Key Words

A Journal of Cultural Materialism

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Introduction: The Raymond Williams Centenary Issue

Emily Cuming and Phil O'Brien

Amongst the many articles, opinion pieces, events, lectures, and symposia to mark Raymond Williams's centenary, a minority were noticeable for their missteps. David Herman, describing the thrill of attending Williams's lectures in the late 1970s, lamented that 'Williams's reputation has waned […]; he seems out of date in the 21st century'.[1] 'I wish this would be a moment of celebration and rediscovery', Herman concluded, 'I fear it won't be'.[2] Herman's piece for the *New Statesman*, which found its antidote in Lola Seaton's insightful essay on Williams at 100 for the same publication, identified the Williams of the late '70s as marking the last high point for his work. In contrast, it was this same moment which, for Boyd Tonkin, saw Williams cede 'too much ground to the salon theorists who tried to outflank him from the Left'.[3] Not only is this evident in the interviews with *New Left Review* for *Politics and Letters* (1979), according to Tonkin, but in what he describes as Williams's 'indigestible' 1977 book *Marxism and Literature*; 'you have to sigh that – in the deepest sense – his heart wasn't in it', suggested Tonkin.[4] It is a remarkable accusation when you consider Williams's own description, in his introduction to the book, of his relationship with *Marxism and Literature* as preoccupying 'most of my working life'.[5] Both articles reveal a lack of engagement with scholarship on Williams during the intervening five decades, as well as a residual attachment to each author's past, rather than a critique of Williams in the present. While an editorial in the *Guardian* published on 1 September 2021, a day after what would have been Williams's 100th birthday, took a different line to Herman and Tonkin, noting that 'much of Williams's work feels contemporary', it too failed to capture the scope and relevance of both his thinking or pick up the strands of his influence today. It ends with the rather banal line: 'What Williams did needed doing and he said his say. Few better things can be said about any life.'[6] As an assessment of a writer who contributed more than 200 book reviews and articles over a thirty-year period to the paper, it is somewhat lacking. But these three pieces – by Herman, Tonkin, and the *Guardian* – were, thankfully, outliers.

As Seaton notes, Williams's own past is an abiding feature of his work: the repeated yet light use of autobiography to explore the logics of capitalism or the literary canon, for instance. But his 'detachment' was also just as important; it 'may provide a model of taking one's experience seriously but not uncritically', Seaton adds.[7] Her article also helpfully identified one of the pitfalls faced when 'celebrating' the work and thought of a writer such as Williams. There is a risk, as Daniel Hartley has said, of 'eliding a whole range of [Williams's] more

unusual, and perhaps more original, political and theoretical innovations' if we succumb to a 'personal and generational nostalgia',[8] which can result in either condemnation or hagiography. This was the challenge for the Raymond Williams Society as we prepared for the centenary. How could we ensure that the event was duly marked and celebrated, that the year could be the site for detailed critical reflection, and that Williams's writing could continue to be the impetus for renewed political work?

This special issue of *Key Words* is the culmination of those attempts, in the context of the centenary, as it collects together six extended essays originally given as papers at the RWS conference in April 2022 organised by Society chair Ben Harker and secretary Phil O'Brien. 'Raymond Williams @ 100' involved 35 speakers presenting their research on or adjacent to Williams across two days in Manchester, with topics ranging from a Persian translation of *Keywords* and the reception of Williams in Germany and Spain to papers on Stuart Hall, science fiction, William Morris, and adult education. It was one of many such events which, far from meaning the centenary passed with little notice, contributed to a year-long, sustained engagement with Williams, his legacy, his limitations, and his relevance. Conferences and lectures, online and in-person, in India, Brazil, Spain, the US, and the Netherlands are testament to the global reach of Williams. Much of the work to establish this network of global scholarship has been done through the Williams archive at Swansea University and Daniel G. Williams, editor of a collection of Williams's writing on Wales: *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity* (2003; 2021). In the autumn of 2021, for instance, the university organised an online, centenary symposia which consisted of four separate day-long events on the theme of Williams in Europe, Brazil, Japan, and China, respectively. That such engagement with his work in comparative national and international contexts has emanated from Wales is of particular significance. While Geoff Dyer commented that a legacy which seemed assured on his death in 1988 has since waned, the opposite could be said of Williams's reputation in Wales.[9] Between the original publication of *Who Speaks for Wales?* in 2003 and the release of its updated centenary version 18 years later, some of the most illuminating engagements with Williams's writing have been from Wales and through the prism of the border country – of class as well as nation – which so shaped Williams's life and work. These include Daniel G. Williams, as mentioned, as well as Rhian E. Jones, for example, both keynote speakers at our centenary conference. Further, the anniversary was discussed extensively by *Planet*, *Nation.Cymru*, and in a new collection of essays, *Raymond Williams: From Wales to the World* (2021), edited by Stephen Woodhams. Alongside a range of reading groups and one-off talks, Peak Cymru also marked the centenary with a programme of events titled, appropriately, 'Culture is Ordinary'.

The danger of listing the range of centenary celebrations is that inevitably some will be missed off but just this brief overview of what emanated from Wales alone in 2021/22 demonstrates the resonance of Williams's work in the country of his birth, as well as the pressing political questions – notably of Welsh independence – to which his writing offers many potential answers. The Society, along with our friends at the Raymond Williams Foundation, aim to capture such currents of Williams's thinking, alongside many other interlocking and divergent themes. Much of what the Foundation did during the centenary year aimed to ensure Williams's insights on politics and education could reach a new audience. The 'Raymond Williams Explainers', for example, used a range of media – from podcasts to animated short films – to introduce and expand upon the major concepts across Williams's writing. You can read more of what the Foundation has been up to this past year at the back of the issue. Articles released on and around the centenary in *Tribune*, *Jacobin*, *The Morning Star*, by *Verso*, *New Socialist*, *Red Pepper*, and the *Rosa Luxemburg Foundation* demonstrate the renewal of interest on the wider British left in Williams's writing. A special issue of *The Coils of the Serpent*, 'Beyond Crisis: Raymond Williams and the Present Conjuncture', edited by Victoria Allen and Harald Pittel (2021), featured interdisciplinary engagements with Williams's work in the context of crisis phenomena of the present. The versatility and global reach of Williams's work is on display in this rich centenary issue, with articles spanning topics from the Cold War to Marie Kondo, drawing from across the fields of history, literary studies, film theory and eco-criticism among others. There was also a special Williams centenary issue of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, edited by Jilly Boyce Kay (2021), which foregrounded Williams's method and continued significance as a key intellectual within cultural studies, with essays by Marie Moran, Graeme Turner, and, notably, Juliet Mitchell, who discusses Williams's fiction and the role of his wife Joy to examine the significance of feminism to his work. Further, an outstanding collection of essays titled *Raymond Williams at 100* (2021), edited by Paul Stasi, affirmed the significance of Williams to recent literary studies in the US and Britain. In many ways, then, it was a true celebration and one which the Society was able to contribute to, either leading or supporting key activities.

Our year of Williams's centenary began with a series of online lectures in the autumn of 2021 delivered by the writer Lynsey Hanley, the leading Williams scholar Daniel Hartley, and three contributors to *Raymond Williams at 100*, Anna Kornbluh, Madhu Krishnan, and Paul Stasi. We also hosted an online screening of *Border Country*, Williams's BBC documentary from 1970, and Phil O'Brien made available on the society's new YouTube channel a range of films and interviews featuring Williams, unearthed through his archival research. This was part of a larger archival project to digitise and make available

recordings loaned by the Williams estate to the society. Funded by the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust to coincide with the centenary, O'Brien's subsequent Raymond Williams Tapes projects released previously unreleased lecture recordings on SoundCloud. Some of these were also transcribed and published in *Culture and Politics: Class, Writing, Socialism* (2022), a new collection of uncollected or unpublished essays by Williams, edited by O'Brien and released by Verso to also mark the centenary. That we are still finding unpublished work from Williams is both an indication that there are many more versions of Williams to explore but also that we need to continually revisit and reassess his thinking in the contemporary moment. Largely unknown work, often because it has never been collected in a volume of his writing, is still waiting to be made more accessible; a 1968 essay on Scandinavian fiction – 'Intensely Observing, Bloodshot Eyes', which is, primarily, an analysis of Tom Kristensen's novel *Havoc* (1930) – published in the Danish journal *Omkring*, for example. So, there is still much to be done.

Such forms of reassessment can also occur as we mark significant anniversaries, such as his birth, but also of those landmark publications which originally established his reputation as a leading intellectual. It is 50 years this year since the publication of *The Country and the City* (1973), for instance, so it is apt that the first essay in this issue involves revisiting that book and using it to read contemporary writing on class and the countryside. Katherine Greenwood's article builds on that study to examine 'a common countryside' – the ordinary, working, and sometimes impoverished landscape of contemporary rural life – in the work of post-millennial working-class writers Adelle Stripe and Anita Sethi. Through illuminating close readings of contemporary texts, Greenwood heralds Stripe and Sethi as part of a new wave of working-class writers whose accounts shift away from the familiar viewpoint of the detached metropolitan observer and visitor. Both Stripe and Sethi are framed as figures writing from within the landscape, providing accounts that have the potential to redress the longstanding absence of the countryside from working-class literature, while rewriting the rural through the lens of class, race, gender, access and embodiment. Merlin Gable's article is also concerned with the representation of people and place, looking back to the posthumous publication of Williams's last, unfinished novel *People of the Black Mountains* (1989–90). Adopting a book historical approach, based on research into the cache of letters and materials held in the Chatto & Windus publishers' archives, Gable uncovers new insights into the marketing of Williams's work and ideas, including the promotion of Williams as a distinctly Welsh writer whose works might be aligned with the burgeoning category of 'world literature'. Graham MacPhee revisits Paul Gilroy's infamous comparison of Williams's analysis of community and belonging in *Towards 2000* (1983) to the far-right rhetoric of Enoch Powell.

Through a close reading of Powell's thinking on nation – demonstrating that rather than suggesting continuity, he consistently argued that the nation is a performative act – MacPhee argues the misreading of Williams emanates from a misreading of Powell. In contrast, Williams's writing on community is compared to that of Ambalavaner Sivanandan in a powerful analysis of how, at a time of disintegration due to the dynamics of global capitalism, we can strive to form diverse, dynamic, and progressive forms of mutual support.

The final three essays, by dealing with different time periods, all take as a central focus the purpose of art and culture in democratic society. Joseph Williams offers a fascinating critique of the journal *Critical Quarterly*. Based on new archival research, Williams constructs the intellectual and political contexts around the launch of the literary journal and, through readings of the work of C. B. Cox, A. E. Dyson, F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams, suggests important ways the original aims of *Critical Quarterly* raise pressing questions around culture, the humanities, reading and democracy for this century. Similarly, Robin Harriott's essay on literary commitment and alignment in 1930s fiction offers a detailed and complex theorisation of what constitutes proletarian literature. Engaging with debates in the United States and Britain on class and form, Harriott seeks to elucidate the political impulses in the work of working-class writers such as Walter Allen; his essay, which draws from Williams's own work as a theorist of class and political commitment in literature, posits the novel as an active site of historical struggle, rather than an ahistorical artefact with questions of political commitment long resolved. These questions of ongoing struggle over contested historical sites are then extended by Nick Stevenson during his discussion of the political uses of museums and the notion of heritage in the twenty-first century. Examining the relationship between class politics, heritage and critical pedagogy, Stevenson argues that museums and heritage sites, as a popular educational resource, have the potential to challenge neoliberal orthodoxies in their representation of radical histories of labour. Stevenson tests this assumption with reference to his visits to four sites with links to labour and trade union history: the People's History Museum in Manchester, the Framework Knitters Museum, the William Morris Gallery and Derby's Museum of Making. Blending critical analysis with first-person reflections on the experience of heritage site visits, Stevenson's article reminds us – through style as well as content – of the compelling intersection of the political and the personal in cultural debates.

We would like to finish by thanking the people who attended and contributed to the 'Raymond Williams @ 100' conference and particularly the authors featured in this special issue for their work and commitment. Many thanks are also due to Liane Tanguay from all at *Key Words* for her exemplary work as reviews editor and editorial board member for many years, and welcome

to Kate Spowage, a new editorial board member, who has edited this year's reviews section. We are also delighted to welcome Hayley Toth to the editorial board, bringing expertise in literary sociology and colonial and postcolonial print cultures. This issue features another keyword entry by Tony Crowley on 'woke', which, as ever, aptly draws attention to the ways in which Williams's method of close historical enquiry of culture and language as constitutive processes remains as relevant for the next 100 years as it has been for the last.

Notes

1 David Herman, 'What Raymond Williams Taught Me', *New Statesman*, 25 August 2021, www.newstatesman.com/culture/2021/08/raymond-williams-lectures-cambridge-1970s (accessed 2 October 2023).
2 Herman, 'What Raymond Williams Taught Me', *New Statesman*.
3 Boyd Tonkin, 'Raymond Williams Mapped Mountains', *UnHerd*, 30 August 2021, www.UnHerd.com/2021/08/raymond-williams-mapped-mountains/ (accessed 2 October 2023).
4 Tonkin, 'Raymond Williams Mapped Mountains'.
5 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1.
6 Editorial, 'The *Guardian* View on Raymond Williams at 100', *Guardian*, 1 September 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/01/the-guardian-view-on-raymond-williams-at-100 (accessed 2 October 2023).
7 Lola Seaton, 'How Raymond Williams Redefined Culture', *New Statesman*, 25 August 2021, www.newstatesman.com/culture/2021/08/raymond-williams-centenary-100-years (accessed 2 October 2023).
8 Daniel Hartley, 'Reflections on Raymond Williams – Part Two', Raymond Williams Society, 26 January 2018, www.raymondwilliams.co.uk/2018/01/26/reflections-on-raymond-williams-part-two/ (accessed 2 October 2023).
9 See Geoff Dyer's introduction to the re-issue of Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with* New Left Review (London: Verso, 2015).

A Common Countryside: Rewriting the English Rural in *Common People*

Katherine Greenwood

Abstract

Fifty years after the publication of Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, this article considers Williams's legacy in contemporary stories of class and the countryside by Adelle Stripe and Anita Sethi in *Common People: An Anthology of Working-Class Writers* and beyond. These stories together address the under-representation of the rural and the urban working classes in literature today, revealing the continued relevance of Williams's account of a countryside 'scribbled over' by a certain form of metropolitan nostalgia, while allowing us to extend his analysis of the 'middle-class rural convention' to an account which entwines the politics of place, race, gender and class. Williams's central argument about the interconnection of country and city is also examined in relation to the concept of the 'edgeland', the places and spaces between country and city which are an expanding feature of contemporary geography and have a particular resonance in relation to writing by marginalised groups in society.

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The contemporary story of the English countryside might be said to begin in the early 1970s, which saw a new environmental activism following the founding of Friends of the Earth in 1971 and the publication of two books in 1973 that marked a turning point in our understanding of landscape, rethinking the rural, the urban, and their interrelation. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* sought to dismantle a long-standing imaginative contrast between urban and rural in culture and society, drawing attention to the social and economic relations bound up in the history of the countryside and its writing. *The Country and the City* anticipated Williams's later work on socialism and ecology and is seen as one of the founding texts of ecocriticism, though it was written before the term existed. Also in 1973, Richard Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside* showed the resilience of nature in urban areas, urging us to perceive nature differently and as an everyday experience. Mabey is generally seen to belong to the genre since called the New Nature Writing, though he and many other of its supposed proponents have expressed reservations about

'nature writing' as a category.[1] The New Nature Writing might be characterised by a discursive, creative narrative style and scientific observation that focuses on quotidian encounters with nature, engaging both with a tradition of writing about the environment and with contemporary climate emergency.[2] In the twenty-first century the natural world is understood as part of our daily lives, the non-human entwined with the human. As the writer, broadcaster and birdwatcher Tim Dee writes in the literary magazine *Archipelago*: 'Nature is no longer perceived to be separate from the more urgent and urban concerns of mankind.'[3]

This article considers some of the ways that post-millennial working-class writers, exploring a countryside that is ordinary and connected with the urgent and urban concerns of the human, are rewriting the English rural. They reshape our understanding of green places and spaces through the lens of class experience, which intersects with place, race, and gender. Written on the fiftieth anniversary of *The Country and the City*, my article draws on Williams to both illuminate and consider Williams's legacy in contemporary stories of class and the countryside.

The publication of *Common People: An Anthology of Working-Class Writers* in 2019 was part of a wider initiative spearheaded by the writer and activist Kit de Waal addressing the under-representation of working-class people in the contemporary literary and publishing industries.[4] Part of the problem of under-representation is misrepresentation. The working classes are too often understood in one-dimensional terms in society and culture: prejudice about 'working-class writing' involves ideas of grim and gritty, largely urban and northern stories of toil and hardship, thereby steamrollering over a rich diversity of creative endeavour that is continually evolving. *Common People* sought to 'reclaim and redefine what it means to be working class', disputing (among other things) the facile association of the working classes with urban environments.[5]

The elision of the rural working classes from our literature is compounded by the barriers faced by the urban working classes to the countryside and its stories. This article therefore offers a sustained critical comparison of two writers, Adelle Stripe and Anita Sethi, whose narratives in *Common People* and beyond are in many ways positioned in diametrical opposition, and together address the under-representation of both the rural and the urban working classes in literature today. Stripe describes an English countryside that is a working place, ordinary and material; while for Sethi the countryside is a place of leisure and spiritual transformation, which must be accessible to a diversity of people. Stripe and Sethi rewrite the English rural from different perspectives in relation to the land, articulating both their attachment to the countryside and their ability to move freely around it in contrasting ways. I go

on to invoke the concept of the edgeland in order to explore these two distinct marginalised positions.

Writing about place and the natural world has – until very recently – been largely the preserve of the middle-class white male, with celebrated writers such as Richard Mabey, Robert Macfarlane and the late Roger Deakin presiding over the contemporary canon. A well-known article by the Scottish essayist and poet Kathleen Jamie in the *London Review of Books* objects to the figure of the 'lone enraptured male' in Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (2007) who, she argues, has characterised a literary tradition of countryside writing featuring men seeking spiritual succour, while working people are vacated from the land:

> Class comes in here. For a long time, the wild land was a working place, whether you were a hunter-gatherer, a crofter, a miner. But now it seems it is being claimed by the educated middle classes on spiritual quests. The land is empty and the saints come marching in.[6]

Jamie takes issue with the absence of contemporary power structures and issues of land rights in Macfarlane's book and an associated literary tradition. She argues that, as in the pastoral convention of retreat and return, this is ultimately a narrative of consolation, venturing into the wild but returning to a place that is familiar and safe: 'Adventures, then home for tea.'[7]

A more inclusive range of writing about the places outside of towns and cities is beginning to be heard. The gender balance has improved significantly with the prominence of writers such as Jamie, Helen Macdonald, and Amy Liptrot, alongside the emergence of working-class voices such as Natasha Carthew, poet, novelist, and author of *Undercurrent: A Cornish Memoir of Poverty, Nature and Resilience* (2023). Rebecca Smith's memoir *Rural: The Lives of the Working Class Countryside* (2023) is an exploration of the land and the lives of the people whose labour has shaped it; while in fiction, recent years have seen debuts by Jon Ransom, author of the coastal story *The Whale Tattoo* (2022), and Karla Neblett, whose *King of Rabbits* (2021) is set on a council estate in Somerset. Issues of racial exclusion are being addressed by writers and activists such as the British-Bangladeshi ornithologist Mya-Rose Craig, also known as Birdgirl (the title of her 2022 book).

The title of this article, 'A Common Countryside', not only reflects its focus on the *Common People* anthology but also draws on three meanings of the term 'common', which is one of Williams's 'keywords'.[8] My article explores the natural world as shared or communal, raising issues of land access and ownership – in a contemporary context in which 1% of the population owns half of all the land in England – and invoking a long history of the enclosure of common land.[9] Common also implies a class distinction, meaning ordinary.

A third, derogatory meaning suggests something low or distasteful; this experience of recoil and disgust relates to the idea of the edgeland that will be explored in relation to these writings.

A Labouring Countryside

'Driftwood' by Adelle Stripe foregrounds rural working-class life, positioning the countryside as a place of everyday life and labour. It opens with a depiction of a farm worker – who in time is revealed to be Stripe's father – gathering firewood from the debris left behind by floods. Her story begins: 'Outside his red-brick house, sheets of tarpaulin flap between fallen fence posts, and nettles grow in sheltered corners beneath the elderberry tree.'[10] Stripe describes not a picturesque rustic cottage but an ordinary house. The scene is an image of decline and neglect, the fence posts suggesting a kind of failure or demise, amongst which nature thrives, ignored. It is littered with the quotidian and the domestic, as Stripe goes on to describe the junk gathered around the house: ruined, useless things like broken freezers and crockery. The overriding concern is one of practical and economic purpose: 'There's a reason for all this mess. The long days he spends outside, gathering' (194). The farm labourer is collecting wood for fuel to heat his home because he cannot afford to pay heating costs. It is a portrait of pragmatism, incessant work and rural precarity. Nature is not sanctified but entwined with human processes and concerns. The floods that have scattered the ground with debris are tangible evidence of contemporary climate emergency, creating 'a fault line of detritus that extended across the corn fields' (193). The 'fault' points to human culpability, as items of refuse that litter the countryside are expressive of the corporeal and mortal. Used sanitary towels, syringes and old shot-cases scattered across the land suggest bodily waste, illness and violence; while discarded dolls' heads and children's shoes imply ageing and are disturbing and sad. Stripe's countryside is ugly and deeply fallible. The land is marked by the refuse of human life and natural growth, and by the lines of class and history of enclosure: 'Along the verges, which are mapped by discarded milkshake cartons and rampant convolvulus, traditionally laid hedges mark the estate boundary' (194).

In *The Country and the City*, surveying centuries of writing about the English rural, Raymond Williams describes a history of country and city entwined by capitalist social relations. He begins by interrogating the myth of rural 'Old England', which is always located in a just-vanished past. Searching back on the moving perspective of what he calls the 'escalator', he argues that the happier, more 'natural' rural England can never in fact be found.[11] The rural idyll, as Stripe's story shows, is a fallacy.

Williams goes on to critique a specific form of metropolitan nostalgia that obscures the real working rural Britain. He describes the declining importance of the rural economy from the late nineteenth century, which paradoxically in the course of the twentieth century was accompanied by a growing interest in rural life, country folklore, land rights and the natural world. Cultural value was increasingly placed upon ideas of the rural, alongside the notion of a working country as a 'place of physical and spiritual regeneration':

> It was now the teeming life of an isolated nature, or the seasonal rhythm of the fundamental life processes. Neither of these feelings was new in itself. What was new was their fusion into a structure of feeling in which the earth and its creatures – animals and peasants almost alike – were an affirmation of vitality and of the possibility of rest in conscious contrast with the mechanical order, the artificial routines, of the cities.[12]

Williams explains how an imaginative contrast between rural and urban in culture and society generated a 'structure of feeling' in which the land – where people and animals became almost as one – was deemed to be fundamentally restorative, representative of repose and life, and merged with existing ideas of autonomous nature and the cycle of life. He goes on to describe the way in which in the twentieth century men from the cities '*came to*' the countryside.[13] It is crucial, he maintains, to appreciate this movement from city to country. Williams describes men whose associations with the institutions of education, and with the urban, inscribed remotely a kind of intellectualised remembrance of the rural rather than a wholly visceral, authentic experience from within. The countryside was 'scribbled over', as their renderings obscured the real working rural Britain with a composite of true and false.[14]

The cultural and geographical 'turn' to the country persists and arguably has grown in contemporary times, as communication technologies have allowed affluent urbanites to move to the country, especially in the post-pandemic period. In *Social Class in the 21st Century*, Mike Savage finds that the geography of class is increasingly drawn on lines of urban and rural, with a powerful accumulation of social and cultural capital in urban areas. Savage notes: 'The countryside is defined in terms of the repose – the rest and recuperation – it offers in the context of these voracious urban driving belts.'[15] Thus an understanding of the countryside which is perceived in opposition to the city – and exists as a negation, a place that is not the city, of retreat for leisure and spiritual succour – is given to us by an urban elite, from the cities and towns where social and cultural capital clusters. Williams's argument from fifty years ago remains vital to understanding contemporary constructions of the countryside.

Adelle Stripe's story in *Common People* expresses what Williams in 1973 called the 'true voice of the surviving countryman' as he might exist today.[16] Resisting the social and cultural supremacy of the urban, she rewrites the English rural from within. The countryside in 'Driftwood' is not a place of 'spiritual and physical regeneration' but rather associated with unremitting labour, the material and corporeal, mortality and death. The opening section of the story introduces Stripe's countryman:

> Wearing a torn boiler suit, steel-cap wellies and a fleece hat to cover his shiny head, he spends his days carrying seasoned husks of fallen ash, birch, oak and rowan up the farm with the gales chasing behind him. He drags driftwood from the snake-bend in the river and stacks snapped branches in funeral pyres along the banks. (193)

His clothes are utilitarian, chosen for their warmth and durability and showing the wear and tear of a working day. The story describes his incessant gathering of wood which is a matter of exigency: with his meagre pension, this is the only means of heating his home. The environment, where he is pursued by strong winds as he works, appears unforgiving and even hostile. The 'snake-bend' describes the curve in the river but also implies treachery and venom; while the driftwood itself seems defeated – it is 'fallen' – and suggestive of decline and mortality: hulks of wood are aged and dried-up, the smaller branches broken and heaped into piles, as if to burn corpses. Death and associated images of injury and illness are insistent in the story. Countryside and countryman alike are ailing: the debris is 'coughed up' (193) by the river; while in the cold and the damp, 'Asthmatic coughs as the sun starts to rise' (194). There are gruesome images of tragedy, desperation, and dismemberment. Stripe's father and his friend Les 'talk in the way only countrymen do: stories of lost limbs […] floating, bloated bodies' (195). Their stories are grisly and macabre, showing an unflinching intimacy with death and danger that is specific to rural life.

In the twenty-first century, the countryside continues to be represented in literature by those who are visitors or tourists, in ways characterised by the 'affirmation of vitality' and 'possibility of rest' that Williams described. While Robert Macfarlane's work more widely is concerned with contemporary anxieties and crisis, a strain of this particular 'structure of feeling' can be detected in *The Wild Places*, for example.[17] In Macfarlane's book, driftwood is of interest for its stories and cultural resonance, rather than material value. The following passage describes Macfarlane and Roger Deakin at the furthest seaward point of Orford Ness in Suffolk:

> We […] walked along the tideline for half a mile, picking up pieces of wood, comparing flints, finds. We discussed the driftwood, tried to imagine the story of each stick or shard; where it had floated from, which river had washed it down to which sea. Roger could tell the wood-type of each curled or flattened piece: a waterlogged oak plank; an ash shard that had the brittle texture of cuttlefish bone; even a rare spiralling cherry bough, weathered to a silky silver-grey, like the handle of a well-used implement.
>
> We made a little woodhenge out of the driftwood: a rough circle of poles and spires, pushed down into the gravel – a homage to Derek Jarman's driftwood garden on Dungeness. Our henge would last as long as the next high tide.[18]

Macfarlane describes an amble along the tide line, where driftwood is not firewood but of scientific, intellectual and aesthetic interest, with its variety of textures and shapes. The cherry bough is unusual and feels particularly precious: its surface smoothed by the elements is like silk, as if crafted, a well-worn tool – though it does not, in fact, have a practical use. The woodhenge, built as a tribute to Jarman, has cultural and spiritual rather than economic significance. Its construction is presented as a creative act, quite different to that of the funeral pyres of Stripe's story with their associations of burning and death. A henge is often something ancient and enduring though this one is fanciful and expendable, to be washed away by the tide. The driftwood in these stories represents opposing narratives of the English rural: while Macfarlane's leisurely countryside offers a kind of spiritual regeneration and revival, Stripe's description foregrounds the material and daily struggle of rural poverty, giving voice to a largely unheard story of a working country today.

The Working Classes at Leisure

Anita Sethi's work can be understood as a further counterpoint to both Stripe and Macfarlane's narratives. 'On Class and the Countryside' in *Common People* recounts a childhood holiday away from Sethi's home in Manchester, a subsidised trip to the Lake District with her mother. It is a coming-of-age story, recalling the author's first transformative experience of nature. Sethi is concerned with issues of access to our country's green places and spaces, in which barriers of place, class, race and gender intersect. These themes are explored more fully in her memoir *I Belong Here: A Journey Along the Backbone of Britain* (2021), the story of a pilgrimage through the north of England that was Sethi's response to a race-hate crime. The book is a call to action and a reclamation of the land and the literature that has been largely denied to marginalised groups in

society. Sethi reshapes our understanding of the countryside by rehearsing and recasting the tropes of the 'middle-class rural convention' that is also a largely white and masculine tradition.[19] Her narratives describe the classic pastoral arc of retreat and return. Sethi writes from an urban perspective, in which the countryside is understood in opposition to the city as a place of leisure, but insists that the physical and spiritual restoration it offers is shared with a diversity of people: a common countryside.

'On Class and the Countryside' invokes and underlines a form of the imaginative contrast between country and city that Williams critiqued in 1973. The countryside facilitates a kind of awakening and revival for Sethi, providing relief from the troubles of the city. The story opens with the transition from a dark and oppressive city to a country that is airy and expansive: 'The huge grey road wound its way up through the hills, further and further up. Out of the M6, the heavy greyness, the cluttered-up world gradually spaced itself out, lifted itself up.'[20] Sethi describes leaving behind the motorway, which is man-made and suggests busy traffic and obstruction. The road spirals into the hills, as if in ever-increasing circles that create space, rising from the city's burdensome grey. A sense of lifting and release – both physically and in mood – is accompanied by a shift from the micro to the macro, from the M6 to the 'earth' and the 'world'. Sethi articulates a sense of becoming less insular, at one with something greater:

> The world grew softer, wider, dragged me out of myself and into something larger, layering into the mountains. Suddenly, everything was slightly warmer. Everything was slightly lighter. The world seemed to open itself up, lift itself, lighten up, shrug a weight off its shoulders. (211)

The open countryside seems to tug at her very being, so that she is unburdened and unfurls into the world around her, which in turn is personified. Person and place, as one, are suffused with a sense of the carefree, of warmth and receptiveness. In Sethi's story, city and country are opposed: a moral contrast is drawn between a benevolent country and malevolent city.

For Sethi, the countryside inspires intense joy and a spiritual epiphany, and she is afterwards profoundly changed. Out walking one day, she marvels at the natural world that surrounds her. As the narrative becomes increasingly fervent, she describes a feeling at her core of opening and expanding into the environment: 'The heart was growing, becoming as vast and deep as those lakes, as wide as those woods' (214). She loses her sense of self as she experiences an extraordinary feeling of renewal, of shedding a hard protective outer layer which is painful and damaged; it is reminiscent of a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, or an invertebrate shedding its skin. The passage gradually builds to

a crescendo, culminating in a euphoric invocation to life and to new belonging and existence as she feels herself becoming part of the natural world around her: 'I was alive alive alive and I was no longer just a girl from home but a girl of the lakes, a girl of the hills, a girl of the flowers, spilling filling thrilling the lungs with their scents, a girl from the world I was becoming' (214–15).

This union with the natural world is an affirmation of belonging in the countryside regardless of class, race or gender. Sethi recalls how her presence in the Lake District is seen as incongruous by an elderly couple who seem to observe Sethi and her mother warily; the man expresses surprise at seeing 'brown folks' in the countryside. She writes: 'It would be true to say there were not many brown people to be seen in the countryside, and not many "common people", either' (213). While Stripe seeks to make visible the rural working-class life that has long been obscured in cultural narratives, Sethi addresses the barriers faced by the urban working classes and other marginalised groups to our countryside and its literature. She emphasises her argument by locating her story in the Lake District, with its Romantic associations of an English pastoral and literary tradition. It is significant, too, that it is the elderly man who comments on the young girl and her single mother: while his male gaze sees their appearance as unusual, Sethi's story of the mother–daughter pair foregrounds the feminine in the landscape, entwining her politics of class and race with a feminist agenda.

Sethi lays claim to a literary convention of writing about the English countryside, drawing on an imaginative opposition between rural and urban to reveal the classed, gendered and racialised structures bound up in this cultural tradition. As noted above, Williams describes how in the twentieth century a particular interpretation of the countryside was written into our stories by the educated middle classes from the cities, who were also male and white, although these aspects do not form an explicit part of his discussion. Critics have noted Williams's neglect of gender and race in *The Country and the City* and in his work more generally, although it must be noted that his account of country and city within an imperial context was ground-breaking.[21] Sethi's narrative – in which she presents an interpretation of the countryside from an urban perspective, as a place of spiritual succour and rest, but one that is more inclusive – offers an opportunity to broaden Williams's analysis. As Jilly Boyce Kay suggests, in this way Williams's work can provide 'theoretical models, political inspiration, and intellectual resources for feminism and anti-imperialism […] rather than disavow it for the silences, absences, and limitations, we might continue to build upon, extend and pluralise what remains a rich, vital and urgent body of work'.[22]

The Question of Perspective

While Sethi is a visitor to the country from the city, Stripe writes from within the rural, her father profoundly of the countryside, its natural world, animals, and agriculture: 'He's as much a part of this landscape as the trees and barns and cattle grazing grass' (196). His friend Les similarly merges with his environment: 'He blends into the woodland' (195). In Stripe's narrative working people are indistinguishable from the land.

As a piece of memoir, Stripe's story is also notable for the absence of the first-person 'I'. The first two of four sections are told in the third person, describing the labours and the life of an anonymous 'he'. In the third section Stripe herself enters the story with a shift to the second person 'you', as she reveals that the farm labourer is her father. Memories of childhood and adolescence are invoked, intimate and domestic, as she describes the spartan conditions of her early years: the bare floorboards trimmed with remnants of underlay and nails and the bitter cold. She recalls her teenage years, which were suffused with a sense of stagnancy and the series of dead-end jobs that enabled her just to subsist. Stripe's childhood home and her father's care are recalled with tenderness – 'He looked after you here, in this house' (198) – and there is something poignant in the food he fed her, which is evocative of poverty and struggle: value sliced white bread, cut-price tins of spaghetti hoops from a budget supermarket, packs of cheap ham, the Battenberg cake that was a treat (198). The passage is emotive and deeply personal, locating Stripe herself at the core of the narrative.

Stripe's use of the second person creates an ambiguous authorial position. 'You' makes her simultaneously narrator and subject, reflecting and reinforcing her position in relation to the story: detached as commentator and yet closely connected. It collapses the distance between the authorial presence and the place described, locating Stripe – present and past selves alike – within the scene. 'You' might also be an address to the reader, inviting us in while excluding us as it is also directed at the author herself. The narrative mode is disorienting, confusing author with subject and author with reader, raising questions about who is observing this scene.

