V.

The Unknowable Community

To what extent was there ever a genuine community ...?[1]

The question, somewhat surprisingly, is Raymond Williams's own. Its asking represents a significant moment in his critical development, a realisation of the difficulties he faces in placing such an absolute priority on the notion of community. Never before has he cast such a seed of doubt over its immanence. And while here the context of the question relates specifically to the pastoral village, Williams's persistent recourse to the ideal of community as an evaluative touchstone by which all social orders may be examined and judged demands that the question be asked with a broader application, taking in his whole notion of community in all its descriptive and prescriptive diversity.

The term itself has a multivalent complexity which invites ambiguity and often masks its vast social, moral and political implications. Williams himself has never escaped its paradoxical nature. Despite his stringent critique of Leavis's "organic" community in *Culture and Society*, an abstracted notion of community continually informs his own critical strategies. Using the concept as a double-edged device, Williams simultaneously adorns community with an auratic, almost religious value by which to morally condemn an individualist society, while persistently deeming it to be a self-evident and wholly knowable material entity by which he can then empirically validate his claims for an attainable alternative.

An investigation into Williams's application of his principal "keyword" reveals a somewhat quixotic character within his work, for like other materialist critics of the left he has struggled to adequately "materialise" the communitarian premise by which he criticises the modern capitalist epoch, failing to provide his evocation of community with a substantially tangible referent. Community as the cure for modernity's ills becomes a healing by faith, immersed in mystification. Semantically the term, as Williams inherited it, is already loaded with a double function possessing both the materiality of a primary and physical site of human enterprise, as well as serving as a

[1] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 103.

humane ideal habitually defined as a particular quality of relationship arising out of fraternity, kinship and the commonality of shared desires, perceptions and experiences.

This moral and material nexus often takes shape in the telling of a history which posits the externalised legislation of "the state" against the internalised values of a communal infrastructure. The tendency to polarise the "officially directed" against the "commonly held" propels the concept of community into a wider discourse of economic, geographic, cultural and class dichotomies. The term becomes politicised, an agent of both resistance and utopian teleology, negating the present while offering a positive alternative for the future, and based ironically on an idealised recollection of the past.[2]

In general "community" takes the high ground above the competing term "society" which has its own sense of geographical space and an encoded value system, though of a more mobile kind. "Society" overlaps and shares so many of the referents associated with community that the points by which they may be distinguished from each other help reveal the idealist/materialist duality which underpins their prevalent usage, and which is quite central to the linguistic paradox Williams has to confront and contend with.

The complex relationship between the two signifiers is evident in the definitions provided by the *OED* in which the terms serve as synonyms for each other. Community is described as "society, the social state" while society is "the aggregate of persons living together in a more or less ordered community". Etymologically both terms can refer to the oneness of the "body politic" and the mutual obligation and indebtedness of the "social contract".[3] In *Keywords* Williams's separate analysis of the terms points out that while both have served to define "a system of common life", the sense of society as "mutual co-operation" had by the nineteenth century given way to the idea of "the social system", the experience of individualism and

[2] The moral and material nexus is historically explicit in the agricultural sense of the related term "common" which constitutes a geographical space that is also functionally related to shared usage, and carries the moral significance of an idealised collectivisation and cooperation. Importantly, the term belongs to a pre-industrial rural world, and the "enclosure acts" of the state legislation which dismantled the common field system are consistently associated with the destruction of this element of traditional community.

[3] Georges Van Den Abbeele notes that "the West has tried to theorise community, between the organicist notion of the "body politic" most colloquially linked with Hobbes and the idea of social contract popularised by Locke and the Enlightenment philosophers. *Community at Loose Ends*, p. xi.

competition.[4] Against this emphasis, or as an alternative to it, the ideas of the common and co-operative became predominantly the property of the term community.

