams explained his purpose adequately, but the difficulty which remains is not so much the evident disintegration of the integrated view of life represented by Harry, but the fact that we cannot but mourn its passing. The dominant centre of value, not simply in *Border Country* but throughout Williams's writing, is an aspiration for a life in which people encounter their individual desires, their personal loyalties and social obligations in an integrated and undivided manner. In this sense the son laments that he is not his father and greets the disappearance of the opportunity to be his father with dismay. Although the insufficiency of the kind of strength bestowed by an apparently integrated view of moral value is acknowledged, the hope for it is not supplanted, diminished, or destroyed. Indeed, in Williams's work there is no distinction between mourning and hoping; both traipse around after each other in a dreary pageant that appears to have no end.

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<sup>5</sup> Williams thought that writers were 'set into a situation' too: 'Marxism, more clearly than any other kind of thinking, has shown us that we are in fact aligned long before we realize that we are aligned. For we are born into a social situation, into social relationships, into a family, all of which have formed what we can later abstract as ourselves as individuals. . . . So born into a social situation with all its specific perspectives, and into a language, the writer begins by being aligned.' (1980c: 25)

In the 1979 interview his interlocutors note that in *The Fight for Manod* the incidents of solidarity and collective action present in *Border Country* and *Second Generation* are absent:

There is no equivalent of the solidarity of the railway-line or the car-factory. A wedding is the only occasion where a significant group of characters comes together. Was this thinning-out deliberate? It seems to give an undercurrent of sadness to the book that is unlike its predecessors.

(1979b: 294)

Yes, the thinning-out was intentional. But the sadness was not retrospective; it was not an expression of nostalgia. On the contrary, it is a 'contemporary sadness' expressive of a 'wholly possible future and the contradictions and blockages of the present' (1979b: 294). Williams is clear that something has gone wrong with the present and this dislocation has implications both for the past and the future, creating a kind of future sadness more profound and much deeper than disappointment:

There's no term for it, as with nostalgia in the case of retrospect. It's the opposite of that, and of course it's distinctively different from the kind of confidence in the future many of us have had, and that I've often written to try to restore, because it is crucial, and yet to get it again means passing through the shadows of the devastating experiences of war and what happened to the best revolutionary societies and then, here, the terrible disintegration of what was once a labour movement with apparently unproblematic perspectives: all the sadness that came when we began to understand reproduction and incorporation, not just as concepts but as the wearying and displacement of flesh and blood. I wanted to seize that moment, when the common actions are latent, indeed quite precisely latent, but through a whole set of contradictions are not actualizing.

(1979b: 294-5)

This elliptical account in which future sadness haunts the present and chases the past permeates his characters and the narratives of

his novels. Williams was reaching here towards describing the loss of the world ‘for which we have fought’. He was struggling to talk about the loss of the future. He continued:

Two other elements decide the later shape of *The Fight for Manod*. First, the quite specific sadness of rural Wales today - the Welsh writers I most respect, Emyr Humphreys especially, have this much more strongly. Then second, the experience of ageing. I don’t so much mean in myself, though I’ve felt it at times, but in a few people I know very well and deeply respect, who have fought and fought and quite clearly had expected that in their lifetime, their active lifetime even, there would be decisive breaks to the future. I have seen one or two of these men actually crying, from some interfused depth of social and personal sadness, and knowing why and knowing the arguments to be set against such a feeling and still in some physical sense absolutely subject to it. I have known this, as a matter of fact, in two of the finest militant intellectuals in Europe; for obvious reasons I’m not going to name them, but they’ve shown it to me, of their own generation, where they’ve often publicly overridden it.

(1979b: 295)

This sadness is the expression of disappointment borne of defeat. However, it cannot be stressed enough: this melancholy is not borne of defeat, which is in any sense absolute, because the dissolution of socialism is inadmissible. Defeat, whether tactical or strategic, is transient – it is never final. Hope may falter – some may even lose hope – but ultimate defeat is not to be contemplated:

My writing of Matthew Price, who of course in *Border Country* was quite close to me, was an attempt to understand this specific contemporary sadness in someone who in *The Fight for Manod* has become very unlike me; indeed I feel a coarse hard bastard beside him, but more able, I think or hope, to work and push through.

(1979b: 295)

It is hard to find a way beyond this self-referential way of reading these novels. It is difficult not to see in them an exploration of both the difficulty and the necessity of hope in and for a future beyond the experience of isolation, of alienation, and of 'self-exile' that according to Williams was such an important part of the contemporary structure of feeling in the second half of the twentieth century.

### Postmodern Geography and other strategies

Williams did not commence or carry on his work in ideal circumstances – they were certainly not circumstances of his own choosing. And, it is usual, in critical engagements with any of Williams's texts to employ these difficulties as explanations of the inadequacy of particular analysis or of lacunae in the body of his work. Allowances are often made which obscure the origins of errors that continue to have wide currency. Hindsight is regarded with embarrassment, rather than resorted to as the key advantage of those who come later. Consequently, in much of the literature on Williams, apart from frankly hostile, *reactionary* or anti-communist accounts,<sup>6</sup> his prejudices concerning socialism and the capacities of the working class, the limited nature of his critical engagement with socialist realism, his bias in favour of the Soviet Union, more often than not go unremarked and unexamined.<sup>7</sup> While his assumption of the integrity of the subject, his reliance upon *feeling*, his idiosyncratic use of language, or the poverty of his theoretical apparatus can be generously attributed to his isolation, to his times and circumstances, the commonplaces and beliefs upon which his aesthetic rested are accepted or finessed.<sup>8</sup> This process can achieve considerable levels of sophistication as we can see, for example, in the encounter staged by Steven Connor between Williams's work and that of Fredric Jameson and Peter

<sup>6</sup> See Gorak 1988, Scruton 1985, and Cowling 1990.

<sup>7</sup> This is not the case with Fred Inglis 1995. However, for an alternative account of Inglis's efforts see: McGuigan 1996: 101-108, and Samuel 1996: 8-11. For a less hostile account see Radhakrishnan Nayer 1995: 20.