The question of perspective is theorised by Williams, who describes the emergence of two distinct understandings of the English countryside as 'practical' and 'aesthetic' alongside the rise of industrial capitalism.[23] Ideas of improvement and the arrangement of the land in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were closely connected to centres of power in society, as in the case of the country house and what he calls its 'pleasing prospects'. Williams notes: 'A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation.'[24] Though Stripe uses the word 'landscape', her

story that makes visible a working countryside – a place of pragmatism and utility and in many ways disagreeable – contests any straightforward idea of the detached observer. Her avoidance of the first person 'I' instead brings to the fore the rural working people who have been obscured in our literature, in a refusal of the social and political power bound up with the gaze on a countryside which is 'pleasing'.

Williams returns to this theme in his novel *Border Country* (1960), in which Matthew, an academic living and working in London, returns to the Welsh valley of his childhood when his father becomes seriously ill. Coming back, he feels estranged and troubled, but rediscovers a relationship to his homeland, which had altered in going away. He realises that in London his recollection of the valley had been static, a vista, but on returning he experiences the land again as a place of ordinary life and labour: 'It was no longer a landscape or a view, but a valley that people were using […] The visitor sees beauty; the inhabitant a place where he works and has his friends.'[25] Matthew's perception of the countryside shifts from the aesthetic to the experiential and pragmatic, though he is caught between the two perspectives, occupying the 'border country' that gives the novel its title.

Stripe can be seen to occupy a similar border country, the ambiguity of her position an expression of her conflicted relationship towards her homeland, as a writer-academic returning to the working-class home. She writes: 'It was home for a long time. Still is' (198). Her use of the past tense and then the correction – as if an afterthought – communicates her equivocation. Stripe articulates the tension that is a familiar condition of social mobility, a friction between the pull of home and the distance created by education and greater affluence, while also feminising the difficult return home that is traditionally a largely masculine trope in the working-class canon. Williams expresses this tension in the motif of the border that runs through his criticism and fiction and reflects his own personal story as a Cambridge academic and writer from a working-class background in Wales. As he comments in a chapter on Thomas Hardy in *The Country and the City*, Hardy 'sees as a participant who is also an observer; this is the source of the strain'.[26] Stripe similarly communicates through a relationship to the land the fraught experience of being both participant and observer, which are classed positions. Intimately connected with the working countryside of her father and yet set apart, she articulates the strain of class mobility through her use of the second person 'you' which creates uncertainty and a visceral sense of unease.

While the avoidance of the 'I' in Stripe's story foregrounds the working people on the land, Sethi asserts the first-person pronoun as a seizing of places and spaces denied to those marginalised in society historically and now. The position of observer is assumed in a deliberate appropriation of the land. The

epiphany which is central to her story in *Common People* is a paean to her own life and existence, to selfhood and a sense of belonging to something greater, to a natural world. The use of the first-person pronoun is similarly prominent in *I Belong Here*, as the very title shows. In a chapter on 'Bearing Witness', Sethi describes giving a statement to the police following a race-hate crime. She is shaken and exhausted but as she speaks, she gains courage and resolution:

> *I* […] A letter so strong and sturdy, upright […] for so much of my life it had been a struggle to fully say it, to be it, all the forces that had tried to flatten it, extinguish it. I. I exist. I have a heart that beats. I have a right to exist and move around the world safely, to belong.[27]

For Sethi, the use of this pronoun represents a form of resistance, of standing strong – 'upright' suggesting a stance that is honourable and ethical – against the forces that would destroy her. Kathleen Jamie's critique of the 'lone enraptured male' notes the prevalence of the 'I' in the literary tradition in which the countryside is a place of masculine spiritual quest. Jamie argues that by making visible the author rather than the wild places, it is a form of 'appropriation' of the land – as if ownership of the land has been taken, or at least a particular version of it has been given to us by a 'single mediator'.[28] Her argument recalls that of Williams in which the countryside is obscured by interpretation. While Stripe's avoidance of the 'I' resists that version of the countryside externally imposed, Sethi takes possession of it, laying claim to the land and the literature long denied to marginalised groups in society.

Edgelands

Fifty years ago, Raymond Williams maintained that country and city are always interconnected. In the twenty-first century the interaction between rural and urban is given physical, spatial form in the edgeland, the places and spaces between country and city which have a particular resonance for the socially and culturally marginalised. In the edgeland, rural and urban meet and mingle in unnamed wastelands and areas – usually but not always on the outskirts of large cities – where refuse is collected, sewage is disposed of, and other things happen that we would rather forget about or ignore. The term was coined at the beginning of the twenty-first century by the writer and land-rights campaigner Marion Shoard, who described the 'rural–urban interface' as an expanding feature of our geography and the 'story of our age'.[29] In literature, the publication in 2012 of *Edgelands* by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts advanced a new aesthetic which sought to 'break out of the duality

of rural and urban landscape writing' and celebrate an unofficial wilderness: disregarded, overlooked, and all the richer for it.[30] Farley and Symmons Roberts see Richard Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside* as the forerunner of the new edgeland narratives that have emerged as a sub-genre in contemporary literature. The meeting grounds of country and city have subsequently been explored in novels such as Melissa Harrison's *Clay* (2013) and non-fiction such as Rob Cowen's *Common Ground* (2015).

Stripe's countryside in 'Driftwood' is a kind of twenty-first-century edgeland, where rural and urban, human and animal, people and place coalesce. She describes a kind of wasteland where nature thrives, ignored, amongst the debris of human function: 'You walk out into the garden, stepping over the rubble, and walk up a mound of ash, now covered in grass and dandelions' (199). The story describes a land littered with the refuse of contemporary existence: abandoned fridges, bin bags, a bike with flat tyres; just as Marion Shoard writes that 'the [rural–urban] interface sucks in the detritus of modern life'.[31] This place is characterised by utility: Stripe complains to her father that it's like a scrapyard outside his house; while elsewhere the story describes in his garden the stench of the nearby sewage works and there are 'cooling towers on the horizon' (198). According to Farley and Symmons Roberts, there is no sign of an edgeland 'truer or more emphatic than the sight of cooling towers in the distance'.[32]

The edgeland aesthetic celebrates that which is conventionally ignored and seen as ugly or unappealing – even threatening. These overlooked places and spaces have a capacity for subversion: they can be lawless and anarchic because 'nobody is looking'.[33] The road that runs through the hamlet is 'for rat-runners, tractors and joy riders': it exists mostly as a place on the way to somewhere else, or for opportunistic crime (194). The shabby, foul and offensive are scattered throughout Stripe's story, and death and danger are never far away. Things bodily and revolting are expelled onto the land, such as used sanitary towels 'coughed up' by the river (193). Shoard writes that the edgeland inverts established notions of good taste: it 'relishes what other landscapes vomit up and […] laughs at current notions of taste'.[34] The coughing up and vomiting suggests things ejected uncontrollably, even violently. Stripe deliberately and unapologetically foregrounds the abject and unlovely in her portrait of a forgotten place and people.

There is a class implication and analogy in the edgeland's essential quality of being neglected and passed over, one that allows for the possibility of resistance. For the edgeland exists outside the processes and concerns of dominant groups in society. It has its own aesthetic and principles, which can be seen to have a particular honesty and integrity. Shoard writes that the edgeland is 'the ultimate physical expression of the character of our age,

unmediated by the passing tastes of elite groups'.[35] According to Shoard, the edgeland is quintessentially contemporary, a concrete manifestation of the spirit of the twenty-first century, direct and authentic, not subject to the casual value judgements of those who are most powerful. Stripe's emphasis on an unaesthetic countryside is not to tell us that we should be repelled by this place and people but rather articulates a deeper truth about contemporary humanity and its relationship with the natural and animal world, representing the realities of rural poverty and the climate crisis in the twenty-first century. As Shoard argues, rather than recoiling from this landscape we should pay attention to it: 'Town and country may show us the surface of life with which we feel comfortable, but the interface shows us its broiling depths.'[36] The edgeland reveals difficult and urgent truths about contemporary life.

In the concluding pages of her essay Shoard addresses the persistent nostalgia that continues to surround the countryside in the twenty-first century:

> Today, we prefer to celebrate the romantic aura that surrounds traditional activities from the past rather than to grapple with those of the present. We yearn to live in a medieval cottage, perhaps a converted forge or farmhouse. Yet when such a cottage actually functioned as a forge or farmhouse it was probably thought of much in the way we think of a sewage works or a car-breaking yard: noisy, smelly, hot and mundane.[37]

Shoard argues that the rural industry of the past, which in the twenty-first century is the focus of our nostalgia, is the historical equivalent of the contemporary edgeland. As Williams maintained in *The Country and the City*, the more natural, more virtuous Old England was always a myth. Shoard suggests that we confront those aspects of the present that we might prefer to ignore rather than finding solace in an imaginary past, just as Stripe's edgeland narrative insists on a more direct, more honest, account of the English rural, one characterised by the disagreeable and routine, by human function and the messy reality of everyday life and work.

Stripe's 'story of our age' represents a departure from contemporary edgeland literature because it is written not as a visitor to the edgeland but from within, presenting a portrait of isolation and decline which is steeped in a sense of inertia. The title 'Driftwood' suggests a place and a people washed-up, cast adrift, and subject to powerful and irresistible forces. It is a remote and forgotten place, epitomised by its bus stop, which is '(out of use)': marooned and expendable, as if in parentheses (193). Though the notion of a rural backwater is not new, Stripe writes in opposition to most contemporary place and nature narratives which hinge upon some kind of journey, a ramble or a wander, which facilitates a personal advancement or revelation. In doing so,

Stripe resists the narrative of mobility – both physical and spiritual – that lies at the heart of these writings.

Farley and Symmons Roberts tell us that 'very few people actually live in the edgelands'.[38] Their own status as tourists in these places and spaces between country and city invokes the sociological concept of elective belonging, where in affluent, highly mobile social groups an attachment to place is understood as an expression of identity and is chosen, rather than pre-determined.[39] While Farley and Symmons Roberts' exploration of edgelands is whimsical and celebratory, Stripe's story has an anxious air: 'Each scrap in his garden symbolic of the person you could become' (199). Though Stripe tells her story with tenderness and a wry sense of humour, she also fears this place and the effect of its inertia on her own life. She describes a profound connection to a place which has become unyielding and disquieting, recalling Williams's account of settlement which 'draws on many deep and persistent feelings: an identification with the people among whom we grew up; an attachment to the place, the landscape, in which we first lived and learned to see'; yet 'can become a prison: a long disheartening and despair, under an imposed rigidity of conditions'.[40] Stripe's edgeland story is an illustration of this 'prison', in which the bond to a homeland has become dispiriting and restrictive. 'Driftwood' is melancholic, showing that the possibility of movement is tied to privilege.

Anita Sethi's stories represent a very different kind of edgeland: a marginalised place that offers a precarious freedom and hope. 'On Class and the Countryside' ultimately moves beyond the country–city dichotomy which characterises the piece. As the story concludes she describes the pictures she drew for her mother as a girl, childlike expressions of her devotion that she wouldn't give to her directly but rather leave where they might be found. These 'little bits of inarticulate love', unspoken and offered obliquely, show:

> houses with paths stretching from their doors away over the hills and towards the lakes and off the page into a future we could dream about, if there was space left in the head for dreams; paths stretching into a space off the picture, off the edges of the page, where hope might live. (218)

The paths stretching off the edges of the page offer an imagined future without boundaries. It is an optimistic vision of belonging, of home – and of the possibility of movement away into an unknown space which is full of promise and freedom, although there are no guarantees. Sethi embraces the radical uncertainties of occupying a marginalised position.

In an online launch event for *I Belong Here*, Sethi said: 'I think that space of being an outsider, that liminal space, it can feel like a negative space that can swallow you up and it can be a lonely space, but it can also be a very magical

and creative space if you then inhabit it, you can use that space and reclaim it as your own.'[41] Her words recall the work of the late American cultural theorist bell hooks, who wrote of a spatial alterity that can be radically freeing: a 'space of radical openness' which is 'a margin, a profound edge'.[42] There are clear correspondences between Sethi and hooks, in their concern with the intersections of class, race, and feminism, and in their embrace of marginalised places and spaces – what we might call an edgeland – which can be painful and difficult but also full of possibility. In *I Belong Here*, there is a great deal of suffering and loss, but this is intimately connected to hope and creative opportunity. Sethi recounts, for example, her various struggles with the trauma of the race-hate crime, the death of her friend Sophie Christopher, and her anxiety and depression. Visiting Hull Pot, a sinkhole, the largest natural hole in England, she considers: 'A hole is not only an absence but also an opening, a possibility […] Is there anything that can be salvaged from the place of loss?' (*I Belong*, 198) A negative space in which you might disappear – akin to the space off the edges of the page in *Common People* – has the capacity also to be receptive and productive. Living on the edge is painful but brings a profound sense of possibility.

Sethi describes a kind of boundless mobility which is afforded by precarity. In *I Belong Here* she visits Settle on her Pennine journey and considers the difficulties many people encounter in attaining security and settlement due to socioeconomic, geographic, and other inequalities. She finds, alongside her quest for belonging, a contrary impulse:

> That summer I decided not to try and settle down but to 'settle up' geographically by walking up, following my unsettled feeling upwards into the hills and seeing what I might discover. Alongside a primal need for home is a need for freedom and adventure, a longing for somewhere that lets the spirit soar. (160)

Sethi reconfigures unsettlement as liberty: her response to precarity is not to seek fixity but rather to embrace its uncertainties and freedoms. She writes: 'in this state of being unsettled there is wisdom to be found, another way of being in the world' (166). Sethi represents a form of mobility that is never taken for granted, nor ever easy, but the precarious, she suggests, might find a kind of wisdom not attainable by others. Making the case for the working-class writer – and writers from other disadvantaged groups in society – Sethi shows that the outsider can access original and distinctive forms of creativity.

Conclusion

Fifty years after Williams wrote *The Country and the City*, the countryside continues often to be 'scribbled over'. Yet Adelle Stripe and Anita Sethi are part of a new wave of working-class writers who are rewriting the English rural, inscribing a working countryside and rural precarity in our stories, and articulating an urban and leisurely experience of the countryside from a working-class, racialised, and feminist perspective. Stripe and Sethi represent, respectively, the rural and the urban working classes; their stories act in counterpoise to redress silences and absences in contemporary literature of the countryside, as well as countering reductive associations of working-class writing with urban environments. Williams's exposition of an intellectualised interpretation of the country which comes from the city and disavows the realities of rural working life is ever-more pertinent in a contemporary landscape of class in which social and cultural capital increasingly accumulates in urban areas. Meanwhile the work of Sethi counsels an extension of Williams's analysis, in her account of the 'middle class rural convention' which entwines the politics of place, race, gender and class.

Williams insisted that country and city are connected historically and culturally by capitalist social relations. In the twenty-first century, his arguments can be seen to find new expression in the burgeoning geography and literature of the edgeland. Stripe's portrait of a forgotten wasteland of human function and fallibility has a particular integrity, confronting contemporary truths that are often not pretty, while Sethi's more abstract form of edgeland embraces the 'profound edge' of millennial precarity. Both these writers show that there is 'wisdom to be found' in the marginalised position. A common countryside is a place of ordinary life and work. It is also shared, by a diversity of people, and fertile ground for creative possibility.

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'A Different Kind of History': The Building of Raymond Williams's Posthumous Reputation and *People of the Black Mountains*[1]

Merlin Gable

Abstract

Upon his death in 1988, Raymond Williams (1921–1988) left 'a vast untidy manuscript – over 250,000 words, revised and corrected in minute handwriting'. This was his final work of fiction, *People of the Black Mountains* (1989–90). Williams's publishers, Chatto & Windus, were faced with publishing a conceptually complex and unfinished novel, as well as deciding what sort of posthumous reputation they wished to create for a writer whose oeuvre resists simple definition. This article utilises a book historical approach to unpick the complex gestation of the published novel, as revealed by materials held in the Chatto & Windus archives. It contends that Chatto & Windus's marketing of the novel played a part in an observable shift in emphasis regarding Williams's work and ideas. During his life, Williams's status as a Welsh writer and a writer about Wales was routinely ignored; after his death, this Welsh identity has become more frequently discussed. In doing so, it develops our understanding of Williams's late work, as well as the perhaps under-regarded role that his publishers played – rather than his readers and critics – in determining the coordinates of his posthumous reputation.

*

Introduction

In 1983, Raymond Williams (1921–1988) moved to Saffron Walden, some miles from Cambridge where he had until his retirement that year held the University post of Professor of Drama. This move represented something of a clean and final break for Williams: Jesus College, where he held a fellowship, did not even know his new telephone number.[2] Having just published his exploration of nationhood, left utopianism and contemporary politics *Towards 2000* (1983), Williams writes to his publisher, Chatto & Windus, upon the invitation of its managing director Carmen Callil to set out his future writing plans.[3] Although he is 'bombarded with proposals for literary-analytic books', Williams feels

'I've done most that I can do of that kind and in any case I'd rather settle'. Instead, Williams writes, his retirement and move to Saffron Walden allows him 'the space for longer work of a different kind'. Williams details two novels he is writing, one 'long, one short'. The shorter is to become his 1985 novel *Loyalties*; the longer, however, is 'where most of [his] heart is, and if achieved would be very much the more important'.[4]

This novel was *People of the Black Mountains* (1989–90), Williams's unfinished final work of fiction. In the novel, the movement of people, communities and societies in Williams's home country of the Black Mountains on the edge of Wales is focalised through individual stories spanning over 25,000 years, held together by modern-day interludes where a young man, Glyn, searches for his grandfather, who has not returned from a walk. In this first communication with Callil, Williams describes the novel as 'very unusual' as 'its continuity is centred on a place rather than on one group of people. In a way it's more like a history, and will contain a large amount of real historical research'. Immediately, Williams expresses concerns over the practicalities of the publication of his work, something in which he had hitherto not shown much interest. He suggests that it requires 'some provisional understanding with a publisher' before he continues writing: his 'realistic estimate' for the length of the novel is a trilogy, each volume of 'average length'. However, Williams is reluctant to plan the novel according to a trilogy structure – 'I get blocked on this whenever I think in publishing terms' – instead wanting the 'whole story [to] develop as one work'.[5]

In her response three days later, Callil, as well as enthusiastically embracing the idea of Chatto publishing the novel, argues that doing so as a trilogy at intervals might be a mistake: 'people tend to buy the first volume and never the second or third'. Instead, she suggests that they 'think of publishing the three in one, very big, novel. Europeans and Americans do this, so why shouldn't we?'[6] Williams responds in a handwritten note and confesses that '[d]oing "People of the Black Mountains" as one book, from this stage, will make it so much better, I think'.[7]

At its inception, Williams's new novel is seen as formally unusual; however, as the years went on and Williams continued to write, it is clear that its market position was considered by his publisher fairly unremarkable – albeit without their having read any of it. In 1986, as Williams progresses with the work, an assistant at Chatto writes to him asking for a synopsis for the 'Forthcoming Titles' list and suggests that it will be featured in the following year's catalogue – a familiarly low-fanfare marketing approach for Williams's novels.[8]

Williams died before *People of the Black Mountains* was finished, leaving an unfinished and heavily revised 250,000-word manuscript.[9] This article utilises a book historical approach to unpick the complex gestation of the published

novel, as revealed by materials held in the Chatto & Windus archives. After his death, Williams's publishers were faced with a novel that – despite its considerable qualities – cannot be considered a straightforward literary masterpiece and whose rationale is the very wholeness that its author embraced in the idea of publishing in one volume. They also had to decide what sort of posthumous reputation they wished to create for a writer who had, in life, rather archly resisted any attempt at pigeonholing.

In executing this challenging task, Chatto & Windus's marketing of *People of the Black Mountains* played a part in an observable shift in emphasis regarding Williams's work and ideas. During his life, Williams's status as a Welsh writer and a writer about Wales was routinely ignored, despite the country's deep presence in his novels and, self-avowedly, in his cultural theory. After his death, this Welsh identity has become more frequently discussed.[10] This mirrors a concomitant increase in Welsh cultural autonomy and activity beginning particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, through to the establishment of devolved government in 1999 and the subsequent growth of a distinct Welsh public sphere.

My suggestion in what follows is that Chatto attempted to use the novel's meditation on place and people to present Williams as a writer of place and as a distinctively Welsh writer, in contrast to the publisher's greater focus on his cultural and political writing during his lifetime. This distinction is one that does not stand up in Williams's own writing, where he was often at pains to demonstrate how his cultural background contributed to his writing and thought, and where co-constitutive cultural processes are preferred over the simple determinism that Chatto employ. In the process of marketing Williams in this way, his publisher invoked a set of institutions that, perhaps unwittingly, involved the novel into a wider narrative of Welsh cultural activity in the 1980s. Chatto had its own imperatives in this process; therefore, I also make statements regarding the novel's specific place in the wider narrative of trade publishing in this period. I demonstrate how Chatto placed Williams's novel tacitly alongside the burgeoning market for and concomitant emergence of the concept of 'world literature', and in doing so I build a base of archival evidence that may enable further examination of Williams's Welshness in relation to the literary marketplace.

Positioning Williams: Chatto & Windus in Transition

The 1980s was as much a time of change for Chatto & Windus as it was for Raymond Williams. From the 1930s onwards, Chatto had held considerable prestige, particularly as a non-academic publisher of literary criticism.[11] By

the 1980s, Williams was one of only a few living authors in this tradition left in its stable. As a traditional hardback publisher, Chatto often sold paperback rights for its books to other publishers. It had acquired the Hogarth Press in 1946 and by the 1980s the imprint had begun to function to an extent as its paperback arm.[12] There was clearly a distinct advantage for Chatto in taking this higher-sales market in-house. Access to the paperback market in this way ensured continued profits on books after their initial release, important for Chatto given that the mid-1980s were characterised by increasing debt and poor sales performance within a rapidly changing print market.[13]

We see this shift play out in Williams's own publications. Through the early years of his relationship with the publisher, most of his books had been initially issued as a Chatto & Windus hardback, after which paperback rights were licensed to another publisher, often Penguin. *Culture and Society* (1958), *Border Country* (1960), and *The Long Revolution* (1961) had all been published in this way. The 1978 reprints of *Border Country* and *Second Generation* (1964) were Chatto hardback editions, published to coincide with the launch of *The Fight for Manod* (1979), the third title in Williams's 'Welsh trilogy'. However, the 1988 reprint of the series, which was being prepared before Williams's death, moved the novels to Hogarth paperback. This followed the reprinting of Eyre Methuen's first edition of *The Volunteers* (1978) by Chatto as a Hogarth paperback in 1985 (to coincide with the Chatto hardback publication of *Loyalties*).

Following the acquisition of Chatto & Windus by multinational paperback publisher Random House in 1987, Vintage paperbacks became another destination for reprints of Chatto originals and the publisher appears to have reconsidered the focuses of its various imprints. With Williams's death the following year, it seems that Chatto were unsure what to do with its back catalogue of Williams publications. In a memo to editorial director Jenny Uglow following her first reading of the typescript of *People of the Black Mountains*,[14] Callil raises the issue of Williams's future in paperback:

> Could you consult Andrew as to whether he thinks a novel of this kind could fit into the paperback side of the Hogarth List – we must decide what we're going to do with Raymond Williams anyway in paperback, or is he going to be Vintage? The reason I ask is that one way of making the whole thing financially possible is for either Vintage or Hogarth to do the paperback…[15]

Uglow's response follows a discussion with Frances Coady, seemingly a representative of Vintage, who wished to take on all of Williams's criticism and fiction. Uglow insists his criticism stays with Chatto – 'he is one of that Chatto tradition we have laid claim to, [which I] said we would be reviving,

upholding etc. Indeed he's probably the most important of that mid-century bunch of Empson, Leavis et al.' – but was not convinced that his fiction need stay with Hogarth, who were at this point launching a new image: 'I don't think we would want LOYALTIES or PEOPLE OF THE BLACK MOUNTAINS in the new Hogarth, at least for some time, until the image is established. If Frances doesn't want to do them on their own we feel it would be better to sell them elsewhere – though I would not want to do that at all.'[16] It is clear that Chatto by no means had a simple and enthusiastic relationship with Williams's fiction, despite its loyalty to his critical work. The profit margin on fiction was lower, especially in hardback, hence Callil's suggestion of a Hogarth paperback of *Black Mountains* to subsidise the hardback.[17]

The choices that Chatto & Windus were making about the publication of Williams's last novel were intimately tied to the wider changes the publisher was undergoing as it settled into place within the Random House Group. John Thompson illustrates the tendency of the introduction of 'more market-oriented values and practices into those sectors of the industry that had hitherto remained rather aloof' as a result of the widespread buyouts of independent hardback publishers by large paperback corporations in the 1980s such as that undergone by Chatto. Thompson links this to the 'massive growth in hardcover sales' in the 1980s and 1990s as the immediacy and convenience of hardback books began to outweigh their higher cost compared to paperbacks, which are typically published a year or so later.[18] Hardback books began to receive more concerted marketing efforts and more careful and attractive cover design as a result. In this respect, *Black Mountains* represents Chatto's first attempt at creating a popular hardback of Williams's writing. Simultaneously, its insistence on his paperback non-fiction remaining with Hogarth, ascribed to the 'Chatto tradition',[19] suggests the transformation of the publisher's history of academic integrity into a marketing position aimed at garnering symbolic capital.[20]

Marketing *People of the Black Mountains* through Place

Uglow was the first person in Chatto & Windus to read *People of the Black Mountains*. On 6 December 1988, she writes to Callil explaining the plot and setting out her vision for publication. Uglow is enthusiastic, describing the book as 'really extraordinary in its way', though she admits there is no 'fine writing'. She compares it to Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea trilogy (1968–72) and describes the story she has read so far as 'very clear, vivid and atmospheric'. Proposing a publication date of autumn 1989, she notes that readers know the book is coming and expect it soon. She describes the book as 'so momentous,

in its peculiar way, that we should think which prizes can be given to authors who've died'.[21]

On 3 January 1989, Callil responds. Her reaction is more guarded, and her initial concern is over the possibility of publishing in one volume and according to the timeline Uglow envisions: 'Before answering the questions in your memo […] the very first thing we have to do is to work out if we can publish this book at all!' She suggests that publishing in two volumes 'may make the whole project financially more viable' and notes that '[a]t least one volume will be complete, and the second volume could be of interest merely because it is unfinished'.[22] This decision was revealing. Chatto recognised that they needed to print something soon (by the time they received the typescript, almost a year had passed since Williams's death) and that, contrary to their discussions with Williams when he was alive, there were distinct marketing advantages in publishing the novel in two volumes. This is the first indication that Chatto perceived a tangible difference in the imperatives of publishing Williams posthumously.

These initial memos by Uglow and Callil are fundamental to the later development of the marketing tactics used for *People of the Black Mountains*, first introducing the idea of marketing the novels as distinctively Welsh and tied insistently to the place about which they were written. Uglow envisions a lavish book, with endpapers, maps, timelines and a 'wrap around cover with a beautiful background of the mountains at their most mysterious – storm coming over, sunshine striking through'.[23] Callil concurs, suggesting they find 'an absolutely wonderful background photograph or painting of the Black Mountains, with beautiful lettering superimposed'. Callil goes on to ask Uglow to 'find out what Welsh lettering would look like', adding that they need 'proper Welsh lettering for the title and for Raymond's name'.[24] It is unclear what she means by this. She may have been thinking of Gaelic type commonly used in Irish and some earlier Scottish writing; however, the published cover uses Roman capitals. Nevertheless, at this early stage the decision is made to market the book through its ties to place.

In this exchange, Uglow inaugurates here a concept that will come to inform Chatto's marketing of the book, suggesting that '[p]eople will, I'm sure, use this as a "guide" to the Black Mountains and it could even be made into a sort of "quest-book" for the area. (Are the Black Mountains a National Park? National Trust?)'.[25] This motif of the novel as a point of entry into the real area it describes henceforth appears consistently throughout the novel's marketing material. In fact, the first volume's blurb emphasises that the novel is 'a journey in search of buried history, following the tracks on a map that all of us can read – and walk along – today'.[26] Similarly, the covering letter sent with review copies of the first volume by Uglow argues that 'it works so well

partly because it is based so firmly in the landscape; since the structure follows an actual walk across the Black Mountains you can still visit all the places where the stories take place'.[27] The sales briefing for the first volume also describes it as a 'nightlong quest through the beautiful and remote Black Mountains'. It details the novel's 'key sales points', describing it as '[t]he last great work by one of the greatest critics and most original novelists of the 20th Century – a unique and extraordinary book crowning a lifetime of achievement' and a 'quest/adventure book and guide to the Black Mountains, now a National Park – every step of the hero's walk can be retraced in real life'. [28]

This close reflection of the language of Uglow's original memo involves Williams's novel in the function of national parks as a way of encoding land as a form of tangible cultural heritage. Jeremy Bate has noted that Wordsworth's idea of the Lake District as 'a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy', may be seen as 'the origins of the National Trust' and the post-war national parks, including the Bannau Brycheiniog (formerly Brecon Beacons) that Chatto is referencing here.[29]

This is not at first glance totally dissimilar to the encounter with place proposed in the opening lines of *People of the Black Mountains*, which implores the reader in a series of imperative statements to

> [s]ee 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. (I, 1)

There are, however, some important differences with respect to the question of mediation. Where Chatto proposes in its materials an unmediated access to Williams through place, the novel instead suggests something more complex. Although you 'hold this place in your hand' in once sense, in another the hand *becomes* a map of the place, an imaginative aid but by no means the real thing, which remains continually mediated through Glyn's deep, grounded familiarity with the land throughout his search. Each historical episode is introduced or inflected through Glyn's location and thoughts. Although the novel promises the divulgence of a complex and long history, it only allows that access through the eyes of this mediator as the modern inheritor of the place's history.

What is significant is not whether any specific claim by Chatto is true to the novel or to the place; the question of value has little bearing on the way the novel seems to have been constructed in the public eye. Instead, it is worth attending to what the claims show about how Chatto is using a rhetoric of place as a point of access to Williams. This is an approach that does not arise organically

from his own thought, yet it appears to be used to construct a personal and autobiographical posthumous image for the writer that might ensure continued sales of his work through a shift that emphasised Williams's Welsh identity and family life. In *Politics and Letters* (1979), Williams had described his reluctance to write in a 'Welsh style', seeing the way the Welsh 'present themselves to a London audience' as 'a form of cultural subordination'.[30] This is not what Chatto are encouraging exactly, and the marketing techniques of a publisher cannot, needless to say, align precisely with the views of a cultural theorist; however, it is clear that Chatto are to a degree consciously establishing an equivalence between Williams and the Black Mountains in a way that provides for broader marketability.

Although Daniel Williams argues that '[t]he fact that it was in his fiction that Williams began to explore the meaning of his Welsh experience has proved convenient for maintaining a distinction between the "international" cultural critic and the "regional" novelist',[31] in Chatto's treatment of *People of the Black Mountains* we see the two reputations begin to combine. Uglow notes that the possibility of national media attention may lie in the fact that 'many media people have hol. homes there'.[32] Indeed, Uglow reminds the team at Chatto that they should not 'see PEOPLE OF THE BLACK MOUNTAINS as simply of local Welsh/border interest', proposing 'broody pictures of mountains' in the *Independent* and material for the *Guardian* and Sunday newspaper glossy supplements as a way to widen the novel's general appeal.[33] BBC Wales even bought an option on film rights, originally planning a 1992 four-part release on BBC Two.[34] It is clear that the image of Wales being produced in Chatto's marketing plans was one designed to appeal to a wider English reading public, not an attempt at situating the novel within a Welsh cultural context to which it doubtless also relates.

This invites questions as to what extent Chatto was encouraging, in its marketing of *People of the Black Mountains*, an imaginative appropriation of space as a method of reading Williams's final novel – the 'last great work of an extraordinary writer and thinker, crowning a lifetime of achievement', as a typewritten mock-up of an advert would have it.[35] Geoff Dyer has noted that after a writer's death 'we drift away from the great texts […] towards the journals, diaries, letters, manuscripts, jottings'.[36] Mindful of the plethora of new editions of Williams's essays being released in 1988 and 1989,[37] and with extraordinary sleight of hand, Chatto's advertising copy at once suggests that the best route to an understanding of Williams is through this 'last great work' and 'final testament',[38] and that this form of appreciation could be enhanced or facilitated, even authenticated, through personal interaction with the real Black Mountains.

Launching *People of the Black Mountains*

Despite the clear national focus of the novel's marketing strategy, Uglow suggests in her memo of 6 December 1988 that *Black Mountains* be launched in 'some small local event in S.Wales'.[39] Callil agrees: 'we should concentrate on making a big noise in Wales'.[40] As it happens, the event is neither particularly small nor local; rather, both volumes saw their launch at the Cardiff Literature Festival in 1989 and 1990 respectively. The festival was organised annually by the English Language Section of Yr Academi Gymreig (The Welsh Academy) between 1986 and 1996 and at its height was a week-long event with an extensive programme.[41] With the festival preceding by two years the founding of the nearby and now world-famous Hay Festival and rivalling it in length and scope, the event appears to have been a major point of the Welsh literary calendar during its existence.

The launch of Volume I of *People of the Black Mountains* took the form of a reading by Merryn Williams, Raymond's daughter, introduced by Dai Smith – the Welsh historian who would later publish the official biography of Williams's early years, *A Warrior's Tale* (2008). The reading of extracts by family members is hardly an unusual way to posthumously launch a book. Indeed, Joy Williams, Raymond's widow, had been a significant force in the development of the novel, undertaking research on his behalf and accompanying him on the walks which informed the novel's description of places. However, this focus nevertheless constructs a certain form of 'access' to Raymond Williams that Chatto & Windus were also propagating. In a memo to Uglow and Callil, Rupert Lancaster, another editorial director at Chatto, writes 'Presumably his wife will do PR?'.[42] A sales planning sheet for the second volume of the novel details 'Interviews with Joy Williams in both national press and regional Welsh press' and a set of early handwritten sheets, presumably by Uglow, planning how to market the novel note: 'human angle – Joy – woman's Hr [i.e. *Woman's Hour*] – She can tell gd stories'.[43] It is clear Joy did indeed appear on the radio – a card interleaved in a small notebook containing research for the novel in Joy's hand describes an interview with 'BBC Cardiff | To talk from Cambridge Studio about Blk Mts book 2.15 – 2.45 | Sept 18 Monday'.[44]

Although Merryn appeared at the book launch in Cardiff, Joy had prepared materials from which to speak at such events. Two drafts of a speech are contained in the Raymond Williams papers, entitled 'Personal approach'.[45] The speech describes the purchase of the Williams's house in Craswall, just east of the Black Mountains, in the early 1970s, Raymond's subsequent interest in the history of the area, and hints at the extensive work that Joy herself performed – research, summaries, diagrams – that contributed significantly to the novel.[46] Key changes are made between the two versions which increase

the emphasis on the personal story of the book over its content. This mirrors Uglow's suggestion that a more personal note should be added to the opening sentence of *Black Mountains*' postscript: 'Raymond Williams died before *People of the Black Mountains* was finished.'[47] In a corrected copy of Joy's earlier draft of the postscript, Uglow had noted:

> Joy – I know you don't want to seem too involved, but I think it would be helpful at the start of this piece, if you explained your relationship – many readers won't know, and it makes sense of 'conversations' etc later.[48]

The words 'My husband' were subsequently added to the start of the postscript. Not only did this addition enter print but the significance of Joy Williams's involvement in the novel became further emphasised as time went on. It is Joy who, in the dynamic prose of a Chatto press release, 'sorted, amended and typed' the 'vast untidy manuscript'[49] of the novel Raymond Williams 'had been working on for the last eight years of his life': 'Thanks to her the first part of this extraordinary work will be published on September 14.'[50]

Joy Williams's role in the marketing of *People of the Black Mountains* seems a complicated one. It appears that her increasingly active role in its promotion was in part due to Chatto's encouragement, and that this construction of the 'story' of the manuscript produces, as Joy herself wrote, a 'personal approach' to the unfinished, posthumous work. James P. Randall argues that 'following a writer's death, every text may appear to become a form of life writing, every literary trace a sign or fragment of the life that the text now survives';[51] Joy Williams's statements regarding the novel further contributed to this effect, whereby Williams's final novel becomes a form of 'testament' to the author, who, it is suggested, we can access after death through this form of personal reading and interaction with the place with which he was associated.