The distinction Williams makes between the two amounts to a matter of emphasis rather than any linguistic precision. Community is given a warm association with the collaboration of "free men" bound by enduring loyalties, while society becomes indicative of a cold state bureaucracy, "the organisation of power, drawing on the senses of hierarchy and majesty".[5] Societal values become linked to the apparatus of administration and are deemed to be less concerned with cultivating harmony than with the ordering, disciplining and maintenance of social institutions. Williams's definitions imbue both terms with political resonance as well as moral dimensions. Community is productive and supportive while society is oppressive and constraining.

Essentially Williams is maintaining the distinctions which Ferdinand Tönnies formalised in his sociological analysis *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society).[6] Tönnies defines *Gemeinschaft* (community) in terms of "the three pillars of blood, place and mind" in which the emphasis is on land, homogeneity, face to face relationships, limited mobility, sentimental attachment and emotional cohesion.[7] *Gesellschaft* on the other hand is characterised by individualism, competitiveness, mobility, and impersonal legislative control. The essential nature of the distinction he makes is between the "natural will" and the "rational will". Against the homogeneous organicism of *Gemeinschaft* is the rational intellect of a *Gesellschaft* in which "all its activities are restricted to a definite end and a definite means of obtaining it".[8] As Bell and Newby point out the distinction is similar to that which Max Weber makes between "traditional" authority and "rational-legal" authority.[9]

Yet what becomes apparent in both the analyses of Tönnies and Williams is that "society" increasingly comes to represent a reflection of the effects of capitalism, and furthermore, both

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[4] Raymond Williams, *Keywords,* p. 75–76 and p. 291–95.
[5] Raymond Williams, *Keywords,* p. 293.
[6] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society.*
[7] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, p. 42–44. Tönnies also makes the relevant observation that "Community will reinforce and encapsulate a moral code, raising moral tensions and rendering heterodoxy a serious crime, for in a community everyone is known and can be placed in the social structure." p. 24.
[8] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, p. 194.
[9] Colin Bell and Howard Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community.* p. 25.

society and capitalism become defined by characteristics which are almost inevitably associated with the negative descriptions of an urban environment.[10] Williams's own position is particularly ambivalent in this respect, for while he argues that agrarian capitalism pre-dated urban industrial capitalism and precipitated the rural crisis which broke up much of traditional village life, he can nevertheless be unreasonably negative in his representations of the metropolis, as if the city itself is to stand accused for the demise of rural community. It is this latent anti-urban bias that drives him deeper into the very myth of the "organic" community he otherwise seeks to deconstruct. Community for Williams becomes the positive antithesis of both urban society and capitalism, and its ostensible moral values are those by which the latter are condemned.

The concept of community becomes the centripetal structure which activates Williams's negotiation of the polarity he ascribes in the title of his most important work, *The Country and the City*. However, the evasive nature of the concept presents itself as problematic from the outset:

> 'Country' and 'city' are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities.[11]

Setting these "powerful words" against each other in order to explore the way that history, art, tradition, myth and mendacity have played upon them, Williams analyses the multiplicity of their terms of reference as they have been apprehended by literary representation, revealing a flux of interminable discursive patterns. Yet beyond his revelations a deeper problem remains, for within the web of overlapping definitions and antithetical referents Williams is unable to finally identify what "the experience of human communities" should be taken to mean, or how it should differ, if at all, from the "history of human settlements" or the "achievements of human society". The fact that Williams uses all three phases in the short opening paragraph of *The Country and the City* indicates the complications and the general nature of the problem he faces. For while here the terms may be taken to represent approximately the same thing, Williams's own analysis of urban and rural relations tends to force distinctions between "settlement",

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[10] As Richard Sennett writes " Tönnies, like Ruskin and Saint-Simon, translated the two terms into space. He made them contrasts between villages and cities ..." *The Conscience of the Eye*, p. 24.

[11] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 1.

"society" and "community", dressing them with a political and moral significance which often seems the direct result of his own nostalgia as well as his personal commitment to socialism and its communitarian ideology.