<sup>8</sup> A fine exception to this observation, although still within the context of a discussion concerning the limitations of experience over cognition, is Derek Robbins's reading of 'Culture is Ordinary' in his essay 'Ways of Knowing Cultures: Williams and Bourdieu' (Wallace 1997: 40-55).

Osborne. However, even here the focus is finally upon the fate of the politics of collectivity:

Socialism, or the politics of reaffirmed community, is not to be guaranteed either by the pledge of temporal wholeness promised by Williams, or by the rattled, over-totalizing logic of catastrophe suggested in the politics of time of Jameson or Derrida. Of course, socialism may not be guaranteeable by anything at all, let alone the relative sophistication of its politics of time. But I think that, in order to grasp and inhabit the conditions of temporality that I have attempted to evoke, the politics of collectivity must learn to live within conditions of synecopation rather than synthesis, and to establish a relation to its times, not of knowledge, but rather of acknowledgement.

(Connor 1997: 197)<sup>9</sup>

In compounding or complicating the temporal Connor was seeking to evaluate Williams's work in ways in which it was hoped were more capable of meeting the challenge of post modernity without restructuring the feelings or surrendering the ambitions of the aesthetic of emancipation.

Tony Pinkney engaged in a detailed reading of Williams's fiction in 1991 in his monograph, *Raymond Williams*, for the Border Lines Series. Here, Pinkney employed the writing of Edward Soja, Fredric Jameson, Gaston Bachelard and others to develop critical tools capable of taking readings of Williams's fiction beyond historicist engagement with the social, political, and personal difficulties which formed them and to which they directly relate.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Here, Connor is not giving full weight or recognition to Williams's attempts to finesse his view of community in *The Long Revolution* and later in *Towards 2000* to take full account of technological, social and intellectual change which resulted in William's account of shifting interests and political and social alignments which in some respects anticipated the outlook, if not the language and analytical strategies, of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

<sup>10</sup> For the full development of this spatial analysis see the section 'Taking the Feel of the Room: *Border Country* and *Second Generation*' in Pinkney's *Raymond Williams* (Pinkney 1991: 18-69).

However, refusal of the time/space dichotomy did not in any event efface Williams's social concerns, and this was consistent with Pinkney's acknowledgement that his own focus upon the 'textual complexities and perplexities' of Williams's fiction do not, 'in the long run, lead away from the social after all.' (Pinkney 1991: 110). The novels are, *after all*, inseparable from the social and political writings.

Alan O'Connor in his *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* gives us an insight as to why this might be the case when talking about Williams's key terms:

The over-and-over quality, the sheer density of the key terms of Williams's writing, should be no surprise. The central trope is not making-strange but that of doubling-over or repetition, or an interest in the density of experience along with a determination to return and give it shape. There is an insistence that experience, when examined again, has a kind of structure.

(O'Connor 1989a: 2)

It is not simply that the six novels derive their status and interest from their author, the well-known radical critic, it is that these fictions share to a remarkable degree their intensity, their obsessions, their fears, their aspirations and sometimes even their turns of phrase and closely guarded sentences, with the *non-fictions*. Raymond Williams, the novelist, is working with the same materials as Raymond Williams, the socialist literary and cultural critic.

Jan Gorak attempted a more sharply circumscribed engagement with Williams's novels in his thesis, *The Alien Mind of Raymond Williams*, published in 1988. Here, in a sustained consideration of writings across the entire range of Williams's work, Gorak seeks to read Williams through the keyword of alienation. He is often perceptive and thoughtful. However, his attempt to use alienation as a determining theme results in a failure to grasp what O'Connor has referred to as Williams's attempt to give shape to the density of experience. Indeed one of the most irritating traits in Williams's writing is the often provisional and conditional character in which clause after clause piles up the qualifications. It is very often difficult to get hold of precisely what is meant. It is a mode of precision in which the

overdeterminations not merely blur the edges but dissolve the individual into the social, the personal into the political, the past into the present into the future, rights into obligations and desires into commitments. The difficulty inherent in Gorak's critical strategy is that Williams's writing cannot be adequately approached through tight definitions or by the identification of some single point of view.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to Gorak's approach John and Lizzie Eldridge seek to complicate our picture of Williams's fiction by showing the way in which different aspects of his themes and concerns were deposited layer by layer in order to reveal the particularity of experience and the difficulties inherent in its articulation. Frankly hostile to Tony Pinkney's mode of analysis, which they think leaves Williams's fiction 'lying fragmented on the postmodernist bookshelf' (Eldridge and Eldridge 1994: 148), they foreground Williams's concern with the passage of time, the succession of generations, the difficulty of settlement, and the nature of commitment.

Throughout their work Eldridge and Eldridge establish a close and often uncritical affinity with all Williams's purposes. Indeed, in *The Fight for Manod* 'This acknowledgement of the continual difficulty of expressing the inexpressible is in itself its articulation' (Eldridge and Eldridge 1994: 159). Thus, they establish a very close bond with Williams's prose, imbibing his turns of phrase and some of the concepts that these phrases carry without subjecting them to analysis. Clearly the desire of John and Lizzie Eldridge to find in Williams 'resources for a journey of hope' enabled them to establish a critical sympathy with his project. It permitted them to argue for an intimate and unproblematic relationship between Williams's fiction, his literary and social criticism, and his political interventions. Consequently, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections* is excellent as a partisan rehearsal of Williams's socialist commitments in a time of extreme difficulty for such an outlook.

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<sup>11</sup> See the entry on 'alienation' in *Keywords* (1976a: 33-6).

### A Topology of Labour

For Williams the past and the future were interfused with experience of material and social relations that appeared to exist independently of actually existing capitalism. Williams's interest was in what he thought as specific but indissoluble processes. These processes were to be realised in the encounter between the demands and pressures of the experience of capitalist relations and the always elusive and often inchoate and inarticulate aspirations for a mode of life in which the properly human desire for recognition and solidarity within a working community are disfigured and submerged.

