VII.

Conclusion: Modernism – The Culture of Non-Community

Raymond Williams was born in 1921. In the following year T.S. Eliot published *The Waste Land,* James Joyce completed *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf released her first experimental novel *Jacob's Room* . It seems ironic that Williams's birth coincided with the emergence of a literature which was to be received as the creative high point of English speaking modernism, for if Williams was a child of modernism, he was born with an apparent disposition to work against its grain. From at least one perspective Williams's whole persona stands in a defiantly negative relation to the cultural programme and political bearings of modernism. When, shortly before his own death, he tentatively celebrated the signs that the period of "conscious modernism" was coming to a close, he was welcoming the passing of an antagonist against which much of his own cultural poetics was motivated.[1] Despite modernism's famous resistance to periodisation, Williams, by his own account, lived within the nebulous parameters of its epoch, and as an upholder of the Marxist's "right to dream" he had to face the contradiction of living through a literary and artistic period which, despite its elastic definitions, is predominantly evoked by a string of unremittingly dystopic metaphors.

By conventional accounts modernism rises out of the new metropolis, habitat of the homeless exiled and immigrant artists who find in their own foreignness, dislocation, and "strangeness" of speech a mode of expressing the "shock" experience compatible with the existential doubts and philosophical interrogations of the period. Accepting this "strangeness" as its formal signature modernism worked to defamiliarise normative modes of perception and expression. Yet despite the artistic freedom implied by its negation of conventional forms modernism's decentring instinct appears to compel the artist to be the tormented author of a dark history. Aiming to disregard the "empty flow of history" the artists themselves appear to be under "specific, apparently historical strain" as they write the narrative of spiritual desolation and social alienation.[2] Modernism, despite its initially buoyant spirit of novelty and innovation, becomes art's own reflexive engagement with the crisis of its culture.

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[1] Raymond Williams, "The Estranging Language of Post-Modernism", *New Society*, June 1983, p. 439.
[2] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds. *Modernism 1890–1930,* p. 26.

Having killed in its wars and lived through its deadlocks and defeated aspirations Williams was well acquainted with modernity's bleakness. But while registering the failures of our age, he refused, in that obstinate way that marks his character, to bend to an interpretation of such defeats as a final cancellation of hope. In rejecting this scepticism Williams also turned away from and renounced much of the celebrated aesthetic achievement of his own time, for the impulses of existential confusion and profound subjectivity driving modernist art had little, at face value, to offer the great communitarian. Indeed modernism appeared to be founded on the very disestablishment of communal reality. As Bradbury and McFarlane argue:

> The communal universe of reality and culture on which nineteenth-century art had depended was over.[3]

For these critics modernism is founded on nothing less than the "apocalypse of cultural community", just as for Tony Pinkney its advent represents that particular moment "when the static, mythic or circular temporality of the 'organic community' ends".[4] Modernism's conscious introspection, social indeterminacy and fragmented narrative technique perpetually echo the violation of connection and continuity.

While Williams could obviously identify with the thesis of contemporary alienation and share, in a more general way, modernism's hostility to bourgeois complacency, he also found that its potential revolutionary capacity had very quickly given way to a cynical acceptance of the modern condition as a fixed and inevitable state, a "modern absolute" which presented the human condition as "effectively permanent". For Williams this ideology merely turned its back on social struggle, cultivating an acceptance or hollow indifference to capitalist hegemony. Of modernism's radical claim to expose false totalities, Williams could only look-on with bewilderment at its tendency to "objectify" the agency of capital, a power which for him represented the most threatening and dominating of all totalising forms. Personally he could never accept the permanence or inevitability of capitalist domination, and modernism's intense subjectivity and obsession with its own formal qualities became, in the end, a "fallacious response to particular conditions of

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[3] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds. *Modernism 1890–1930,* p. 27.
[4] See Tony Pinkney's Introduction to Williams's *The Politics of Modernism*, p. 3.

closure, breakdown, failure and frustration."[5] It is in this respect that Williams rejected "the politics of modernism".[6]