Like community and society the words country and city have come, largely through their literary representation, to embody moral distinctions of a quite Manichean dimension. The "powerful feelings" associated with the terms have tended to ossify into generalisations. Yet the distinctions between them are never as straightforward as rural virtue opposed to city vice. As Williams illustrates, along with the associations of peace, innocence and simple virtue, the country also becomes associated with the negativity of backwardness, ignorance and limitation. Alternatively the romantic, conservative and puritanical perceptions of the city as a site of chaos, worldliness and ambition competes with more positive associations, so that the city as a place shrouded in moral darkness is also a centre of intellectual light, cultural sophistication, refinement, and of course "urbanity" itself.

It is not just that, for instance, a provincial perspective will demonstrate a wariness or even fear of the overcrowded, noisy disorder and licentiousness of the metropolis, or conversely, that an urban account of city life will juxtapose its dissolute values against the idealised tranquillity and face-to-face relationships of the country, though this is common enough. What is more significant is the mobility between these more generalised and conventional impressions. The movement from one world to the other can pose antithetical perceptions even within the same cultural field, so that a rural crisis may produce an enormous migration to urban industrial centres by one time rural labourers now seeking employment in mining and manufacturing, and this can be represented in tragic terms as a lost way of life replaced with what is metaphorically depicted as a fall into the industrial furnace of an earthly hell. However, an alternative to this common construction can be found, for instance, in the young Jude Fawley looking towards his New Jerusalem, and placing a deep faith in its ability to offer personal liberation. It is an individualist response which is also an explicit denial of a rural community drenched in ignorance and insensibility.

Of course it is one of the ironies of *Jude the Obscure* that its hero can only chisel away at the great edifices of Christminster, never able to penetrate its centres of knowledge and power. But the journey itself from rural backwater to the promise of the city and enlightenment is common enough, and of course Raymond Williams knows the road from Pandy to Cambridge, just as his fictional alter-ego Matthew Price knows the line from Glynmawr to Oxford. This journey from limitation to light informs the heroic quest of brave endeavour and future promise, just as its glittering prize frequently proves illusory and destructive. In a type of literary schizophrenia representations can oscillate between the contesting images of the pandemonium of the City of Destruction and the celestial promise of the City of Light, just as images of the country as unsullied innocence and sober introspection contend with those of brute insensitivity and the rural idiocy of the clown. Between the ideas of city and country there has been this mixture of extreme revulsion and fervent affirmation.[12]

Yet within this dialectic of vicissitudes there is also the persistence of certain enduring and dominating images, tropes which are reproduced in text after text until they become an accepted currency, a matter of form almost wholly extricated from its social basis, dehistoricised to the point of abstraction. One of the key areas of this type of dislocation consistently occurring within the city/country dichotomy is an idealised conception of a rural community which bears little resemblance to its material reality. Prior to the emergence of realism the prevalent post-classical construction of rural life conventionally corresponded to the more sanguinary sense of Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft,* echoing the harmonious strains of a settled and timeless existence in which the cycles of the yielding earth and the providence of nature promote a simplicity of character, neighbourliness and a perpetual peace shrouded in natural beauty.

For Williams this sort of distortion is always rendered suspect because such ethereal and non-material accounts reduce the critical initiative of literature through its own willed incapacity to make real social relationships manifestly "knowable". An idyllic construction of rural life denying

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[12] See U.C. Knoepflmacher, "The Novel between City and Country", *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, Vol. 2. Knoepflmacher points out that it was not until Coleridge and Arnold that the rural terms "cultivation and culture" began to replace the term "civilization" which has its origins in the urban sense of civil or *civitas*. p. 520. See also Ian Donaldson, "The Satirists' London", *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 25, 1975. Donaldson remarks that "since classical times it has been a common rhetorical pastime ... to deplore the inequities of the city and speak affectionately of the country life; and (alternatively) to deplore the uncouthness and boredom of the country life, and speak affectionately of the civilizing excitements of the city." p. 107.

its hardship and deprivation becomes vulnerable to appropriation in support of a selective world-view, a view from the terrace of the country-house, a dominant ideology that is also dislocating itself with the help of the literary forms that serve it, from its own social and economic basis as it makes and remakes its preferred history.

Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral

Williams explores and exposes this preferred history of the dominant ideology through his critique of "pastoral" from Virgil to Crabbe in the opening chapters of *The Country and the City*. In an impressive assault on the organicism of the literary representation of rural life and its evocation of a harmonious community (the implications of which clearly shocked even the writer himself) Williams attacks the idealised and ideologically accommodating pastoral mode as an inhuman misconstruction of the lives of "the permanently cheated".

In one of his most memorable accounts Williams watches the "organic" community recede into the sentimental recollections of successive generations of writers on an historical "escalator" travelling beyond Eden. The lamentable loss of the organic relations which bound a community had occurred, for Leavis, in our own century, but for Charles Sturt, on whom Leavis based his conception of an organic form of living, it had occurred a generation earlier, around the period in which Thomas Hardy wrote. And in writing Hardy too was remembering an earlier "timeless rhythm". Then, as Williams demonstrates, the escalator moves without pause, accelerating into history. George Eliot sets *Adam Bede* and *Felix Holt* in the early nineteenth century as "Old England" grows older, beyond Cobbett's youth apparently, beyond Clare's. It was already gone for Crabbe in "The Village" (1783) just as Goldsmith had earlier seen "the rural virtues leave the land". In More's *Utopia* an old order is being destroyed as "good holy men turne all dwellinge places and all glebeland into desolation and wildernes." Then into the Middle Ages where the celebrated right relations between men and master can be called to account by Langland's Piers Plowman registering the disgruntlement of the labouring class, or in Doomesday "when four men out of every five are villeins, bordars, cotters or slaves". As Williams asks, shall we find the timeless rhythm of an organic community before "the Norman rape and yoke", or before "the Saxons came up the rivers", or before the Celts came "with their gilded barbarianism?"[13]

[13] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 9–12.

Williams's point here, still extremely pertinent, is that the critical and rhetorical procedure of appealing nostalgically to the values of yesterday is not only enlisting "the 'good old days' as a stick to beat the present" but is also an interested misconstruing of history to erase the "timelessness" of suffering and oppression by implying that contemporary social disorders and fractures are of an unprecedented kind. Williams is concerned that this provides the grounds from which a "retrospective radicalism" can posit a critique of contemporary values by appealing to a pre-industrial and therefore irrecoverable world. He signals the reactionary potential of a criticism which springs

> to the defence of certain kinds of order, certain social hierarchies and moral stabilities, which have a feudal ring but a more dangerous contemporary application. Some of these 'rural' virtues, in twentieth century intellectual movements, leave the land to become the charter of explicit social reaction.[14]

It is against this reactionary "charter" that Williams assembles his critical armoury indicting the pastoral form, its writers and compliant critics, for transforming its original social and material basis into a highly contrived aesthetic passively serving class interests in the name of naturalising a new bourgeois order. Of course Williams has been swayed by the same such "intellectual movements" himself and he has fallen into similar habits of organic thought, which, as I will argue, he is never to be entirely free from even as he condemns its reactionary overtones.

Tracing the transition through which the material component of the pastoral form in its classical origins is stripped by its renaissance revival, Williams notes that in Hesiod, the Golden Age "remote and free from evil and grief" is already consigned to the past, and it is "the character of his own 'iron age'" that commits the poet to give an account of a "working community" that is also a "life of pain". A life where the abundance of a fertile summer is celebrated for its resurrecting victory over winter, barrenness and hardship, so that "Wolves, foxes, locusts and beetles are as much part of the experience as balm and rock-rose and apples and honey."[15] Two centuries later in Virgil's eclogues the bucolic form maintains its link with the working year and with "the real social conditions of country life". Its air of timeless tranquillity is always undercut by "the

[14] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 36.
[15] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 15.

threat of loss and eviction".[16] Mediating its idealised images and its utopian invocation of a future in which the land will require no husbandry is the tension of countervailing experiences of loss and labour. It is just this tension which Williams claims has been extricated by the renaissance adaptation of pastoral, which through a selected use of classical images paints only an "enamelled" rather than living world.