In a guided walk by Merryn Williams through 'Raymond Williams Country', these personal and geographical forms of access combined. The walk, a tour of the sites described in the novel, took place on 23 August 1989, a little over a month before the first volume's launch. The pamphlet advertising this walk bore a large stamp of the Academi and a notice below acknowledging the support of the Welsh Arts Council and the South East Wales Arts Association.[52] The event received a mischievous write-up in the *Guardian*: 'All we had to go on was the dust-jacket of a book not yet published and an anonymous handout that might just be a publisher's hype.'[53]

The host of cultural institutions that were involved in the launch and walk are also notable. Yr Academi Gymreig first established an English Language Section in 1968; by 1971 it was receiving Welsh Arts Council funding, which increased substantially in 1974. The association between the English language

section of the Academi and the Welsh Arts Council had always been strong. Meic Stephens, who was associate director of the Welsh Arts Council at the time, pressed for the establishment of the English Language Section.[54] Although Chatto had received Welsh Arts Council funding for the 1978 reprints of *Border Country* and *Second Generation*, its involvement with the apparatus of Welsh civic culture had remained fairly limited until this point.[55] Clearly this changed with *People of the Black Mountains*, where we see the publisher positioning the novel through its launch as of not merely national Welsh interest, proposing instead a wider range of appeal whilst mobilising a range of Welsh cultural institutions. By working with Williams's family on the launch activities, Chatto established an additional angle of access – that of the personal.

Raymond Williams and Wales in the 1980s

To assess the significance of Chatto & Windus placing *People of the Black Mountains* at the centre of Welsh cultural life and engaging its largest institutions in the marketing of the novel requires an understanding of the state of Welsh culture in the 1980s and Raymond Williams's activities within it. This remains an under studied area of Williams's life and work; however, information may be gleaned from the progression of his essays on Wales and his correspondences with notable Welsh figures held in the Raymond Williams papers.

The failure of Wales to opt for devolution in the 1979 referendum was a watershed moment for nationalists. In the 1960s and 1970s, Plaid Cymru had increased its influence, gaining its first MPs and finding support in Welsh intellectual life (albeit not without reservation) from such figures as Gwyn A. Williams and Ned Thomas. D. Gareth Evans identifies a cultural resurgence following the referendum and throughout the 1980s.[56] Evans also notes the large role played by state-funded institutions in this period, registering that '[b]y 1988, there were eight [theatre] companies in existence, funded by a combination of [Local Education Authorities], the Welsh Office, the Welsh Arts Council and regional grants'.[57] Similarly, Martin Johnes notes that 'Wales was slowly developing a civil society that was more delineated from England than ever before' in this period.[58]

Raymond Williams held a Plaid Cymru party card for 1969 only, but by the 1970s was calling himself a 'Welsh European',[59] and in *Politics and Letters* (1979) describes how he 'began having many more contacts with Welsh writers and intellectuals' around the same time.[60] He published several articles, many of them book reviews, pertaining to Wales in the 1970s,[61] and had been engaged to speak at the 1976 Plaid summer school, though he could not do so due to illness;[62] he then spoke on 'The Importance of Community' at the 1977

event.[63] As an introduction to a posthumous article in *Radical Wales* states, 'by [the mid-'70s] Raymond Williams was operating within and out of a Wales context which he was to feel even more deeply in the 1980s'.[64]

It is clear that during the 1980s, Williams's realignment away from Cambridge life also entailed a turning towards the Welsh cultural conversation. Gwyn A. Williams mentions in a letter that Williams was travelling to Aberystwyth in October 1982, and in another letter in 1985 asks that *Radical Wales*, a journal launched by Gwyn A. Williams under the auspices of Plaid Cymru in October 1983, reprint an article Raymond Williams contributed to the *New Statesman* in 1985 (or that he provide a new piece of writing if he preferred).[65] Further, Dafydd Elis-Thomas and David Reynolds propose discussing a 'new book on Welsh politics' in 1984,[66] and Phil Cooke requests again that Williams write 'something of your Welsh Europeanism' for *Radical Wales* in 1986.[67] Ned Thomas, the intellectual and writer who first achieved notoriety through his book *The Welsh Extremist* (1971), invited Williams to the University of Aberystwyth to deliver lectures in Aberystwyth in 1978 (later published as 'The Tenses of Imagination')[68] and a lecture, research seminar and undergraduate seminar in March 1985. A similar visit was scheduled for 1988 but Williams was to die before this could take place.[69]

We can also observe Williams forming connections with figures across Welsh life. A letter in 1980 from Dafydd Elis-Thomas, then the Plaid Cymru MP for Meirionnydd, states that a card Williams sent to him 'restored part of my faith during the post referendum period'. He claims that Williams's novel of political corruption and rural redevelopment *The Fight for Manod* represents 'the clearest possible statement about the position of rural and urban Wales' and is key to how Plaid can 'represent urban as well as rural Wales as a political party'. It is clear that Williams's work was important to Welsh political and academic thinkers, and this is in part precisely because of his central position in English cultural discourse: 'only a Welshman could have made your kind of project in English cultural studies', Elis-Thomas writes.[70]

Williams published little direct comment on the devolution referendum. However, in a 1981 article for *Arcade: Wales Fortnightly* (a short-lived magazine produced between 1980 and 1982), he notes that '[w]e are arguing at every other level about whether Wales […] is a nation or a people, or as seen from elsewhere, a region', a comment that surely has the discourse surrounding the referendum in mind.[71] What Williams makes clear in the same article is his view of the centrality of the novel form to this ongoing conversation. In this respect, *People of the Black Mountains* develops a new dimension as an intervention into a Welsh cultural discourse that might not be 'perceived from the outside'.[72] This is not to say that the novel was considered of solely Welsh interest by Williams, who was certainly cognisant of his English audience, but it

allows us to understand the stark contrast between Williams's own perception of the novel's 'Welsh function' as a contribution to a national conversation and that of Chatto. Indeed, by 1986, Williams feels able to write that 'I have been an active participant in the internal Welsh argument but, living so much in England, I have thought from an early stage that the issues being explored are of much more general significance'.[73] It's perhaps in this statement that we can most clearly see Williams's own understanding of the function of *People of the Black Mountains* in relation to place and nation.

The importance of the above discussion is to develop what contrast we can between Williams's engagements with the institutions of Welsh culture and those of Chatto & Windus in the marketing of *People of the Black Mountains*. Williams's involvement with Wales was consistent but largely academic (or personal) for the final decade or so of his life. His engagement with Welsh political discourse was considered, deeply knowledgeable and sensitive. By contrast, Chatto's historic awareness of Williams's significance in Welsh circles seems limited: Norah Smallwood, Callil's predecessor, writes to Williams in 1980 that '[f]or some reason beyond my ken I've only just this moment learned that you have been awarded the top fiction prize by the Welsh Arts Council, for THE FIGHT FOR MANOD', clearly some while after the announcement of the prize.[74] Chatto's attempt to transform this relationship with Wales into a popular association with the country, 'the land he loved and left, but could never forget',[75] and its engagement with the trade-oriented functions of the Arts Council and with the Cardiff Literary Festival, betrays a radically different attitude towards institutions that, whilst unsurprising, has profound ramifications for our understanding of its construction of Williams's posthumous reputation. Further research in this area would profitably examine what lasting effect this had, as well as pay more attention to Williams's posthumous publishing history of more recent years and further trends that have emerged, particularly in the 25 years since political devolution in Wales.

Conclusions: Raymond Williams('s) Country?

In her discussion of the global literary marketplace, Sarah Brouillette notes that 'authority rests […] in the nature of [the writer's] connection to the specificity of a given political location'.[76] Despite Brouillette's engagement with radically different national contexts, in her insistence on the loss of agency that the marketing of 'authenticity' as an aspect of place creates, there are important parallels with the story of the publication of *People of the Black Mountains*. The novel's meditation on place as a rooted, historical experience and Chatto & Windus's attempt to mobilise a rhetoric of nature tourism to

develop an association with the Black Mountains and Williams's work as a form of surrogate for the now dead writer, resembles this same contest between authenticity and agency that Brouillette examines. Randall argues that 'texts become encrypted within the life' of a dead writer;[77] in this way, Williams's novel took on significance in the process of Chatto bringing it to market, both in its autobiographical weight and an overdetermined locational specificity that nevertheless remained divorced from a real Welsh cultural and political location. Given Williams's absence as a living author and thinker, Chatto attempted to find continued authenticity and marketability instead in the place with which Williams had devoted so much of his thought.

Perhaps the most surprising angle with which Chatto attempted to market *People of the Black Mountains* is revealed in the description of the 1989 Cardiff launch event, which suggests that the novel has 'prompted comparisons to several schools of writing, including the work of the magical realists'.[78] This claim is not reproduced in any reviews of the novel, where instead Dai Smith remarks that its 'pace and scope are Tolstoyan' (a distinctly European analogue that sits comfortably alongside Williams's Welsh European identity),[79] calling into question who 'prompted' this comparison. In fact, it appears to have originated in a publicity document produced by Chatto, which argues that the novel has 'some of the feel of magical-realism'.[80] In an essay published in 1989, Uglow elaborates further:

> But to find anything which shared the same atmosphere as *Black Mountains* we had to look abroad, to films like Umberto Lenzi's ambitious, if unsuccessful *La Guerra del ferro* (*Quest for Fire*), to the Chinese *Yellow Earth*, or even to the magical-realist genres of Central and South America. Williams's novel, so rooted in Welsh soil, came to seem a peculiarly un-British work.[81]

Again, we see this suggestive language emerge in early handwritten notes by an unknown hand held in the Chatto archives: 'surprise because different' and 'Unbritish – magic realism'.[82] Although Uglow's references are clearly towards other magical realisms, it is notable that Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* had been published in September 1988 and that it was during the editing of *Black Mountains* that Ayatollah Khomeini issued his *fatwa* against the novel – it is hard not to think that this would have been the more available contemporary reference point in the public imagination. Chatto's (admittedly somewhat timid) branding of the novel as comparable to magical realism seems a somewhat extraordinary attempt to associate Williams's novel with the emerging mainstream market for 'world literature'; the work is 'un-British' despite its deep claims to Welsh soil. In doing so, it could be perceived that Chatto interpellates Welsh space as postcolonial or 'worldly' space in its

marketing of the novel outside Wales: that is, its distinctive Welshness serves to produce an aesthetic otherness by which to market it to the English. We are reminded of David Damrosch's comment that texts become 'world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture'.[83] From an understanding of Britishness determined within a dominant English culture, it is clear how *People of the Black Mountains*' historical and cultural vertigo – tens of thousands of years of quite 'un-British' history taking place firmly within a troublingly familiar Britain – might induce such a response. Chatto's concerted efforts at marketing the novel through a rhetoric of geographical and personal access, whilst neglecting any consideration of *cultural* access, relocates Williams's novel beyond and outside of Wales, despite its own insistences, into a quite different 'political location', to use Brouillette's term.

Arriving at this point does not necessitate a condemnation of Chatto & Windus's tactics of publishing and marketing Raymond Williams after his death. Indeed, many of the categories and concepts that Chatto engage – not least the limited but significant engagement with world literature – touch upon ideas that interested Williams throughout his writing, albeit in different modalities. Instead, it reveals how the challenges of memorialising a complex writer whose final work balances finely between the unremittingly specific and the overwhelmingly universal produced a published novel whose placement speaks at once to the pressures of late capitalist book publishing and to the emergent discourses of world literature and Welsh culture in contest with a dominant British culture. In doing so, it develops our understanding of and proposes new directions for the consideration of Williams's late work, as well as the perhaps under-regarded role that his publishers played – rather than his readers and critics – in determining the coordinates of his posthumous reputation.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the archivists at the University of Reading, who directed me towards two unordered and uncatalogued folders that have proved invaluable in reconstructing the narrative told in this article. In addition, I am grateful to the staff of the Richard Burton Archives at the University of Swansea, who were accommodating and friendly. My gratitude goes to the Raymond Williams Estate for permission to access and use all archival materials related to Raymond Williams.

Editorial decisions

Many of the materials described are uncorrected carbon copies of typewritten letters that presumably would have been forwarded to a secretary for correction and retyping before sending, or internal memos where presentation and accuracy were not priorities. As such they are often annotated with corrections and contain many obvious mistypes and errors. Where the sense is obvious, or where annotations correct mistakes, these have been altered without indication to maintain ease of reading. Underlining, capitals and abbreviations are maintained regardless.

Notes

1 A note on the title. In a short statement she wrote presumably to accompany her speech, Joy Williams noted that Raymond Williams 'wanted to write a different kind of history' in *People of the Black Mountains*. See 'People of the Black Mountains: Personal approach', 15 September [1989(?)]. Raymond Williams Papers (hereafter 'RW papers'), University of Swansea, WWE/2/2/2/6 (8 of 9). Catalogue numbers may refer to individual documents or folders containing multiple items.

2 Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 1995), 5.

3 Carmen Callil (1938–2022) became managing director of Chatto & Windus in 1982 following its acquisition of Virago Press, which she had founded in 1973 and where she continued to hold the post of chairman until 1995, having left Chatto in 1994.

4 Letter from Raymond Williams to Carmen Callil, 26 September 1983. Archives of Chatto & Windus Ltd (hereafter 'Chatto files'), University of Reading, CW 371/3/3. Individual items in this collection are not numbered.

5 Williams to Callil, 26 September 1983, Chatto files, CW 371/3/3.

6 Letter from Callil to Raymond Williams, 29 September 1983. Chatto files, CW 371/3/3.

7 Letter from Raymond Williams to Callil, 4 October 1983. Chatto files, CW 371/3/3.

8 Letter from Allegra Huston to Raymond Williams, 13 June 1986. Chatto files, CW 396/2.

9 Williams died quite unexpectedly on 26 January 1988, although he had been bedridden for some months in late 1987, a fact recorded in Ned Thomas's letter to him of 21 October 1987. RW papers, WWE/2/1/16/353.

10 Although Daniel G. Williams notes that '[i]n discussions of Williams's writings, both before and following his death, aged 66, in January 1988, the tendency is for the "education" to be foregrounded, whilst the "native place" is either ignored or dismissed', it is the very book in which he argued this that has since shifted the discussion regarding Williams's Welsh identity. See Daniel Williams, 'Introduction: The Return of the Native', in Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, ed. Daniel Williams (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2003), p. xv. Daniel Williams also provides a helpful sample of work on Raymond Williams that does engage with his Welsh identity, much of which is the contribution of Welsh scholars; see Daniel Williams, 'Introduction', xlvii, n. 13.

11 As Stefan Collini notes, 'there can rarely have been such a close and sustained association between a publisher and an individual discipline as that between Chatto & Windus and literary criticism in the years between about 1930 and 1970'. See Collini, "'The Chatto List": Publishing Literary Criticism in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Review of English Studies* 63, no. 261 (2012): 636.

12 The only extended history of Chatto & Windus is Oliver Warner's, which ends at the company's merger with Jonathan Cape in 1969; see *Chatto & Windus: A Brief Account of the Firm's Origin, History and Development* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973).
13 See John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 120.
14 Jenny Uglow was editorial director at Chatto & Windus until 2012, as well as being a critic and biographer in her own right. She appears to have been Williams's main contact at Chatto following the retirement of Norah Smallwood, the managing director before Callil, in 1982. She maintained a similar relationship with Joy Williams during the publication of *People of the Black Mountains*.
15 Memo from Callil to Uglow, 3 January 1989. Chatto files, CW 482/5/2.
16 Memo from Uglow to Callil, 7 February 1989. Chatto files, CW 482/5/2.
17 The paperback was eventually published under the Paladin imprint.
18 Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 38.
19 Memo from Uglow to Callil, 7 February 1989. Chatto files, CW 482/5/2.
20 Thompson uses Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital to better describe the various imperatives of publishing. I have applied his usage here.
21 Memo from Uglow to Callil, 6 December 1988. Chatto files, CW 482/5/1.
22 Memo from Callil to Uglow, 3 January 1989. Chatto files, CW 482/5/2.
23 Uglow to Callil, 6 December 1988. Chatto files, CW 482/5/1.
24 Callil to Uglow, 3 January 1989. Chatto files, CW 482/5/2.
25 Uglow to Callil, 6 December 1988. Chatto files, CW 482/5/1.
26 Raymond Williams, *People of the Black Mountains, I: The Beginning* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), back cover.
27 Generic letter template from Uglow attached to list of addresses for sending, [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
28 'Chatto & Windus Publicity News', [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW 482/5/3.
29 Jeremy Bate, 'The Economy of Nature', in *Environmentalism: Critical Concepts*, ed. David Pepper, Frank Webster and George Revill, 5 vols (London: Routledge, 2003), II, 135.
30 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with* New Left Review (London: New Left Books, 1979), 279.
31 Daniel Williams, 'Introduction', xvii.
32 'Chatto and Windus Key Title Plan', 8 January 1990. Chatto files, CW 521/2.
33 Memo from Uglow to 'CC/RL/NP/CE/JB-E', 7 February 1989. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
34 Mentioned in a letter from Mary Thompson to Joy Williams, 15 October 1990. RW papers, WWE/2/2/1/2.
35 Untitled promotional material, [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
36 Geoff Dyer, O*ut of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Little, Brown, 1997), 111.
37 See the collections *What I Came to Say*, ed. Francis Mulhern (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989) and *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989).
38 Mock-up of *People of the Black Mountains, I: The Beginning* wrapper on film. Chatto files, CW PU 90/11.
39 Uglow to Callil, 6 December 1988. Chatto files, CW 482/5/1.
40 Callil to Uglow, 3 January 1989. Chatto files, CW 482/5/2.
41 See National Library of Wales, 'Cardiff Literature Festival', https://archives.library.wales/index.php/cardiff-literature-festival-2 (accessed 5 March 2023).

42 Memo from Rupert Lancaster to Uglow and Callil, 10 January 1989. Chatto files, CW 482/5/2.
43 Two handwritten sheets untitled, 11 April 1989. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
44 Cue card contained in WH Smith notebook, [n.d.]. RW papers, WWE/2/1/1/21/2 (Box 2 of 2).
45 These documents are contained in a folder otherwise concerned with the 1989 book launch, which suggests Joy may have originally intended to speak, or indeed did speak unannounced, at this event. See 'People of the Black Mountains: Personal approach', 15 September [1989(?)]. RW papers, WWE/2/2/2/6 (8 of 9).
46 The notebooks containing Joy Williams's research are contained in the Raymond Williams Papers.
47 Raymond Williams, *People of the Black Mountains, II: The Eggs of the Eagle* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), 318.
48 It would make sense for this to be Uglow's writing. See 'The Rest of the Book', [December 1988(?)]. Chatto files, CW 482/5/1.
49 Press release for *People of the Black Mountains, I: The Beginning*, [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
50 Press release for *People of the Black Mountains, I: The Beginning*, [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
51 James P. Randall, 'Posthumous Temporality and Encrypted Historical Time in Fiction and Life Writing' (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2018), 175.
52 See pamphlet for 'Raymond Williams Country' walk, [n.d.]. RW papers, WWE/2/2/2/6 (8 of 9).
53 Dennis Johnson, no title, *Guardian*, 25 August 1989, 3.
54 National Library of Wales, 'Academic Gymreig: English-language section', https://archives.library.wales/index.php/academi-gymreig-english-language-section, (accessed 5 March 2023).
55 This was upon Williams's suggestion. He wrote that he was 'particularly glad that with the Welsh Arts Council grants [Chatto] would be willing to reprint the two earlier books'. See letter from Raymond Williams to Norah Smallwood, 12 January 1978. Chatto files, CW 371/2/2.
56 See D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales: 1906–2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 245–278. For a more recently published series of first-person testimonials of this history, see Richard King, *Brittle with Relics: A History of Wales, 1962–1997* (London: Faber, 2022).
57 Evans, *History of Wales*, 270.
58 Martin Johnes, *Wales Since 1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 324.
59 See Dai Smith, *A Warrior's Tale* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008), 8.
60 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 295.
61 These are collected, alongside his other writings on community and Wales, in *Who Speaks for Wales?* For a fairly complete bibliography of Williams, see Alan O'Connor, *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 128–75.
62 See letter from Dafydd Williams to Raymond Williams, 13 July 1976. RW papers, WWE/2/1/15/2/12.
63 Reprinted as 'The Importance of Community' in *Who Speaks for Wales?*, 177–185.
64 Raymond Williams, 'Are We Becoming More Divided?', *Radical Wales* 23 (1989): 8.
65 See letters from Gwyn A. Williams to Raymond Williams, 3 March 1982 and 2 February 1985. RW papers, WWE/2/1/16/376.
66 Letter from Dafydd Elis-Thomas and David Reynolds to Raymond Williams, 28 February 1984. RW papers, WWE/2/1/16/351.

67 Letter from Phil Cooke to Raymond Williams, 13 January 1986. RW papers, WWE/2/1/16/72.
68 Reprinted in the 2021 edition of *Who Speaks for Wales?*
69 Letters from Ned Thomas to Raymond Williams, 29 January 1985 and 21 October 1987. RW papers, WWE/2/1/16/353.
70 Letter from Dafydd Elis-Thomas to Raymond Williams, 29 April 1980. RW papers, WWE/2/1/16/351.
71 'Freedom and a Lack of Confidence', reprinted in Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?*, 239–240.
72 Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 296.
73 Raymond Williams, 'West of Offa's Dyke', in *Who Speaks for Wales?*, 34.
74 Letter from Norah Smallwood to Raymond Williams, 3 April 1980. Chatto files, CW 371/3/1.
75 Mock-up of *People of the Black Mountains, I: The Beginning* cover wrapper on film. Chatto files, CW PU 90/11.
76 Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3–4.
77 Randall, 'Posthumous Temporality', 175.
78 Cardiff Literary Festival 1989 Souvenir Programme, [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW PU 90/11.
79 This recalls Callil's original comparison with the large one-volume novels of Europe. Dai Smith, draft review of *People of the Black Mountains: The Beginning*, [n.d.]. RW papers, WWE/2/2/2/6 (6 of 9).
80 'Cream Publicity News', [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
81 Jenny Uglow, 'The Trees of Wooden Clogs and People of the Black Mountains', *Raymond Williams: Film, TV, Culture*, ed. David Lusted (London: NFT/BFI Education, 1989), 70.
82 Two pages of untitled marketing notes, [n.d.]. Chatto files, CW PU 89/8.
83 David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 283.

Raymond Williams and Enoch Powell? Retrieving the Politics of Community with Ambalavaner Sivanandan

Graham MacPhee

Abstract

This article takes Paul Gilroy's charge against Williams – that he echoed the cultural assumptions of Enoch Powell in his appeal to community – as an opportunity to reconsider Williams's response to the structural transformation of neoliberalism. It challenges the very premise of the comparison by arguing that it rests on a misunderstanding of Powell's project as an organic conservativism. Instead, it identifies how Powell's thinking is informed by a nihilistic ontology of the will which implies a hollowed-out conception of the neoliberal nation. Set against this understanding of the neoliberal nation and drawing on the contemporaneous work of Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Williams's writing of the 1980s can be seen as attempting to rethink community outside of the binary of authenticity/inauthenticity. The essay identifies significant affinities between Williams and Sivanandan in their shared concern for the capacity of community to politicise the social and so substantiate collective needs and aspirations against the domination of capital.

*

> Yes, we are being re-made, but if we overlook the occasion for that re-making, we overlook those myriad others who are being un-made by the self-same revolution.
>
> Ambalavaner Sivanandan, 'All that Melts into Air is Solid: The Hokum of New Times' (1989)

I

What can be learnt today by returning to Paul Gilroy's charge, made back in 1987, that Raymond Williams 'draws precisely the same picture of the relationship between "race", national identity, and citizenship' as Enoch Powell?[1] Or, to think with Walter Benjamin: how might we read this moment

outside of a teleological intellectual history in which earlier errors only reveal our contemporary correctness? How might the commitments and concerns of our recent intellectual past return to us insights that are not simply confirmations of what we already know?[2]

In a sense, the dispute has long since petered out, not least because Gilroy's subsequent account of 'conviviality' – 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas' – is closer to Williams's concern for everyday contiguity than to the unworldly certainties of British Althusserianism that framed his earlier critique.[3] And there have been some thoughtful defences of Williams, which place his writing on the nation in the context of the diversity of Welsh experience[4] or stress Williams's scepticism towards state-based identities and legal forms.[5] Which is not to say that there aren't broader critiques of Williams's engagement with race to be made, a point acknowledged by Williams's defenders.[6]

However, without dismissing such concerns, the focus of this essay is different. Given the powerful influence of Powell's ideas – as evidenced by Brexit and the rise of a populist English nationalism – and the evident failure of contemporary critical theory to counter them, there is an opportunity here to rethink the terms of critique. In the spirit of Benjamin, my aim is therefore to look to the anomalies and difficulties of an earlier engagement with Powell in order to illuminate our own predicament. For Benjamin, attention to what is unsuccessful or unhomely in earlier texts suggests ways of seeing beyond the interpretative parameters of the present: 'the history of works prepares for their critique', he writes, for over time 'the concrete realities rise up […] all the more distinctly the more they die out in the world' and 'the interpretation of what is striking and curious […] becomes the prerequisite for any later critic'.[7] From this perspective, 'what is striking and curious' in Williams's thinking of community in the early 1980s is that it could appear to at least some contemporaries as coinciding so 'precisely' with the ideas of Enoch Powell.[8] For present purposes, this perception is neither to be assimilated to contemporary critique nor explained away, but instead retrieved as an opening into a past moment of intellectual crisis that may yet yield to us something different.

I argue below that such a critical optic reveals that this comparison is wrongly calibrated around the question of whether Williams, 'unlike Enoch Powell', escaped the abstract opposition between 'an unproblematic, rooted "Britishness" [and] the newer, less "rooted" and thus less "authentic" identities of immigrants'.[9] As I demonstrate, this is not in fact an accurate characterisation of Powell's intellectual project, which is not built on the kind of rootedness or authenticity that preoccupies contemporary critical theory. Rather, Powell's concern is much more forward thinking, although no less racist: to construct

an asocial sociality – the 'nation' – from the wreckage of social disintegration, or what we would now call neoliberalism. Despite Williams's scatter-gun use of the language of 'reality' and 'artifice', he also grappled with the politics of social disintegration, although unlike Powell it was in order to discern new forms of community and value that might oppose neoliberalism. I argue that however ill-formed and incipient Williams's thinking, it aligns his intervention not with Powell but with another, largely neglected thinker of community from this period – namely Ambalavaner Sivanandan and his account of 'communities of resistance'. The retrieval of an experientially based but non-essentialist conception of 'community' after its decades-long dismissal may indeed be helpful in negotiating our own post-Brexit political moment, where 'community' and 'the popular' are increasingly occupied and abused by the radical Right.

II

In the second chapter of his ground-breaking study, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987), Paul Gilroy deploys Martin Barker's conception of a culturally rather than biologically-based 'new racism' to show how race is at work within the discourse of the nation in post-war, post-imperial Britain.[10] The central witness for the prosecution is Enoch Powell, whose anti-political populism exploits what Hannah Arendt called 'the secret conflict between state and nation', the tension within the nation-state between the universalism of the legal-rational and the demands of a particular, delimited national people.[11] Gilroy interprets Powell's deployment of this opposition in terms of an ethnic essentialism based not in biology but on 'the historic continuity which constructs the British people'.[12] On this view, whatever claims are made for a formal-legal citizenship dispensed by the state, for Powell they melt away before the authentic cultural rootedness of the nation. In its dance of disavowal, the new racism no longer speaks the language of biology and race but that of the *culture of nations*: belonging becomes a matter of longue durée and non-white immigrants are cast as perpetual foreigners, always excluded from a nation whose closed 'historic continuity' will never encompass them.

It is not difficult to see why Gilroy would be so alarmed by the chapter of Williams's *Towards 2000* (1983) entitled 'The Culture of Nations'.[13] Laced as it is with a poorly explained vocabulary of 'artificial' and 'real', the chapter features a surprisingly ham-fisted discussion of responses to 'the most recent immigrations of more visibly different peoples' (194) – which seems to want to offer a critique of abstract universalism not unlike Arendt's account of

the abstraction of the Rights of Man, but ends up sounding like a defence of xenophobia.[14] Influenced by Althusserianism's hostility to notions of 'experience' and 'community' – as signalled by the prominent citation of Francis Mulhern's suave dismissal of *Towards 2000* in the pages of *New Left Review*[15] – Gilroy levels a much broader charge against the fundamental structure of Williams's thinking:

> The distinction which Powell […] make[s] between authentic and inauthentic types of national belonging appears in an almost identical form in the work of Raymond Williams (Williams 1983, Mulhern 1984). It provides a striking example of the way in which the cultural dimensions of the new racism confound the left/right distinction.[16]

Gilroy translates the chapter's vocabulary of 'artificial' and 'real' into the essentialism he ascribes to Powell ('authentic and inauthentic types of national belonging'), and then generalises this across Williams's entire conception of community. On this view, Williams's refusal to accept the autonomy of discourse from spatio-temporal experience and the consequent dispersal of subjectivity is not only theoretically retrograde – received wisdom at the height of British Althusserianism – but also implicitly racist.

There certainly are problems in Williams's account here, and indeed formulations which might become dangerous. But what gets missed is the remarkable ambition of his project. What he's trying to do, I would suggest, is to analyse the emergence of neoliberal nationalism as a function of social disintegration and state/political deformation under capitalist globalisation, whilst mapping alternative possibilities for politicising the social beyond directly economic or 'objective' patterns of ideology and consciousness. And this in a language designed to be accessible (albeit adulterated with a little sociological and Marxist terminology) and avoid the jargon-laden excesses of Althusserianism.

To make good this claim we need to look at the terms of Williams's misrecognition *as* Powell, which is itself a misrecognition *of* Powell. It is only in this way that the central critique made by Williams in 'The Culture of Nations' can be understood: that what existing accounts of the nation cannot challenge, 'except in selected marginal ways, is capitalism itself'.[17]

III

Enoch Powell's thinking is widely misunderstood, especially by his supporters. This is because he often draws on the rhetorical and argumentative power of

intellectual positions without signing up to the theoretical commitments they are ordinarily understood to imply. A good example is provided by his well-known St George's Day Banquet speech in April 1961, where Powell is keen to mobilise the symbolic sweetmeats of a specifically English tradition, from 'grenadiers and […] philosophers', 'pikemen and […] preachers', and 'the brash adventurous days of the first Elizabeth' to the 'village church' replete with 'tall tracery […] and […] coffered ceiling'.[18] But to take at face value his claim that 'the continuity of England' emerged from 'the slow alchemy of centuries' (4) – a widely quoted poetical confection[19] – is not only to misread the speech but also to ignore Powell's broader intellectual programme, which is neither an organicist conservatism nor a Burkean providential traditionalism, and nor is it particularly Christian, rationalist, or democratic – although at different times he will use the rhetorical and argumentative resources of each of these.

In fact, as I set out below, Powell's thinking is informed by a nihilistic and anti-rational ontology of the will developed from an idiosyncratic reading of Friedrich Nietzsche by way of Arthur Schopenhauer. In particular, the Schopenhauerian twist to Powell's nihilism distances him from claims to essence, authenticity, and historical continuity while enabling him to appeal to the affective particulars we normally associate with such claims. Commentators often remark on Powell's inconsistency and recourse to contradictory ideas,[20] but his idiosyncratic nihilism allowed him to draw on incompatible rhetorics and arguments while maintaining what he could regard as a consistent and coherent position.

While Powell conspicuously modelled himself on Nietzsche,[21] his nihilism was significantly shaped by a selective appropriation of Schopenhauer. As Powell reveals in a BBC radio talk on the philosopher, he emphasised two elements of Schopenhauer's architectonic. First, 'the will' understood as 'a sort of force, blind, undifferentiated, devoid of end or beginning or aim'.[22] Second, the devaluation of spatio-temporal experience and its exclusion from any constitutive role in human subjectivity and value. For Schopenhauer, because the phenomenal world is trapped within the 'principle of sufficient reason' (Kant's categories and forms of intuition), it is cast as mere 'representation' (*Vorstellung*) and so irredeemably cut off from truth or the thing in itself (Kant's 'noumenal') (4). But Powell also rejected Schopenhauer's commitment to some kind of intimation of the thing in itself through the renunciation of willing as a basis for a transcendentally secured ethics, which he regarded as an implausible and illegitimate return to theology. As he puts it, Schopenhauer's 'logic' exposes 'the blind, impersonal, undifferentiated, reality of the world', but this is 'not God' (9). That is, the primacy of the will reveals human value, meaning, and morality as nihilistically untethered, but the absolute unknowability of the

noumenal means it can never provide a compensatory principle, ground, or essence – even through a pessimistic inversion of Kant's ideas of reason.

As I indicate below, the nihilistic ontology that Powell constructed via Schopenhauer is central to his ungrounded conception of the nation as a performative act of willing. But his rejection of Schopenhauer's transcendentally secured ethics is significant too. Although Powell follows Schopenhauer in devaluing the phenomenal – historical experience cannot meaningfully condition subjectivity and value whether in terms of historicism, phenomenology, or genealogy – his rejection of any vestigial or negative relation to the noumenal introduces a significant adjustment. No longer participants in the moral drama of the renunciation of the will, phenomena retain an affective power as *objects of the will*, however arbitrary, contingent, and ungrounded they may be. That is, while representation can never provide a basis or ground for truth, its elements have the capacity to elicit and direct the subject's willing, a potency reflected in Powell's strikingly unorthodox translation of Schopenhauer's *Vorstellung* as 'imagination' (1).