The nature of these indissoluble processes is probed in his fiction by the way in which landscapes and people — their relationships with each other and with the land — are forged by work. Work, being as old as Adam, exists independently of capitalism and is not confined to any particular class<sup>12</sup> or indeed to societies divided into classes. Work exists independently of any mode of exploitation.<sup>13</sup> Since the times before memory work has been creating and recreating human life and with it a kind of topology of labour which defies the idle consumption of views and landscapes engendered by a move away from a working relationship with the land. In *Border Country* Matthew feels this very sharply:

He had felt empty and tired, but the familiar shape of the valley and the mountains held and replaced him. It was one thing to carry its image in his mind, as he did, everywhere, never a day passing but he closed his eyes and saw it again, his only landscape. But it was different to stand and look at the reality. It was not less beautiful; every detail of the land came up with its old excitement. But it was not still, as the image had been. It was no longer a landscape or a view, but a valley that people were using. He realized, as he watched, what had happened in going away. The valley as landscape had been taken, but its work forgotten. The visitor sees beauty; the inhabitant

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<sup>12</sup> See the description of Edwin Parry's farm and of his wife, Olwen, working in her kitchen, in *Border Country* (1960a: 62-68).

<sup>13</sup> See *People of the Black Mountains* (1989; 1990).

a place where he works and has his friends. Far away, closing his eyes, he had been seeing this valley, but as a visitor sees it, as the guide-book sees it: this valley, in which he had lived more than half his life.

He stopped at a gate and looked down. Lorries were moving along the narrow road to the north. A goods train was stopped at a signal on the down line, just beyond the Tump (a round barrow, tufted with larches, that he had not known was a barrow when he went away). The line-gang were working about a hundred yards from the train, and there was grey smoke from their hut. Around them stretched the fields, bright green under pasture or red with the autumn ploughing. He saw the woods, the treeline of the river, the intricate contours of slope and fall, and these slowly distinguished themselves as farms — Parry's Tregarron, James's Cwmhonddu, Probert's Tynewydd, Richards' Alltyrynys, Lewis's The Bridge. Then the other houses, away from the farms: grouped, in their patches, along the lines of the roads and lanes. There, in Hendre, people were busy around their houses, and the marks of their work were everywhere: in the untidy sheds, the stark posts of the washing-lines, the piles of red earth beside the unfinished ditch, the sprawl of netting wire and old troughs in the fowl-runs, the dirty lorry parked in a field corner, with black tarpaulins beside it on the grass. In the general loveliness that was so clear across the valley, he found himself narrowing his eyes to blur out this disfiguring debris around the houses. Yet, as he did so, some quality vanished: it was now neither the image nor the actual valley.

(1960a: 75-6)

Matthew looks up at the mountains and even here he finds work:

On a low skyline a tractor was moving, in an area that he remembered as wooded but that now had been cleared and fenced. . . . (1960a: 76)

And so on. Dogs chase hares around the fields but labour: the ploughing, the lime spreading goes on:

This was not anybody's valley to make into a landscape. Work had changed and was still changing it, though the main shape held.

(1960a: 76)

The mountains themselves are defined as much by labour as they are by the sky:

Not one of his Edwin Parry's fields was anywhere near flat. Those across which Harry walked to the house sloped so steeply that already, though it was meadow and ploughland, he seem to be climbing the mountain itself. Everywhere there were signs of the seizure of this land from the mountain. From every hedge the bracken encroached, the brooks and watercourses, slow declivities of marsh, cut across the steep fields.

(1960a: 62-3)

In a manner, which anticipates the tone and outlook of *People of the Black Mountains*, we are aware that the people and the landscape are shaped and bound inextricably together by work.

### **The Pleasures of Work**

**W**ork was not simply tough, nor was it simply imposed by the demands of natural or social processes, it could also be the site of pride and perhaps even of sensual pleasure:

The digging Jack Price would not let him help with: 'You can't dig yet, boy.' Will watched and thought about it. Harry at least worked quickly, trenching and double-digging, bending for weeds and stones. But Jack Price worked so slowly that nothing seemed to get done. Only if you went away and came back could you see the advance of the beautifully clean ground.

One cold afternoon a strip was being made ready for the first planting of broad beans. When he thought it was done, Will fetched the beans and the line, but his grandfather had started on the strip again, moving incredibly slowly, raking and raking at the earth until it

seemed he was trying to change its nature. Already there was nothing larger than a marble, but still, endlessly, the slow raking and fining went on. Though he said nothing, Will doubted whether in the growing this would make much difference. It was less this, he thought, than some ritual of service. And he saw how separate, in these ways, he had already become. For whatever purpose, he would never dig like this. The jobs which satisfied him were those involving an immediate sharp effort — hauling at a grubbed root, heaving a load of leaves to the heap, forcing along a heavy bundle of sticks. Harry worked like this sometimes, but Jack Price never. To him there seemed all the time in the world, though already the blue damp air was thickening, and evening was drawing along the valley.

(1960a: 255-6)

In the circle formed by Will's youthful enthusiasm for quick hard work, Harry's swift efficiency and the old day labourer's ritual of service Williams draws the different modes of enjoyment to be found in hard labour. Reading this one is reminded of Williams on Hardy:

Work enters his novels more decisively than in any English novelist of comparable importance. And it is not merely illustrative; it is seen as it is, as a central kind of learning. Feeling very acutely the long crisis of separation, and in the end coming to more tragically isolated catastrophes than any others within this tradition, he yet created continually the strength and the warmth of people living together: in work and love; in the physical reality of a place.

To stand working slowly in a field, and feel the creep of rainwater, first in legs and shoulders, then on hips and head, then at back, front, and sides, and yet to work on till the leaden light diminishes and marks that the sun is down, demands a distinct modicum of stoicism, even of valour. Yet they did not feel the wetness so much as might be supposed. They were both young, and they were talk-

ing of the time when they lived and loved together at Talbothays Dairy, that happy green tract of land where summer had been liberal in her gifts: in substance to all, emotionally to these.

The general structure of feeling in Hardy would be much less convincing if there were only the alienation, the frustration, the separation and isolation, the final catastrophes. What is defeated but not destroyed at the end of *The Woodlanders* or the end of *Tess* or the end of *Jude* is a warmth, a seriousness, an endurance in love and work that are the necessary definition of what Hardy knows and mourns as loss.