Williams describes this de-materialising of pastoral as an "aristocratic transformation" in which the social and material basis of the form has been reduced to a courtly mannerism, "the fancy dress of court games", where the shepherds wear an "idealised mask" and are removed from their working life, absorbed into the theatrical realm of romantic love.[17] The qualities of innocence, natural beauty, fertility, harmony and seclusion are abstracted as the metaphors of idyllic love and tranquil repose: a "perpetual neo-pastoral May". Williams is not always censorious towards this displacement, recognising its refined usage as an allegorical stratagem in the complex intrigues of courtly life. In this respect the form has so distanced itself from its social correlative, become so immersed in a scrupulous adherence to modes of stylistic decorum, that it stands as a "totally literary artifice", beyond any real association with primary activities. Williams's real concern is with the historical development of pastoral form as it leaves the aristocratic court and re-emerges in the service of a high-bourgeois agrarianism.

As he makes the point, "neo-pastoral as a court entertainment is one thing; neo-pastoral in its new location, the country-house and its estate, is quite another."[18] Now the artificial mode of the courtly idyll has been given a rural locale. It is a returning of the form to its original social basis, its agrarian root, but now without the sceptical eye of the eclogue and its mediating recognition of hardship and loss. Williams's argument is that a recognition of the real primary activities and material processes most directly supporting the existence and dominance of the country manor have been obfuscated in the transition from a feudal to an aristocratic and then bourgeois world. And as he reminds us, it is not just the activities that have been removed:

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[16] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 17.
[17] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 21.
[18] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 22.

> It is not easy to forget that Sidney's *Arcadia*, which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants.[19]

What is happening in this development of pastoral is that the Arcadian myth of a spontaneous providential nature is being given a contemporary application in the form of a country estate, which then becomes an idealised site of retreat and retirement from the disturbance of the ways of the world. By poetic conceit the country-house becomes an aspect of a natural and providential order, in harmonious existence with the woods, rivers and animals of the countryside. And Williams's ground for complaint is that the new inclusion comes at the expense of a subservient class who actually cultivate and produce nature's abundance. When the labourers are included it is as the "much poore", figures by which the charitable impulses and uncondescending airs of the landlord may be shown to advantage. Such paternal charity informs the basis of what was upheld as the "moral economy" of an "organic" community. But as Williams remarks:

> there was very little that was 'natural' or 'moral' about it. ... this economy, even at peace, was an order of exploitation of a most thoroughgoing kind: a property in men as well as in land; a reduction of most men to working animals, tied by forced tribute.[20]

The poets who failed to recognise or ignored these pressing social and material realities become the recipients of Williams's acrimony and disdain. Jonson, Carew and Marvell are singled out and accused of falsehood and misrepresentation. The primary ground of Williams's criticism is the recurring recourse to Arcadian images as representations of the authentic relations between lord and labourer. As Williams sardonically asks, "[w]hat kind of wit is it exactly ... which has the birds and other creatures offering themselves to be eaten?"[21] The offending passages appear to make the issue at stake clear enough. As Jonson declares in "To Penshurst":

> The painted partrich lyes in every field
> And, for thy messe, is willing to be kill'd.[22]

> Bright eeles, that emulate them, and leape on land,
> Before the fisher, or into his hand.[23]

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[19] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 22.
[20] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 37.
[21] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 29.
[22] Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst" ll. 29–30.
[23] Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst" ll. 37–38.

Carew elaborates with interest in "To Saxham" :

> The Pheasant, Partridge, and the Lark
> Flew to my house, as to the Ark.
> The willing Oxe, of himselfe came
> Home to the slaughter, with the Lamb,
> And every beast did thither bring
> Himselfe to be an offering.
> The scalie herd, more pleasure took
> Bath'd in the dish than in the brook.[24]

And in a similar vein, Marvell in "The Garden" finds

> The Nectaren, and curious Peach
> Into my hands themselves do reach;
> Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
> Insnar'd with flowers, I fall on grass.[25]