In these terms Powell consistently argues that 'the nation […] *does* [*not*] correspond to *any objective reality*'.[23] There is '*no objective definition* of what constitutes a nation', whether in terms of 'race, language, [or] geography'; instead, a nation 'is that which *thinks it is a nation*'.[24] National identity is not 'given' in the sense of being ontologically grounded, but nor is it a 'result' in the historicist sense; rather, it is *a performative act of willing* in which *the nation wills itself into being*:

> The […] existence of a nation is only visible when it is *there*, when it *has happened*, when the sense of being a nation has been demonstrated *to itself* and to the outside world [in] *the will and the ability to be distinct from the rest of mankind* and to acknowledge no other secular power as superior.[25]

The primacy of the will renders the affective particulars associated with the nation – doughty pikemen, Elizabethan adventurers, venerable village churches and what have you – as so many unmoored phenomena incapable of coalescing as a historical basis for authentic identity. However, they *can* function as a 'world of *imagination*' in Powell's modified conception of *Vorstellung*, with the ability to stimulate and channel the performative willing of the nation.[26] Powell is only too happy to tickle his St George's Society audience with rhetoric about 'the continuity of England' and 'the slow alchemy of centuries'; but as he sees it, the nation only exists in the *now*, in the act of performative willing. As Schopenhauer writes, 'the will […] has absolutely no ground', it is 'the unfathomable […] which cannot be derived from anything else', and 'action […] is simply the appearance of an intrinsically groundless will'.[27]

Powell's nihilism constructs a very different relationship between community and nation than that envisaged by Gilroy. For Powell, the 'unity of the nation's life' in modernity is not based on the growth of organic community over time but on a coincident act of willing that would be disrupted by the existence of community. As he sets out in a draft for an unpublished book titled *One Nation*, communities represent conflicting wills, the competing claims of divergent sectional and class interests – a vision summarised disdainfully as 'Communism and the class war, industrial unrest and socialism'.[28] On the contrary, the cohesive power of the nation is based *not* on the aggregation of local communities (which for Powell is fanciful anyway) but on the *disintegrative* power of market society, its capacity to *dissolve* the connections and modes of mutual recognition in community that would otherwise interrupt identification with the nation. That is, the nation depends on the capacity of capitalism to degrade what Arendt calls 'social texture',[29] the network of everyday relations that emerge through social contiguity, association, and interchange in spatio-temporal experience. Community does not found or ground the nation for Powell but is an obstacle to it. Powell's nation does not want communities, it wants atomised individuals – or what we would describe today as the generalisation of neoliberal subjectivity. As he wrote in the aborted *One Nation* book, the central importance of capitalism, in the shape of the 'Industrial Revolution', was that 'individual conscience and judgment was enthroned as arbiter over the acts and words of the community'.[30] Conversely, the nation is the only possible 'collectivity' left under the atomisation of market relations – it is the only 'sociality' possible under the conditions of *asociality*.

This reading of Powell, I suggest, in turn allows a different appreciation of Williams's writing on community in the 1980s. As I indicate in the next section, what Williams shares with Powell's intellectual project is not a commitment to an essentialised nation but two particular insights into the politics of disintegration, although these insights are valued in diametrically opposed ways by each thinker. Both Powell and Williams exhibit an understanding of social texture, the relationships of spatio-temporal contiguity, as the basis for particular communities to politicise social/economic demands; and conversely, both are centrally concerned with the capacity of social atomisation to depoliticise the social. For Powell, the absence of the former and the generalisation of the latter provides the necessary basis for a depoliticised or neoliberal nation, the groundless expression of coincident willing which can alone embody 'the ability to be distinct from the rest of mankind and […] acknowledge no other secular power as superior'.[31] Whereas for Williams, it would mean the disintegration of the only basis for 'real' or meaningful political action.

IV

Williams's late work exhibits an incipient attempt to rethink his earlier account of community in the face of an emergent neoliberalism. He had started to address the reorganisation of social experience in his work on television in the 1970s, which he sought to capture with his own idiosyncratic neologism 'mobile privatisation'.[32] By the 1980s, he began to situate this conception of mobile privatisation within the larger dynamics of neoliberal globalisation, or what he termed 'nomad capitalism'.[33] 'The international market […] receives its deep consent from this system of mobile-privatised social relations', he observes, yet these very social relations encourage those within not to see the consequences for others – not least the 'thousands of authorised and unauthorised emigrations and immigrations, and […] the desperate trails from land dispossessed by agribusiness to the shanty towns on the edges of the already densely populated cities' in the global south.[34] That is, the new intensification and expansion of capital tends not to promote a corresponding expansion of consciousness in terms of universal solidarity as Karl Marx had hoped, but encourages consciousness to turn inwards, making it smaller and more intensely resentful of what come to appear as alien others.

Like many, Williams saw these tendencies as eroding traditional appeals to class, but he also saw a broader unstitching of the social texture upon which class depends if it is to be anything more than an abstract and empty universal: as he puts it bluntly, 'in this society, we're getting a worse and worse opinion of each other'.[35] Consequently, his emergent understanding of social atomisation within the framework of neoliberal globalisation began to reorganise the residual account of community he had developed in 'Culture is Ordinary' in the 1950s,[36] although the coexistence of emergent and residual strands in his writing in the 1980s makes it obscure and difficult to unpick. My argument is that the incoherence of his language of 'real' and 'artificial' during this period reflects the struggle to rethink community outside of an ontological or historicist notion of 'authenticity' through its ability to politicise the social – while at the same time retaining a role for contiguities of place, language, cultural habit and idiom, and the imaginary of shared history.

Mobile privatisation plays a pivotal role in 'The Culture of Nations' chapter, although its expression is obscure and not clearly connected to the larger argument.[37] A better exposition is offered in an essay of the same year, 'Problems of the Coming Period', which I consider first. Here Williams identifies consumption as much stickier and more fraught and encumbered than the playful and weightless choice imagined by theorists associated with *Marxism Today*. He does so by stressing consumption's immersion in 'home', by which he means both the literal 'dwelling-place' but also the locus of

immediate emotional relationships, the affective embrace of friends and family. Although involved in meaning and identity, the semiotic dimension of consumption is less about the free play of signifiers and more about affirming disconnected subjectivity within a drastically reduced habitus: 'a shell […] which [encompasses] you and your relatives, your lovers, your friends, your children – this small unit' becomes 'the only really significant social entity'. This 'shell' is highly 'mobile', both in the literal sense of travel but also in terms of the mobility of consumer choice and economic opportunity, at least within the constraints of market society. And as such, it gives those who have secure access to consumption and the resources to sustain this habitus 'genuine kinds of freedom of choice and mobility which their ancestors would have given very much for' – albeit at a 'price'.[38]

This conception of mobile privatisation offers a much more complex and plausible account of social disintegration than the uncompromisingly bare model offered by Enoch Powell. For Williams, because affective connectivity and the desire for affirmation evinced by a fragile subjectivity cannot simply be erased, atomisation is never absolute but occurs as a kind of granular intersubjectivity or tightly restricted agglomeration.[39] Affect and affirmation are intensified as the scope of intersubjectivity is radically reduced, and the resultant 'shell' is hardened in proportion to the gradient between outer frigidity and the longed-for inner warmth. Despite its exorbitant exclusions, then, mobile privatisation *gives* something, in the sense of providing an intersubjective nexus in which an etiolated subjectivity can be lived. This is why its restrictiveness is not merely borne but actively sought. For Williams, it is the *lived experience* of those who 'underwrite it as their real life, against which those big things, in whatever colour of politics they appear to come, are interpreted as mere generalities'. Crucially, this 'shell' and what it enfolds cannot simply be dismissed as illusion, as the veil of false consciousness to be *seen through*; for in Williams's own words, it provides 'genuine kinds of freedom of choice and mobility'.[40]

What might easily slip under the radar here is that Williams is implicitly developing a new account of community from the ground up – from the nexus of intersubjectivity and its interactions in spatio-temporal experience or social texture. It is difficult to see because its explication is conducted in the negative, as it were: through analysis of the restriction of intersubjectivity in mobile privatisation and the blockage of other configurations of social experience.

The basic insight that drives this rethinking of community is the dynamic potential of intersubjectivity in shared spatio-temporal experience, which endures even under social disintegration. Mobile privatisation may restrict intersubjectivity to the granular agglomeration of the 'home' or 'shell', so that the aspirations and activity which it generates are contained within

the circularities of consumerism and careerism. But intersubjectivity is fundamentally dynamic and creative: although structurally limiting, mobile privatisation only functions because it 'enlists […] the most productive, imaginative impulses and activities of people' (16). Intersubjectivity has the potential to generate different patterns of association, sociality, and political organisation and different aspirations, actions, and values. This potential is implicitly articulated in the essay when describing the limiting political effect of mobile privatisation. In circumscribing social texture, mobile privatisation constitutes a 'radical dislocation' in which 'people [are] not able to connect with movements which they really believe could change the world and their situation' (10). Which means, by implication, that a more open and connective sociality *would* provide the substantive nexus for alternative demands and actions and their orientation to a different configuration of the social and political.

The reconceptualisation of community being developed by Williams in the face of neoliberalism is not, then, based on an ontological rootedness or essentialism, to be judged as 'authentic' or not according to its continuity with a fixed essence over time. Rather, community is enacted (or not) through the dynamic potentiality of intersubjectivity: the generation of practical values and demands from within a shared social texture that reach beyond existing conditions and orientate action towards collectively produced social goals. As such, community is judged *performatively or politically* and not ontologically: as operative or inoperative, rather than as conforming to or diverging from a fixed essence. Community is 'real' or 'authentic' for Williams to the extent that it is able to *politicise* social experience, to generate normative values and real-world projects that substantiate those communal aspirations within the polity; it is 'inauthentic' or 'unreal' where it pursues a 'submissiveness to the deliberate reduction, in some cases destruction, of people's lives, of whole communities' (11).

We need, then, to recognise different modulations of the term 'authenticity' in this discussion, rather than mechanically forcing all usages into the master binary of ontological authenticity/inauthenticity and its monological lexicon of 'organicism', 'rootedness', and 'continuity'. When Williams writes that 'socialists have now to recognise that the central problem for the coming period is to create an *authentic* rather than an *inherited* sense of what a society is and should be', 'authentic' here is clearly being distinguished from 'inherited', or continuity with and nostalgia for a past essence or golden age (17; emphasis added). This usage makes sense if we read in it in terms of political performativity and not ontological homogeneity or continuity: as 'a bonding of a different sort – a bonding which is the basis for a different consciousness

from that of mobile privatisation', one that can generate 'accessible alternatives […] around a meaningful political movement' (18, 10).

Nor was Williams alone in this period in thinking community in terms of political performativity rather than ontology. Relevant here are the writings of Ambalavaner Sivanandan, which are worth reading alongside Williams because they explicitly articulate the expansion of intersubjectivity as the politicisation of civil society or the social.

As Sivanandan observes, 'capital fragments the self as it fragments society', encouraging the emergence of 'a small, selfish inward-looking self that finds pride in lifestyle, exuberance in consumption and commitment in pleasure'.[41] Yet he also sees the potential for a more expansive intersubjectivity in those who are least integrated into the circularities of consumerism and the striving of market society:

> They come together […] over everyday cases of hardship to help each other's families out, setting up informal community centres to help them consolidate whatever gains they make. These are not big things they do, but they are the sort of organic communities of resistance that, in a sense, were pre-figured in the black struggle of the '60s and '70s and the insurrections of '81 and '85 (25).

The more open if more 'ragged' social texture inhabited by those least integrated into market society enables a more expansive intersubjectivity, 'a capacity for making other people's fights one's own', which in turn strengthens social texture (24). These are 'organic' – or as Williams might say 'authentic' – 'communities of resistance' because they reinforce intersubjective connectivity, enabling the articulation of social demands and the building of collective projects that exceed the imperatives of market society; not because they claim an ontological 'truth', 'essence', or 'authenticity'.

Significantly, Sivanandan develops this account in terms of the mutual implication and diremption of state and civil society, which provides a more coherent framework for reading Williams's chapter on 'The Culture of Nations' in *Towards 2000*.[42] While 'these are not big things they do' (25) in the sense that communities of resistance occur in the prosaic realm of civil society, out of necessity 'these movements do not stop at the bounds of civil society or confine their activities to these boundaries'. This is because 'on every street corner […] at the Job Centre and the town hall, in the schools and at the hospital, whether demanding your rights or asking for guidance or just trying to lead an ordinary family life' there 'lurks' 'beyond civil society […] the state' (28). Consequently,

> The struggles stretch *from civil society to state and back again in a continuum*, effecting material changes in the life and rights of ordinary people and *extending, in the process, the bounds of civil society itself* (28; emphasis added).

What makes community operative is its capacity to *politicise the social* – to move 'from civil society to state and back again' – a capacity which in turn has the potential to renegotiate and restructure the very configuration of society and state itself. And it is this *political* conception of operability which, I argue, underpins what has been taken to be a predominantly *cultural* discourse of the nation in Williams's *Towards 2000*.

V

Understood in these terms, Williams's confusing language of 'real' and 'artificial' in 'The Culture of Nations' chapter begins to make a different kind of sense. His observation that the dominant nationalism of modern nation states – what he calls 'national statism' – depends on 'artificialities' can be understood as a statement about political performativity rather than ontology.[43] Conversely, his invocation of 'real' communities can be seen not as an appeal to an essentialised 'people', but as a call for 'cultural struggle for actual social identities' which might provide the basis for an 'effective self-governing' politics (193).

According to Williams, hegemonic nationalism or 'national statism' functions as a compensation for the hollowing out of operative community in neoliberalism, providing a threadbare container for 'the essentially non-profitable human needs of nurture and care, love and fidelity, membership and belonging' (190). This assessment does not oppose real and artificial but rather identifies how the former is mobilised by and enables the latter. Just as mobile privatisation provides a restricted nexus for intersubjectivity by offering a circumscribed configuration of its potential creativity and affective affirmation, so national statism generates emotional appeal by harnessing 'the real and powerful feelings of a native place and a native formation', which are 'pressed and incorporated into an essentially political and administrative organisation' (181). Although affectively powerful, this configuration is politically inoperative in the sense that it blocks 'the established interests of communities and workers' and privileges instead global capital flows (191). Thus, a programme of economic nationalisation 'can be perceived as "unpatriotic" – "unBritish" […] while a transnational strategy [of] unrestricted competition, is by its structural retention of the most artificial national images perceived as the "patriotic" course' (192–93). Structured by a 'profound subordination to the forms of existing interests', national statism uses the

affective appeal of 'nation' to 'overrid[e] all the real and increasing divisions and conflicts of interest within what might be the true nation, the actual and diverse people' in favour of the 'interpenetrating market flow' of neoliberal globalisation (184, 192).

Williams's account of national statism provides an experientially richer alternative to Enoch Powell's neoliberal nation, one that keeps open the prospect of politically operative communities. Where Powell's threadbare schema jumps straight from the asociality of atomised individuals to the overarching neoliberal nation, Williams provides a more plausible and mediated path: from the granular ensemble of mobile privatisation, by way of its drastically restricted intersubjectivity, to a national identity that does offer opportunities for affective connection and meaning-making, however hobbled they may be. But more than that, its conception of the dynamism of intersubjectivity also maintains the possibility of communities of resistance able to move beyond the paradigm of national statism by politicising the social, so challenging the configuration of social and political itself.

However, Williams also seeks to mobilise the resources of shared history and tradition, especially in the context of subaltern nationalisms within the United Kingdom (193–96). And it is here, in his discussion of 'the real inheritance of those hundreds of diverse and unevenly connecting generations', that the language of authenticity threatens to become incoherent and risks bleeding into cultural essentialism (194). I argue that the chapter's closing discussion of community points back to a political notion of operability, and comparison with Sivanandan provides a helpful guide through the muddle.

Both Williams and Sivanandan recognise the erosion of a homogenous working-class social experience and the consequent collapse of class as the organising principle of everyday consciousness. But Sivanandan's response is particularly instructive: forthright in his critique of that experience, he also understands its strategic role and the political potential of the values it produced. 'Up to now', he writes, 'we have had the homogenising influence of class, but this was […] a flattening process, a reductive process, mechanical, and as destructive of the creative self as Capital'. Yet in the resultant social disintegration 'the freedoms won in […] working-class struggle are […] threatened'.[44] Sivanandan's approach to the past is not nostalgic or conformist, but seeks to reanimate and revitalise for the future what remains liberatory:

> there are still values and traditions that have come down to us from the working-class movement: loyalty, comradeship, generosity, a sense of community and a feel for internationalism, an understanding that unity has to be forged and re-forged again and again and, above all, a capacity for making other people's fights our own (24).

While past patterns of consciousness and experience are being lost, there are opportunities here to open experience and consciousness and at the same time to retrieve what remains politically operative from that past.

Williams's discussion at the close of 'The Culture of Nations' is less clear cut, but I would argue that it is moving in a similar direction. In a way that Sivanandan does not, he locates communities of resistance in 'lived and formed identities […] of a settled kind', what we might think of as traditional, established working-class communities.[45] But he understands that such communities are being eroded, and as he puts it elsewhere, 'are going to become exceptional, marginal'.[46] He therefore begins to look to 'lived and formed identities […] of a *possible kind*'.[47] And in 'Problems of the Coming Period' he echoes Sivanandan in viewing the receding working-class tradition not as a nostalgic model but as a resource that 'may give us an indication of the kind of socialism that we now have to *re-define*'.[48] As a work of retrieval, this retrospection involves reinventing that past: 'What strikes me most about those traditionally militant areas is that people were not forced to define themselves along any single direction.' The task of reinventing or redefining 'a sense of society' does not lie fixed in a past model of working-class community but 'will really have to come from some different roots' (17). Williams urges us to begin by looking to

> the areas which are now most in crisis: in the definition of what local government is; in the problems of what it is to be in a minority nationality; or in what's called an ethnic group in British society (18).

That is, to 'lived and formed identities […] of a possible kind, where dislocation and relocation require new formations'.[49]

For all the apparent emphasis on 'settled community' in 'The Culture of Nations', I would argue that the theoretical impetus of the chapter lies in opening this paradigm to 'new formations' or communities 'of a possible kind' – and as such is much closer to Sivanandan than to Powell. The basis for this expansion is a theoretical reconceptualisation of community in terms of political operability, its ability (or not) to politicise the social and so substantiate collective needs and aspirations against the domination of capital. As Williams had written two years before, 'any wider community – a people or nation – has to include, if it is to be real, all its actual and diverse communities'.[50] Or in the terms of the chapter's conclusion, the future of community requires 'a necessary openness to all the indispensable means of mutual support and encouragement, directly and often diversely […] negotiated from real bases'. Such a 'variable socialism', Williams concludes, 'could be very different'.[51]

Notes

1 Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 51.
2 For an account of Walter Benjamin's non-teleological reading of the past, see Graham MacPhee, 'Glass Before Its Time, Premature Iron: The Unforeseeable Futures of Technology in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*', *New Formations* 54 (2004): 74–90.
3 Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), xv.
4 Daniel Williams, 'Introduction: The Return of the Native', in Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021), 23–9.
5 Daniel Hartley, 'Anti-Imperial Literacy, the Humanities, and Universality in Raymond Williams's Late Work', in Paul Stasi, *Raymond Williams at One Hundred* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 96–100.
6 Daniel Williams, 'Introduction', 29; Hartley, 'Anti-Imperial Literacy', 97.
7 Walter Benjamin, 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*', in *Selected Writings: Volume 1*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael V. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 298, 297.
8 Gilroy, *There Ain't*, 51.
9 Daniel Williams, 'Introduction', 27.
10 Gilroy, *There Ain't*, 41–9. See also Étienne Balibar, 'Is There a "Neo-Racism"?', in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 17–28.
11 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1973), 230. For a reading of Powell in these terms, see Graham MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 55–64.
12 Gilroy, *There Ain't*, 50.
13 Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), 177–99.
14 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 194–96. For Arendt's critique of the Rights of Man, see *Origins*, 290–302.
15 Francis Mulhern, '*Towards 2000*, or News From You-Know-Where', *New Left Review* I, no. 148 (1984): 5–30.
16 Gilroy, *There Ain't*, 50.
17 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 184.
18 Enoch Powell, 'Speech for the St. George's Day Banquet', 22 April 1961. Papers of Enoch Powell, POLL 4/1/1(6), Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, 3.
19 See for example Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell* (London: Faber, 2008), 339.
20 See for example Paul Corthorn, *Enoch Powell: Politics and Ideas in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3.
21 Keith Kyle, 'Impressions of Nietzsche', *London Review of Books* 11, no. 14 (27 July 1989), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v11/n14/keith-kyle/impressions-of-nietzsche.
22 Enoch Powell, [BBC Radio 3 talk on Schopenhauer], 18 January, c. 1984. Papers of Enoch Powell, POLL4/1/29, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, 5.
23 Enoch Powell, 'The Church', c. 1951, Papers of Enoch Powell, POLL3/2/1(1), Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, 4; emphasis added.
24 Angus Maude and J. Enoch Powell, *Biography of a Nation* (London: John Baker, 1955), 7; emphasis added.
25 Enoch Powell, 'Speech by the Rt. Hon. J. Enoch Powell, MP, to the North Wales Advisory Council Dinner, at the Royal Lido Hotel, Prestatyn', 27 September 1968, Papers of Enoch Powell, POLL 4/1/3(2), Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, 3–4; emphasis added.

26 Powell, [BBC Radio 3 talk on Schopenhauer], 1; emphasis added.
27 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: Volume 1*, trans. and ed. Norman Judith, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137–38, 146, 132. For a fuller consideration of Powell's use of Schopenhauer to develop a conception of the nation that anticipates Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' see Graham MacPhee, 'Imagined Authority: Enoch Powell's Schopenhauerian Aesthetic', unpublished manuscript, 2023.
28 Powell, 'The Church', 3.
29 Arendt, *The Origins*, 293.
30 Powell, 'The Church', 2.
31 Powell, 'Speech by the Rt. Hon. J. Enoch Powell, MP, to the North Wales Advisory Council Dinner', 4
32 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, [1974] 2003), 19–21. Williams makes this connection back to his earlier work in *Towards 2000*, 188.
33 Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 124.
34 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 189, 186.
35 Williams, 'Problems of the Coming Period', *New Left Review* I, no. 140 (1983): 17.
36 Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 3–18; for an account of Williams's earlier conception of community see MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature*, 80–88.
37 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 188–89.
38 Williams, 'Problems of the Coming Period', 16.
39 Given the difficulties in the reception and 'translatability' of Williams's late work due to his attempts to avoid familiar theoretical terminologies, I use a Hegelian language of 'intersubjectivity' in my exposition, which in turn elucidates the connection to the post-Hegelian problematic of state and civil society deployed by Sivanandan. Hegel's conception of intersubjectivity is quite distinct from its meaning in psychoanalytic theory and some branches of Anglophone cultural theory and stems from his understanding of the "'I" that is "We" and "We" that is "I'". See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110–11; for a fuller account see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 215–21 and 243–52. This framework underpins the diremption of state and civil society associated with Hegel, Marx, Arendt, and Gillian Rose inter alia, and which features in Sivanandan's discussion of the politicisation of the social explored below.
40 Williams, 'Problems of the Coming Period', 16.
41 Ambalavaner Sivanandan, 'All that Melts into Air is Solid: The Hokum of New Times', *Race and Class* 31, no. 3 (1989): 23. For a brief account of Sivanandan's broader critique of contemporary capitalism, see MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature*, 95–100.
42 For an account of the role of the nation in the mutual implication and diremption of state and civil society, see Graham MacPhee, 'Hegel After Ulysses? The (Dis)Appearance of Politics in "Cyclops"', *Twentieth Century Literature* 69, no. 3 (2023): 293–328.
43 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 191, 180.
44 Sivanandan, 'All that Melts', 23.
45 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 196.
46 Williams, 'Problems of the Coming Period', 17.
47 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 196; emphasis added.
48 Williams, 'Problems of the Coming Period', 18; emphasis added.
49 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 196.
50 Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 124.
51 Williams, *Towards 2000*, 198.

‘Literature is for Everyman’? *Critical Quarterly*’s Democratic Literary Culture

Joseph Williams

Abstract

The inaugural issue of *Critical Quarterly*, published in March 1959, began with a short editorial in which founding editors C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson stated, ‘literature is for everyman’. Cox and Dyson sought to democratise F. R. Leavis’s ‘minority culture’ by creating what they called an ‘expanding élite’. To do this, they sought to bring the specialist knowledge of an academic literary journal to a wider audience beyond the university, a readership which included schoolteachers, sixth-formers and general readers. *CQ* therefore published articles of varying depth and specialisation, from short close readings of single poems to surveys of recent criticism of canonical texts, which could be used as the basis for A-level English lessons. Cox and Dyson also organised regular *Critical Quarterly* Society conferences for this non-university audience; archival research at the John Rylands Library in Manchester sheds light on how important these activities were to Cox in particular. The *CQ* project was broadly popular (in the 1960s the journal was sold to more than half the grammar schools in Britain), but it was not without its flaws: the word ‘everyman’ is emblematic of the early *CQ*’s dependence on male contributors, and the schoolteacher audience was drawn mainly from the grammar schools. Further, these non-specialists were seen more as a passive audience than an active base of contributors: to use the distinction made by Raymond Williams in the conclusion to *Culture and Society* (1958), *CQ*’s communication with this non-specialist audience was a one-way ‘transmission’ rather than a two-way ‘conversation’. After considering the *CQ* example, this paper asks how we might enact a similar project today, albeit one which gets closer to a democratic ‘conversation’ between academic literary critics or scholars and a non-specialist, non-university audience.

*

The inaugural issue of *Critical Quarterly*, published in March 1959, began with a short Foreword in which founding editors C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson stated their aims for the journal. It concluded:

> We are hoping, then, that *The Critical Quarterly* will be mainly constructive in its emphasis […] If we can help to keep alive the belief that literature is for everyman – for everyman, that is, who will pay it the courtesy of a creative response – and that it is still one of the major pleasures of life, we shall feel we have achieved at least one of our aims.[1]

The word 'everyman', taken as it is from the medieval morality play, was dated in 1959, and it is emblematic of what James Robert Wood has called 'the dominance of male voices' at *CQ* under Cox and Dyson's editorship.[2] However, the motto 'literature is for everyman' was meant to be a bold statement of intent for a democratising project. As the pair wrote in a later essay, titled 'Literary Criticism' (1972): 'The aim of our journal was to promote high standards in common educated discourse, to make literature accessible to any student with goodwill, and, in Northrop Frye's words, to prevent it from "stagnating among groups of mutually unintelligible élites".'[3] Rather than an organ for the sharing of knowledge between specialists, Cox and Dyson sought to use *CQ* to bring the specialist knowledge of an academic journal to a wider audience beyond the university, a readership that included schoolteachers, sixth-formers and general readers. Indeed, one of the titles originally considered for the journal was 'Communication', although in the end they decided this was 'too dull'.[4] This paper will look closely at how Cox and Dyson sought to communicate specialist knowledge to non-university audiences in two ways: through the editorial policies of the journal and through the regular *Critical Quarterly* Society conferences, which ran twice a year from 1961 until at least 1992.[5] The *CQ* project was broadly popular (in the 1960s the journal was sold to more than half the grammar schools in Britain), but it was not without its flaws. In particular, these non-specialists were seen more as a passive audience than an active base of contributors: to use the distinction made by Raymond Williams in the conclusion to *Culture and Society* (1958), *CQ*'s communication with this non-specialist audience was a one-way 'transmission' rather than a two-way 'conversation'. After considering the *CQ* example, this paper asks how we might enact a similar project today, albeit one that gets closer to a democratic 'conversation' between academic literary critics or scholars and a non-specialist, non-university audience.

In the motto 'literature is for everyman' as well as the arguments of the later essay, Cox and Dyson were consciously defining themselves in opposition to F. R. Leavis's Cambridge-based journal *Scrutiny*, which ran from 1932 until it folded in 1953, as well as the Oxford-based *Essays in Criticism*, established by F. W. Bateson in 1951. It would pay to briefly sketch out this intellectual context. The 1950s was a decade when, as Matthew Taunton puts it, 'the powerful influence of F. R. Leavis could be felt everywhere in the discipline of English Literature',[6]

and while Cox and Dyson had both been trained in Leavisite practical criticism at Cambridge's Pembroke College from 1949 to 1954, they rejected Leavis's pessimism about contemporary culture. This pessimism had been articulated by Leavis in the infamous and influential essay 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' (1930), in which he argued 'culture is at a crisis'. Under threat from mass-produced goods, the cinema, and the tabloid press, the future of culture – which, for Leavis, meant the literary tradition – depended on 'a very small minority' of expert critics with specialist knowledge about literature. Leavis argued: 'The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Conrad (to take major instances) but of recognizing their latest successors constitute the consciousness of the race.'[7] Though Cox and Dyson shared with Leavis the 'belief that understanding of great literature creates tolerance and wisdom',[8] they found his cultural pessimism to be stifling for contemporary writers. As Dyson put it in a 1960 editorial, Leavis 'adopted towards contemporary literature an unfortunately negative approach; his standards of excellence are such that only a few writers in any century could hope to come up to them'.[9] The effect of this was recalled by Cox in his 1992 memoir, *The Great Betrayal*: 'During our years at Cambridge Tony [Dyson] and I were typical in taking almost no interest in contemporary verse. We read Dylan Thomas, of course, but our attitude tended to be one of contempt.'[10] This contempt for contemporary poets had a profoundly negative effect on Cox's own creative practice: 'Leavis's scorn was easy to imitate, and made my own personal writings seem feeble (as they were, but they were beginnings on which I might have built).'[11]

Despite their reservations about Leavis's pessimism, Cox and Dyson did publish a symposium titled 'Our Debt to Dr Leavis' in *CQ*'s third issue, dated September 1959. The three contributors, Raymond Williams, R. J. Kaufmann and Alun Jones, were all broadly positive about Leavis's work; Williams, for instance, wrote that Leavis 'is the most interesting critic of his generation, […] his educational influence has been central to the best work of the period, and […] his life's work is a major contribution to our culture'.[12] Himself a graduate of Cambridge English, Williams had previously offered a notable critique of Leavis's minority culture in the seminal *Culture and Society*. In particular, Williams questioned the centrality of literature to Leavis's idea of culture:

> the ways in which we can draw on other experience are more various than literature alone. For experience that is formally recorded we go, not only to the rich source of literature, but also to history, building, painting, music, philosophy, theology, political and social theory, the physical and natural sciences, anthropology, and indeed the whole body of learning. We go also,

> if we are wise, to the experience that is otherwise recorded: in institutions, manners, customs, family memories.[13]

Later, in the book's conclusion, Williams writes of the importance of contemporary culture, in particular:

> A culture, while it is being lived, is always in part unknown, in part unrealized. The making of a community is always an exploration, for consciousness cannot precede creation, and there is no formula for unknown experience. A good community, a living culture, will, because of this, not only make room for but actively encourage all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need.[14]

Despite Cox and Dyson's acceptance of Leavis's definition of literature *as* culture, Williams's description in this second quotation bears some relation to Cox and Dyson's rejection of the pessimistic tendencies of Leavis's cultural criticism and their hope, described in *CQ*'s first foreword, that the journal will be 'mainly constructive in its emphasis'.[15] In what follows, I seek to position Cox and Dyson's editorial policies at the journal and their work organising the *Critical Quarterly* Society conferences as examples of an ongoing attempt to, in Williams's words, 'not only make room for but actively encourage all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need'.[16]

As editors, Cox and Dyson were committed to contemporary writing; the journal published contemporary poetry from the very first issue, and fiction as early as 1968.[17] They dedicated what they themselves called 'an appreciable amount of space to the publication of new poets such as Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Thom Gunn, R. S. Thomas and Sylvia Plath'.[18] They also looked beyond the British Isles, publishing poetry by international writers such as the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite. This active engagement with new writers and commitment to publishing contemporary work was one of the ways in which Cox and Dyson sought to democratise literary culture. As the pair wrote in 1972: 'From the beginning, we committed ourselves optimistically to faith in the possibility of an expanding élite.'[19] The term 'expanding élite' is, to a great extent, an oxymoron (and it is certainly less ambitious an idea than 'literature is for everyman'), but it is still illustrative of the modification Cox and Dyson were attempting to make to Leavis's 'minority culture'. While acknowledging the place of canonical writers such as Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire and Conrad, Cox and Dyson sought to do what Leavis never actually did: to 'recogniz[e] their latest successors'. They did so by publishing contemporary writing and the criticism of this writing at a time when, as Malcolm Bradbury

observes, this writing 'had almost no place in the teaching of English in British universities'.[20] In doing so, Cox and Dyson hoped to expand Leavis's canon and 'turn literary criticism away from puritanism and towards intelligent celebration of creative achievements'.[21]

It is worth noting briefly that the motivation behind this 'expanding élite' was social as well as literary. Of the generation of working- and lower-middle-class children who benefitted from the increase in free grammar school places between the wars, those who were fortunate enough to go on to university and an academic career would have graduated by the mid-1950s and taken their first teaching positions in universities or schools by the time *CQ* was founded in 1958. Dyson, who had grown up in poverty in Paddington, was acutely aware of his own social mobility, and would go on to describe himself and his contemporaries as 'the generation that, as it seems, had the luck'.[22] Cox had also attended a local grammar school, and so, too, had a number of *CQ*'s regular contributors, including Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, Richard Hoggart, Ted Hughes and Raymond Williams. Williams and Hoggart were also members of *CQ*'s honorary committee, whose names were published on the journal's masthead and promotional material. The above list of names corresponds, again, with what Wood has called the 'dominance of male voices' in *CQ*,[23] although it should be remembered that these men were, like Cox and Dyson, mostly 'scholarship boys' from working- and lower-middle-class backgrounds who were entering into an academic sphere that had until then been dominated by the privately-educated upper and upper-middle classes.

Cox and Dyson therefore sought to create an 'expanding élite' by extending Leavis's definition of culture to include contemporary literary activity, and by broadening Leavis's minority group of critics to a wider social demographic. But the two men also shared a distinct ambition to cultivate an audience beyond those whose job it was to think and talk about literature. If literary culture does contain, as Leavis argued, 'the finest human experience of the past',[24] then it follows that this experience should be communicated to as wide a readership as possible. As Taunton writes: '*CQ* conceived of its readership in a completely different way' to *Scrutiny* and *Essays in Criticism*: 'Rather than being "by academics, for academics", the magazine sought a much wider audience and emphasis was placed in particular on the need to address readers in schools.'[25] As Cox himself wrote in 1992: 'We believed that it is worth devoting a life to presenting, teaching, and celebrating great art, of both past and present, and that academic criticism can be of benefit to the general reader.'[26] The term 'general reader' is, like 'everyman', a vague one – Williams might well have said that there is no general reader, only ways of seeing readers as general – but it is useful to compare Cox and Dyson's imagined non-specialist, non-university 'everyman' with the implied reader of Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957),

published the year before *CQ* was founded. Hoggart writes in the preface that his work is addressing 'first of all the serious "common reader" or "intelligent layman" from any class'. This reader

> is an elusive figure, and popularization a dangerous undertaking: but it seems to me that those of us who feel that writing for him is an urgent necessity must go on trying to reach him. For one of the most striking and ominous features of our present cultural situation is the division between the technical languages of the experts and the extraordinary low level of the organs of mass communication.[27]

There is an obvious parallel between Hoggart's 'technical languages of the experts' and Cox and Dyson's aim 'to promote high standards in common educated discourse, to make literature accessible to any student with goodwill, and, in Northrop Frye's words, to prevent it from "stagnating among groups of mutually unintelligible élites"'.[28] Hoggart, like Cox and Dyson, sought to broaden the audience for specialist literary knowledge to include those from outside the university. But whereas Hoggart expresses – or at least hints at – a doubt as to whether this 'elusive' figure really does exist at all, Cox and Dyson do not offer any extended argument about the real existence or specific location of this 'everyman' or 'general reader', beyond their being outside the university. Carol Atherton notes that these terms have 'a rhetorical vagueness that would presumably allow any of the journal's readers to imagine themselves part of this group';[29] while this is undoubtedly true, that is not an entirely negative matter.