(1970a: 116-7)

For Williams the intimate sensuality of work in community is carried by its formative role in sustaining heterosexual familial relations.<sup>14</sup> When a young labourer, a boy of seventeen, strips the better to swing his pick, he does not strip to his skin, as he would have done for George Orwell or D. H. Lawrence. For Williams the boy strips only to a red shirt and heavy black trousers. We are not contemplating the boy's body as that of an isolated or isolatable man. We see him as a son working alongside his father in contrast to Will, who as Matthew, no longer works besides his father and this in some sense is Matthew's loss:

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<sup>14</sup> I. Morgan, Watch Repairer, conducts the Eisteddfod as Illtyd Morgan y Darren, reciting the names of the child performers and remembering the fathers and mothers before them:

'Will looked round uneasily. He could see Mrs Watkins, in a low brown hat, with a brown square-shouldered coat, not betraying by so much as a movement her intent reception of this memory of herself. He knew how much this ceremony of identification and memory meant to the silent and apparently unresponsive listeners. *This, centrally, was the meaning of life.* And Illtyd Morgan was never out in the smallest detail. Half-ashamed, Will found himself wishing that there could be 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. But always — there it was — he was right, and a stranger coming into the room would learn, in the course of the day, the greater part of the complicated family relationships by which Glynmawr lived.' [My Emphasis] (1960a: 201)

At the turn by the pitch he came on the diggers: a boy of seventeen in front with a pick, a man in his forties working behind with a shovel. He spoke as he walked past. He knew the man well, though the name would not come. the boy in front was still working, stripped to a red shirt and heavy black trousers. He was obviously enjoying the high swing of the pick; his whole life seemed in it.

‘Come to see your Dad, Will?’

‘Yes’

‘You remember my boy? Teddy.’

‘Watkins, Phil Watkins, used to work at Trefedw.’

‘He’s a worker, isn’t he?’

‘Aye, keeping me at it.’

It came through quite suddenly: a father and son in the same line of work. He spoke to Teddy as he passed, and the boy smiled.

(1960a: 308-9)

But Matthew, the academic, is also committed without conflict, ‘to the work that gave meaning to this moving history’ of population in Wales.

But in practice, in a different atmosphere, moving back necessarily into the long struggle with detail, the emphasis had changed, until the Kestrel was no more than an irrelevant memory. The landscape of childhood never disappears, but the waking environment is adult: the street, the committee, the long, quiet library, the file of revised manuscript, the books shifting under the arm as you run for the crowded bus. The personal meaning is evident in every shape in this country, every sound of the loved voices, but the public meaning is elsewhere, in a different negotiation in another voice.

(1960a: 307)

### Writing Beyond Class

**W**illiams had a lively sense of the complexity and confusion that accompanied many attempts to identify accurately the nature of class relations in British society. He understood that large numbers of people were unwell-

ing to identify themselves as working class because of the association of the term ‘working class’ with *lower* class. Similarly, he noted among people who clung to the identification, ‘middle class’, widespread hostility towards the implication that they did not *work* because they rejected inclusion in the ‘working class’.<sup>15</sup>

By the early sixties Williams acknowledged a growing feeling that class was thought of as ‘out of date’ and that this feeling was being used to ratify the capitalist social system, but in response he merely recommended a concentration upon the traditional Marxist notion of ‘objective’ (i.e. economic) as opposed to ‘subjective’ (i.e. sociological or psychological) class positions:

To perpetuate the present confusion is to guarantee a minimal social consciousness. We have instead to concentrate on two general facts: the open differential, and the ownership and control of social capital.

(1961a: 362)

Confusion concerning the *real* facts of class relations results in ‘minimal social consciousness’. This is not exactly the ‘false consciousness’ of the Marxist tradition, but it is most assuredly its second cousin. But Williams does not conclude, as adherents to the notion of ‘false consciousness’ would, that we should actively promote identification with the working class. Instead he wants to revise the differentials in the working-class-middle-class distinction:

It is certainly my view that the differential will have to be revised, but the only possible basis for this is a real feeling of community – the true knowledge that we are working for ourselves and for each other – which, though present now as an ideal, is continually confused and in some cases cancelled by the plain fact that most of us do not own or control the means and the product of our work. In an industrial economy, social production will either be owned or controlled by the whole society, or by a part of

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the difficulties concerning the so-called difference between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ class identifications were addressed by G. D. H. Cole in 1955 in ‘The Social Structure of England’, ‘The Conception of the Middle Class’, and ‘British Class Structure in 1951’, Chapters 3, 4, and 6, of his *Studies in Class Structure* (Cole 1955: 43-100; 147-188).

it which then employs the rest. The decision between these alternatives is the critical decision about class, and if we are serious about ending the class system we must clear away the survivals, the irrelevancies, and the confusion of other kinds of distinction, until we see the hard economic centre which finally sustains them. With that basic inequality isolated we could stop the irrelevant discussion of class, of which most of us are truly sick and tired, and let through the more interesting discussion of human differences, between real people and real communities living in their valuably various ways.

(1961a: 362-3)

This attempt to sweep away the nuances of 'life style' distinctions, subtle and otherwise, by concentration upon the ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, reveals the deep foundations of Williams's socialism. The aspirations for individual advancement, the desire to rise in the social scale, the necessity felt by millions of achieving and maintaining superior social status, and the leisure and well-being that goes with it – all of these things which arise spontaneously from our whole way of life – were to be combated, Williams thought, with real community feeling and the perception that 'we are all working for each other'. In this way, his apparently no-nonsense materialism and his tough realism when confronting the question of who owned and controlled the social capital was employed in an ideal attempt to efface the real antagonisms and substantial social differences between middle class and working class people.

Williams's strategy was, of course, to degrade or erode the distinctions between middle class and working class people by winning the middle class over to what he regarded as the distinctively working class virtues of solidarity and community. These values were he thought manifested in the central cultural achievements of the working class: the trades unions, trades councils and co-operative societies. Perry Anderson identified this outlook as 'proletarian positivity':

This idea represents a maximum statement of one of the two poles of socialist theories of the working-class: in it, the constitutive nature of the working-class prefigures the society which it is its vocation to create. This is what has

been called the concept of ‘proletarian positivity’, in contrast to its opposite: that of the proletariat as the negativity of history, total negation of the existent social order, a subjectivity flung towards absolute suppression of class society and therewith suppression of itself.