Under this title Tony Pinkney has assembled a collection of essays that formed the basis of a book Williams was contemplating before his death.[7] However, in his introduction to the volume Pinkney presents an evaluation of Williams's relation to modernism that seems to run counter to the position Williams sets down in the essays themselves. Pinkney's assessment of Williams seeks to demonstrate that both his criticism and fiction demonstrate a formal interest and psychological reliance upon modernist modes of imagery. This latent disposition in Williams has not gone unnoticed by other critics. There is a strong sense of it in Jan Gorak's account of the solitariness of Williams's "alien mind" which somehow seems to operate in contradistinction to his own communal ethos, so that, as Gorak argues, it is in fact "alienation" above all other things that "supplies the key by which Williams can be unlocked."[8] This sense of personal alienation as a determining element of his work is initially apparent in his deep identification with the defeated and isolated protagonists of Ibsen's plays. And in declaring the necessity for a form that would transcend the social limitations and class specificity of naturalism, he looked with enthusiasm upon the dramatic possibilities of the early modernism of expressionist theatre, and particularly to the experimentation of the later work of Ibsen and then Strindberg. It was in the development of non-naturalist techniques and the more precise use of symbolism that Williams saw the possibility to extend the parameters of naturalism so as to effectively represent the psychological and subconscious realities beyond external mimetic representation. Much of this emphasis on extending formal possibilities was also at the heart of his admiration for the expressionist montage editing and filmic technique of Eisenstein, Lang, Weine and Murnau, of which he sees the formal qualities of Strindberg's *Road to Damascus* as a dramatic precursor. In his second edition of dramatic studies *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* Williams extends the range of his earlier survey to consider the work of Pirandello, Ionesco, Genet and Beckett, and while he clearly has his reservations about their loss of social context and the distancing effect of their

[5] Raymond Williams, "The Emergence of Modernism", *The Politics of Modernism*, p. 47.
[6] In this respect Williams's position echoes the official Communist denunciation of the decadence and individualism of the Russian Avant-Garde.
[7] Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists.*
[8] Jan Gorak, *The Alien Mind of Raymond Williams*, p. 8.

language he endorses their general attempt to come to terms with the new century's crisis of consciousness.

The problem that Williams faced was that as he increasingly worked towards a full integration of his communal political bearings and his literary practice, he had to confront an insistent representation of experience in which "break-down" rather than "continuity" was the governing theme. His political/critical emphasis on a "community of expression" within a more general "community of culture" was predicated upon a holistic and unitary sense of stability that was vigorously interrogated by modern art. It was continually calling into question the conceptual validity and actual relation to experience of Williams's profound desire to "connect". If he was to counter this disassociation of communal bearings in modern thought, he had to find an aesthetic that would accommodate the collective enterprise of his socialist beliefs. To this degree he was almost compelled to re-trace his steps and start afresh, reinventing himself as Lukacs's heir and turning his critical focus away from the contemporary problematic of modernist forms and back towards the unifying sensibility of nineteenth-century realism. Against the anti-community of modernism and the dramatic limitations of naturalism, Williams proclaimed the great achievement of the realist novel. His patronage was based on what are by now the familiar grounds of his literary/political nexus. Realism, like "community" and "culture" in their ideal forms, "creates and judges the quality of a whole way of life". His earlier endorsement of the "radical charge" of modernism now gives way to his expression of its "negative freedoms" and awakening concern that the shock of the new, under deep ideological pressures, had mutated into a form of decadent indifference and a cynical reduction of "the whole status of human beings".[9]

Demanding the reinvigoration of the lost epic narrative against the distanciation of modernism's exacerbated individualism, in which he now began to sense the chimera of a fascist politics, Williams outlined his position in his chapter on "Realism and the Contemporary Novel" in *The Long Revolution.* While on the face of it this account represents a fairly unambiguous denunciation of the modernist tendencies of contemporary fiction, what is still evident is the awkward relation between his rejection of modernism and what he sees as the creative necessity to embrace new

[9] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters,* p. 392.

forms that will "literally create the world" and provide the basis of a "new realism". How this "new realism" will substantially differ from modernism's own celebrated attempts to break from traditional practices and write "the new" is the real point of tension that Williams must eventually negotiate.