The invocation of paradisal bounty far removed from the realities of rural hardship seems unequivocal enough here, and the poets might stand condemned on these persuasive grounds. But Williams is too sophisticated a reader to allow abstracted passages to speak this loud. He virtually concedes that the grouping of the bombastic Carew with the more refined arts of Jonson and Marvell is a dubious critical practice. Carew is easy to dismiss, but Williams rather peremptorily condemns all three in a blanket judgement, charging the form with corruption and indicting all its users. It is worth recalling that pastoral poetry has often been considered as a humble means for disguising radical and subversive thought, a highly intertextual genre that is discursive rather than historical and capable of providing its own internal critique. As is characteristic Williams embeds the germ of a counter-argument within his own discourse, noting that Jonson celebrates the country-house by a 'procedure of definition by negatives":

> Thou *art not,* Penshurst, built to envious show
> Of touch, or marble; nor *canst* boast a row
> Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold:
> Thou *hast no* lantherne, whereof tales are told.[26]
> (my italics)

The poetic voice is not speaking directly to Penshurst, but to those other country-houses who pale by comparison. Yet having recognised the negative mode Williams doesn't extend the

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[24] Thomas Carew, "To Saxham" ll. 21–30.
[25] Andrew Marvell, "The Garden" ll. 37–40.
[26] Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst" ll. 1–4.

observation far enough to take account of the ironic play the conceit allows for. Moving from objective description to a subjective and self-conscious recognition, the poet declares his own tainted role in the scheme of things:

> Here no man tells my cups; nor, standing by,
> A waiter, doth my gluttony envy:
> But gives me what I call, and lets me eate.[27]

Continuing in the negative mode Penshurst still stands as the exception, but there is a subtle shift in sensibility as the poet gives thanks, not for the natural order or moral economy in total, but for the specific protection this country-house offers in allowing him to eat unmolested by hungry eyes. The pathos of this darker aspect, and the material reality and literal image of the poet enjoying the supper he has sung for, reorientates the hyperbole of his Arcadian imagery. For Jonson's extravagantly embroidered account of an estate built and maintained at the cost of "no mans ruine" and "no mans grone", and of nature's bounty as passively awaiting consumption and "willing to be kill'd" can hardly be taken as a faithful and serious account of life at Penshurst. In registering the hunger on other estates, Penshurst as a virtuous exception becomes increasingly improbable, for nature itself is forced to be a party to the exception. The implication of the negative mode is that, on other estates, a bountiful and giving nature is willing to accommodate only the landlords, and is apparently indisposed to decorate the table of his servants and labourers. If Penshurst is to be literally taken as exceptional, it must by definition have an exceptional nature at its behest. And it does. At Penshurst the very air is superior. This is a place where the Muses have met, where Pan and Bacchus have feasted. The universality of these images effectively undermines the ostensible object of the poet's praise and facilitated by the depiction of it in the most fantastic and improbable terms, the effect tends towards the parodic, even within the rhetoric and imagery that the convention readily accepts as its own. Penshurst disintegrates as a material entity as it merges into the realm of Arcadian, Edenic, and Utopian metaphor.

Here the "organic" community is not upheld, not given as a reality, but codified as myth by the poet, a conscious strategy that turns Williams's argument back on itself. When Williams sarcastically quips, "we need not refuse Jonson and Carew the courtesy of their lucky exceptions"

[27] Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst" ll. 68–70.

he is perhaps missing the important point that, within the limits of the artist's conditions of production, the negative mode of identification and the ironic possibilities it affords were an effective means of providing an implicit critique of country-houses in general, and at the same time providing the improbable exception that would not offend the poet's host.[28] To this extent Williams errs in assuming that there is no ready answer to the question, "what kind of wit is it exactly..?" Irony seems to provide an answer. As Barrell and Bull confirm, "the humour is deliberate and indicates the ultimate impossibility of the vision."[29] There is a wilful silence in Williams's barely registered references to the self-reflexive and ironic possibilities of the pastoral form.