As editors, Cox and Dyson therefore published a range of articles of varying depth and specialisation. In the first issue, for example, short close readings of single lyric poems by Philip Larkin and William Blake, each under four pages long, appeared alongside longer articles of academic literary criticism and scholarship, such as Williams's reading of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, at nine pages long. The latter is an example of specialist knowledge being transmitted through the journal to other specialists within the same field, in this case literary studies, whereas the shorter pieces were written for their educative function: they were meant to be accessible for undergraduate students as well as sixth-formers and general readers from outside the institutions of formal education. Jonathan Culler calls this 'interpretative criticism' – the kind of writing 'which in principle if not in practice requires only the text of a poem and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, [and] offers but a more thorough and perceptive version of what every reader does for himself'. As Culler puts it: 'Citing no special knowledge which it deems to be crucial and from which it might derive its authority, interpretative criticism seems best defended as a

pedagogic tool which offers examples of intelligence for the encouragement of others.'[30] This is a novel position for an academic journal to take: teaching readers, rather than sharing knowledge among specialists.

This effort to publish a 'teaching' literary criticism for a non-university audience was accompanied by an attempt to redefine the university itself – and particularly the university English school – within the pages of the journal. The second issue, dated June 1959, published an article by Dyson titled 'Literature – in the Younger Universities' as part of a wider symposium on teaching literature in various settings. In it, Dyson argued that the university should function as a centre of culture and liberal values, and that the English Literature degree should be central to an idea of the university as 'a living and civilising force'.[31] Dyson argued that the university – particularly the provincial university – should be a 'cultural centre for the whole community, a guardian of values, and an inspirer of humane activity in local and national affairs'.[32] The university could be 'a place where all those interested in education, ideas and human beings can join together for study, discussion, and if necessary for action'.[33] This would serve an important social function for our 'mechanised society', as Dyson argued:

> it remains true that most parts of Britain are still rich in cultural and traditional resources – architecture, song, history, drama, local skills – and that a modern university ought to recognise a living responsibility for these which no-one else (landed families, the Church, even the Ministry of Works) is any longer able to bear.[34]

Dyson here appreciates the importance of what Williams called 'experience […] more various than literature alone'; however he does, like Leavis, position the university English faculty as central to his social model for a democratic culture, seeing it as

> the core from which a revival of liberal values could emerge. […] I personally should like to see develop a number of close liasons [sic] which ought to exist, but seldom do. First, between junior staff and students […] Then, there might well be a link between the university itself, both staff and students, and those in the town and locality who attend W.E.A. [Workers' Educational Association] or Extra-Mural classes, school teachers, voluntary workers in sociology and local government, sixth formers, clergy, foreigners visiting under British Council or other auspices, political workers of all parties, and anyone interested in world affairs […] The types of cultural activity sponsored by a healthy English department, especially drama, film and debating, could provide an initial meeting ground; and a bar or coffee

> bar for formal and informal meetings would provide the atmosphere of a club.[35]

There is an obvious resemblance here between the community of thought that Dyson describes above and the 'expanding élite' that *CQ* sought to establish. The university is, in this ideal, an institutional base for 'cultural activity' that crosses the boundary from the professional academics at the university campus to interested members of the public. The term 'cultural centre' anticipates a term that Leavis himself would use a decade later in the introduction to *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (1969), which collects the six Clark Lectures he gave at Cambridge in 1967. Leavis described the idea of a university as a 'creative centre, for the civilized world', but he did not suggest as Dyson did the same kind of practical connections between the university and the wider social world.[36] Leavis and Dyson had reached this same conclusion that the university should be a 'creative centre' or a 'cultural centre' by following a line of thought originating from 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', namely the question of how to communicate the 'subtlest and most perishable parts' of a specifically literary culture to the wider society and in so doing make possible 'our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past'. Leavis never offered as concrete a suggestion as Dyson's, in part because he believed that the preservation of the literary tradition among a minority of professional academics was sufficient on its own. Dyson, on the other hand, attempted here to imagine how the specialist knowledge preserved in the English department might benefit the wider community beyond the university. This ideal model of how the 'cultural centre' might interact with its periphery, though difficult to achieve in practice, gave Cox and Dyson something to work towards.

Cox and Dyson's idea of an 'expanding élite' was also inspired by their own experiences as WEA tutors in the early 1950s. As Cox recounts in his memoir, he began teaching with the WEA in 1952, while still a postgraduate researcher at Cambridge. His first class was a ten-week course called 'The Countryside in Literature', which he taught in the small village of Methwold in southwest Norfolk. Although, as Cox puts it, '[v]illage classes rarely included more than one or two real "workers" (such as farm labourers), and were mainly middle-class housewives, with perhaps a vicar's wife or the local school-teacher', the experience was formative: 'The people I met, the teaching challenges, felt so much more real to me than my so-called "research" on Henry James. […] In those days after the war the W.E.A. performed miracles in keeping alive literary and cultural debate.'[37] The opposition Cox makes between his classroom teaching and postgraduate work is unhelpful – his teaching would not be possible without the 'so-called "research"' undertaken by himself and

his predecessors – but it does emphasise the importance, for Cox especially, of using academic knowledge to serve teaching, in particular the teaching of non-university learners. Williams himself was also an adult education tutor, both through the WEA as well as through the Oxford Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies, where he taught from 1946 to 1961. Much of Williams's writing in the 1950s and 1960s was influenced by this work, particularly his first book, *Reading and Criticism* (1950). In the preface, Williams writes:

> This book is designed for the general reader, to help him in the reading and criticism of literature. Wherever possible it limits theoretical discussion and concentrates on practical reading. There are analyses of poems, of prose extracts, and of one complete work, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. There is a series of exercises in practical criticism, and a short syllabus and reading-list. […] The book has been written with the ordinary private reader in mind, but it is additionally hoped that it will be useful as a reading manual in literature classes, whether university tutorial classes or the less formal kinds of adult education.[38]

This project closely resembles Cox and Dyson's use of interpretative criticism to 'teach' non-specialist readers; like *CQ*'s short close readings of single lyric poems, Williams teaches by example, for the benefit of interested general readers as well as his fellow educators.

While Williams mentions university and adult education tutors in the above preface, the key non-university demographic with whom Cox and Dyson wished to engage was secondary school English teachers. As Atherton writes, the pair 'explicitly courted' this readership as part of an attempt 'to bridge the gap between those working in university departments of English and their colleagues in secondary education'.[39] Indeed, in a 1962 letter to *CQ*'s Honorary Committee (which again, it should be noted, included both Williams and Hoggart), Cox explicitly stated: 'We believe that there should be more contact between universities and schools.'[40] Alongside the shorter pieces referred to above, *CQ*'s inaugural issue carried a contribution which was clearly intended for teachers in particular: G. K. Hunter's short article 'Hamlet Criticism', which provided a brief historical survey of the reception and criticism of the play that could be easily adapted into a lesson for sixth-formers, and from there into the kind of short essays they would be expected to write for their A level exams. Interestingly, Leavis had himself enacted a similar project with *Scrutiny*. As Ian MacKillop writes in his biography of Leavis: '*Scrutiny* went out of its way to interest teachers and recruit them to "The *Scrutiny* Movement in Education". It was militant: the Leavisian mission was to build a public and foster a minority.' Leavis did so because he recognised that '*Scrutiny* needed

a professional constituency: it could not rely on simply being a magazine for "literary people"'.[41] Like Leavis, Cox and Dyson worked to 'recruit' a schoolteacher audience for *CQ*, but, crucially, they did so for different reasons: for Leavis, this audience was a means to an end, as it would provide a social and financial base for *Scrutiny* and its minority elite. For Cox and Dyson, however, engagement with schoolteachers was part of their wider ambition to democratise literary culture. For this reason, they sought closer contact than Leavis had attempted through *Scrutiny*.

One way Cox and Dyson sought to make an actual engagement with non-university readers was through the *Critical Quarterly* Society conferences, which, as noted, ran twice a year from 1961 until at least 1992.[42] Material related to these conferences (including leaflets, advertisements, and correspondence between Cox and the invited speakers) is held in the *Critical Quarterly* Archive at the John Rylands Library in Manchester. Unlike a conventional academic conference, where research is presented by professional academics within or between specialisms, these conferences were a forum for 'the general discussion of literary questions' between academics and contemporary writers on the one hand, and schoolteachers, students, or interested general readers on the other.[43] This was an extension of their established editorial policy of publishing shorter pieces of criticism that would 'teach' the non-university reader, alongside the more familiar academic article which communicates specialist knowledge between professional academics. The first conference was held at Bangor in 1961 and advertised as being 'intended, in the first place for professional teachers of literature', but it was also open to *CQ*'s general readers: 'some of our regular readers might also be interested, and so we are throwing open the score or so of remaining places to anyone who would like to come'.[44] This first conference was a success, and the *Critical Quarterly* Society then held similar conferences at Bangor and Scarborough in 1962. In July 1963, they held their first four-day conference '[f]or young people under 21' at Manchester.[45] As Atherton points out, this age range 'encompassed both A-level students and undergraduates'.[46] These conferences for young people – which were held during the Christmas and Easter holidays – would go on to become immensely popular and were regularly oversubscribed. Victor Sage, who was a PhD student of Dyson's at the University of East Anglia, remembers the audience at the Keele conference in 1966 being made up of 'masses and masses of sixth formers from up and down the country and their teachers'.[47]

The popularity of these conferences was due in part to the profile of the visiting speakers Cox and Dyson managed to attract. Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes's last public appearance together was at the Bangor conference for English teachers in the summer of 1962.[48] The August 1963 conference in

London, titled 'Literature Today', featured Hoggart, Angus Wilson, Stephen Spender, and R. S. Thomas as visiting speakers. But the conferences were also popular due to their direct relevance for sixth-formers hoping to go on to study English at university. The conferences were held at universities (most of them at Hulme Hall in Manchester), with lectures, seminars, meals, and accommodation all based on campus. This, along with the presence of undergraduates below the age of 21, exposed sixth-formers to university life. Similarly, each conference featured a 'Practical Criticism Game' in which the course members submitted unseen passages for the lecturers to try to date against the clock. Candidates were often asked to date unseen passages in Oxford and Cambridge entrance exams and interviews, and as Wood points out, 'the implicit rationale' behind this game at the conferences was that,

> if students were to perform well at this task themselves, [then] when it was no longer a game but a question in a Cambridge scholarship examination, it might make the difference between them winning a place at a college and being shut out.[49]

As well as this, set texts for A-level English exams were covered at the conferences because of their specific relevance to sixth-formers. Part of the conference secretary Joan Darlington's job was to research and prepare reports for Cox with 'details of the "A" level courses of the various Boards'.[50]

The *CQ* conferences were especially important to Cox, who spent as much time corresponding with teachers and their pupils as he did editing journal proofs or writing to academics and creative writers. In 1969, on the Friday before Christmas, a Cheshire schoolgirl wrote to Cox to ask if she could attend the Manchester conference that was due to begin on 3 January: 'I am anxious to attend the course, and I understand that you had promised to see whether a few extra pupils could be admitted.'[51] Cox wrote straight back on the Monday to let her know that whilst it was too late to enrol her officially, 'there is no reason why you should not come to the lectures and seminars'.[52] This exchange is emblematic of Cox's generosity towards these sixth-formers and his willingness to make concessions so that as many students as possible could benefit from these projects. And while this particular student, Hilary Mantel, went on to study Law at university rather than English, it would be unfair to see that as a failing on Cox's part.

Despite the obvious benefit to sixth-formers attending these conferences, the *CQ* project had two major shortcomings. The first was that the ongoing interaction with schools and schoolteachers favoured the grammar schools to an overwhelming degree. Most of the archived correspondence sent between Cox and various headteachers shows this. In a 2008 retrospective,

Cox remarked in a somewhat triumphalist tone that 'throughout the 1960s we were selling to more than half the grammar schools in Britain', but made no mention of the secondary moderns or comprehensives.[53] As individuals, Cox and Dyson each saw the increase of free grammar school places between the wars as the catalyst for their own trajectory from childhood poverty to secure, well-paid positions as university academics – as quoted above, Dyson described them as 'the generation that, as it seems, had the luck'.[54] But in depending on the grammar school in this way, Cox and Dyson fell for what Williams calls 'the ladder version of society'. In the conclusion to *Culture and Society*, Williams writes that 'the ladder is a perfect symbol of the bourgeois idea of society, because, while undoubtedly it offers the opportunity to climb, it is a device which can only be used individually: you go up the ladder alone'.[55] Williams continues: 'the boy who has gone from a council school to Oxford or Cambridge is of course glad that he has gone, and he sees no need to apologize for it, in either direction. But he cannot then be expected to agree that such an opportunity constitutes a sufficient educational reform.'[56] Cox and Dyson, however, seemingly did see their own individual social mobility in this way.

The second major shortcoming was that *CQ*'s non-university audience was a fundamentally passive one. As Atherton points out, the schoolteacher audience 'occupied a relatively restricted space within the ideal community that Cox and Dyson envisaged'; they were not seen as 'potential contributors' to the journal and the 'overwhelming majority of articles were written by academics'. To Atherton, *CQ* was limited to 'a process in which professional academics and writers carried on a dialogue that schoolteachers could only spectate on, with opportunities to participate being restricted to attendance at conferences'.[57] But even when they did attend conferences, their participation was limited to discussion periods, group activities, and the practical criticism game. Teachers, students, or members of the public were not invited to give presentations, lead their own seminars, or address the conference as a whole, and there was no mechanism in place for them to challenge or enter into a dialogue with the visiting speakers. In the conclusion to *Culture and Society*, Williams reminds us that 'much of what we call communication is, necessarily no more in itself than transmission: that is to say, a one-way sending'. To 'complete communication' there must also be 'active reception' and 'living response'.[58] *CQ* was, then, both in the journal and at the conferences, simply *transmitting* ideas to these wider audiences, rather than engaging them in an active conversation. Cox and Dyson's efforts – publishing shorter pieces of interpretative criticism, putting on huge conferences for sixth-formers, and so on – were only democratising reception, not response. The teachers, sixth-formers, undergraduates, and non-university readers could not enter into the written discourse of the journal

by submitting articles, and they could not make any significant contribution at the conferences.

In light of this, we can see that when *CQ*'s first issue proclaimed 'literature is for everyman', this in fact meant that the enjoyment and understanding of creative works is for everyone, reading is for everyone, reception is for everyone; but Cox and Dyson failed to realise the importance of response to the democratisation of culture. There is an important link between *CQ*'s cultural transmissions and the phrases 'expanding élite', 'cultural centre', and 'core': each depends upon a spatial metaphor which places at the centre a singular body of knowledge, in this case the literary canon. While Cox and Dyson did make important modifications to Leavis's minority culture, any project that is based on the idea of a singular cultural tradition leaves little room for – or, indeed, actively prevents – the flourishing of contemporary cultural activity in areas beyond that centre. A model that begins to embrace 'living response' would therefore have to begin by moving away from the idea of a 'cultural centre' and instead theorise a more pluralist construction, where various points, none of them centred or central, are put into contact with one another.

Today *CQ* has a different emphasis and a different readership, and few academic journals have attempted to reach a non-university audience in the same way. Perhaps the most visible is *English*, published by the English Association, an organisation that, as they put it on their website, 'represents teachers of English across the education sector'. *English* is described as 'a platform for scholars and educators to reflect on the key questions facing our discipline today', and the journal has a readership made up of 'schoolteachers as well as academics'. Membership fees are modest: £50 a year for an individual standard membership and £25 a year for concessions, including students, postdoctoral researchers, early-career teachers, retirees, and the unwaged.[59] However, as was the case with *CQ*, the project undertaken by *English* is yet another example of democratic transmission rather than democratic conversation: the contributors are largely trained academics (including salaried members of faculty as well as postgraduate researchers), rather than schoolteachers or interested general readers.

How might we enact a similar project to democratise literary culture, albeit one which incorporates active reception and living response? In some ways the conditions are more favourable in 2023 than they were in 1958. Cox and Dyson set their valuable example long before the advent of the internet. An online publication could share contemporary criticism and writing to a large audience without the difficulties (or indeed the overheads) of running a quarterly print journal. In the same way, online conferencing software has, since the coronavirus pandemic, been made widely available and affordable: Zoom, for instance, can be downloaded and used without paying a subscription fee. Again, however,

without active participation an online journal or online conference is still no more than an exercise in popular transmission. Organisers and tutors would have to make an effort to involve any non-specialist, non-university readers in the conversation by inviting them to make their own contributions. This could be as simple as publishing a series of short close readings written by teachers, students, or general readers, or inviting these non-university participants to give shorter spoken addresses at a conference. Put simply, unless non-university readers are conceived of not just as an audience but also as a base of potential contributors, then there is no option for a 'living response'.

Despite the technological advances, there are many more pressures facing academic workers in 2023 than there were in 1958. Much of the labour that goes into producing a quarterly journal is unpaid and undertaken by academics at a time when social, political, and financial pressures have brought the university (and the humanities in particular) to a point of crisis. Conversely, when Cox was hired at Hull in 1954, he was told 'that [the] three-year probationary period was only a formality, and that [he] had a safe job for life'.[60] Once hired, his duties were similarly relaxed:

> When I arrived I was asked to prepare lectures on the novel from Defoe to the present day, and I had a great deal of preparation to complete. But once I had broken the back of this work, I enjoyed an easy life. My total teaching load was about seven hours a week. On a typical day I would take a tutorial at 9.30 am, adjourn for coffee and possibly talk to friends until lunch. After lunch I might give a lecture. Older lecturers rarely published; many left the university after degree day in mid-June for a vacation in France or Italy, and would not return until the first week in October. Philip Larkin once said to me that the English middle classes always look after their own. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they found younger sons comfortable posts as curates and vicars in the Church of England. In the twentieth century they found them sinecures in universities.[61]

Not only are the sinecures gone, but the British media is now more than ever marked by a broader philistinism which routinely undermines the work done in universities. *The Times*, for instance, published in June 2023 a column by Emma Duncan titled 'We should cheer the decline of humanities degrees'.[62] In this context, any project to democratise literary culture is not only made far more difficult, but far more urgent, too.

Notes

1 C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, 'Foreword', in *Critical Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1959): 3–4.
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In a Library Reading Room: Literary Commitment and Alignment in the 1930s

Robin Harriott

Abstract

This essay tracks some of Raymond Williams's observations in order to identify commonalities and contradictions in the wider discussion of political and literary commitment during one of proletarian literature's more conspicuous 'moments' in the 1930s. Initially registering some of the definitional difficulties attaching proletarian writing in the West, I take up Frank Kermode's retrospective survey of 1930s writing and criticism in *History and Value* (1988), more specifically his reappraisal of the art/politics binary as undertaken by Americans Edmund Wilson and Louis Kronenberger whose dialogue functions as a framing device by which to assess the fuller implications of the political positions adopted following the economic crisis in both America and Britain. In an approach that looks forward to more recent appeals of this nature, I shall then provide an account of how Kenneth Burke's and Edwin Seaver's more nuanced, though undoubtedly controversial, approach sought to mediate their fellow Americans' more rigidly held standpoints in what was a redefinition of the rhetorical forms constitutive of a proletarian literature and its potential readership. I conclude by considering Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Author as Producer' (1934). Written against the backcloth of a nascent National Socialism where more than economic devastation alone was at stake, Benjamin suggested that, in order to break the deadlock of what he termed the 'unfruitful antithesis' of the art/politics binary, a more urgent solution be sought in the shape of the wholesale reconfiguration of the traditional bourgeois mode in order to make it a more persuasive device with which to engender the potential collaboration of readers. Although the Birmingham writer Walter Allen's *modus operandi* did not derive directly from Benjamin, I underpin his notion of 'reconfiguration' by considering Allen's deployment of cinematic montage techniques in his first published novel *Innocence Is Drowned* (1938). Though each of the Birmingham group members adopted different innovative strategies, Allen is representative of his fellow Birmingham writers' broader approach to working-class writing. Allen's use of cinematic effects presents not only as praxis in terms of both prevailing and continuing theorisations of working-class writing but also reveals how innovation and reconfiguration within the traditional realist mode via a 'politics of form' might, to cite Williams, 'consciously, actively and openly'

foster political engagement and commitment by performing the cultural task of generating readers' empathetic identification, consciousness and political alignment.

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Conscious that a nation's economic position is constantly in flux, that social change and impermanence are lifetime companions and that 'a week is a long time in politics', one should perhaps be wary of citing copy from the press or broadcast media. However, whilst formulating this essay, a newspaper article reported that, owing to the imminent energy crisis, libraries, museums and civic spaces – formerly designated 'warm hubs' for those experiencing the dilemma of whether to heat their homes or pay for food – would no longer be available due to the requirement that local authorities reduce their fuel bills.[1] The use of civic space as refuge resonated with a passage in Birmingham writer Walter Allen's novel *Innocence is Drowned* (1938) in which the reading room of a public library doubled as a sanctuary: a haven for the unemployed and destitute during the slump years of the 1930s. It is disappointing to reflect that, as history repeats itself for the 'second time as farce', we appear, in socio-economic terms, to have advanced very little. Spreading well beyond the pronouncements of the left-wing commentariat, there is a gathering belief that, due to a lack of political will and commitment, the package of welfare reforms underlying what came to be termed 'the post-war consensus' is, if not dying on the vine then certainly withering. Though held in abeyance during the war years, the Attlee government's post-war espousal of Keynesian economics and the enactment of social policies designed to eradicate William Beveridge's 'five evils' had been adopted and lasted until the late 1970s, when the alternative economic paradigm that is neoliberalism arrived to announce a wholesale rejection of the beneficent state. The following discussion derives from the concluding chapter of my PhD thesis 'The Birmingham Group: Reading the Second City in the 1930s'. Part recovery project, part re-assessment of the affiliation of working-class/proletarian writers active in the City of Birmingham during the 1930s, I'd been struck by how the fictional narratives of this unlikely collective not only negotiated the aesthetics/commitment binary, but consistently offered practical resolutions to many of the prevailing theoretical concerns, critical debates and expectations, informing the evaluation of working-class literature produced during the 1930s.

Outliving his Birmingham group companions by some years and later a respected novelist, literary critic and reviewer, Walter Allen's autobiographical and critical writing situate him as the group's *de facto* representative. Alongside John Hampson – already a published writer highly regarded by E. M. Forster

– the two functioned as core members of the short-lived 'Birmingham group', an informal coterie that included Peter Chamberlain, Leslie Halward and Derbyshire's Walter Brierley, whose monthly meetings took place in the second city during the 1930s.[2] Frequently considered as – in what is something of a misnomer – 'proletarian writers', their fictions offer little evidence of third-period prescriptivism. Their literary productions display a marked avoidance of what Allen described as the kind of working-class writing where 'characters [were] shown as the passive victims of an overwhelmingly hostile environment, will-less automata helpless in the grip of circumstance'.[3] Yet, whilst evidencing little of the prevailing discussion and theorisation of working-class writing, their novels and short stories did, paradoxically, realise many of its ambitions. Under the aegis of Allen and Hampson, the Birmingham writers formally re-configured the traditional mode of the working-class novel and short story by such means as autobiografiction, irresolution, the collective novel and the use of montage techniques and effects derived from the cinema. Each formal device aimed to communicate a content exploring such contemporary issues as the inequities of unemployment, educational opportunity and achievement, and gender roles through the male breadwinner and the doubly-oppressed position of women.[4] Discarding what Allen considered an 'over-emphatic naturalism' and avoiding what Friedrich Engels described as 'tendency' in proletarian writing – what Raymond Williams later termed the 'false commitment of the inserted political reference'[5] – they moved working-class fiction from the more clamant tone of a hitherto narrowly-conceived and predominantly sectarian male canon towards a popular front engagement with their subject matter redolent of more recent discussions centring upon a 'politics of form'.[6] Discussing his early novels *Innocence Is Drowned* and *Blind Man's Ditch* with Andy Croft, Allen recalled 'the influence of cinema was tremendous, I think, on the "montage" […] what I usually used to do was to try and get on the page the image as a film-director might present it. That was what I was after, and I think everybody was after'.[7] As Keith Williams indicates: 'Film technique came into its own as a new principle of poesis in the thirties novel, [montage being] virtually talismanic.'[8]

Although much of the critical and theoretical apparatus I engage with below was not addressed to the narratives of the Birmingham group *per se*, my evaluation of their work has been shaped largely by reference to the often heated debates polarising around the art/commitment binary in Britain and the USA during the 1930s, where, especially in the latter, owing to the lack of basic welfare provision the discussion was all the more urgent, its contours more clearly defined. From the outset, the contradictory nature of the theoretical and critical exchange has ensured that attempts to evaluate working-class writing have proven problematic. In what I hope will open out some of the

'matters arising' from these earlier engagements I shall have reference to the work of Raymond Williams whose observations function as a sounding board against which to consider commonalities in what remains a continuing discussion, and as a writer for whom, as readers of this journal will be well aware, the themes of commitment, alignment and working-class writing were of particular interest.

In order to shape this article, I begin with a brief discussion of political commitment, why it matters and how the working-class writing of the 1930s might function – again to borrow from Williams – '[as a] resource for a journey of hope' in our own, politically inclement, times.[9] I then consider some of the definitional quandaries attaching to the production and criticism of proletarian writing and offer an exposition of the art/commitment binary as furnished in the dialogue between American critics Louis Kronenberger and Edmund Wilson. Their oppositional positions, as recounted in Frank Kermode's *History and Value* (1988), provide a framework with which to consider not only the prevailing critical climate but also the practical difficulties involved in evaluating a working-class text. I then turn to Lawrence F. Hanley's survey of Kenneth Burke's and Edwin Seaver's more nuanced attempt to negotiate the art/commitment antithesis.[10] This is followed by an examination of Walter Benjamin's mediation of what he termed variously the 'sterile opposition' or 'unfruitful antitheses' of the art/politics binary as outlined in 'The Author as Producer', which – in effectively re-energising that most persistent of literary-critical binaries: the form and content distinction – approaches the prevailing discussion from a Marxist/materialist perspective by suggesting ways in which the traditional realist mode might be productively reconfigured.[11] To illuminate Benjamin's advocacy of formal reconfiguration via montage, I shall conclude with an example of the appropriation of cinematic montage effects as these appear in Allen's *Innocence Is Drowned* (1938).

To Commit or Refrain?

Despite difficulties of definition, and subsequent attachments of the 'failure' epithet to much of the writing produced during the pre-war decade, 'readings of leftist literature turn', as Elinor Taylor maintains, 'on questions of the relationship between art and commitment'.[12] Asking why we read novels at all, Allen proposed they function as 'a sort of resistance movement against rigid and impersonal concepts of man and his duties', adding that, 'the novel continually ministers to the enlargement of human sympathy; and sympathy implies identification with and understanding of another, putting oneself in someone else's place as we say'.[13] Having been actively engaged in the process

of evaluation and critique: the practical weighing and consideration of a text's *aesthetic* and *political* 'values', my reading of these Birmingham narratives has undoubtedly precipitated the 'enlargement of human sympathy': the 'identification *with* and understanding *of* another'[14] that Allen believed the novel ministered to its readers. Politically speaking, it is only a short step from sympathy, identification, and understanding to alignment, commitment, and political affiliation where, in working-class writing particularly, readers are urged to 'activate' their political consciousness, though, as Williams reminds us:

> Marxism has shown us that we are in fact *aligned* long before we realise we are aligned. The alignments are so deep. They are our normal ways of living in the world, our normal ways of seeing the world. Of course we may not become intellectually aware that they are not normal in the sense that they are universal. We come to realise that other people live differently, were born into different relationships, see the world differently.[15]

Holding that such alignments are 'of a deep type', Williams suggests 'the most serious case for commitment is that we 'commit ourselves far enough to social reality to be conscious of this level of sociality'. Becoming conscious of our own *real* alignments is, as Williams writes elsewhere, a process that frequently involves 'confronting [the] layers of alien formation in ourselves'.[16] But, whence this sympathetic identification and alignment with another? I take Williams's notion of 'sociality' as both measure and manifestation of the human concern for others that transcends considerations of the self. Initially deriving from a moral sensibility inculcated within the formative frameworks of family, friendships, school, community or religion, its political potential later becomes more forcefully evident in the shape of convictions and beliefs, where, to cite Williams again, one's 'consciousness' is 'actively' raised or realised in, the decision to 'align', 'commit', or seek 'solidarity' in such larger 'interested' identities as race, gender, or class groupings bent upon realising and upholding 'the propriety of human conduct, qualities, or goals'.[17] Despite Williams's caution that commitment is polyvalent so may not necessarily be 'intrinsically progressive', Lea Ypi emphasises that, when realised as a form of *partisanship* 'political commitment' means 'to care about the public good and actively to seek to promote it, making one's efforts and ideas of social change part of a joint project shared with others'.[18] Strategising for a resurgent Left, Jeremy Gilbert and Alex Williams argue (cynically, though justifiably) that 'if you want to persuade people to follow you', rather than getting blown off course by engaging in moral argument, you 'tell them what's in it for them'.[19] Again, while supportive of having 'skin in the [identity] game', they likewise caution

against a 'tendency' which here is read as a *superficial* liberal identarianism: 'the achievement, defence, expression or recognition of a personal identity as an end in itself'. They press instead for the kinds of exemplary 'solidarity' evidenced by the 1970s Combahee River Collective whereby 'social identities such as "black" or "gay" were ways of identifying common sets of interests'. '[C]ommon horizons of aspiration and realisability' are to be found in a solidarity that appreciated and understood the 'vectors of *collective* becoming',[20] and one more likely leading to a 'fuller realisation of wider interests'. Gilbert and Williams cite Judith Butler to remind us that 'identity [alone] ought not to be the foundation for politics. Alliance, coalition and solidarity are the key terms for an expanding left.'[21]

Moving from such 'life-world' considerations, I now turn to how some 1930s writers and critics negotiated the relationship between art and conceptions of political commitment which, as Williams reminds us, were often developed against alternative ideas, e.g. subservience, repression and prescription, and were questions of aesthetics; a fictional work's (perceived) literary worth or merit were often considered superfluous to socially-progressive content.[22] The difficulty of deciding to which side of this obstinate binary the emphasis should be placed or, perhaps more pertinently, to which one's allegiance is bound, has historically ensured that the process of venturing a literary evaluation – the focus here, particularly in the discussion of 1930s working-class literature, on the root term 'value' (Latin *valere*: strength or worth) – remains something of a literary/critical minefield. Describing his pre-war commitment to communism, Walter Allen explains, somewhat guiltily, how he and many of his literary generation were 'interested in politics and in saving the world, fighting for the working class against unemployment, fascism, and the threat of war. And we were quite serious and sincere. But in fact, though we didn't know it, we were as much swayed by aesthetic considerations.'[23] Looking back from the 1970s, Allen was possibly underplaying his own political fervour at this time. Noting that he and Walter Brierley 'both considered themselves "Labour Party men"' and that Allen had 'once written a pamphlet for the Birmingham [Communist Party]', Andy Croft suggests 'their common interest in ideas of class, unemployment, working conditions and elementary education was as *literary* subjects, not political ones'.[24] Commitment and political alignment could prove disconcerting and controversial; confronted with 'alternative ideas' or pressed to qualify earlier, though nonetheless sincerely held convictions, renunciation was not untypical. As Williams remarked: 'By the early 50s you could line up a whole series of writers who said, "yes of course I was like that in my foolish youth, but now I know better"'.[25]

Proletarian Literature in the 1930s

Despite more recent revisiting, reclamation work, and an abundance of summative articles attempting to define what came, for a brief period during the 1930s, to be termed Proletarian Literature, the corpus has proven stubbornly resistant to categorisation. What Alice Beja terms 'An Unidentified Literary Object', what Alan Wald perceives as 'The Radical Presence in American 20th Century US Literature', and Michael Denning identifies as 'The Literary Class War' are just three of many surveys attempting to describe a literature which, as Denning suggests, '[in terms] of [t]he gravitational force exerted by [its] magazines, conferences, alliances, and debates, [was] similar to that exerted by the magazines and controversies of the avant-garde modernists of the previous generation'.[26] Concerned less with definitional propositions, Barbara Foley asserts:

> Some of the most important work currently being done in literary theory and literary history centers on the discursive strategies by which marginalised subjects articulate selfhood and challenge dominant cultures. The study of proletarian fiction, which is replete with images and voices of the dispossessed seeking possession, makes an important contribution to this inquiry.[27]

Whilst the lived experience of the submerged, dispossessed, urban-industrial proletariat is clearly crucial, further questions remain: who should be writing such fiction, for whom, and to what purpose? For those engaged in the recovery of working-class literature, Williams's assertion that '[t]he simplest descriptive novel about working-class life is already, by being written, a significant and positive cultural intervention' is both encouraging and, though written in 1977, one that still holds firm.[28]

In terms of the prevailing social context, a mood of allegiance and partisanship undoubtedly emerged, a phenomenon whereby intellectuals and fellow travellers sought to make cause with the working classes in what Ronald Blythe described as 'a kind of moral deed-poll' coterminous with the Comintern's adoption of Popular Front policies in 1935.[29] Williams later viewed such attempts a form of 'negative identification' stemming more from middle-class liberals' dissatisfactions with their own social caste – though he conceded his opinion had also been based on hindsight following the Cold War recantations of those who believed their erstwhile enthusiasm betrayed. It was nonetheless a gesture of political allegiance paralleled, to some extent exacerbated, in America owing to the more extreme nature of labour relations there. Reflecting on the immediate, post-depression period, Allen noted how

engagement in the 'great collective moments', whilst imperative to socialist novelists on either side of the Atlantic, was more violent and radical in America:

> The twenties boom had soared to far greater heights in the United States than in England: the slump was therefore the greater, and so was the sense of shock, outrage and betrayal. The violence of the novels reflected, too, a tradition of violence in American industrial relations that had no parallel in English life.[30]