(Anderson 1964: 44)<sup>16</sup>

Anderson acknowledges the truth of Williams’s account of working class culture but doubts that it can be used as model for society as a whole:

The truth seems to be that the nature of working-class culture is as he Williams describes it, but that *the will to universalise it, to make it the general model of society*, which he tacitly assumes to be a concomitant, has only rarely existed.

(Anderson 1964: 45)

However, Williams had confidence in the creativity and achievements of the British working class. Even in difficult times he was undismayed:

Through 1955 and 1959, with a majority of English people (though not necessarily of Scots or Welsh) opting, in politics fairly clearly, in everyday practice more substantially, for consumer capitalism, it was hard to hang on, but it was still not true that the existing resources of the people were so depleted or corrupted that there was no option but to retreat to a residual minority or a futurist vanguard.

(1976b: 241)

He did not share Anderson’s concern that the achievements of the working class rendered it ‘incapable of launching any project of total social change’ (Anderson 1964: 44). Consequently, he was not concerned about the deleterious effects of the apparent onset

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<sup>16</sup> Perry Anderson also refers his readers to the debate on negativity and positivity in the work of G. Lukács, J-P Sartre, M. Merleau-Ponty, and L. Magri.

of the process of *embourgeoisment* on the working class;<sup>17</sup> he was much more interested in winning the middle class to the side of the workers. And, in this respect Williams was not at odds with the practice or ideas of the Communist Party during the forties or fifties. The much-feared ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ of the twenties and early thirties had by 1950 softened into a belief in ‘the leading role of the working class’ as the basis for forging a more popular and broadly based struggle against monopoly capital.<sup>18</sup>

The ambiguities and contradictions of this outlook, an outlook that wanted the social solidarity born of the class struggle, to take precedence over class differences and antagonisms, was approached in Williams’s novels through useful work. What emerges very strongly in Williams’s fiction is that work matters and that work is, in all important senses, independent of class. The attitude of Williams’s characters to work and their specific relation to institutions that may have some hand in distorting or frustrating work and its proper purposes in shaping and sustaining families, communities and landscapes is much more important in determining Williams’s attitude to them than their formal class position.

The working people in Williams’s fiction are as likely to be a filling station proprietor as a car worker. They might be a farmer or smallholder, a labourer, an academic, a coal miner or

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<sup>17</sup> The softening of boundaries between a distinctively middle class walk of life and a resolutely working class life had, of course, been noted since the late 1930s. See (Durbin 1940: 109ff). See also (Orwell 1941a: 96-9) and (Laing 1986: 3-30).

<sup>18</sup> The Communist Party programme, *For Soviet Britain*, 1935, had fallen into disuse after 1941 and the transition of party policy from the frankly revolutionary towards espousing the democratic supremacy of Parliament was well advanced by the time that General Secretary, Harry Pollitt, published *Looking Ahead* in 1947. See particularly Chapter VI, entitled, ‘The British Road to Socialism’ (Pollitt 1947: 85-97). This trend was consolidated by the publication of the party’s new programme, *The British Road to Socialism* (CPGB 1951: 12-17). See also Mahon 1976: 349-357. In its final abandonment of ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ the Communist Party of Great Britain was anticipating, by some twenty-five years, the moves made towards ‘Eurocommunism’ by the French, Spanish and Italian communist parties. See Santiago Carrillo, ‘Eurocommunism’ and the State (Carrillo 1977: *passim*). See also Göran Therborn’s essay ‘The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: The Words and the Concept’ (Therborn 1978:23-34).

shop assistant.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, from one point of view the world of Williams's fiction could be said to be distinctly 'petit-bourgeois'. Indeed, it is evident that even many of those who do actually work for weekly wages see their wage as only part, albeit an essential part, of their income. Consequently, Harry, like Meredith, runs what amounts to a smallholding producing, among many other things, hundreds of pots of honey.

There was a good flower garden in front on the cottage, but the rent also included a long vegetable garden at the side of the drying green. Harry worked at this, and in the following autumn persuaded Mrs Hybart to rent him for a pound a year a further strip adjoining it, which he put under fruit trees - apple and pear and plum. Also, that same autumn, he was able to rent two strips of garden behind the timber yard at the station, and these he put down one to gooseberries and currants, the other to potatoes. In the following spring he bought wood and made four hives, which by the end of the summer, buying swarms in the valley, he had stocked with bees. The hives stood among the young fruit trees at the edge of the home vegetable garden. Then, at the end of the strip, he built a poultry run, which would be Ellen's work. (1960a: 58)

The explanation for this form of enterprise is given as Harry's childhood in the family of a poor labourer, but as this background is unfolded it is evident that we are in the presence of something much more akin to peasant life in France during the nineteenth century than anything that could be regarded as typically proletarian in Britain during the nineteen twenties.<sup>20</sup> It is notable

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<sup>19</sup> See Williams's expressions of family feeling for George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence in passages in which the class and social position of the children of nineteenth century bailiffs, and master builders, are implicitly merged with those of twentieth century coal miners and railwaymen as Williams conflates the considerable difference between the class position of Eliot and Hardy on the one hand, and Lawrence and himself on the other (1969f: 259-260; 1970a: 95-7).

<sup>20</sup> This seamless assimilation of all working or labouring people into some general notion of 'the working class' was perhaps more likely in rural communities farming marginal or poor land in early twentieth-century Britain where many working people occupied a kind of hybrid class position somewhere between peasants and workers. See for example, *Sunset Song*, the

that even when Harry's mother escaped the work of a day labourer picking stones (presumably towards the end of the nineteenth century) she did so by getting 'a weekly contract' for doing the laundry for Llangattock Manor. On the whole these workers rent land on their own account and accumulate a small capital in money, tools and equipment. They are doing more than renting allotments to grow vegetables for the direct consumption of their immediate families. Like the local farmers Harry and Meredith aim at the production of surplus produce for sale. They are engaged in commodity production on their own account. Wage labour is an essential part of this world but independent initiative and enterprise creates more than a margin for survival.