The great achievement of the realist novel for Williams is its ability to connect the individual experience with the general processes of the social life, to demonstrate the way in which the substance of the whole way of life "actively affects the closest personal experience". In foregoing the methods which facilitate such connection the modern novel has succumbed to "the fiction of special pleading" and a "damaging unbalance" between object-realist and subject-impressionist modes. But as Williams fully recognises, this division of the personal and the social is a deeply entrenched response to the experience of isolation, alienation and self-exile that is, as he puts it, a crucial element of "the contemporary structure of feeling". Williams was a cold-war casualty of exactly this type of estrangement and isolation, and it was in response to its burden that he championed the renewal of communal values. The realist novels of Eliot, Tolstoy and Lawrence offered a model of connecting relationships within an indivisible whole, that vital interpenetration of "person into community, change into settlement", yet as Williams understood, such a model could never be adequately applicable to a contemporary world. As he remarks, "the realist novel needs ... a genuine community" and it is "obviously difficult, in the twentieth-century, to find a community of this sort."[10] The experiences of dislocation and estrangement are the effects of powerful social pressures which need to be articulated:

> Since I know the pressures, I admit the responses, but my case is that we are reaching deadlock, and that to explore a new definition of realism may be the way to break out of the deadlock and find a creative direction.[11]

The new direction is not a reversion to the formula of the great realist epoch, indeed Williams is surprisingly candid in his rejection of the "naive" and "static" realism of the unproblematic narrator, writing it off as a "hardened convention" of the past.[12] His emphasis is now firmly on the "deeply necessary" task of formulating "new acts of perception, interpretation and

[10] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 286.
[11] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 287.
[12] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 288.

organisation". But this emphasis alone never overcomes the essential quandary he has raised, for what form will such a new realism take? Clearly Williams wants to preserve that element of realism which will creatively express and define the relationship between individual and society in "absolute" terms so that what is revealed is the way in which "the substance of a general way of life actively affects the closest personal experience." It is this "balance" between the claims of the individual and society that Williams is after, but the very term "balance" is part of the problem, for this metaphor of symmetry is only another version of the equilibrium of wholeness, continuity and connection. Williams is appealing for an "organic" form that will represent modernity, and the issue is whether this is not a somewhat nostalgic even disabling basis for such a project. As the interviewers of *Politics and Letters* have asked:

> Could the canons of 19th-century realism hypothetically cope with the increased complexity of 20th-century industrial capitalism, whose much greater anonymity and impersonality - it is often argued - preclude the kind of totalizing imagination classically to be found in Balzac or even Dickens?[13]

Accepting the point Williams recognises the problem as the crisis of contemporary realism, the extreme complication of a form based on the acknowledgment of a "knowable" world but which now confronts a modern experience which cannot, in former ways, be apprehended or known with the same degree of confidence.

It is exactly this difficulty that informs Williams's own fiction. His negotiation of the problem of accommodating modern experience to realist conventions is central to his literary project. The general difficulty he faces is further exacerbated by his desire to represent a particularly working class experience which even the nineteenth-century realist form had itself struggled to embrace. While his aim is to develop a narrative structure that will resolve these tensions between form and subject matter, the final result is more an exposure of the difficulties themselves, a writing of the "experience of uncertainty and contradiction" as he puts it.[14] The dilemma Williams inherits from bourgeois realism is the problem of the consciously "educated observer" that he has identified in the pastoral novels of Eliot and Hardy, and which manifests itself as a linguistic and consequently class distinction, a middle class observation of working class life. Like D.H.

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[13] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters,* p. 276.
[14] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters,* p. 272.

Lawrence Williams has an intimate experience of the working class to draw upon, but again like Lawrence he has, through his own social mobility, willingly severed contact with that life, absorbed a cosmopolitan perspective and learned a new language. And it is just such working class exiles that become the central protagonists of Williams's novels, dislocated individuals, returning natives, drawn by an idea of "settlement" but ultimately incapable of letting down the complex armoury of defenses they have constructed in order to preserve themselves against the hostilities of the non-community of their worldly experience. As is consistent with his general anti-urban prejudice, the immigrants of Williams's fiction appear badly wounded by the competitive individualism and mechanical relationships of the city. So badly scarred are they by their knowledge of the wider society they are disallowed from making any unqualified reconnection with their forsaken settlements. The constant theme of "returning", of coming home to a particular physical "place" serves largely as a spatial metaphor for what proves to be a highly internalised psychological intrigue, a private investigation into the alienated individual's quest for self-comprehension and self-definition. What unites almost all of Williams's important characters is their search for the recovery of a centre of stable value (identity, family, community) which they feel as an absence in their own experience. Matthew Price, Peter Owen, Gwyn Lewis and Lewis Redfern are all in need of emotional recovery, and it is to the ideals of place and settlement that they reach tentatively for their healing. But such recovery, which requires some resolution between their present condition and the memory traces of their past, is invariably blocked by the unsettling suspicion that what they seek to recover is a life they have never really lived at all.