A sense of complacency perhaps, but the more settled, less harrowing socio-political atmosphere manifest in Britain's post-war consensus witnessed a willed forgetting of pre-war conditions. As Frank Kermode remarks, '[there had] been for some time a tendency to avoid all questions of value'.[31] Written at a time (1988) when he considered critical judgement in the academy to have been suspended or evaded in deference to the supposed wisdom of the 'old common arbitrator, Time', he sought to revisit that earlier tradition obfuscated by the authorial recantations of the cold war years. *History and Value* thus marks its author's reconsideration of 1930s literature and finds Kermode asking 'why [it is] we appear to have forgotten how urgent and powerful it seemed in a time of economic crisis and imminent world war?'[32] It seemed – to paraphrase Mark Twain's comments on the Queen's English – that, during the depression years, financial and economic immiseration in the United States might be likened to a joint stock company of which America owned the majority share, for, as had Walter Allen before him, Kermode believed the Americans 'more explicit than the English about both doctrine and its consequences'.[33] His exploration of 'literary value' commences with a description of the positions adopted by critics Louis Kronenberger and Edmund Wilson whose mutual respect, though often divergent opinion (they were both Marxists), forcefully registers the intractable dilemma surrounding the art/commitment question. However, according to Kronenberger:

> There really is no fundamental dilemma. It is more necessary for us to interest ourselves in an important subject treated without much merit [here literary, i.e. aesthetic merit] than in an unimportant subject treated with considerable merit. *Culture herself* demands that we put the right social values ahead of the right literary values, and wherever we encounter people who want to keep art dustproof, who bewail the collapse of aesthetic values, it is our duty to ascertain just how far their indignation is a screen for reactionary and unsocial [thinking].[34]

Writing in 1937 and conceding that 'cultural coarsening' was inevitable in a time of stress, Kronenberger asserts 'the present business of writers is to *save* civilisation rather than *enrich* it'.[35] His stark invocation of the 'desperate measures' idiom to urge the prioritisation of 'social values' during a period of heightened economic and political conflict was – and certainly seems to this reader – entirely justified. In deferring to *Culture herself*, Kronenberger calls for a suspension of the aesthetic, arguing that an expedient intervention now will ensure its return later. According to Kermode, while commending the undoubted sincerity of his fellow Marxist's political alignment, Edmund Wilson wondered what Kronenberger's opinions might mean in practice, '– telling lies about Trotsky? Praising boring novels about textile strikes and condemning Wilder and Hemingway?' As Kermode indicates, 'the rhetorical question makes clear Wilson's assumption that 'good' writing *doesn't* make direct political interventions. Despite the sincerity of each writer's position, Leftist zeal was nonetheless running hot at this time, and, as Kermode suggests, 'there were some who would have dismissed Wilson as a traitor and even Kronenberger as a trimmer'.[36] Nevertheless, Kronenberger's comments resonate with those of fellow American Joseph Freeman who, as his introduction to *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology* (1935) makes clear, was similarly unable to contain his indignation in the face of overly precious liberal reformers for, as he acerbically indicated, 'it does not require much imagination to see why those sympathetic to the working-class should be more interested in unemployment, strikes, the fight against fascism, revolution […] than in Nightingales or the stream of middle-class consciousness'.[37]

Questions with regard to *who* should be writing a proletarian/working-class literature and *for whom* are partially answered by Hanley, who registers the '[American] depression's sudden influx of disaffected intellectuals', in discussing the papers presented by literary theorist Kenneth Burke and editor and critic Edwin Seaver at the 1935 American Writers Congress.[38] Burke and Seaver had called for a re-definition of proletarian literature, hitherto (with the usual qualifications), the province of worker- or working-class writers. According to Hanley, though many remained sceptical, the 'fellow-traveller' intervention 'cemented popular front initiatives which had only recently resolved tensions fuelling conflict on the Left since the beginning of the decade'.[39] He suggests '[their incorporation] opened up new outlets and *new audiences* for radical writing and brought different assumptions and expectations about "literariness" into the movement'.[40] Seaver's 'What is a Proletarian Novel?: Notes Towards a Definition', is illustrative of the contradictory and, at times, seemingly intractable nature of the prevailing debate, for in it he asserted: 'the proletarian novel is not necessarily a novel written by a worker, about workers or for workers. It is possible for an author of middle-class origin to write a novel

about petty-bourgeois characters which will appeal primarily to readers of the same class, and yet such a work can come within the classification Proletarian Novel'.[41] As Hanley explains:

> By arguing that the 'proletarian' in 'proletarian novel' does not necessarily correspond to an economic or social referent, Seaver was implicitly endorsing [Kenneth] Burke's more controversial formulation that, in cultural terms, the 'proletariat' referred not to an economic or social thing, but to 'a secondary order of reality.' Burke calls this secondary order 'myth,' a term which he uses to designate the cultural symbols that perform a 'necessary function' as 'systems for binding people together'. Viewing the term 'proletariat' as it works within the terrain of culture, both Seaver and Burke assert the essentially discursive nature of the 'proletariat', how this term might be used to organize texts and the social relations between texts and readers.[42]

In his paper 'Kenneth Burke's Thirties: The 1935 Writers Congress', David Cratis Williams explains Burke's conception of the 'cultural symbol': 'In order to be an effective recruiting device for the unconvinced, a symbol must appeal to people's *ambitions*, not *sympathies*.'[43] 'The workers' "rigorous ways of life"', says Burke, "'enlist our sympathies", but not our ambitions. Our ideal is to eliminate such kinds of work, or to reduce its strenuousness to a minimum.'[44] Thus, by considering the term 'proletariat' *discursively*, rather than a marker of economic or social (class), Burke wrests it from a mechanical Marxism aligning it more closely with a position resonating with the 'idea of culture' as championed by Williams who considered 'society' less as an 'objective economic structure', more as a material social *process*'.[45] Though the source of no little controversy, Denning suggests Burke's "'Revolutionary Symbolism in America", stands as a central document in the developing [American] notion of a cultural front'.[46] In its 'appeal to radicalized white-collar workers', Denning asserts that Burke's portrait of the 'complete propagandist' functioned not only as 'the working model for the [American] intellectual of the cultural front' but also 'finds mirror images in the works of European Western Marxists, particularly in Walter Benjamin's discussion of the "author as producer"'.[47] I would want to suggest that Burke's cultural perspective aligns closely with that of Williams.[48] As Hanley recounts, Seaver, and Burke especially considered the proletarian *novel* less in terms of 'the "absolute tests of excellence" as determined by bourgeois criteria, but more in terms of what Burke considered [its] rhetorical 'addressedness': not only in terms of the sense of being written *to* people and *for* people but also by reference to its 'class alignment', the 'ideological approach of the writer and his text'.[49] In its identification of, and appeal to, a receptive

white collar/middle-class readership, Burke's notion of 'addressedness' provides a possible answer to the '*for whom?*' question. Hanley summarises Burke's and Seaver's position: '[T]he politics of proletarian literature […] consists in the cultural work it sets out to do, […] the project [is therefore] theorised […] as the work of representing social difference to middle-class readers in the interests of cross-class solidarity. In this sense, the politics […] are as Burke might call them, "congregational"'.[50] As I argue below, Burke's notion of 'functionality', its emphasis on *doing/ambition* rather than *depiction/sympathy*, parallels Benjamin's censure of hack writers' content merely to *describe* deprivation, rather than to actively *challenge* it, and thus underscores his belief that, in the interests of socialism, it is necessary that a work be *transformed* rather than simply 'functioning' as a bourgeois artefact.

A Worthy Compromise?

In a paper discussing a variation of the art/commitment debate as it unfolded between Frankfurt Institute theorists Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, G. Frederick Hunter follows those critics cited above by stating unequivocally: '[t]he point is simply the following: in a situation of social oppression and conflict, autonomy in art is not merely impermissible – it is impossible'.[51] Hunter's paper rehearses the antinomies between Benjamin's notion of *Tendenz* and Adorno's theory of autonomous art. As with the American positions detailed above, it seems Benjamin was in little doubt:

> [The] present social situation compels [the artist] to decide in whose service he is to place his activity. The bourgeois writer of entertainment literature does not acknowledge this choice. [The Marxist proves] to him that, without admitting it, he is working in the service of certain class interests. A more advanced type of writer does recognise this choice. His decision, taken on the basis of class struggle, is to side with the proletariat. That puts an end to his autonomy.[52]

I would contend the decision-making process, the act of self-recognition that Benjamin alludes to here, would involve writers 'confronting the layers of alien formation in [themselves]' as Williams set out in 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?'[53] The remainder of Hunter's discussion is densely argued and time here necessarily imposes constraints: however, he usefully points up Benjamin's position by reminding readers that 'emancipatory politics and critical esthetics [sic] [ultimately] share the same *telos*: autonomy, freedom from domination'.[54] More helpful however is Walter Benjamin's own formulation

as stated in 'The Author as Producer', where he suggests 'the tendency of a literary work can be politically correct only if it is also literarily correct. That is to say, the politically correct tendency includes a literary tendency'.[55] Again, Benjamin's pronouncement is surely one that Raymond Williams would have endorsed. Citing Marx and Engel's discussion of *Tendenz* in Eugene Sue's *The Holy Family* and Lassalles's *Franz von Sickingen,* Williams emphasises that the 'critique of "tendency literature" is not a case against "commitment" but for serious commitment: the commitment to social reality'.[56] Though seeming rather circular (a 'best of both worlds' compromise), Benjamin treads a fundamentally different path, for he considered the literary artefact and its author as enmeshed – just as with any other commodity and its maker – *within* the relations of production. As Terry Eagleton explains, this entails 'seeing the literary artefact as the culmination of certain processes, techniques and styles common to the particular stage of development reached in the relevant industry (here publishing) and at a particular point in time'.[57] He suggests 'the original of Benjamin's essay lies in his application of [historical materialism] to art itself. […] For Benjamin the revolutionary artist should not uncritically accept the existing forces of artistic production, but should develop and revolutionize those forces. In doing so he creates new social relations between artist and audience.'[58] If Benjamin's desire to form '*new* social relations between artist and audience' sounds familiar, it is owing to its resemblance to Burke's notion of 'allegiance': the need to invoke 'cultural symbols' that would perform the function of 'binding people together', in short, how the *discursive* use of the term proletariat 'might serve to organise texts and social relations between texts and readers'.[59]

There remains a caveat however for Benjamin, as we saw with Williams: that a work attempting a direct appeal to individual consciousness by adopting the 'correct attitude' (the superimposition of political opinions and phrases, or unrelated moral comments) would only effect superficial change, leaving the 'apparatus', the mode of literary production unaltered – essentially remaining a bourgeois artefact.[60] Benjamin stressed such superficiality of message merely constituted bourgeois 'entertainment', as in *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) commodification of poverty, or in functioning as the 'negative symbols' which, as Kenneth Burke explained, merely enlisted the reader's sympathies. One might view such negative symbols as precursors to recent television iterations of the genre termed 'poverty porn': such audience-figure, outrage-driven populism as Channel 4's *Benefits Street*, or the game show format of Channel 5's *The Great British Benefits Handout.*[61] Far from such facile kicking-down, Benjamin's definition of literary correctness had instead been predicated upon the use of innovative formal techniques which, rather than simply *adopting* the bourgeois 'apparatus' of the realist novel, actively sought to reconfigure or *adapt* it by

'alienating the productive apparatus from the ruling class [and] improving it in ways serving the interests of socialism'.[62] One of Benjamin's favoured means for doing so was by the employment of shock montage, a technique designed to realise what George L. Dillon describes as 'sudden illuminations triggered by […] juxtapositions and "dialectical images"'.[63]

In a Library Reading Room

In this section I offer an illustration of how the use of montage technique as advocated by Benjamin was approached by Walter Allen in his first published novel *Innocence is Drowned* (1939). As its title, taken from a line in W. B. Yeats' 'The Second Coming' intimates, the novel traces the emotional 'progress' of skilled artisan Dick Gardiner as he crosses from patriarchal naivety (more possibly an arrogant complacency) to metaphorical 'drowning' in confrontation with the grim and inescapable realities of long-term unemployment, a journey travelled by many thousands of his contemporaries during the pre-war decade.[64] The novel's title connotes an epiphany of sorts, being effectively an enactment of Williams's requirement that we 'commit ourselves far enough to the social reality to be conscious of this level of sociality'.[65] Possibly modelled on his own father, a silversmith engraver and die-sinker, Allen's Dick Gardiner embodies the demeanour of the craft-proud artisan who, his sons having gained scholarship places, proudly sent them to the local grammar school and believed – as Allen remarked of his own father – '[w]e were a cut above […] our strictly educational peers, [in] the municipally established secondary schools'.[66] Having contracted TB owing to working long hours as a toolmaker in damp and poorly ventilated workshops during the Great War, Allen's sick and unemployed artisan epitomises the type described here by Robert Tressell:

> The skilled artisan […] strives to keep up an appearance of being well to do, and would be highly indignant if anyone suggested that he was really in a position of abject, miserable poverty […] he tries to bluff his betters that he has some mysterious private means of which they know nothing, and conceals his poverty as if it were a crime.[67]

Such concealment reaches further down, however. His plans eviscerated by circumstance, Dick Gardiner's position is paradoxically one of denial and hubris: an inability both to come to terms with his redundancy but also a failure to appreciate how the ramifications of his unemployment, both economic and emotional, are casting a blight on the family as a whole. Allen's novel reduced the nation's social and political anxieties to the more manageable dynamic of

a provincial family unit striving beneath the shadow of catastrophe. As fellow Birmingham writer John Hampson remarked: 'Allen's books deal with the provincial scene; they indicate the turmoil existing beneath the dull surface of an industrial town […] Allen takes a small section of the community and shows what happens to them over a short space of time.'[68] The process dovetails with Williams's views regarding 'the interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch […] and the whole process of actually living its consequences'.[69] Being a collective novel Allen focalises each member of the family to offer differing perspectives on contemporary events.[70] In an earlier scene, Allen laid bare the wider implications of Dick's redundancy by use of cross-class montage which contrasts the experience of his wife Rose – ground down by a lifetime's hard work and forced by ill-circumstance to take in ironing – with Mrs Gamble, the well-heeled wife of a local businessman who drinks orange juice for breakfast, stays in bed until midday and whose silk lingerie forms the basis of Rose's workload.[71] In terms of the Gardiners' predicament, 'unemployment', as Carole Snee remarks, 'means that [couples] are forced by external factors to modify the traditional segregation of conjugal roles'.[72] As redundant 'breadwinner', it was partly to be 'out of the way' or 'to get from under his wife's feet' that Dick Gardiner had visited the Library reading room. Again, though space here does not permit a fuller account, it is worth mentioning that each of the Birmingham writers had written sympathetically on the doubly-oppressed condition of contemporary women.

Glancing disinterestedly at a copy of *The Tatler* – his usual reading matter having been appropriated by one of the unemployed and dozing denizens in the reading room – Dick Gardiner peruses photographs of upper-class 'society' lounging on the French Riviera. Confronted with the degradation and suffering of the ageing and listless contemporaries that inform his immediate surroundings, the enormity of the social disparity is self-evident. As Allen's narrator explains:

> [P]ictures of ladies and gentlemen in evening dress posed in restaurants with bottles in buckets at their feet; a full-page picture of a girl holding a Scots terrier – 'Miss…, lovely daughter of Captain and Lady…, one of the season's most popular debutantes'; pictures of ladies and gentlemen in bathing costumes lying under the Riviera sun. Resentment smouldered in Mr. Gardiner. He turned hastily to the advertisements and saw a picture of a proud lady in a fur coat and a prouder lady head thrown back and breasts jutting triangularly forth, wearing somebody's corsets. He glanced about: putting a paper like that in a public library seemed to him a bloody insult. The man next to him snored gently. Mr. Gardiner looked at him. His head was placed in his folded arms that lay in a loop on the table. His old bowler

> hat tipped forward showed a mat of thick white hair. He had a piece of red rag around his neck. A sweetish sickly smell came up from his body. Cautiously Mr. Gardiner peeped under the table. The man had no socks and was wearing a pair of broken brogues; under a toe-cap a dirt-encrusted toe protruded coyly.[73]

Here Allen 'directs' the narrative viewpoint using cinematic effects: zooming-in for close-up sequences and scanning the magazine's photo imagery so as to emphasise its apparent inappropriateness. In this way Dick Gardiner functions as the novel's camera eye and centre of consciousness. The close up sequence that closes the passage both 'illuminates' and 'shocks', in the manner of Eisenstein's broken spectacles/Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* and owes much to Allen's Sunday evenings at the Birmingham Film Society.

Unlike the cross-class montage images that Stuart Hall had found so democratic in *Picture Post*, *The Tatler* was aimed specifically at a middle- and up-market readership consisting of celebrities, investment bankers and aristocrats. Recoiling angrily at the magazine's fawning adulation of these over-indulged socialites, Dick Gardiner considers its very existence an affront to the dignity of the beaten and defeated humanity he finds around him. '[P]utting a paper like that in a public library seemed to him a bloody insult' (162). Allen's narrator gives vent to Dick Gardiner's moral outrage by use of free-indirect speech, whereby his feelings are made plain. His private (inner) rage contrasts with a later episode, where, speaking to the headmaster at his youngest son's school, he adopts a markedly public (i.e. measured and deferential) tone. As Matti Ron pointed out in a recent *Key Words* article, the use of free indirect discourse reveals characters' 'subjective function' in action, enabling the reader to register their 'confinement within [the conventions of] bourgeois ideology'.[74] Dick Gardiner's progression from craft-proud artisan and family patriarch to class-progressive is a troublesome experience. Allen communicates this by employing free indirect narrative to show the mental turmoil played out as his character wrestles the layers of alien formation within himself. Montage and free indirect discourse devices are supported by the clipped, telegraphic style of the passage which in turn mimics Dick's perfunctory scanning of the society magazine and conveys his indifference towards its frivolous copy.

In his reconfiguration of the traditional 'bourgeois apparatus', Walter Allen engaged readers as active participants in the construction of his novel's political meaning, revealing not only his own political alignment and commitment via his characters' solidarity with the downtrodden but also enjoining theirs. His figurative 'screening' of the chasm, the shocking disparity between elite and subordinate classes, thus constitutes a deeply political act. As Chantal Mouffe suggests, 'artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of

a given symbolic order, or in its challenging, and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension'.[75] In terms of a 'politics of form', the success of *Innocence Is Drowned* 'as a device for spreading areas of allegiance', of 'binding people together' is dependent on the two-way process which Greta Olsen and Sarah Copland describe as 'the necessity of reading not only aesthetic forms but also modes of interpretation in politically acute ways'.[76]

The images of evening dress, bathing costumes, fur coats and lingerie that fill the *Tatler*'s pages represent a world of excess wholly inaccessible to Dick Gardiner and his class. The magazine's meritocratic extolling of luxury goods and possessions as the rewards for hard work and achievement function as a personal rebuke to Dick Gardiner. His labour in a munitions factory is rewarded only with exhaustion and consumption. Prevented from fulfilling his historically defined role as 'family breadwinner', Dick's self-esteem is diminished; no longer able to provide for his own, he feels emotionally inadequate. As noted, Allen had previously juxtaposed Rose, Dick's careworn wife, with Mrs Gamble the pampered wife of a local accountant. An intersectional reading of Birmingham group fiction provides many further insights into the lot of the contemporary woman. In *The Proletarian Answer to The Modernist Question*, Nick Hubble laments the preponderance of narrowly political readings of working-class literature and sees women's political and intellectual history as key factors in his exploration of a genre where issues of gender, sexuality and familial relations might provide a more appropriate 'way in' that should be adopted more widely.[77] On leaving the library reading room, Dick Gardiner reflects:

> It was wrong, wrong that men should be reduced to such hopelessness. Holding himself very stiffly, head in the air and the shapeless overcoat hanging sacklike from his shoulders, he marched out of the library. It's a bloody scandal, he muttered repeatedly. And, as he walked homeward those images of hopelessness and poverty burned into his mind; and the image of a dirt-encrusted toe sticking out from broken brogues became the symbol of all the hopelessness and poverty in the world.[78]

As the distracting images and advertisements in *The Tatler* reveal, for the wealthy a surfeit of luxury, for the old and unemployed only dereliction. As Lara Feigel indicates:

> The contrasting of rich and poor through montage came to dominate both Russian and German cinema in the late 1920s and was used explicitly in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) where […] the beleaguered, dehumanised mass of dark-clothed workers is juxtaposed with the upper classes, dressed in white and frolicking in the sun.[79]

As one becomes only too aware, the theorisation and critical evaluation of working-class writing produced during the 1930s is detailed, complex and often emerges in radically conflicting positions. Such controversy may in fact prove radically energising. As Terry Eagleton indicates, 'it is the seeming aporia or double-bind regarding the commitment/aesthetic binary that maintains its vitality; as with other philosophical disputes, tension and irresolution serve to ensure its continuance […] the question of how "progressive" art needs to be to be valid is an *historical* question, not one to be dogmatically settled for all time'.[80] However, the practical application, more specifically the creation or production of the cultural (here the 'literary') artefact remains very much in the hands of working-class authors and their narratives. Indeed, one might play devil's advocate by inverting the theory/practice binary in order to ask how the theorisation measures up against the actual *practice* of working-class narrative. For, rather than uncritically accepting the tools handed down to them, working-class writers were able, and historically speaking, often did represent lived experience in innovative and imaginative new ways, not only extending the relationship between writer and audience during the heightened socio-political crises of the 1930s but also as a legacy and potential resource in what unfortunately remains a continuing struggle.

As Phil O'Brien remarks of some twenty-first century working-class novels, fictional writing can make 'powerful interventions into both class discourse and the drastic changes to class formation in Britain brought about by the ideologies of neoliberalism'. It is owing to what O'Brien considers the flexibility of 'the novel as a form'[81] that working-class literature functions as the cultural arena in which a continuing tradition of dissent is played out. This is important, for the legacy of working-class writing constitutes a rhetorical resource in what is an ongoing struggle against the host of disadvantages experienced by a working class whose material conditions are once again under assault from a resurgent capitalism constructed upon neoliberal political assumptions. As Eagleton observes:

> There are less 'extreme' phases of bourgeois society in which art […] becomes trivial and emasculated, because the sterile ideologies it springs from yield it no nourishment […] in such an era, the need for explicitly revolutionary art again becomes pressing. It is a question to be seriously considered whether we are not ourselves living in such a time.[82]

It would seem the situation has deteriorated noticeably in the 20 years since Eagleton's observation. If we do require a resource for hope – and there's no time like the present – perhaps we might heed Kenneth Burke's requirement for the kind of congregational politics stressing the importance

of 'representing social difference to middle-class readers in the interests of cross-class solidarity'.[83] That the 'sterile ideologies' of neoliberalism demand fuller scrutiny and confrontation, and 'the need for an explicitly revolutionary art again becomes pressing', the requirement for a literature capable of forging alignments between working- and middle-class wage earners has never been more timely.[84] In the spirit of engendering a wider sense of political commitment and a greater appreciation of the pressing need for cross-class-partisanship, I conclude with Benjamin's adjuration that:

> What matters [in the sphere of literary production] is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first to induce other producers to produce, and second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is 'readers or spectators into collaborators'.[85]

Notes

1 Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian,* 2 September 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/02/uk-tipping-point-liz-truss-economy-government-intervention.
2 Halward suggested the Birmingham writers 'met periodically for the purposes of telling each to the other where he was wrong'. Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You* (London: Michael Joseph, 1938), 251.
3 Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1964), 215.
4 Allen's idea for a collective novel may have likewise derived from Eisenstein. According to Benjamin Kohlmann '[Eisenstein' s *Strike* (1925)] sought to demolish bourgeois plot conventions and the "individualist conception of the bourgeois hero" in favor [sic] of a more truly democratic aesthetic: we brought collective and mass action onto the screen," Eisenstein noted, in contrast to the individualism of bourgeois cinema'. Benjamin Kohlmann, 'Proletarian Modernism: Film, Literature, Theory', *PMLA* 134, no. 5 (2019): 1060.
5 Raymond Williams, 'The Writer Commitment and Alignment', *Marxism Today*, June 1980, 23.
6 Williams, 'The Writer Commitment and Alignment', 23. Sarah Copland and Greta Olsen, 'A Politics of Form', *European Journal of English Studies* 20 (2016): 207–21 (207).
7 Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), 256.
8 Keith Williams, *British Writers and the Media, 1930–45* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 128, 132.
9 'Resources for a Journey of Hope', in Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983).
10 Lawrence F. Hanley 'Cultural Work and Class Politics: Re-reading and Remaking Proletarian Literature in the United States' , *Modern Fiction Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 715–32 (718).
11 Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2 1931–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 769–82.
12 Elinor Taylor, *The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934–1940* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018), 22.
13 Walter Allen, *Reading A Novel* (London: Phoenix House Ltd, 1949), 22.

14 Ibid. (emphasis added).
15 Raymond Williams, 'The Writer: Commitment and Alignment', *Marxism Today*, June 1980, 22–5 (25).
16 Raymond Williams, 'You're a Marxist Aren't You?', *Resources of Hope, Culture, Democracy Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 75, 76.
17 Ibid. Ronald Dworkin, 'The Concept of a Moral Position', in *Taking Rights Seriously,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). Cf. Kenneth Burke's notion that proletarian/working-class narratives are 'addressed' to an envisaged reader.
18 Lea Ypi, 'Political Commitment and the Value of Partisanship', *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 3 (2016): 601–13.
19 Jeremy Gilbert and Alex Williams, *Hegemony Now: How Big Tech and Wall Street Won the World (and How We Win it Back)* (London: Verso, 2022), 246.
20 Emphasis added.
21 Gilbert and Williams, *Hegemony Now*, 246. Judith Butler, 'We Need to Rethink the Category of Woman', *Guardian*, 7 September 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/sep/07/judith-butler-interview-gender#:~:text=It%20was%20meant%20to%20be,it%20to%20be%20that%20way (accessed 16 November 2021).
22 Williams, 'The Writer', 22.
23 Walter Allen, 'Thirties Fiction: A View from the Seventies', *Twentieth Century Literature* 20 (1974): 246.
24 Ibid.; Andy Croft, 'The Birmingham Group: Literary Life Between Two Wars', *London Magazine* (1 June 1983), 23: 13–22 (21, 22).
25 Williams, 'The Writer', 22.
26 Alice Beja, 'Proletarian Literature: An Unidentified Literary Object', *L'Atelier* 7, no. 1 (2015), n.p.; Alan M. Wald, 'The Radical Presence in 20th Century US Literature', Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London New York: Verso, 1997), 201.
27 Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in US Political Fiction, 1929–1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), ix.
28 Raymond Williams, 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems In Some Welsh Novels', in *The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition*, ed. H. Gustav Klaus, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982) 110–21 (111).
29 Ronald Blythe, *The Age of Illusion: Glimpses of Britain Between the Wars 1919 – 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 107.
30 Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, 141.
31 Frank Kermode, *History and Value: The Clarendon Lectures and the Northcliffe Lectures 1987* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 4.
32 Ibid., 3
33 Ibid., 93.
34 Kronenberger, cited in Kermode, History and Value, 94.
35 Ibid., 94.
36 Ibid.
37 Joseph Freeman, Introduction, *Proletarian Literature in the United States*, 6.
38 Lawrence F. Hanley 'Cultural Work and Class Politics: Re-reading and Remaking Proletarian Literature in the United States', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38, no 3 (Fall 1992:) 715–32 (718).
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid. 719 (emphasis added).
41 Edwin Seaver, 'The Proletarian Novel', *American Writers Congress*, ed. Henry Hart (New York: International, 1935), 98-103.

42 Hanley, 'Cultural Work and Class Politics', 720.
43 Burke suggested 'The People' was a more unifying phrase than the Worker/the Masses and one more likely to appeal to and engage the partisanship of those in middle-class professions/occupations. See David Cratis Williams, 'Kenneth Burke's Thirties: The 1935 Writers Congress', a paper analysing Burke's speech 'Revolutionary Symbolism in America', presented at the Southern States Communication Association Annual Meeting, Louisville, KY, April 1989, 14 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED311473.pdf (accessed 14 November 2022) (emphasis added).
44 Burke, quoted in David Cratis Williams, 'Kenneth Burke's Thirties', 43.
45 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 96.
46 Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 102.
47 Ibid., 103.
48 'The similarities between Burke and Benjamin, Gramsci and [Lewis] Corey, derive from a common historical project: all of them were attempting to theorize a new cultural politics, a politics summed up in the phrase "the cultural front".' Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 102.
49 Hanley, 'Cultural Work and Class Politics', 730 (emphasis added).
50 Ibid. (*q.v.* 14).
51 Benjamin, cited in Hunter, 'Commitment and Autonomy', 42.
52 Ibid.
53 Raymond Williams, 'You're A Marxist Aren't You?', in *Resources of Hope, Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), 75–6.
54 Hunter, 'Commitment and Autonomy in Art', 53.
55 Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', 769.
56 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 201.
57 Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen and Co, 1976), 61–2.
58 Ibid., 61.
59 Quoted in Hanley, 'Cultural Work and Class Politics', 720. See also Denning, *The Cultural Front*, on similarities between Burke and Benjamin, Gramsci and (Lewis) Corey.
60 Raymond Williams, 'The Writer', 201.
61 Aired in January 2014, Channel 4's 'Benefits Street' documented the lives of the residents of James Turner Street, Winson Green, Birmingham.
62 G. Frederick Hunter, 'Commitment and Autonomy in Art', 44.
63 George L. Dillon, 'Montage/Critique: Another Way of Writing Social History, *Postmodern Culture* 14, no. 2 (January 2004), 1.
64 This extract also demonstrates the 'theme of "crossing", a term coined by Hanley to describe the device whereby the reader gains "knowledge of class conflict" by the initiation of a fictional character transported across the class boundaries that divide proletariat from bourgeoisie'. Hanley, 'Cultural Work and Class Politics', 723–4.
65 Raymond Williams, 'You're a Marxist', 75–6.
66 Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down New Grub Street; Memories of a Writing Life* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 8.
67 Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Paladin, 1991), 288.
68 John Hampson, 'In the Underground II', in *The Penguin: New Writing*, ed. John Lehmann, 28 (London: Penguin Books, 1947), 138.
69 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with* New Left Review (London: Verso, 2015), 159.
70 Whilst offering a small cast of individuals, often in conflict with themselves, Walter Allen's Gardiner family supply an appropriate grouping for the 'collective/social' novel addressing contemporary working-class experience. Barbara Foley cites American left-wing novelist Meyer Levin: 'The group method which eliminates the central character, and uses the

interwoven experiences of many characters of equal value […] is particularly *a propos* for the social novel. By its very lack of a central character emphasis, it declares democracy.' Meyer Levin, 'Novels of Another War', *The Clipper* 1, no 5, (August 1940), cited in Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations*, 363.

71 Walter Allen, *Innocence is Drowned* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1938), 103.

72 Snee was referring to the hapless Cook family in fellow Birmingham group author Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man*. Her words are equally applicable here. Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: A Test Case', in *Red Letters: Communist Party Literature Journal* 3 (Autumn 1976), 11–13 (12).

73 Allen, *Innocence is Drowned*, 161–2.

74 I'm grateful to Matti Ron, whose thought-provoking article 'An Uneasy Avant Garde: The Politics of Modernism' in *Key Words* 18, broadened both the discussion and my understanding of free-indirect discourse. 'Working-Class Writing,' *Key Words* 18 (2020), 62.

75 Chantal Mouffe, *Agnostics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013), 91. Cited in Copland and Olsen, 'A Politics of Form', 207.

76 Copland and Olsen, 'A Politics of Form', 207.

77 Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer to The Modernist Question* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 33.

78 Allen, *Innocence is Drowned*, 163.

79 Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics 1930–45: Reading Between the Frames* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 21–2.

80 Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 57.

81 Phil O'Brien, *The Working Class and Twenty-First-Century British Fiction: Deindustrialisation, Demonisation, Resistance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 1, 152.

82 Qtd in Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 58.

83 Hanley 'Cultural Work and Class Politics', 715–32.

84 Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 58.

85 Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', 777.

Class, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of English Heritage: Beyond Neoliberalism and Consumerism

Nick Stevenson

Abstract

Here I seek to outline a cultural politics of heritage in respect of a number of debates relating to English heritage. The ascendancy of complex struggles over what constitutes 'our heritage' has become especially important to the politics of class in the early part of the twenty-first century. The rise of right-wing populism has explicitly sought to start a war against a so-called 'woke' culture in respect of popular memory. I argue that museums and heritage sites remain important forms of popular education and should be taken seriously. Missing however from more contemporary debates are issues related to class and traditions of the labour movement. In this respect, I seek to explore the pedagogic potential of a number of museum and heritage sites in the context of a culture where the working class are not only written out of history, but whose own radical histories continue to be mostly ignored by the overwhelmingly middle-class heritage industry. Finally, I argue that instead of seeing this heritage and tradition as 'dead' or merely nostalgic, it continues to offer a vital guide as to how we live in the twenty-first century.

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If we think about museums and questions of heritage what comes to mind? For many people this question conjures up an 'educational' day out or perhaps more 'official' forms of knowledge. For some, they are sites that promote virtuous ideas of civic and cultural identity, for others a day out, while others may view them as places of cultural domination that reinforce ideas of class, race, gender and other social identities. In terms of more everyday practices, they can be simply a place to take the children (often after a good deal of persuasion) during the half-term break. My own memories as a child are that museums were too much like school to be considered interesting and less places of discovery or excitement than somewhere to shelter from the rain or simply to pass the time. The 'classed' dimension of museums was especially evident and they were mostly not places where 'people like us' would be found. Despite the current dominance of the technologically informed 'nowist' present, issues of heritage remain important for the stories they tell about

our collective pasts and the potentially new and more critical horizons they can inform. It is, however, notable within the current context how important these negotiated narratives have become given the current cultural struggles evident within this sector with regard to the government's much discussed 'war on woke' and concerted attempts by certain sections of the museum and arts sector to connect the practice of curation to more activist agendas.[1] While such manoeuvres by the party of the English ruling class could be dismissed as a cynical form of distraction, they are also arguably a powerful reminder of just how significant questions of hegemony and cultural domination remain. In this respect, it is worth remembering that museums in the English context are connected to ideas of civilisation, moral improvement and colonialism, seeking to shape consciousness and knowledge in such a way as to garner support for empire and promote middle-class ideas of respectability.[2]

Museums have long been places of popular education and are therefore subject to critical scrutiny and re-evaluation. While recognising that like other sites of culture in terms of questions of production and consumption, heritage is dominated by the professional middle-class, museums remain interesting precisely because of their educational and cultural orientation.[3]

In this article I want to explore questions of heritage in terms of its potential to open new realities and ways of thinking and feeling. I will do this first by outlining the relationship between class politics, heritage and critical pedagogy. I then look at four specific examples of heritage sites in order to test these assumptions. These include the People's History Museum (Manchester city centre), the Framework Knitters Museum (Ruddington, Nottingham), the William Morris Gallery (Walthamstow, London), and the Museum of Making (Derby).