### Remote Controls: The Metropolis at Work

It is perhaps because of this outlook and tone that the difficulty inherent in class differentiation receives a peculiarly parochial inflection in Williams's fiction. Middle or upper class characters only assume a class status inimical to the interests of the hard working characters when they put loyalty to some remote institution before the well being of those immediately around them. These remote institutions can range from research and planning committees to the Communist Party, from the directors of railway companies to the national officials of trade unions, and from large commercial concerns to governments. The brooding hostilities turn out to be about betrayal, disloyalty, and fractured personal relationships in family life and in the community of work. Insofar as wider social struggle is depicted it is depicted as the struggle of a single community or group. Even the General Strike is encountered in *Border Country* as a plethora of telegrams issuing, as telegrams would, from far away intruding dilemmas and conflicts into an otherwise homogeneous community.<sup>21</sup> Morgan Rosser is the only person who is enthusiastic

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first book in the trilogy, *A Scots Quair*, where the crofters of Kinraddie occupy just this sort of intermediate social position (Grassic Gibbon 1932-4).

<sup>21</sup> There is a brief discussion in *Politics and Letters* (1979b) of the formal difficulties Williams encountered in realising the wider class relations in *Border Country*. However, Williams does not seem to be unduly concerned about what he regards as a *purely* formal matter. Strikingly, neither he nor his interlocutors discuss the need for formal innovations or development capable of overcoming the parochialism of this kind of novel. Williams concludes by saying: 'I found when I was writing *The Fight for Manod* that I

about the strike. In contrast, Major Blakely of Brynllwyd House is, like Constable Watkins, merely doing his duty.

In Williams's fiction the enemies, in so far as there are any, are remote metropolitan or international forces that threaten the tangible face-to-face relationships that positively sustain the working people. Characters who function as local agents of these forces rarely do so consistently and are few and far between — Major Blakely, the Reverend Mr Pugh, Norman Broase, Friedmann, Arthur Dean, John Dance — more often the malevolent alien forces are felt by the hard working characters as a general pressure expressed in the logic of existing social arrangements to collaborate with wider changes and purposes in pursuit of their own pressing needs and those of their families.

So, as Morgan Rosser undergoes the transformation from signalman and staunch trade unionist to entrepreneur the tensions between Harry and Morgan do not ever appear to be a consequence of Morgan's changing class position. Morgan for the most part is engaged in a primitive form of capitalist enterprise akin to the 'putting out system' where he supplies fruit jars, labels and other equipment and transport for the direct producers - small farmers and small-holders. His brand new factory, which is still under construction when we visit it, is bereft of workers. The conflict between capital and labour within this small community is not investigated. It is true that Meredith loses his smallholding to Morgan Rosser's and Major Blakely's desire for profits from the growth of soft fruits, but this is not a struggle between workers and capitalists. The tensions between Harry and Morgan, as inarticulate as they are, seem to be about differing levels of engagement with the verities and solidarities of the local community.

Morgan both as a trade unionist and a capitalist is always striving beyond the confines of the community.<sup>22</sup> He was the kind

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had to go back up to Whitehall, where ministry meetings make long-distance decisions. It is a world I now know better, but it still may not be adequately realized.' (1979b: 284)

<sup>22</sup> Williams indicated in 1979 that he thought of the tensions between Harry and Morgan were both different aspects of a tension that was combined in his own father: 'Harry is not my own father, because a lot of him went into Morgan 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 figure who represented the much more restless, critical and self-critical side of my father's nature.' (1979b: 282)

of man who, engrossed in large ideas, would forget his small commitments:

Harry leaned forward, and put the big kettle on to boil. The express came through, and he stood at the open barred window to watch it pass, and then put back the signals. As he was doing this, the lamp that hung in the centre of the box sputtered and faded. He crossed and reached up to it, shaking the bowl. As he had expected, it was empty. His look moved for a moment to the door that Morgan had slammed, and he smiled. It was the afternoon man's job to trim and fill the lamp, but again and again, in taking over from Morgan, he had found it empty.

(1960a: 88)

Morgan desires a larger life and in doing so he strives for ideas inimical to the local community from wanting to stop Will Addis planting out the 'snaps' in the station flower beds during the General Strike to moving, eventually, from the supply of wholesome fresh food at fair prices to adulteration of the workers' jam:

Morgan had taken over a new building in Gwenton, partly as a depot and partly for bottling and jam-making. Janie worked there, in the busy time, with four or five other women. Morgan was sure, in this way, of standard quality. The amount of fruit, the quantities of sugar or other sweetenings — for some things substitutes were better, making a better colour for instances — could now be properly controlled.

(1960a: 208)

And, this adulteration expresses his growing contempt for the workers in the valleys to the south of Gwenton and Glynmawr who, as consumers, are his final customers:

'Yes, if all goes well I'm going to build. I've got an option on a site, and now it's just the finance. What I want, you see, is a small modern jam factory. Nothing on a big scale, not yet. Only it's in jam, I've found, the money really is. It's the way they eat.'

(1960a: 212)

**Feeling the struggle**

In Williams's novels sharp actions, which might be said to be motivated by class interests, are noted from time to time, but he is usually more interested in feeling. General indignities of tone and attitude in relations between people who occupy broadly different class positions permeate Williams's fiction. However, these expressions of spite or contempt never reflect or express any direct attempt to prosecute or deepen the class struggle. Instead, they seem to represent Williams's interest in poking about in the formative modes of *ressentiment* experienced by those who have grown up feeling excluded or disregarded, and, because it cuts both ways, the *ressentiment* of those who feel the loss of being shut out from the camaraderie and 'authenticity' of a life in the working class.