This is where Williams's ambition to return to the realist mode of connecting individual and society confronts the defining paradox of his work. For while, at the narrative level, Williams seeks to bring the individual and the social into relation with each other, the deep sense of alienation which marks his protagonists has the over-riding effect of cancelling the intent of his "new" realist project. Seeking to imbue his work with organic "rhythms" which connect past and present through the metaphorical continuity of landscapes, seasonal cycles and local and individual histories, and which will tie together the three parts of his Welsh trilogy, he cannot finally reconcile this desire for narrative wholeness with the juxtaposed disconnection of the damaged psyches of his characters. The lasting affect of Williams's fiction is the memory of hardened and bitter figures undergoing various forms of existential anxiety and who through

their experiences of that "self-conscious, competitive, metropolitan exchange" are so utterly disillusioned that they seem almost emotionally incapable of connecting at any meaningful level. These figures become Williams's own version of the modernist "stranger", and the fact that for the most part they are Welsh, working class born, left wing writers, academics and journalists only adds to the psycho-biographical sense of his fiction. The sense, as Gorak has noted, that Williams's work is the endless rewriting of his own alienation.

In the first of the trilogy, *Border Country*, Williams presents a working class community which possesses much of the character of the *Gemeinschaft* ideal, but his determination to avoid the nostalgia of "the Welsh novel" leads him to mediate the claims of this ideal through the crisis of that community's returning native. Matthew Price's recall to Glynmawr is prompted by the imminent death of his father, yet despite the sombre nature of this reunion, his almost immediate reversion to the local idiom suggests the promise of some impending familial connection with blood and place. The initial awkwardness occasioned by the circumstance of his return is impressively rendered by Williams, but the anticipated softening and gradual easing back into the rhythms of the village life of Matthew's youth never eventuates. The accents and mannerisms of the local speech represent the only significant point of communal integration he is able to achieve. In his deep self-consciousness, his restless irritability and his entirely humourless demeanour he presents a somewhat unexpected figure of "radical distrust". Matthew is a man, as his former lover remarks, who has lost some essential human quality, who has "forgotten every ordinary feeling". His unrelenting coldness compels almost every person he comes in contact with to respond in kind to his terse defensiveness and desperate physical discomfort. What comes across is Matthew's remarkably anti-social disposition and hostility towards the pressures applied by a community which seeks to draw him emotionally back into its world.

The negative pressures of a close community form the thematic centre of Williams's *Second Generation* where the limitations of experience exacerbate a desire to break out of a stultifying conformism. This search for social fulfilment leads only to the futility of empty sexual transgressions and the breakdown of the communal values of family and neighbour. Within this work Peter Owen is the acerbic self-obsessed heir of Matthew Price's malcontent. Owen not only shares the blunt aggravated spareness of Price's speech, but his conversational mode has a

convoluted strangeness about it, as if he is only ever thinking out loud, constantly embroiled in a tense internal rumination. Far from expressing any communal affinity, he is almost pathologically incapable of committing himself to any form of relationship, being "neither physically present nor physically responsive". While in *Border Country* Williams has tried to balance an external objective overview with the subjective impressions of an individual in crisis, *Second Generation* is a far more interiorised work, surprisingly devoid of collective scenes, concentrating instead on the fragmentation of a single family, and only dimly backdropped by the scene of industrial unrest and political defeat. This increasingly internalised narrative perspective of his fiction is an indirect response to the problem his literary criticism has so powerfully engaged with, the aesthetic difficulty of capturing and formally articulating the "knowability" of an increasingly complex social organisation. This is the point at which Williams's realist initiative falters. For as he has himself acknowledged, an effective realism, if it is to make the necessary connections, requires a certain overview of the social mechanism. George Eliot's realist "web" requires a centre, and for someone of Williams's political perspective, the representation of modern industrial capitalism requires a defining centre of power, an identifiable enemy whose presence is reflected in the mutated structure of contemporary social organisation. Yet as his work progresses Williams increasingly defers his realist imperative, now demonstrating his own unwillingness to imaginatively "materialise" the character of power. He is drawn instead into representing power and domination through a study of its "effects" as they act upon the consciousness of his individual protagonists. As these effects are seen in his fiction to be the actual producers of alienation, the idea of connection, of welding the parts to the whole, becomes, again, deeply problematic. For without any representation of the source of power and domination, Williams's idea of the realist whole is devoid of its implicit centre.