Adapting Roger Simon's work, I argue that in visiting a museum or heritage site we are encountering a specific 'social form' that will 'frame' ideas that help to shape experience.[4] For while we need to recognise the ways that the museum is constructed by specific networks of colonial, capitalist and other frameworks of power, it remains an important and significant site of learning that shapes and influences 'the way meanings are absorbed, recognised, understood, accepted, confirmed, and connected as well as challenged, distorted, taken further, or dismissed'.[5] In this respect, my argument is not that the heritage sector should become a specific form of propaganda for particular points of view, but that it should be positioned within what Simon terms 'a pedagogy of possibility' that interrupts dominant frameworks of knowledge and explores other counter-hegemonic possibilities.[6] Such a view insists that rather than celebrating 'our' heritage or simply bemoaning its lack of criticality, there is instead an invitation to understand the way that social and cultural space is constructed more dialectically. This remains an intrinsically hopeful approach,

one that posits museum and heritage sites as specific zones that struggle over meaning. Here I offer a critical reading of several heritage sites that are located within the English context and all of which have a bearing on labour and trade union history. Methodologically I follow Margaret Lindauer's lead in identifying myself less as the 'expected' visitor to heritage sites and more as a critic who is explicitly connected to radical socialist forms of politics that continue to take seriously not only the cultural dimensions of society, but also the ongoing need to raise critical questions about the organisation and control of labour and wider frameworks of cultural power.[7] Clearly this means I bring with me specific experiences and understandings to bear on the practice of museums (although I would dispute the argument that this means that such views could be dismissed as simply particular to me.) Instead I seek to recover a view I share with others who are concerned that the recognition of working-class histories in educational and heritage sites are in decline and that the working class in a post-industrial context often find themselves as stigmatised citizens.[8] In this respect and others, I retain a connection to the socialist tradition as defined by the New Left in the 1960s while remaining aware of some of the limitations of perspectives from this era, given the ways that questions related to feminism and race amongst other aspects were often marginalised. Having said this, I remain concerned that many explicitly post-Marxist perspectives often have little that is meaningful to say about labour disputes, preferring to discuss matters related to identity. Through my exploration of sites of heritage, I seek to remind readers of the ongoing need to struggle for more radical forms of class consciousness within the working class and the possible emergence of more common forms of struggle against capitalism that retains a critical purchase. This is especially urgent during a period when the sheer cruelty of neoliberalism is increasingly evident and in the context of a challenge posed by a reignited labour movement during the current 'cost of living crisis'.

Class Politics

If we are to recover more radical traditions of thought in respect of the histories of labour then the socialist tradition remains central. Marx's materialist vision of freedom remains significant when viewed within the history of bourgeois thought and practice. If more liberal traditions have concerned themselves with the abstract freedom of the individual, Marx taught that freedom was not simply a matter of 'inner' liberation, but required the democratisation of social relationships of production and the reduction of the working day. Within this setting the persistent question becomes why supposedly democratic societies have continued to organise human labour in an authoritarian manner, while

restricting the time people have to replenish themselves spiritually and develop themselves in ways that are not directly related to the reproduction of their labour power.[9] The by now long history of socialist and labour movements could be said to haunt the present with these very questions. Despite the insistence that history is now over (especially because of the current insistence that we are faced with a basic choice between liberal democracy or authoritarianism) there has never been a better time for socialists to remind themselves of their own complex histories and struggles.[10] We need to remember that the relationships that operate within most workplaces continue to be built on the 'unconditional authority of the capitalist'.[11] The impact of neoliberalism more generally has been not only to insist that this is indeed the 'natural order of things' but to further inscribe this logic. The intensification of neoliberalism into the fabric of the workplace has resulted in growing levels of inequality, mental stress, managerialism, and insecurity, all under the guise of increased efficiency. This is reason enough for socialist educators to seek to remind the population that there are alternative ways of imagining the future while reconnecting with the past. The point of an approach informed by more critical forms of pedagogy is that it seeks to develop radical perspectives and more democratic relations of power and authority, while suggesting that social and cultural struggles are necessary to help forge a better world. This can only be achieved within wider cultural frameworks that pride themselves in raising complex questions while viewing neoliberalism as offering an education of a different kind.[12]

Wendy Brown argues that people more generally 'have come to prefer moralizing, consuming, conforming, luxuriating, fighting, simply being told what to be, do and think over the task of authoring their own lives'.[13] Similarly, Herbert Marcuse in the 1960s became increasingly concerned about the lack of critical possibilities available within a social order that not only lacked a sustained opposition but where many supposedly oppositional forces have systematically integrated themselves into the status quo.[14] And despite the brief upsurge within radical activity that has developed through environmentalism, anti-racist and anti-austerity campaigns, more generally today it remains the political Right who until recently remain in ascendency. The populist Right or more centrist New Labour-informed perspectives persist as more powerful than Left alternatives in seeking to reimagine class relationships embedded within paid employment. The current answer as to what it means to be human remains a relentless focus on technological gadgets, consumerist versions of satisfaction and the distraction of shiny commodities. That such visions of the good life are entirely unsustainable and unable to provide people with a more meaningful life that is not saturated in stress and anxiety has not prevented them from becoming embedded within popular consciousness.

More democratic and socialist forms of education require spaces that have recovered narratives and identities beyond those geared towards lives ruled by the imperatives of hyper-consumption, where the certainties of the dominant culture can become resisted and contested. Having said this, the so-called 'winter of discontent' of 2022 has seen a resurgence in trade union activity and brought a new generation of trade union leaders to national prominence. These figures have proved thus far to be especially skilled at connecting both with their own members and the broader public in challenging the argument that trade unions are organisations that belong to the past. Given the magnitude of the problems I have sought to outline, an analysis of labour history museums seems like an unusual place to begin; however, I shall argue that locations such as museums continue to have a significance that should not be forgotten when it comes to the active construction of memory. This issue has become even more pressing considering recent events that have undermined the myth that workers are powerless to challenge their employers while constructing popular demands from below.

With these questions in mind, I seek to investigate some of the recent contestations in the English setting on themes of heritage in order to explore the extent to which specific sites connected to labouring histories might be able to bring different identifications into being. Many of the museums I go on to address here can be conceived as offering a form of education underpinned by a notion of the public good rather than the more narrowly conceived meritocratic frame that is so popular at present.[15] This is perhaps why questions of cultural heritage remain so important. If working-class history is rarely taught in schools and the pedagogic role of trade unions is in decline, it is no longer clear where – apart from the valuable sources of family history – people might gain an understanding of the struggles and cultures of the past. The question I seek to pose is to what extent can critical heritage sites develop alternative forms of pedagogy in respect of the struggle to survive and earn a living? Before looking at these issues in more detail I want to investigate some of the current debates that are dominating the heritage sector before pointing to some of the ways they are informed by social class.

The Cultural Politics of Heritage

Raymond Williams could have been thinking of the vexed cultural politics of heritage when he wrote that the 'selected tradition thus creates, at one level, a general human culture; at another level, the historical record of a particular society; at a third level, most difficult to accept and assess, a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture'.[16] Since Williams wrote

these words in the 1960s there has been an increasingly intense debate about the classed, gendered and racial nature as to what constitutes national heritage. These debates continue to matter greatly in societies that have been built less on popular forms of democracy than 'the elite and the mass', where dominant groups 'see the rest of life through categories that are most closely involved with their power'.[17] Cultural struggles of this kind are likely to be ongoing during the present period and are a key component of a 'public education designed to create the values of an educated democracy'.[18]

During this period Williams could afford to be optimistic about the prospects for an informed democracy and enhanced questioning on these issues, due to the emergence of radical movements, including the labour movement, the rapid growth of the reading public and the growing demand for a self-managed society beyond rule by the market. Such optimism however has mostly proved to have been misplaced. During the New Labour period (1997–2010) questions of heritage were explicitly linked to questions of exclusion, diversity, and regeneration.[19] There were concerns that the organisational ethos of the heritage sector was based on capitalist versions of success and exclusion, and this had pushed out the idea of culture being a shared community resource. In addition, we also need to recognise the persistence of a set of more deeply ingrained cultural hierarchies. The post-war Labour government, despite its transformative programme on welfare, was very conventional on questions of culture. In respect of heritage and the arts, the New Labour government aimed to widen access to high culture more generally. It was in fact the New Left of the 1960s that had sought to challenge the dominance of the established middle and ruling class in this respect.[20] Despite considerable differences, the New Left of the 1960s questioned the class elitism that dominated heritage and dismissed the idea that education could be reduced to a means of class mobility.

If the 1960s was a period when new working-class voices could be heard within the arts, this is arguably no longer the case with the shrinking of the welfare state and disappearance of many of the workshops and co-operative ventures that gave working-class people support in the past.[21] In the age of ongoing austerity, there is a well-founded concern about the under-representation of working-class voices across a range of artistic practices and concerns that inform what we understand as arts and heritage.[22] Further, if the increased funding for the arts and celebration of diversity by 'new' Labour might be viewed as relatively progressive it obscured what might be termed as more 'polite' forms of marginalisation. Roshi Naidoo argues that while there are new spaces for previously excluded narratives, especially around race, this does not necessarily unsettle the assumed dominance of whiteness in the arts.[23] Given the role that museums have played historically in constructing a

shared sense of citizenship through ideas of nationhood and empire, it is not surprising that there has been a considerable amount of recent scholarship on the theme of more 'cultural' understandings of citizenship in relation to questions of nationalism, difference and otherness.[24] As noted previously, in the English context there is an ongoing culture war being fought mostly by the Conservative Party against a so-called 'woke' agenda that is presumed to challenge English patriotism. If the cultural politics being waged by the Conservative Party seeks to close legitimate questions of race and empire, it also seeks to position the 'white' English working class as unquestioningly loyal patriotic subjects who need to be mobilised to defend 'our' heritage against more decolonial perspectives. Missing from this debate is the view that the working class themselves have their own rebellious history, one that E. P. Thompson described as 'the long and tenacious revolutionary tradition of the British commoner'.[25] While recognising the progressive move to introduce decolonised perspectives into museums and heritage sites, we need to go further to avoid positioning many working-class people as being the subservient subjects of capitalism. This is not to deny that the host working-class population economically benefited from empire; it is instead to argue that the multi-ethnic working class remain the inheritors of radical traditions that can still be drawn on in the present.

Heritage and Critical Pedagogy

Here I seek to defend a less reductive idea of culture which, following Raymond Williams, recognises that 'the struggle to learn, to describe, to understand, to educate, is a central and necessary part of our humanity'.[26] Taking a lead from Williams, radical educator Henry Giroux argues in this respect that neoliberalism acts as a form of public pedagogy seeking to produce competitive and market-orientated selves while destroying the welfare state.[27] Elsewhere Giroux reminds us that neoliberalism launches a specific assault on the meaningfulness of education, insisting on a set of practices connected to rote learning and standardised tests along with transferable skills required by employers.[28] Instead of developing more critical forms of knowledge, educational sites are asked to concentrate on either equipping young people for survival in an increasingly competitive world or encouraging them to build resilience by navigating their way through the cut-throat world of the labour market and pressured educational institutions. The problem is that this individuated world seeks to displace wider languages of collective struggle or solidarity. As Franco Berardi argues, if educational institutions in the past granted intellectuals some autonomy and allowed them a degree

of independence of thought, today this is being circumvented since what ultimately matters is economic growth.[29] This makes the necessity of locating critical spaces both inside and outside the institutional space of education more important than ever.

My argument at this juncture is that museums potentially offer possibilities in respect of offering alternative pedagogies. In this context, Angela Failler argues that the practice of remembrance within a heritage context can be a hopeful practice.[30] The heritage sector can help recover more hopeful moments by connecting them to the social and cultural struggles of the past. Here, however, we also need to be especially careful of forms of pedagogy informed by a 'feel good' neoliberalism that might wish to displace uncomfortable or difficult memories. We should be cautious about the idea of the museum that either seeks to evoke seemingly comfortable ideas, or indeed 'progress' narratives that simply locate exploitation and oppression in the past. A more critical approach would bring to the fore the trauma of class-based violence while engaging different generations into dialogue. In this respect, within a neoliberal context, the museum is under pressure to become a form of entertainment while becoming overtly populist in orientation.[31] The museum then risks simply becoming a tourist attraction listed as one of the many reasons to visit a particular area, along with other commercial outlets like shopping or a visit to the cinema.

Equally threatening in the age of more populist movements is the attempt to impose 'correct' ideas that might then displace more complex forms of dialogue and experience that resist closure within more supposedly liberating narratives. Simon argues that what matters within the idea of public history is the ability to be able to locate the knowledge, cultures, and artifacts on display within a broader framework.[32] As Simon argues, for historical knowledge to become pedagogic 'traces of the past break into the present, remembrance becomes a form of difficult learning'.[33] Such a process requires a connection between past and present, thereby enabling the unsettling of previously assumed identities and experiences. Museum exhibitions under this framework need to be considered as pedagogic opportunities with the capacity to develop more complex ways of seeing and questioning. Such a vision necessarily points beyond heroic narratives or indeed stories that close off issues of grief and shame. This is clearly a demanding agenda and yet one that is increasingly important in a society where civic narratives and stories from the past are in permanent danger of being displaced by neoliberal and more populist assumptions. Giroux makes the point that if memory is to become a form of hopeful resistance within the present it will need to recover a sense of struggle, while suggesting that such a politics might again become possible within the future.[34] If the critical educational politics of heritage remains demanding, we

need to locate this debate within wider concerns related to a critical politics in the English setting.

The Politics of Heritage

Stuart Hall usefully defines heritage as 'works and artifacts so conserved to be "of value" primarily in relation to the past'.[35] The key question becomes who has the educative and cultural power to give meaning to artifacts within a certain historical and cultural location? As Hall recognises, hegemonic notions of heritage have found themselves challenged by processes of democratisation and a critique of the idea that there could ever be such a thing as value-free knowledge. These processes have had a long-term effect on the ongoing contestation of the power of ruling groups to simply impose an idea of heritage from above. Raphael Samuel argues that the hierarchical pedagogic relations established by 'official' forms of heritage have become challenged by more popular forms of memory, including television, newspapers and increasingly people tracing family histories.[36] This process has produced new forms of knowledge helping to shape popular understandings of the past. If the power relations that help construct what we mean by heritage have been challenged more recently, then we need to be careful not to overstate the transformation.

More hegemonic notions of heritage persist within the English setting in such a way that continues to conjure up images of the aristocracy, country houses and the royal family. Arguably the power of these images and practices are inscribed within notions of ruling class power. The dominance of these images can be connected to romanticised ideas associated with the decline of the aristocracy and the emergent class power of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century. Thompson argues that the partial coming together of the aristocracy and capitalism (both agrarian and industrial) in the eighteenth century was made necessary by elite fears of class revolt from below and emergent ideas connected to the French revolution.[37] The bourgeoisie of this period moved comfortably between country houses and factories located in the cities. Not surprisingly, just as there remains a considerable nostalgia for the days of empire and imperial dominance within English culture, the same can be said of the persistent fetishisation of the country house. This regressive nostalgia is evident within popular television programmes like *Downton Abbey*, which represents a rigidly hierarchical class society where each citizen knows his or her place.

England remains a highly stratified society where a recent study pointed out that about half of those people in elite professions were from families who had similar backgrounds.[38] This is a society that continues to reproduce rank,

hierarchy and privilege, while continually seeking to disguise how this is done.[39] Notably this is not simply a case of economic structures, but also involves questions of self-elimination and cultural distinction as to who seemingly fits into arts and heritage organisations. It undoubtedly influences which plays are worth performing, whose voices are worth listening to and whose past needs to be remembered. Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison note how 'getting on' is in 'part simply a matter of having the "right" pedigree, of hailing from a "good family"'.[40] What matters in this respect is having an 'elite' education, preferably at a private school, that helps create certain cultural dispositions and ways of being in the world. Across a range of arts and cultural organisations and other professions, class background matters greatly. Recent research has demonstrated the cultural sector remains dominated by white middle-class men who are well versed in 'diversity talk', while insecure, temporary and unpaid labour continues to be imposed on many workers at the periphery.[41] Memoirs by Kerry Hudson and Darren McGarvey and others point to the class-based and exclusive nature of the metropolitan world of art and culture and the lack of working-class voices and writing more generally.[42]

In the next section, I want to explore the extent to which labour heritage sites could be said to offer a space for working-class experiences and perspectives. I suggest that the complex legacy of at least some of these spaces continues to offer different forms of learning and understanding beyond the ways in which citizens are currently asked to understand themselves through powerful hegemonic discourses, as either self-interested or deferential members of society. However, as we shall see, despite the ongoing critical potential of labour heritage sites, these same locations are also at risk of erasing the complex dimensions evident within radical history, focussing instead on more populist narratives or forgoing the necessary work of trying to connect the past to the present.

Labour Heritage Narratives: Four Heritage Sites Investigated

Despite a concern about a decline in heritage sites that focus on working-class history, we need to be careful that this view is not exaggerated. For if the cultural history of the industrial working-class has now been pushed 'to the margins of cultural memory', it has not been completely extinguished.[43] While heritage sites still remain places that are associated with elites, I will suggest that the sites I have visited retain critical possibilities for more complex histories especially in the context of the present. Many of these sites remain valuable for the ways in which they continue to offer a history of the struggles of working-class people from below.[44] They also propose a story of the struggle

for democratic inclusion into something that might be called a shared national story that has altered the nature and shape of English identity and society over the course of the twentieth century.[45] This would include, of course, the winning of many critical rights to strike, free health care and comprehensive education that continue help inform a common citizenship. Here I seek to briefly explore four different heritage sites, all of which are located close to where I currently live in the East Midlands and all of which are focused on labour history.

The People's History Museum, situated in the centre of Manchester and opened in 1994, originally aimed to tell the story of democracy from below.[46] The two main galleries mostly concentrate on the formation of the labour movement and the struggle for democracy from Peterloo to the present day. The museum tells an explicitly national story that, despite an attempt to engage with a diversity of struggles, remains overwhelming focused on the labour movement. This is evident as one the most visible exhibits is the collection of trade union banners in the second gallery of the permanent exhibition. Ultimately the story told begins with a focus on the concentration and abuse of power by elites in the early nineteenth century and the fight for the vote, labour representation and women's emancipation, finding its culmination in the development of the welfare state in 1945. From this point there is a sense of history going in reverse after the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, ushering in a period of welfare cuts and privatisation. There is also a mention of new struggles, including the campaign for nuclear disarmament, the climate strike of 2019, queer resistance and anti-racism. This helps create a sense that the struggle for democracy (despite setbacks) is an ongoing process and further suggests that ordinary people remain capable of undertaking collective forms of resistance.

Despite its limitations, the People's History Museum guides audiences to a history concerned with values and concerns beyond the normalisation of free market capitalism. An important feature of the exhibits on display is the idea that the activism of the past is linked to that of the present day. While the exhibition seeks to reassure visitors that 'we have come along way' and encourages audiences to think about taking civic action themselves, the insistence on a narrative of optimism takes the place of more critical modes of reflection.[47] Failler comments that in the museum setting positivity and hope can become 'a quick and painless antidote that rids us of having to sit uncomfortably with difficult memories'.[48] The need to curate hope can become a way of displacing more complex encounters. For example, there is a famous photograph from the miners' strike of 1984-5 of a policeman on a horse about to strike Lesley Boulton, of the Sheffield Women Against Pit Closures, who is quoted within the exhibition display as saying 'it felt a bit

like Peterloo without the swords'. On one level, this image clearly breaks up any straightforward idea of progress, while the connection back to Peterloo suggests a level of historical interconnection necessary for bringing the past alive. But this image also sits uncomfortably with the generally positive idea of civic activism promoted by the gallery. Again, what is perhaps under-explored in the gallery, is the pain and difficulty of defeat or the sense that civic activism offers no guarantee of victory or assurance that you are on 'the right side of history'. More discordant memories of the miners' strike remind us that despite the undoubted democratic gains that have been made historically, the heavy-handed Orwellian state is still with us.

There is, however, a missed opportunity to connect this photograph to the ongoing civic campaign to call for a national inquiry into what happened at the 'Battle of Orgreave', where violent clashes between miners and police occurred. Doing so would suggest that not only does the considerable pain produced by the miners' strike of 1984 continue to linger in the present, but that it is one of many periods of history that cannot be considered closed. The point here is less the search for the perfect exhibition or indeed the 'correct' narrative, but more for spaces where alternative ideas and perspectives might be introduced to help foster critical forms of reflection. In this respect, the persistent assault on the traditions of labour and trade unionism by forces of neoliberalism is hardly explored at the museum. To have done so might have suggested the limits of the 'anything is possible' narrative that is sometimes implied by the central exhibition. This would have meant deeper forms of reflection on themes of disappointment, defeat and the idea that civic forms of agency are often far from successful, and that even when there is 'progress' it can be rolled back. To suggest otherwise is to displace the lost causes, defeats and dynamic nature of historical processes. However, the historical narrative plotted by the museum at least makes it clear that the struggle for human progress is an ongoing feature of contemporary democratic life and cannot be said to be either over or achieved. During my many visits to the museum, I became increasingly concerned about the presence of a 'heroic' narrative of civic activism that seemed to detract from a need for more careful and complex forms of historical reflection.

In Ruddington (a village in Nottinghamshire) the Framework Knitters Museum seeks to focus on the ways of life and work-place practice of knitters and their families in the nineteenth century. Like the Manchester People's History Museum there are significant attempts to point to the importance of locality. If the People's History Museum makes frequent references to Manchester history, especially the Peterloo massacre, then the Framework Knitters Museum makes a great deal of its own specific location of Ruddington where textile work in the nineteenth century employed half of the town.

Apart from displays that showcase the machines and living conditions, the most notable focus is on Luddism (when workers engaged in protests that included burning down factories, as well as machine breaking). Instead of the usually dismissive approach to Luddism that is popularly understood as a reaction to progress and prosperity, the museum offers a rather different set of interpretations. Luddism is displayed in the museum as a reaction to exploitation, unfair working-practices, and reduced incomes of workers in the early nineteenth century.

Yet what is missing from the museum's display is any account of how practices of deliberate machine breaking are linked to the later development of the labour movement and its ongoing contemporary significance. Rudolf Rocker, for example, comments that the revolts of the Nottingham stockingers in 1811 prefigured both Peterloo, Chartism and then trade-unionism.[49] What matters in this respect is the recognition central to the development of these movements that the 'new arises from the realities of vital being. New worlds are not born in the vacuum of abstract ideas, but in the fight for daily bread.'[50] This fight continues to have a strong bearing on the present, given widespread concern that technology itself is not a neutral mechanism but acts as a dynamic of the class struggle. Gavin Mueller thus argues that that Luddism was less a revolt against machines than an effective way of establishing solidarity against a society that offered workers little control over the labour process that impoverished them.[51] Despite the museum's recognition of the significance of the Luddite revolt, its broader implications are not fully explored or developed. In this respect, there is scope for the museum to have made a more concerted attempt to think about current debates about the so-called 'end of work' or indeed the role that technology might be said to be playing in that process.[52] While some historians have suggested that such revolts are essentially reactionary, since they are often viewed as anti-technology, Mueller argues that Luddism is more complexly articulated through the work of William Morris.[53] Instead of the presumption that labour could simply be eliminated through the application of technology, Morris argued that the important thing was to view technology as a site of struggle. That the exhibition grasps this essential point is important, but there is a failure to securely connect this insight to current working-class struggles against precariousness and the role technology continues to play in economic extraction and the control of labour.[54]

Despite the ongoing significance of Morris to the socialist and broader labour movement, the third of my case-studies, the East London-based William Morris Gallery, has disappointingly little to say about the political ideas of the designer and socialist. Indeed, it is striking that the political aspect of Morris's life is mentioned in only one of the museum's nine galleries. While much is made of Morris's artwork, design, and business acumen, his 'late'

conversion to socialism is treated almost as if it was the outcome of middle-aged eccentricity. Morris's significance to the wider labour movement and the cause of socialism is mostly absent from the gallery. When I visited the gallery in 2019, none of Morris's political writings were on display and the ethos of the museum seemed far removed from any serious encounter with labour history and its traditions.

Thompson warned about the way that the heritage industry had attempted to disable Morris's radicalism.[55] If museums with a connection to labour history and socialist ideas can imperfectly be places where the past can be recovered, then equally they remain spaces where this history is erased or contained given the emphasis that is placed on less critical forms of knowledge. Visitors could easily leave the museum knowing very little about Morris's criticisms of Victorian capitalism and the way that the production of cheap goods robbed the poor of a decent life and instilled in them the permanent dread of destitution.[56] Morris commented at length about how these processes destroyed working-class people's capacity to enjoy time away from work, develop themselves intellectually or engage in the pleasures of nature. A dignified life requires what Morris called 'abundant leisure', all made possible by humanely designed modes of production rather than technology that degraded labour.[57] He argued that this would only be possible once society had moved beyond a world motivated solely by profit.

Finally, I turn to the Museum of Making at the Derby Silk Mill, a place remembered as the world's first factory and a recognised UNESCO world heritage site. My ancestors dating back to the late 1800s had worked in the original mill, so this location has a strong personal connection for me. Within my own family's history there are documents that trace many long-lost family members back to this Silk Mill. The Museum of Making had only just opened when I made my visits in 2021 and there was a palpable a sense of excitement as well as a great degree of local interest. The opening of the museum came after a long build up following the award of a major UK lottery grant in 2015. Most of the exhibits displayed objects and technologies that had a strong connection to the history of the East Midlands. The majority of the artifacts, such as railway signal boxes, aeroplane engines, silk looms and old railway signs were from the local community, enabling people to become their own historians by connecting family and local histories to specific work-places. Together these artifacts evoke a sense of Derby's industrial past and are suggestive of a place where people worked in order to make things

Part of the affective power of the museum for me (and perhaps for others) is precisely due to the way it grants space to local experience. However, there is also evidence of a failure within the framework of the museum to connect these objects to the specific conditions under which they were made or mark their

connection to the world of work and wider labour process. The museum in this regard mostly focuses on 'making' – in the sense of the crafting of objects – and not labour relations. While the exploitation of workers is mentioned in some of the displays, this narrative is not sustained and it is easy to come away from the museum having absorbed a 'progress' narrative where the complexity of the relationships in the workplace are relegated to the distant past. For example, one of the centrepieces of the museum displays is an artwork by Red Saunders called 'The Lockout', which uses modern subjects to visually recreate a strike that took place at the Silk Mill between 1833 and 1834. The image makes clear that this event fed into the development of the labour movement and serves as an important act of remembrance. Yet this narrative is not one that is really developed in the rest of the museum, where the story quickly shifts to the presentation of 'objects' and other more technological features. The museum seems therefore less concerned with labour history and more focused on a form of public engagement relating to aspects of making and design. This is made plain by the museum's guidebook that has the strapline 'What Will You Make?' Interestingly, on the ground floor, a workshop offers an open invitation to local people to come and make objects within the museum. By contrast, there are few attempts to link the objects and technologies on display in the museum to the long histories of exploitation experienced by working people, or indeed to explore how individuals and communities might envisage a better future under a different economic system. Again, my concern is not that the Silk Mill should simply replace its current narrative with a more radical one, but that these more difficult questions are barely raised in the context of the visitor experience. I was left with the sense that while many of the exhibits are eye-catching, there is little on display to provoke deeper forms of historical and political reflection.

Labour History and Tradition

Writing in the 1980s, Patrick Wright argued that British (by which he mostly meant English) society seemed to be awash with nostalgia and the assertion of national identity.[58] Similar arguments could be made today. When it came to the labour tradition, Wright argued that the endless recycling of the past by the labour movement was not helpful and that rather than relying on 'the crypts of history', proponents of socialism would be better served looking to the complexities of the present.[59] This argument is not far from the so-called 'New Times' project that was associated with the magazine *Marxism Today* and one of its leading intellectuals, Stuart Hall. Hall's argument was that the labour movement needed to modernise its image of socialism and that

by continually evoking past struggles and traditions it was unable to connect with a more individualistic and consumer-orientated society.[60] If this argument seemed persuasive to many at the time, it is much less so today. Later in the 1990s, the 'third way socialism' of Tony Blair was to offer an almost entirely technocratic and managerialist view of social change that had little regard for labour history. The labour movements of the past were presented as simply being out of date or entirely regressive in an age dominated by globalisation, where what mattered was adapting society to suit the needs of the market. Within this setting, Anthony Giddens, one of the main architects of the New Labour project, helped popularise the idea of the post-traditional society.[61] Giddens's arguments about a hyper-modern society driven by media and computer networks were suggestive of ways in which tradition becomes just another choice amongst others, thereby losing its binding force in terms of the horizons and identities of the population. This argument is, of course, deserving of a more extended discussion, but like those of Wright and Hall it is deeply misleading especially when applied to a more critical understanding of labour politics.

Part of my argument here is that while traditions are of course historically invented and created, those constructs have an endurance and importance poorly understood by scholars who seek to ignore their ongoing relevance. The idea that the labour movement needs to 'modernise' its image can easily become a way of simply refusing to talk about the past. Instead of the invitation to view the self as being produced through a long history of associations connected to families, communities and labour, more 'modernised' versions of socialism can unintentionally fail to make connections with a living history. Here I have sought to suggest that the ongoing dialogue between past and present in relation to labour history and the role that this history has played in terms of creating a shared sense of national and local belonging should not be underestimated. Labour history museums of all kinds continue to play an important role in terms of both reminding people of this point, while being representative of a set of traditions that even within the so-called global era have a bearing on our collective futures. I have noted that despite the complexity of labour socialist history, the most pertinent issue is the role that the organised working class, and the institutions and common ways of living, could yet play within our future. As Williams notes, it was the working class historically that created co-operatives, trade unions and political parties that have made an enormous contribution to the development of the democratic and common lives of the people.[62] That these traditions have emphasised ideas of service, community, and solidarity over that of individualism are reason enough to recognise their enduring value. Given that the post-industrial working class have become increasingly detached from the Labour Party and trade unions,

these traditions are likely to be more important than ever in rediscovering this interconnection. If the complexities of these memories are still alive within key heritage sites, they are also currently in danger of being submerged by other frames of analysis that deny their complexity and ongoing relevance. During a period that has sought to normalise the grip of neoliberalism over the collective imagination, labour heritage sites offer the potential to be locations reactivated by socialist educators and curators creating new zones of pedagogy for the citizens of the future. In doing so they need to cautiously resist the temptation to offer heroic stories or indeed other more technologically-driven progress narratives that would end up displacing much of the pain and difficulty – and sometimes achievement – involved in long histories of class-based struggle.

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Keywords

Tony Crowley

Woke

Woke is an interesting word, not least because of its recent use in the so-called 'culture wars' in Britain and the United States in particular ('culture war' dates to the late nineteenth century and referred to specific political struggles for cultural and educational institutions). These 'wars' – debates over ideals, values and practices (sometimes fundamental, sometimes not) – are hardly new. The use of 'culture' as a site of contestation cannot be a surprise to anyone familiar with the work of Raymond Williams. What is novel, however, is the particular intensity and public prominence that has characterised these arguments and the ways in which they have been deployed in the public sphere, including the arena of electoral politics.

Woke is the African American Vernacular English past participle of 'to wake', a verb whose early senses – from the early thirteenth century – included 'to remain (or be kept) awake' and 'to be active, alert, vigilant', and then slightly later, 'to come out of sleep' or 'to rouse from sleep'. Specialised early senses were 'to stay awake in order to watch or guard' (usually someone who sleeps) and to keep vigil, hence by extension 'to wake watch' (an ill person) and indeed in Irish English 'to wake' (the dead). Important figurative senses developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'to become animated, alert or lively', 'to become conscious or aware of', 'to be stirred up', 'to rouse to action'. A number of these semantic threads – solicitude, alertness and awareness – come together in the late nineteenth century African American coinage **woke**.

The provenance of the term is significant for linguistic and political reasons. Linguistically, **woke** (in the sense of 'not asleep') is first recorded in 1891 in a representation of African American speech – 'dreamin', mon He ain't woke good yit'. Politically, the earliest first recorded use of **woke** appears in African American political discourse in the 1930s and 40s. It may derive from the earlier use of related terms: the 'Wide Awakes' were supporters of Abraham Lincoln in the 1860 American presidential election (abolitionists, they included a number of Black activists). While in 1923 Marcus Garvey issued his call to 'Wake up Ethiopia! Wake up Africa!'.

The earliest recorded sense of **woke** in the contemporary political sense dates to the 1930s, specifically in a gloss by the African American folksinger Lead Belly to his 'Scottsboro Boys' (the story of nine teenage and young Black

men falsely accused of rape in a series of trials that exposed the racism that lay at the core of the American justice system). Lead Belly's warning was: 'I advise everybody, be a little careful when they go along through there [Scottsboro] – best stay woke, keep their eyes open.' In this sense being **woke** referred to the requisite alertness that was key to survival for African Americans in a racist society – it was in effect a watchword.

The status of **woke** within African American culture was confirmed by its inclusion within a short glossary composed by a Black novelist, William Melvin Kelley for the *New York Times Magazine* in 1962: 'If You're Woke You Dig It; No mickey mouse can be expected to follow today's Negro idiom without a hip assist' ('mickey mouse' was a derogatory African American term used to refer to white people). Kelley's account of African American discourse identifies it as a form of code 'used primarily for secrecy, exclusion, and protection' (much like the travellers' 'cant' recorded in Thomas Harman's glossary, *A Caueat or Warening for commen cvrsetors Vvlgarely called Vagabones* in 1567 – 40 years before the first English dictionary). Kelley's word list was intended to clarify the developing language of 'beatniks', not least by pointing out that many of its terms were borrowed from African American discourse, particularly that of Black jazz musicians and critics ('cool', 'dig', and 'hip' – hence 'hippie' – were examples).

The political sense of **woke** shifted to mainstream discourse with the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013-14 following a series of racially motivated killings. Much of its initial usage appeared on social media – #staywoke – in relation to racist violence. But a wider sense of the term quickly developed – at the 2017 Women's March against Trump for example – which extended the reference beyond racism to other forms of oppression and injustice. In so doing, the term appears to have shifted slightly but significantly from the sense of an alertness to danger towards an awareness of the possibility of resistance. From there, a further extension (keywords can develop in complex ways over short periods of time) led to what is now a general sense. Being **woke** is now predominantly used to describe someone who is both aware of various forms of social injustice and affiliated (however loosely) with causes that seek to remedy them.

And therein lies the root of the pejorative use of **woke**. For if **woke** is the latest of a number of such phrases ('right on' and 'politically correct' are other examples), then its deployment as a cipher for progressive causes serves as a useful focus for conservative politicians and the right-wing media. Often exaggerated, frequently scurrilous, sometimes simply mendacious (the Marxist goal of corrupting the minds of American schoolchildren) the charge of being **woke** can function as a powerful and usually non-specific insult. In fact, its significance derives at least in part precisely from its non-specificity,

and often, when challenged on a particular issue (the **woke** belief in equal treatment before the law, for example) the charge disappears. In a sense, this simply reveals the question that the phrase 'political correctness' begs. For if the charge is that you are 'politically correct' (or indeed **woke**) then surely the response is: 'as opposed to what?' For even those who aspire to be 'politically incorrect' are in effect claiming to be politically correct in their own distinctive beliefs and values. There is no way around that conundrum, nor should there be, since debates over values, practices and the meanings of words, are simply central to the construction of a social world.

Reviews

Henri Lefebvre, *On the Rural: Economy, Sociology, Geography*. Stuart Elden and Adam David Morton (eds). Robert Bononno (transl). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022. li + 258 pp. £25.99 pb. ISBN 978-1-5179-0468-5.