This strategy of *feeling* the class struggle, rather than exploring the difficulties inherent in prosecuting it, results in an exploration of tensions between people in their personal relations that seems to cancel interest in the active aspects of class differentiation within a community. Consequently, in *Border Country*, Mr and Mrs Hybart, jobbing builders and landlords are not regarded as people with interests distinctly different from those of their tenants. And when Mrs Hybart raises the rent for one of her properties from eight shillings and sixpence a week to ten shillings her opportunism is winked at because the victim is the Baptist minister, Joshua Watkins. Furthermore, we learn that Joshua is a man who does not want to pull his weight when it comes to carrying out the unpleasant and perhaps degrading manual task of emptying the lavatory bucket — he wants Harry to do it for him. But even before we discover this about him Harry takes a dim view of Joshua:

So in the spring after Morgan had married, Edie Davies, now Mrs Watkins, moved into Morgan's house. Ellen was pleased, not only because she like Edie but because she could not bear to see the house standing empty any longer. The winter had made it very damp, and she and Mrs Hybart lit fires in it for a week before the new tenants moved in. Harry was less pleased. He'd have preferred, he

said, with unusual bitterness, a man to come there. The garden, just watch, would get worse than ever. He had no use for Watkins, even as a minister, and a few weeks' experience of him as a neighbour was more than enough to confirm this.

(1960a: 175-6)

In this community, Joshua Watkins's attitude to manual labour, keeping his garden and emptying the lavatory bucket is evidently of much greater importance than the fact that Mrs Hybart is living off rents and raising them when the opportunity presents itself. Bill Hybart and his wife are working people whether they live off rents and small capital or not, on the other hand Joshua Watkins is not a workingman. Consequently, as far as Harry is concerned, Joshua is not even a man.

This acute consciousness of class which specifically ignores or denies its operation in the face-to-face relationships of a community is given explicit voice in the course of Will's meditation prior to his departure to Cambridge and his metamorphosis into Matthew:

They expect you to go up cap in hand perhaps, so they can pat your head. Going to Cambridge: as nice to say really as modern. But honestly, Cambridge, where's that? The only attitude you can take. Go and see.

Go and see, with your clothes in the suitcase Blakely gave you. A good case, green, with the initials on it in black: M. H. P. And that already sounds different. Very good of him to have given the case, wasn't it? Well, he can afford it. Not really though, he hasn't all that money.

One thing at least there's no need to worry about, and that's class. We don't have classes here, sir, except in school. Our place, I suppose, is too poor for that. Or put it the other way round. What it is, see, in Glynmawr, people take themselves seriously. There couldn't, not anywhere, be more important people than them. The men, look, taking themselves seriously. They walk slowly, showing all their layers. Mack open, jacket open, cardigan open, waistcoat open, collar-band open — nothing, you see, to hide. The ruling class. Though, of course, there's accent.

Once you cross the river. Still, you can talk as you like: like Pugh certainly; like Billy Devereaux if you put your mind to it. Talking's no trouble, not from here. Just leave it to your voice.

(1960a: 295)

This is, perhaps, not a very convincing meditation for a young lad on the verge of the great adventure of leaving home, but it reveals an interesting aspect of Williams's fiction that, irrespective of location, identifies class conflict as a product of alien and essentially remote forces.

This attitude transcends the generations in *Border Country*. At one stage, when responding to the suggestion that somebody has deserted his class Harry says, 'No. What do class matter?' However, in this conversation with his father Matthew is anxious concerning his own changing class position:

'Like I've grown away, though. We both know this.'

'I wanted that, Will. So that you could do what was needed.'

'Needed?'

'I needed it, Will.'

'But I needed it too. And I've gone my own way. I can't be just a delegate, sent out to do a particular job. I've moved into my own life, and that's taken me away. I can't just come back, as if the change was water. I can't come here and pretend I'm Will Price, with nothing altered.'

'Nobody is asking you that. In any case, leave the work aside, you've come back as a man. You saw me and your Grandad: we were different. How many, ever, live just like their fathers? None at all like their grandfathers. If they're doing the same work, still they're quite different.'

'Leaving class out of it, you mean?'

'Aye, I hope you leave it out of it.'

'As prejudice, yes. Where it's real, no.'

'Where it's real it's lived through, it has to be in the end. Only finish this different in kind. You're my kind, Will, and the men you work with are my kind. Yes, the work is changing, but that isn't the heart of it. There's no virtue in work, but that men should stand as they are.'

'Stand equal?'

‘Stand as they are, with nothing bearing them down. For you that was made quick.’

‘Part of it was made quick.’

‘Only it isn’t solved, when it’s made quick for you. The rest of us need it, remember.’

(1960a: 311-12)

The meaning of Harry’s oracular pronouncements concern independence . . . being your own man . . . this is the aim of all the striving and the struggling. The emancipation sought is emancipation from any relationships which ensnare people in purposes which are not their own or their family’s or their community’s. Solidarity that extends beyond the parochial is extended to defend these intrinsically local aspirations. Something similar can be seen in the sadness that permeates *The Fight for Manod*, a place where the alien forces have already entangled the struggle for independence on the part of most of the characters in a process of collaboration that, although inimical to authentic independence in community, is probably unavoidable.

However, Williams remained committed to an anthropology in which man’s self-creation in the process of meaningful work and in the founding and sustaining of his family and communal life set the parameters for his ideas of alienation and emancipation. As a consequence of this, freedom flowed from the establishment of autonomy in the sphere of material production in such a way that the concept of ‘livelihood’ would take over from the concept of ‘production’ as the motive for economic activity. This is, of course, simply another way of canvassing the move from the production of *exchange values* upon which capitalism is based to a society in which the production of *use values* would take precedence. This point of view, embodying as it does the fundamental socialist aspiration of moving from *production for profit* to *production for need*, was never controversial among Marxists and revolutionary socialists.

The central element is the shift from ‘production’ to ‘livelihood’ from an alienated generality to direct and practical ways of life. These are the real bases from which cooperative relationships can grow, and the rooted forms which are wholly compatible with, rather than contradictory to, other major energies and interests. They are

also, at just this historical stage, in the very development of the means of production, the shifts that most people will in any case have to make.

(1983b: 267)

The importance of the word ‘livelihood’ here is its philological capacity to move production from an apparently separate economic sphere to a place where all those productions that constitute a rounded life are fully recognised. ‘Livelihood’ is not one of Williams’s key words, but it is certainly one that he hopes will have the magic effect of decisively dividing labour done at the behest of capital from the *necessary* work performed for self, family, and community.

Modes of work, manual, technical, or intellectual, which are meaningful because they create the potential for independence and community were understood by Williams to form the basis of any healthy social development. Evidently, some individuals could accomplish something approaching this within capitalist society, but to make this independence secure and to make it generally available required the transformation of society by the disciplined efforts of those working people deprived of independence and the vital sustenance of meaningful work in community.