In his later novels power becomes even more opaque, beyond vision, and so beyond the realist convention of physical representation. In *The Fight for Manod* the central characters Price and Owen are insidiously "incorporated" as experts into a Welsh community project. While it is they who finally reveal that the communal city of the future is a cynical corporate strategy motivated by the malignant grasp of unknowable multinational mergers, off-shore banking business and the bureaucratic machinery of government, their victory is limited to the revelation of corruption rather than the identification of a conscious enemy. This same sense of the

"unknowable" reverberates throughout the personal and political intrigue of *Loyalties*. Here Williams angrily depicts the betrayal of a noble Welsh working class by a left wing intelligentsia who forsake local struggle for the covert theatre of cold war espionage. From the outset the whole question of identity is at issue, and while Williams's realism works to connect by putting the pieces of the extraordinarily complicated puzzle back together again, once this is done, what we are left with is a picture of personal and social betrayal, of defeat and breakdown. *The Volunteers*, written in the form of a detective novel and set in a future world is a further remove from realism. Investigative journalist Lewis Redfern follows leads in order to "make sense" of secret organisations and clandestine operations. While he solves the political riddle, his public investigation becomes a private interrogation of his own "incorporation" by "Insatel", a media cartel with an Orwellian sense of saturating but unknowable authority.

It is in these later works that the sombre heaviness of Williams's fiction takes on its full weight, for even though his novels invariably end with some guarded air of resolution or reconciliation, his work contains such an "undercurrent of sadness" that despite the affirming rhetoric of his conclusions there is no convincingly germinal quality that looks with any confidence to the future.[15] Instead his work is borne down by a surprising sense of negation and cancellation. The utopian elements of his fiction are restricted to the pastoral nostalgia he privileges as the knowable but disappearing alternative to the unfathomable world of cosmopolitan high-capitalism. And it is this negative dimension which provides the strange incongruity between Williams's cultural criticism and his fiction. For while as a critic Williams continually resists the Althusserian view of unremitting ideological domination, his fiction is often determined by exactly this sense of our susceptibility to such incorporation and containment. In a revealing eventuality his fiction all but chronicles the psychological defeat of the political left in which the collective aspirations of the radical are subsumed by an intractable class enemy who escapes concrete identification, and who is clearly a powerful impediment to the prospects of a humanity seeking to make its own history. And then the question that needs to be asked is how the final form of Williams's fiction significantly distinguishes itself from a modernism that presents the human condition as "effectively permanent", and how, in the end, it differs from that "fallacious response to particular conditions of closure, breakdown, failure and frustration" which Williams rejects as the negative

[15] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 294.

politics of modernism. Within his novels there is no potent subjunctive mode, no reassuringly affirmative prospectus, and in this sense Williams seems to succumb to the ideological pressures of modernism and its bitter cancellation of tomorrow. Eagleton has argued that Williams is "ideologically bound to the moment of nineteenth century realism" but it is perhaps the tragedy of the Marxist realist that he needs to be, for the anticipatory moments of classical realism in which Williams could detect the emergence of a radical structure of feeling seem to perish in his own attempt to develop a realist form appropriate to modern experience.[16]

Far from any teleological optimism Williams reflects a world of diminishing prospects, and in this respect his novels cannot be usefully enlisted among his own "resources of hope". One can understand the difficulty clearly enough, for projecting an alternative world as it could be or should be presents creative difficulties of a kind not encountered in any realist representation of how the world is or appears to be. As a social critic Williams can afford the luxury of more abstract projections on the community of the future, but imaginatively expressing the felt quality of this life and the road that leads to it is beyond Williams's art, if not beyond any realism. Just as Hell appears more amenable to representation than Heaven, so Williams quite naturally paints despair with more confidence than redemption. And this applies equally to his literary criticism which despite its air of positive hermeneutic is still primarily orientated toward a negative mode of critique bent on denying the legitimacy of domination. This engagement at close quarters with the enemy seems to have the effect of drawing his intellectual energy deeper into the field of domination, so that while his critical eye vigilantly challenges the claims of an oppressive minority, it seems less adroit at seeing its way clear of domination's entanglements. This is why, finally, Williams's work is to be taken as a decisive identification and mapping of the strategic fields of "cultural violence" rather than a prospective poetics of liberation.[17] In this respect Williams is a somewhat Promethean figure, defiantly forecasting liberation, but compelled by the nature of domination to the close examination and unravelling of his own chains. At the significant points of engagement there is the sense that as Williams strikes a blow against the dominant ideology he also reveals his own degree of ideological incorporation, indicating that

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[16] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 36.