Henri Lefebvre's recently translated book *On the Rural: Economy, Sociology, Geography* (2022) offers a rural component to Lefebvre's longstanding critique of space and everyday life in the Marxian tradition. Though not offering a specific framework or preliminary analysis for the production of rural space, the book furthers Lefebvre's analyses of rurality and capitalism in his classic *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991), specifically in the chapter 'Notes Written One Sunday in the French Countryside'. A distinctive critique of rural space and class consciousness is not offered on its own accord, as Lefebvre's urbanist standpoint remains the core of his theory of rurality. Highlighting the essential and inseparable role of urbanization in the production of rural space, Lefebvre helps paint a historical portrait of what Raymond Williams called the 'factual exploitation of the country as a whole by the city as a whole' in his classic work *The Country and the City* (1973). Lefebvre's deep and expansive historical analysis in *On the Rural* helps contribute to the potential for a broader spatial theory of rurality in the capitalist world.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of *On the Rural* is its ability to go beyond a critique of rurality synonymous with agriculture and agrarian structure: a significant advance in Marxian theories of rural geography. Though still emphasising traditional forms and characteristics of rural sociology and agricultural economics, Lefebvre offers critical consideration for a framework of rurality that transcends historically specific trends in rural production and consumption. In addition to addressing questions such as agrarian change and theories of ground rent in the Marxist tradition, Lefebvre offers commentary on topics such as peasant traditions, the role of Western law in private land ownership and the critique of everyday life in semi-feudal relationships of rural production (Lefebvre uses the example of the *fattorie* in the Italian countryside of Tuscany). The result, though at times fragmented, is a daring attempt at a dynamic and flexible theory of rural space and everyday life based on a historical geographical materialist foundation (David Harvey used this term to claim the necessary consideration for spatio-temporality in the dialectical process of historical materialism). Rurality emerges as a malleable and manipulable force of economic transformation, social experimentation, and class antagonism. This in turn provides an important framework necessary

for conceptualising an increasingly diverse and dynamic rural reserve army of labour – a reality that is especially the case in the US and Western Europe.

Compared to the critical theory that is central to Lefebvre's previous work, *On the Rural* takes a much keener eye to the historical specificity of rural economics, at times providing detailed historical analysis similar to the likes of Eric Hobsbawn or Fernand Braudel. What makes Lefebvre's historical analysis so effective is its breadth, as he considers rural economies and social formations around the world operating in different historical times, at different levels of capitalist development, with different roles in the global economy, and with different transitions from feudalism to capitalism. This comparative analysis of successful and unsuccessful pasts in rural working-class histories yields a conceptual framework for contemporary rural working-class consciousness and subsequent organisation – a theme that has seldom been emphasised among Marxists outside the traditions of anticolonialism and agrarian change in the global south. Lefebvre's uncovering of global connections in rural class consciousness and cultural specificity is invaluable, helping add to the classic work of Antonio Gramsci and Williams on the revolutionary potential of rural constituencies around the world.

By establishing his critical viewpoint in the context of Marxian and Ricardian theories of ground rent, Lefebvre expands his critique of rurality into the world of classical political economy and agrarian change. He traces back the history of Western legal structure and its role in allowing for the exploitation of rural workers beyond what has been possible in cities. These contributions, combined with the classic Lefebvrian tools for revolutionising everyday life and the production of space, gives the reader a brief glance into how theories of urbanisation may and may not be applied to rural human geographies. Though at times disjointed, Lefebvre's critical view into the rural sphere of production and consumption proves both insightful and foundational for any future Marxian-inspired theories of rural life under capitalism and the spatial processes of capitalist development that create and maintain it.

On the Rural provides a unique characterisation of rural life based on how capitalism tends to develop over space. Instead of insisting on an inevitable 'idiocy of rural life' characterised by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Lefebvre offers a much more critical and productive perspective on what ruralness and rurality mean in social and economic contexts. *On the Rural* is centred around Lefebvre's fundamental claim that 'the rural (peasant) community is a social group organised according to historically determined modalities' (28) instead of a mere afterthought in capitalist planning. Likewise, Lefebvre makes clear that any theory of rurality that does not recognise the historical materialism of rural constituencies and rural economic processes is not a serious one. Building on Marxist concepts in political economy and

geography, *On the Rural* initiates a theory of rurality that is linked to, but not synonymous with, historical processes of urbanisation. The end result is a bold and groundbreaking attempt to expand the Marxist tradition into a demographic of inquiry it has long avoided, but can no longer afford to.

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Robin Harriott, *The Birmingham Group: Reading the Second City in the 1930s.* Cham: Palgrave Macm illan. 2022. xii + 305 pp. £89.99 hb. ISBN 978-3-031-14382-3.

Richard Vinen, *Second City: Birmingham and the Forging of Modern Britain.* Allen Lane. 2022. xxx + 548. £25.00 hb. ISBN: 978-0-241-45453-4.

Richard Vinen is an accomplished historian of, amongst other things, French business and politics, the radical moment of 1968, British National Service, and the country under Margaret Thatcher. This repertoire and authority inform the identification of a curious oversight when it comes to Birmingham – Vinen's home town – and an absence he recalls accentuated in his own schooling, that 'history was something that happened somewhere else' (xv). As he argues, Birmingham is not a presence in histories such as the Ladybird books of his childhood or conventional historiographies featuring monarchs, the aristocracy and military conflict familiar from his professional training. This absence is a cue for the challenges of historical thinking in and about a city where, he argues, there has been an active disinterest in its past. Birmingham, writes Vinen, is a city that lacks old institutions, buildings or even a deep history. Its ascendance to significance in this account begins with the enlightenment. Its importance is consolidated in the nineteenth century, particularly under the impactful leadership, and considerable legacy of Joseph Chamberlain. Into the twentieth century, Birmingham's industrial might was asserted in its role in equipping Britain's war machine across two world wars and in its post-war identity as a 'Motor City' (1945–75). In the last lie the seeds of the city's decline which underlines an elegiac quality in Vinen's final chapter.

Robin Harriott's book emerges from doctoral study. A little stylistically florid at times, it concerns the work of a number of contemporary male fiction writers that includes (with indicative titles) Walter Allen (*Innocence is Drowned*, 1938), Henry Green (*Living*, 1929), John Hampson (*Saturday Night at The Greyhound*, 1931), Leslie Halward (*Gus and Ida*, 1939) Walter Brierley (*Means-Test Man*, 1935) and Peter Chamberlain (*What the Sweet Hell?*, 1935). Otherwise known as the Birmingham Group, Birmingham School or Birmingham Proletarian Writers, the last of these labels underlines their particular character,

analytical framework and absence addressed in this study. Harriott describes the scholarly backdrop to the book as founded on two decades of 'renewed interest in the working-class writing of the 1930s' (39), albeit one in which this group, he claims, has been largely 'overlooked, neglected and under written' (xi).

In recognising absences in the historical and critical record, both authors express a slightly sheepish approach to their respective accounts. Vinen distinguishes this 'highly personal book' within his oeuvre as 'a somewhat idiosyncratic project' (531), while Harriott describes his object of study as an 'unlikely, if not rather incongruous, literature coterie' (ix). What reads as trepidation here may be homologous to what Jonathan Meades celebrates as the 'self-deprecating, unboastful' native character of Birmingham's inhabitants – Brummies.[1] This echoes a cultural embarrassment often attached to the city and attempts to find in its history some value and significance. Nonetheless, Vinen and Harriott are both concerned to make a case for why Birmingham, and Birmingham writers respectively, are worthy of more than parochial interest. What unites them is an attention to the specificity of this site as a benchmark against which one might critique presumptions about analytical categories, or keywords, such as the social, class, identity and culture (and cultural prescriptions), and even the meaning of the historical in the context of urban experience. For instance, in referencing a prodigious local history and heritage industry, Vinen is particularly attuned to the nature of his rich and various sources for the kinds of tales they tell and for the challenges they present for understanding a site marked for him by change in tandem with a durable ordinariness. At the end of the book, Vinen is prompted by the reflections on Birmingham of Jamaican migrant Victor Williams, as featured in Philip Donnellan's BBC TV documentary of 1964 *The Colony*, to elaborate on an existential question:

> Does Birmingham have a history at all? Does the town of the late eighteenth century (let alone the village of the Middle Ages) have anything in common with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? (428)

In a similar way, Harriott is concerned with the ways in which locality and aesthetic potential meet to meaningfully convey cultural identity and experience. With implications for understanding the historical practice of local writers, he notes that Birmingham is 'as far from the coast as it is possible to get', suggesting that 'the "romantic" associations of seaport, travel and overseas adventure clearly did not attach to this land-locked metropolis' (16). Likewise,

1 Paul Lay, 'How Birmingham Changed the World', *UnHerd*, 17 August 2020. Unherd.com/2020/08/how-birmingham-changed-the-world/ (accessed 1 April 2023).

the milieu conveyed in the Birmingham Group's output contrasts with that of better-known working-class writing focussed on communities and occupations organised around industries such as coal, shipbuilding or iron production. Core to the exploration of these works is a critique of what constitutes class and class-based writing.

Both books draw on rich original archival investigation and critical employment of existing material to convey original insights. Harriott's analysis of the Birmingham group relates their accounts of working-class life to depictions of work, workplace and unemployment and the impact of developments in technology. He frames their styles as informed by the 'ethnographic turn' represented by contemporary practices in documentary and modernist cinema, in projects such as Mass Observation. Critical of the limitations of contemporaneous literary models and 'purveyors of a prescriptivist Marxism' (27), he considers class in its intersection with gender, ethnic and sexual identities, offering a useful discussion of these positions. Important to the approach and arguments about the primacy or otherwise of class as a creatively generative and analytical category is the fourth chapter of the book dealing with authorial subjectivity, extending in the writing discussed beyond work into depictions of home and family life. Here, Harriott's employment of a generic concept of 'autobiografiction' has the danger of circumscribing the imaginative landscape of his writers alongside questions of their authenticity as working class or even being *from* Birmingham. As he summarises, a historical and continuing issue for analysts concerns 'those best qualified to write about working-class experience and whether accounts of working-class life should be ideologically prescriptive' (100). One result of this framing is to cause one to assess whether the authors or their works are the more interesting object of study here. Take Halward, whose working-class credentials are clear to Harriott as he was employed, variously, as 'toolmaker, die-sinker, brick-layer and plasterer', with leisure pursuits 'including cinemagoing, a spell as a dance-band drummer and bouts as an amateur boxer'. This authenticity is questioned by critic Valentine Cunningham on account of Halward being born to a pork butcher, yet physiologically affirmed in the description of contemporary Walter Allen of the writer as:

> pure Brummie, speaking no other tongue than the Birmingham accent, the product of working-class Birmingham […] At first glance he struck you as sullen, from the combination, I think, of his accent, the seemingly unhealthy urban pallor of his skin, and a broken nose he had acquired as an amateur boxer. (Quoted in Harriott, 106)

Harriott's focus is a useful companion and contrast to the broader ambition of *Second City*. That said, his authors and their milieu are sketched by Vinen who contrarily concludes that it is 'going too far' to suggest as 'London-based commentators' did that there *was* a Birmingham School. I think this is evidence of how Vinen is sometimes a little dismissive of the imaginative life and possibilities of Birmingham: the popular TV series *Peaky Blinders* is 'ludicrously implausible' (is that not the point?). However, Vinen is imaginative and deft in handling the sweep and detail of change, impressive in conveying the growing scale of the city and indeed the meaning of modern life defined by mass production, participation and consumption. As one might expect of the home of the Lunar Society, the Birmingham Union (which assembled 200,000 people for a meeting in support of the 1832 Reform Bill), the aforementioned Chamberlain dynasty, or individual figures such as the execrable Enoch Powell or media bogeyman and trade unionist Derek 'Red Robbo' Robinson, aspects of political affiliation, conflict and cooperation are key matters for consideration. Typically, Vinen finds accounts of the 'peculiarity of Birmingham's social structure' (142) such as those of Asa Briggs too static in their understanding of the nuances of class, work and industrial organisation and indeed the local character of the economy. In this analysis, few act in accord with any *a priori* theorisation about class interest, for instance, as Vinen maps complex differentials within and between social groups. Not to say that there is not a history of a whole way of struggle in evidence here, as well as confrontations with injustice, but the insight into work places and relations such as at a site like the Longbridge car factory is fascinating. Contrary to right-wing commentary, management there relied on union leaders such as the communist Bob Etheridge for stability and effective production. Still, the impression is that amidst its constant change, Birmingham has been an abidingly conservative place when it comes to politics, culture and social relations.

A structuring aspect of identity and experience in relation to Vinen's attempt to understand history in terms of a dynamic of continuity and change is bound up in the assertion that 'Birmingham has always been a migrant city' (xxx). By way of contrast, and while he is attuned to the city's mutability, this characterisation is not confirmed by Harriott's study. One infers that migration is seen as a largely post-war phenomenon, his periodisation 'limiting in that it is unable to provide an intersectional analysis of ethnic or racial categories' (223). For Vinen, however, Birmingham's emergence and growth is partly thanks to the coming to the city of Scots, Welsh and Irish migrants and their 'self-made' status as 'Brummies'. More broadly, this making of Birmingham is bound up in the idea that the city 'was the capital city of a certain view of empire' (431), albeit not one expressed in the works examined by Harriott. Where Vinen deals with the character of post-war migration, he argues that is one that must

take account of imperial power and its decline, of events such as the partition of India and its displacements. This means that any history must account for its impact on how 'remembered, and misremembered, pasts structured how people related to the city in which they lived' (xxx).

Vinen is attentive to migrant experience, not only in the face of the welcome or hostility expressed by established communities but of relations within and between them. This is apparent in chapters devoted to more recent experiences of 'Birmingham Irish' as well as 'Non-white Immigrants'. The fraught nature of this experience is witnessed in the subtitle of the latter – 'Neighbours?' – as well as supplementary appendices exploring the Birmingham Six as well as Philip Donnellan's *The Colony* (1964) for its portrait of Caribbean migrants. As one who has spent some time with the films of Donnellan, Vinen's reading analysis is an example of the insightfulness of his attention to historical documents. He rightly recognises both the originality of its attempt to afford a space for the voice and experience of migrants (as did Donnellan's suppressed 1965 film *The Irishmen*) but also attends to its deficiencies and lost opportunities. The nature of the Birmingham pub bombings and the fate of the men wrongly convicted for that atrocity continues to be a sensitive issue in the city, looming large in popular memory and grievance (a memorial to the victims was commissioned by the Birmingham Irish Association and unveiled in the city's main rail station in 2018 and *Justice for the 21* continues to campaign for enquiry). Both chapters and appendixes offer pithy insights to the structures of power and prejudice, of harrowing ignorance expressed on the part of Lord Justices, politicians and police as well as in the accounts of white primary school children, assumed to have imbibed racism in the home.

As suggested, Vinen's conclusions have an elegiac quality, unavoidable perhaps in reflecting on the rise and fall of the city's status, its fortunes and the fate of working people. He reflects on the rebuilding and rebranding of Birmingham in recent years which he rightly sees as rather contrived: 'Sometimes it seemed that Birmingham was inventing a past that was at odds with what many people must have remembered' (413). As he notes, much of the city's heritage industry celebrates a time before the living memory of most, building on ideas of community, class and work that, despite genuine aims at inclusivity, elide Commonwealth migration, the changes it has wrought and the profound challenges newcomers faced. Whatever claims for the essence of Birmingham as an abiding site of craft, skill and native ingenuity, decline is manifest most obviously in the experience of its working-class majority, of the changing nature of work available and opportunity, of community and the spaces in which they live. As he notes, while this is now a place of modest prosperity, pockets of deprivation and estates blighted by unemployment and reputation are wicked problems that would be recognisable to our ancestors.

Underpinning this study of modernity is a history of the operations of capital leading one to conclude that any sense of optimism and meaningful solutions for the future of the city are surely limited by a vision of more of the same.

The detail and focus of the histories of Vinen and Harriott are useful correctives to the concentration on London in the national imaginary and a continued neglect by cultural intermediaries of regional life and its integrity. They demonstrate the richness of Birmingham as an object of study, with substantial insights for broader thinking about class, society and culture. One should accord them the superlative Brummie praise and say that they are 'alright'.

Paul Long
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Joseph Harley, Vicky Holmes, Laika Nevalainen (eds.), ***The Working Class at Home, 1790-1940*****.** Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. xv + 260 pp. £109.99 hb. ISBN 978-3-030-89272-2.

Until relatively recently, the working-class home of the nineteenth and early twentieth century has been painted with a relatively broad brush by historians, conforming largely to two main tropes: either the sensationalist slum dwelling far removed from a home, or the nostalgic jollity of Mary Barton's cluttered but clean front parlour, stuffed with trinkets and filled by laughter and music. While there have been attempts to get beyond these representations for decades, it remains difficult not to fall into the trap of generalisation based on the sources of social explorers, philanthropists, journalists, and others who made observing the lives of working-class people their stock in trade. This edited collection, showcasing a 'new generation of writers', is a fine attempt to add nuance to our understanding with 'a more homely, diverse, and detailed picture of the interiors and the domestic lives of the working class' (2).

For an edited collection, the quality of contributions is consistently high across the piece. All the chapters are, seemingly by editorial design, grounded in historiographical debate and reflective in discussion of methodological issues with primary sources. This makes them accessible to the undergraduate reader, who could learn a wealth from following up each chapter's copious and careful referencing. The introduction is strong and thorough in placing these new perspectives in the wider trajectory of the development of social history over the last thirty years, particularly work influenced by post-linguistic-turn return to material, sensory and emotional experience, attached to a fluid definition of class that is nonetheless rooted in economic, social, and cultural realities. This informs the presentation of the collection as particularly attuned to specificities of region (as opposed to the large concentration on London in the existing

literature), including rural areas as well as urban. This does come across but only to a point: the introduction transparently remarks that, ironically due to the Covid pandemic that kept us in our homes world-wide, a wider range of chapters were lost and replaced by a narrower focus on England. There is nothing specifically on Wales, Scotland, or Ireland, or even on 'minorities' in England. This leads to Laika Nevalainen's chapter on the temporary homes of Finnish sailors and loggers being rendered somewhat of an anomaly as the sole chapter with a focus outside England (although, interestingly, much of the historiography to put these primary sources into context is also on England). This is a shame but somewhat understandable in the circumstances and leaves room for another volume as a corrective.

The book is split into three main thematic sections, although inevitably (and happily) there is some overlap. Part I on 'The Material Home' comprises chapters by Joseph Harley on pauper inventories, the life-cycle, and the material wealth of the English poor 1790–1834; Ruth Mathers on the politicisation of the English working-class home between c. 1790 and 1820; and Vicky Holmes on beds in the Victorian working-class home. Part II on 'The Emotional and Exterior Home' explores feelings toward the domestic interior and exterior in Emily Cuming's chapter on spaces of girlhood in working-class autobiography, Michael Guida on songbirds in social investigation, and Lesley Hoskins and Rebecca Preston on the use and meaning of yards, gardens and other working-class outside domestic spaces. Part III takes us to the 'Home Beyond Home' with Tessa Chynoweth on the maidservant's bedchamber of the late eighteenth century, Cara Dobbing on pauper lunatics finding 'home' in the pauper asylum between 1845 and 1906 and ending with the aforementioned chapter by Nevalainen on the everyday domestic practices of Finnish sailors and logging workers from the 1880s to the 1930s.

In a short review, I can only highlight a few chapters in more depth and this is due more to personal interest and novelty, rather than an attempt to elevate them above others. Mathers's excellent chapter is a masterful analysis of radical domestic material culture and deserves to be widely read and cited by anyone working on English politics and culture in this period. Readers of this journal may be particularly interested in Cuming's chapter, which uses Raymond Williams's work in *The Country and the City* to frame analysis of girls' working-class biographies as more than sentimental and to recover the political significance of their form. Focusing on memories of dollhouses, themselves recreations of domestic ideals in miniature, Cuming makes an original interjection into a historical area dominated by middle-class evocations and experiences of childhood. Building on recent interest in the history of pet ownership, Michael Guida's work on songbirds in social investigation (particularly Henry Mayhew) is truly fascinating. The chapter makes a strong

argument for thinking about domestic animals in the context of class relations, and the importance of going beyond the familiar (to us) cats and dogs, to embrace the more distant domestic sound of the songbird and its ubiquity in the East London working-class home. The chapter also – along with others – demonstrates how middle-class social investigation can still be a rich source of working-class experience if read critically and creatively. In what is perhaps the most original chapter of the book, Tessa Chynoweth expertly explores the ambiguity of creating a working-class enclave in a middle-class home, focusing on the bedchamber of the live-in servant.

Overall, this is a coherent and thought-provoking collection, which both builds on and provides a corrective to past scholarship, while challenging an even newer generation of scholars to widen its range further. Excellently edited and with an extensive bibliography and a particularly strong introduction, it certainly provides strong building blocks with which to do this. It is a shame then that, despite its accessibility to undergraduate readers, it is priced so highly across all formats.

Cath Feely
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Clare Anderson, *Convicts: A Global History.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022. *xv* + 476, £26.99, paperback, ISBN 978-1-1088-4072-9.

During the 1890s and around the time Anton Chekhov was studying the convicts of the Russian penal colony Sakhalin Island, he wrote in *Ward No. 6* of another penal area whose fictional superintendent, the doctor Andrey Yefimitch Ragin, comes to find himself trapped within its walls. Chekhov had spent time studying the records and statistics of the island penal colony in an attempt to understand how penal transportation had shaped the colonial ventures of the Russian Empire. Unlike Ivan Gromov, the articulate and thoughtful inmate of *Ward No. 6*, Chekhov found those on the island to be suspicious and unforthcoming during the interviews he conducted to collect information for his study. Despite these obstacles, Chekhov collected 8,000 cards containing data, albeit often with the assistance of convicts who seemed to have offered their services largely because there was little else to do on the island. From this research he produced reports on the age and birth rate of the island's inhabitants and, given the state of the conditions he witnessed during his time there, he called it 'the end of the world'.[1] Since the time of Chekhov's study, the island was sequestered between Russia and Japan before returning to full

1 Anton Chekhov, *Sakhalin Island*, trans. Brian Reeve (London: Alma Classics, 2019), 45.

Russian control at the end of the Second World War and despite repatriation and population movements associated with this transferral of power, territories around the island remain disputed.

Clare Anderson's monumental study of the history of exile and punishment traces the ways that penal colonies like Sakhalin Island have shaped the modern world. It charts how population movement, through forced and punitive migration, has shaped empire since the beginning of the fifteenth century. It is perhaps unsurprising that *Convicts: A Global History* fits, broadly speaking, into a Foucauldian tradition that examines how penal spaces have contributed to the development of structures of social regulation and control. For Anderson, histories of punishment have neglected practices associated with colonial enterprise and the development of empire. *Convicts* carefully traces how state and empire building were intertwined, and how the power of penal subjects was harnessed within colonial enterprises. Anderson's adjustment in perspective to take full account of practices like penal migration is a challenge to the view that the construction of prisons following Bentham's panopticon model provided a blueprint for social control in European states which was in turn applied to colonial territories. Instead, Anderson convincingly argues that a full account of the history of governmentality must incorporate the history of slavery, imperial governance and an understanding of the operations of exile-penal colonies like Sakhalin Island. It stands then that confinement and punishment practices exercised in colonies were pivotal in the development of discipline and punishment on a global scale. Moreover, the ways prisoners were put to work when exiled to these to these territories has implications for the development of knowledge and power, which Anderson outlines through detailed case studies across geographic contexts. The wealth of evidence presented in *Convicts* supports the recalibration in the conceptual reach of the term 'convicts' and this is the product of two decades of work across research projects. Indeed, in its pages we encounter themes and topics beyond typically conceived areas of relevance to histories of punishment and confinement: whatever the arguments over the precise timing of the so-called Great Confinement may be, Anderson disputes the view that the large-scale establishment of penal institutions was a product of modernity.

Anderson begins in the early modern period, specifically 1415, when the Portuguese Empire first started using convicts to expand its territory into North Africa. The first part of the work examines flows of forced migration, with the second half shifting its focus to the ways that these have shaped knowledge of the criminal, and the human, medical, and natural sciences. In removing and exporting undesirables, a source of labour power could be harnessed and regulated to expand, control and manage colonial territories. Depending on the context, this power shaped landscapes, the building of infrastructure,

the collection of botanical samples, the capturing of animal specimens, the study of indigenous peoples and an understanding of the impact of new environments and tropical diseases on exiles. It is in this way that Anderson shows how penal colonies generated new systems of knowledge, classification and society. Exiles became an occupying force, where voluntary migration had failed or was unfeasible. To support this view, Anderson outlines projects co-ordinated by the colonial garrisons of France, Britain and Russia that were designed to encourage permanent settlement of exiles as part of territorial expansion programmes. The sequestering of land undertaken during these works often led to the displacement of indigenous people, be it through force or through indirect ways such as new illnesses brought from Europe that decimated populations. It is through reference to an impressive number of case studies over nearly six centuries that Anderson provides a robust picture of the intricacies of punitive migration and how it has shaped a globalised world. Indeed, Anderson closes her investigation by tracing the afterlife of penal infrastructure like Sakhalin beyond their functional lives as penal colonies; be it as prisons adopted by successor states or the target of territorial disputes, these territories continue to exert their influence.

Anderson's analysis of forced migration as a central feature in the logic of colonial enterprise provides significant contributions to global history, criminal history and social history. For this reviewer, the way Anderson combines detailed archival evidence to reinterpret the convict and their placement within colonial enterprises is remarkable. In Part II of *Convicts* Anderson explores considerations on the consequences penal governmentality had for the development of knowledge of the natural and human sciences. In chapter 8 'Encounters, Exploration, and Knowledge', she assesses the links between imperial knowledge production and the ways penal practices for transporting and confining convicts were adapted to contain indigenous communities. Chapter 9, 'Medicine, Criminality, and Race' provides a detailed account of how the body of the convict contributed to clinical knowledge of race, ethnicity and disease. Anderson builds on this picture of knowledge production in colonial spaces in chapter 10, 'The Human Sciences', by interrogating the ways colonial administrators developed statistical and ethnographical methods of social science through research conducted on penal populations. In this second part of the book, Anderson provides the view that confined populations have been harnessed for the development of scientific knowledge, be it the gathering of botanical samples, social data being collected from prisoners, or as the subjects of clinical observation. The use of confined populations in the development of knowledge is an area of typical focus for the history of psychiatry, with there being a well-established field of scholarship that explores the use of asylum inmates in the development

of clinical knowledge. Anderson adds to the recent interest from historians of science that has shifted focus towards the role convicts have played in the development of the human and biological sciences, but through adopting a global perspective, her work is able to make connections that are frequently out of the reach of localised case studies. *Convicts* charts developments in the history of knowledge on a granular level and through an effective choice of case studies is able to merges them with macroscopic considerations on the policies of forced migrations adopted by European states. The brevity and detail of *Convicts* in tracing colonial governmental logic across disparate areas from the history of science to economic and social history and illuminating the marks it has left on humans, landscapes and knowledge means that it is set to be a defining text in social and population history for some time to come.

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Notes on Contributors

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Robin Harriott is an independent researcher with interests in British and American working-class writing. He received his PhD from the University of Birmingham in April 2021 following submission of 'The Birmingham Group: Reading the Second City in the 1930s', a thesis exploring the coterie

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Kevin Matthew Jones is a lecturer in the History of Science at the University of Leeds. He has research interests in the links between the history of science, science communication and public policy. He has published work on the history of psychology, mental health social services and the integrated history and philosophy of science.

Paul Long is Professor in Creative and Cultural Industries and Director of the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre at Monash University, Australia. His published research encompasses studies of class, cultural and creative production and policy, heritage and the archive. His research has often focussed on the communities and cultures of Birmingham. Now based in Melbourne, he is researching aspects of creative agency amongst the city's migrant communities of writers, musicians, comedians and artists.

Graham MacPhee is an honorary research fellow in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh University Press) and *The Architecture of the Visible* (Bloomsbury), as well as essays on modernism, twentieth-century British literature, Walter Benjamin, and Hannah Arendt. He has edited journal special issues on 'Arendt, Politics, and Culture' and 'The Banalization of War' (co-edited with Angela Naimou); and he is co-editor (with Prem Poddar) of *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective* (Berghahn). He is currently working on a study of the right-wing public intellectual and politician Enoch Powell.

Phil O'Brien (editor) is the author of *The Working Class and Twenty-First-Century British Fiction: Deindustrialisation, Demonisation, Resistance* (Routledge, 2020) and edited *Culture and Politics: Class, Writing, Socialism* (Verso, 2022) by Raymond Williams.

Nick Stevenson is Reader in Cultural Sociology at the University of Nottingham. His most recent publication is *Class*, published by Routledge earlier this year.

Joseph Williams is a postgraduate researcher at the University of East Anglia, writing a thesis on the relationship between the university and contemporary literary culture. He teaches literature seminars for the Norwich WEA on

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Raymond Williams Foundation (RWF)

Much of the development within the RWF over this last year has been of a strategic nature. Our emphasis has been on implementing the RWF strategy, adopted by RWF Trustees in summer 2022. This strategy is designed specifically with the aim of consolidating and building on the gains made during the Raymond Williams Centenary year in 2021.

The keystones of the new strategy are diversification and fair representation; this has meant increasing the range of adult learning projects that the RWF supports while ensuring that issues of fair representation are given greater practical consideration. To this end, we have developed a new targeted grants scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to fund adult learning projects being initiated by grassroots groups and to specifically target RWF funding towards groups that the foundation has historically not engaged or involved as well as it needs to: specifically, young people, people who are unwaged or on very low incomes and people of colour.

The new scheme was launched in September 2022 with two grants worth up to £1,000 being made available. The scheme was publicised to RWF members and via the RWF's X account, which now has over 2,000 followers. The quality of the 11 applications received were generally very high and almost exclusively from groups that have historically been under-represented in RWF grant-making. After a rigorous assessment process, two community-based projects were selected. The same process is now currently taking place for 2023 and, again, the levels of application have been high.

In October 2022 we supported and co-hosted the Raymond Williams Centenary coach tour. This project was led by Russell Todd, who is a community development worker based in Cardiff and was very successful, attracting 40 people on the day. We will look to develop similar activities in the future.

The second strand of our strategic activity relates to the Centenary Commission on Adult Education 'Research Circle'. Three successful Research Circle online events took place in 2022 with an overarching theme of 'Dialogues for Democracy: Cultures and Ecologies in Crisis'. This built on the 2021 events based on the theme of Resources for Hope. The Research Circle is led by Sharon Clancy, under the aegis of University of Nottingham and RWF, with Iain Jones from the University of Wales Trinity St David. In 2022 we sought to develop and broaden our focus to examine and counter the current crises in our democracy with three events focusing on 'Dialogues for Democracy: Cultures and Ecologies in Crisis'. In 2023 we have co-hosted three more events in April, June, and October with a focus on learning communities,

global/local perspectives and the question of challenges to power and control in relation to learning.

We are also currently trialing a regional Research Circle initiative which will offer subsidised bursaries to support participants' attendance at Regional Research Circles in the West Midlands. These will be themed face to face events/workshops aimed at 'building up of knowledge of community needs'.

Open-access Policy – Green Route

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is now committed to supporting open-access publishing, a policy which impacts directly on submissions for the next Research Excellence Framework (REF). For the most recent HEFCE policy guide, please consult www.hefce. ac.uk/whatwedo/rsrch/rinfrastruct/oa/policy/.

On acceptance for publication in *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, authors may deposit the accepted pre-publication version of their article on a personal or university department website, in a subject repository, or in their university's research repository.

As soon as the article is published in *Key Words*, the published version may replace the pre-published version, but only after an embargo period of 24 months during which period the published version may not be made publicly available. Authors may, however, use the published version of the article for teaching purposes or for sharing with research colleagues on an individual, non-commercial basis. All issues are also made available for free, 24 months after publication, at www.raymondwilliams.co.uk/view-issues/.

Style Notes for Contributors

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Key Words is an internationally refereed academic journal. In the first instance typescripts for prospective publication should be submitted as an email attachment to the Contributions Editor David Alderson, University of Manchester at david.alderson@manchester.ac.uk. Articles should normally be no longer than 8,000 words; reviews should typically be no longer than 1,500 words. Articles should be double spaced, with generous margins, and pages should be numbered consecutively. For matters of style not addressed below, please refer to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edn or www.chicagomanualofstyle.org. Contributors who fail to observe these notes may be asked to revise their submission in accordance with them.

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Key Words is prepared electronically. Consequently, contributors whose work is accepted for publication will be asked to supply a file copy of their work to the Contributions Editor. The preferred word processing format is Microsoft Word (any version).

References and Bibliographic Conventions

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Please cite books in the following manner:

On first citation: Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama, 1954).

On subsequent citations: Williams and Orrom, *Preface to Film*, 12.

Please cite journal articles in the following manner:

Patrick Parrinder, 'Politics, Letters and the National Curriculum', *Changing English* 2, no. 1 (1994): 29.

Chapters in books should be referenced in the following way:

Andrew McRae, 'The Peripatetic Muse: Internal Travel and the Cultural Production of Space in Pre-Revolutionary England', in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550–1850*, ed. Gerald MacLean, Donna Landry and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 41–57.

For internet articles:

Raymond Williams Society Executive, 'About the Raymond Williams Society', Raymond Williams Society, www.raymondwilliams.co.uk (accessed 26 March 2012).

Please refer to newspaper articles in the following way:

John Mullan, 'Rebel in a Tweed Suit', *The Observer*, 28 May 2005, Features and Reviews section, 37.

A thesis should be referenced in the following manner:

E. Allen, 'The Dislocated Mind: The Fictions of Raymond Williams' (PhD diss., Liverpool John Moores University, 2007), 22–9.

Conference papers should be cited in the following style:

Dai Smith, 'Translating Raymond Williams' (paper presented at the Raymond Williams's Culture and Society@50 conference, Canolfan Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea, 7 November 2008).

Quotations

For quotations use single quotation marks, and double quotation marks for quotations within quotations. Punctuation is used outside quotations. Ensure that all spellings, punctuation, and abbreviations within a quotation are rendered exactly as in the original, including errors, which should be signalled by the authorial interpolation '(*sic*)'.

Book reviews

Book reviews should open with full bibliographic details of the text under review. These details should include (in the following order): in bold type, first name(s) and surname(s) of author(s), or first name(s) and surname(s) of editor(s) followed by a parenthetic '(ed.)' or '(eds)'; in italics, the full title of the volume followed by a period and a hard return; then, in regular type, the place of publication, publisher and date of publication; the page extent of the volume, including front papers numbered in Roman numerals; the price (where available) of the supplied copy and an indication of 'pb.' or 'hb.'; and the ISBN of the supplied copy. For example: **Dai Smith, *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale*.** Cardigan: Parthian Books, 2008. xviii + 514 pp. £24.99 hb. ISBN 978-1-905762-56-9.