### *The Volunteers*

For all his aspirations and the tenacity of his hope for the future there was no place for utopia or remote futures of any kind in Williams’s fiction.<sup>23</sup> *The Fight for Manod* is only *about the future* insofar as it is about plans for incorporation and ‘regeneration’; its location *in the future* is not sharply defined in the course of the narrative, its formal realisation, or in the technology and relationships available to the people depicted, whereas the past is both active and present in all his novels. In *People of the Black Mountains* the past is brought from the last Ice Age but in *The Volunteers*, his most futuristic story, the future

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<sup>23</sup> For discussion by Williams of utopian fiction see ‘Utopia and Science Fiction’ (1978b). For discussion of temporality in ‘imaginative writing’ and in his own fiction see ‘The Tenses of Imagination’ (1978c).

is not sought beyond 1989 or 1990.<sup>24</sup> And, even in this future he made few concessions to the idea that it would be radically different from the time of publication in 1978.

Workers occupy a factory in West Bromwich and a power station coal depot in Pontyrhiw. Welsh miners and railwaymen take united strike action. The Government activates its Emergency Supplies Committee. The Communist Party in Pontyrhiw still has a District Secretary and the Trades Council is fully functioning. Typewriters are still tapped and telephones that are still (figuratively?) ‘dialled’ continue to be wired to the wall. The police force still has its Special Branch but the Bobbies are not equipped with stab-proof vests or riot shields or baton rounds or guns. And, faxes are, for some reason known only to the author, written in rather bad telegramsese.<sup>25</sup>

We know that it’s the future because there is a Welsh Assembly and Senate; the British Government is a coalition government, and people take ‘air-taxis’ (presumably helicopters) between Cardiff Airport and St Fagins. However, the international economy is inflated by oil and wheat and the para-national companies that dominate society are in oil, fibres and metals. The only other enterprise which features in the novel is satellite broadcasting, Insatel, a company heavily dependent upon the advertising revenue furnished by the para-national companies active in oil, fibres and metals.

Monopoly capital is figured as a conspiracy in which television news organisations, heavily dependent on “oil and wheat; on cars and trucks and washing machines; on fibres, on metals, on food packaging” arrange most of the events on which they report and retain a merely ‘subsidiary facility’ to report on ‘unarranged events’ (1978a: 6-7); our privileged access into this conspiratorial world is provided by Lewis Redfern, a ‘consultant analyst’ (reporter) on the ‘political underground’ for Insatel. He functions as something of a ‘private eye’ investigating an assassination attempt on Edmund Buxton, Secretary of State

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<sup>24</sup> *The Volunteers*: By reference to the date of birth and the movements of the framed ‘suspect’, the ‘young man’ Marcus Tiller, and the details of Mark Evans’s career it is possible to locate the time of the novel as no earlier than March 1988 and not much later than 1990 or thereabouts (1978a: 63; 67-8).

<sup>25</sup> It may be that Williams thought faxes similar in some way to teleprinter or Telex messages.

(Wales), in the course of which he stumbles upon a counter radical conspiracy: 'the Volunteers'.

The Volunteers, quaintly associated by Redfern with Fabianism, are long-term radical sleepers who are wheedling their way into positions of power and authority; infiltrating the establishment of fifteen countries: the civil service, the army, the police, the banks, so that they can act against the monopolists. The conspiracy is spelled out in a conversation between Lewis Redfern and his boss at Insatel, Friedmann:

'They've been trying for years. Since the Fabians,' I said.

'Yes but the Fabians were open about it. Their whole line was gradual persuasion. This is quite different. This is conscious occupation of the critical centres of power. And not for persuasion, Lewis. For takeover.'

'So you get another State. A volunteer autocracy.'

'No, no. You must read Pete Jacob's stuff. These are radicals, Lewis, they mean to change the whole system.'

'Don't we all?' I said, looking away.

'We all did,' Friedmann said, and that was a laugh. 'But it's so obvious now, once this new way's been found. All the old stuff is out; the petty demonstrations, the radical playgroups, the polite social criticism, the party games, the manifestos. As if, for God's sake, this was an open society, like in its own rhetoric. When the reality, always, is this simple control: of the force and of the money.'

(1978a: 145-6)

Lewis Redfern, a former radical activist himself, is confronted with interlocking conspiracies, the Volunteers, the attempted assassination of government minister, Buxton, and Buxton's clear responsibility for the fact that troops fire on the workers occupying the Pontyriw coal depot, killing one and injuring eight others. In the event Lewis has to deny all knowledge of the conspiracy to kill the minister and fails to speak out against the Volunteers, but he tells the essential truth that is that the state did plan the armed attack on the workers:

I had indeed presented a necessary truth. I had also, not once but repeatedly and consciously, lied. I knew all the arguments to justify this combination.

I had no good arguments to refute them but I was still left tense and drained . . .

(1978a: 206)

Lewis Redfern's meditative narration is written in a voice that is recognisably Williams's, and no formal innovations are attempted in the novel.<sup>26</sup> Redfern is concerned with his relationship, not just to his radical past, but to his father, a man killed fighting for British colonialism in Kenya.<sup>27</sup> He has a sense of the folly of the Volunteer's project, but despite his necessary lies through which he presents the necessary truth, he remains his own man, resigning from Insatel, and refusing offers of protection from the radical conspirators.

*The Volunteers* is a sad book in which the radical energy of the intellectuals is only meagrely connected to the collective resistance of the workers at private and episodic points. For all its flaws the novel does in its mood or structure of feeling anticipate the series of catastrophes for socialist politics that were to unfold in the fifteen years following its publication.

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<sup>26</sup> In an anticipation of *People of the Black Mountains*, disembodied voices from the history of Wales are heard 'speaking of tribute and of taxes and of rents' at the Norman castle, 'a gross building: a fortress', set above the Folk Museum (1978a: 29-30).

<sup>27</sup> Relations between father and son are also critical in the motivations of Mark Evans as he discusses the generational ramifications of historical rather than personal failure with Lewis Redfern (1978a: 176).