[17] Even in his last book *Towards 2000* where he begins by defending utopian thought and concludes with his chapter "Resources of Hope" the sense of optimism is wholly undermined by the bitter analysis of the ominous "Plan X" of capitalism's invisible power brokers.

while he may be able to identify the hand of domination he is still subject to its insidious grasp. Just as his fiction absorbed many of the ideological implications of modernism, so his critical investigations into the notions of culture and community have also been subject to a certain reproduction or valorising of the ideology it seeks to discredit.

Extolling the values of a "community of expression" in his early dramatic studies, Williams was looking to lay the foundation for a socialist aesthetic only to find that the influential arguments and procedures he adopted were those of figures he would later recognise as among his chief antagonists. By adopting a Leavisian criticism and the cultural values of T.S. Eliot he was to find his own critical initiative derailed by the myth of contemporary cultural decline and the valorising of the "organic community" of pre-industrial life. So impressed is he with the rigorous commitment of his opponents that his oppositional impulse defers to the more polite considerations of a conciliatory position. As the mediating voice of the "culture and society" debate Williams draws a lineage of culturalist thought leading to his own concluding sermon in which he argues for an egalitarian "community of culture", yet at the same time his radical socialist coda submits to the desire for inclusion as the latest heir to the tradition he outlines, so that despite its "oppositional" intent and challenge to reactionary positions on culture, his book is received with acclaim from the critical establishment and accused of a conservative bias by the left.

Even the undisguised hostility of the revolutionary politics of *Modern Tragedy* has the effect of validating the cultural authority of the critical tradition it mobilises itself against. Seeking to reaffirm the communal basis of the origins of tragedy against the critical academy's emphasis on individual crisis, Williams's own accounts of modern tragic drama tend to unconsciously consolidate the sense of tragic inevitability which he reasons to be the ideological position of a dominant order confident of its universalist assumptions. Here his desire for communal redemption confronts the dark finality of a tragic view of life that has "got into the blood stream" so that in the tragic drama of the twentieth-century he hears only "the last cries of a dying world". Determined to write the tragedy of community Williams set out in *The Country and the City* to liberate the term from the nostalgic abstractions that celebrated a mythical past as a protest against the mechanised present. Yet even while he could brilliantly expose the political and cultural implications of upholding an idealised image of an organic community, clearly his

own optimistic rendering of the socialist community of the future is deeply dependent upon this same organic motif and its intrinsic reliance on the ideas of wholeness, homogeneity, connection and totality. His emotional bias towards the community of the rural working class saw him effectively reproduce a nostalgia for stable settlement, cooperative values and a neighbourliness "beyond calculation" that mitigated the force of his political initiative. By privileging the communal values of the country he effectively marginalised the experience of an urban proletariat which he himself recognised as the primary catalyst of revolutionary activity. The residual organicism informing his work is evident in the emphasis he puts upon the agrarian root of the word culture to which he is able to transfer all the totalising metaphors with which he adorns community. In fact the two terms become highly interchangeable, so that Williams can talk of a community of culture just as easily as he can examine the culture of a community.

As his collection of *Keywords* testifies Williams has always been manifestly conscious of the ambiguous character of language, and the duplicity of his own foundational terms marks the conceptual tensions that his criticism is forced to repeatedly negotiate. Williams's desire to connect the past with the present and to create a critical continuity of thought surrounding the idea of culture has carried its price, for by drawing on a nineteenth-century tradition of social criticism and then applying its cultural and communal emphases to a contemporary world, he finds himself to be the latent conveyor of an ideology that his own versions of culture and community work to transcend. Culture can offer Williams a "material" alternative to economic determinism, a sense of active process by which he can combat reification, and a field of counter-hegemonic practice, yet, if it is to carry this full weight, culture needs to address the contradictions of its own semantic history. Just as, beyond its ideal, community has also been the site of prejudice, servitude and conformism, culture too has been subject to an excluding, self-promoting and reactionary discourse, and Williams has struggled to extricate this ideological presence in his own pursuit of culture's liberating promise. As he has written himself, "it is as if every attempt to break out, to tell the truth, is met by a revelation of the truth-teller's complicity".[18]

[18] Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 114.

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