Certainly he is more alive to Marvell's wit when he recognises that in "The Garden" the poet is in part ridiculing the conceit of a benevolent nature: the fruit of the earth being of such bounteous degree that the poet stumbles on "Melons" and being "Insnar'd with flowers" falls, invoking "the easy consumption" of a paradise before the fall of man. He is also willing to concede that "Upon Appleton House" is on the whole "a composition of different ways of seeing", a "truly transitional" work in which labouring figures are now "seen" even if from a detached distance, but he nevertheless holds fast to his contention that the really significant aspect of Marvell's poem is its "justification" of the dispossession of land on the basis of "a religious and natural order."[30] How Williams arrives at anything so unequivocal from "Upon Appleton House" must bemuse those critics who have pored over Marvell's work unearthing a host of complex antinomies, ambiguities, analogies and subversions, as well as a plethora of contemporary political, religious, philosophical and textual references. Marvell's work defies fixed positions by its constant deployment of a rigorous dialectical procedure that keeps conventional tropes in a constant state of flux, out of which it would be extremely difficult to extract anything as concrete as a "justification". Williams's reading is overly determined by his general argument's mono-causal structure, reducing the ideological complexity of Marvell's heterogenous text to a single effect: the obscuring and mystifying of the power relations of actual social and economic organisation in the name of a burgeoning agrarian capitalism.

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[28] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 29.
[29] John Barrell and John Bull, eds. *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, p. 144.
[30] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 57.

While Williams adroitly analyses the form as a means of production mediated by specific conditions of production, he does so within the framework of exposing the rapacious acquisition of property and capital of a newly emergent land-owning class rather than seeing the poems themselves as sites of contest and negotiation in which a complex array of ideological determinants come into play. In Marvell's case the tensions of the Reformation, protestantism, the civil war and republicanism are all evident within the dialogical structure of "Upon Appleton House". Beauty and corruption, war and peace, freedom and incarceration, nature and order, activity and leisure, and self and society, act not so much as identifiable oppositions, but as threads woven through the work, entangled within a complicated metaphorical organisation that seems to evade synthesis and any identifiably fixed position.[31] Louis Montrose argues that Williams succumbs to "an outmoded Marxian aesthetic", in which the text is too readily designated as "the superstructural reflection of an economic base".[32] For Montrose, Williams's thinking on pastoral represents a critical naivety prior to his own illuminating critique of base and superstructure in which he begins to theorise the cultural materialist position where culture is granted greater autonomy to determine consciousness through its communication, reproduction, exploration and experience of a social order. In this sense culture becomes a "primary activity" in its own right, possessing a reciprocal rather than fully determined relationship with the economic base. The process as Williams would later see it is "constitutive" as well "constituting".[33]

This is not to say that Williams's general thrust is not valid and important. The marginalisation of the majority and the removal of a people and their history from a major form which held the promise of inhabiting and representing them, and the shaping of their material reality into an idealised form which no longer bears witness to their grief, called for Williams's critical attention. It does, however, throw a question-mark over his critical procedure, particularly in relation to his wholesale indictment of the pastoral form. His selectivity is of concern in this respect. A condemnation of pastoral might not have been so convincing had he included certain other writers who have utilised the pastoral form. Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Johnson, Blake and Wordsworth might have proved more difficult to arraign.

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[31] See Donald M. Friedman, *Marvell's Pastoral Art*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, and P. Jaeckle, "The Dialogization of Genres", *Genre*, Vol. xxiii, No. 4, Winter, 1990, p. 257–278.

[32] Louis Adrian Montrose, "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form", *ELH*, Vol. 50, 1983, p. 419.

[33] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 110.

Shakespeare in particular has demonstrated a remarkably self-conscious understanding of the pastoral convention. He burlesques the literariness of the convention, exposing the underbelly of the conceit. In *As You Like It*, the idealised claims that a rustic life can serve as a panacea for the tensions and difficulties of the life of the Court are completely demolished. The idea that a pastoral life actually exists as a viable alternative is the play's insistent joke as the pastoral convention's rhetorical hyperbole is seen as meaningless and ostentatious banter. By dramatically confronting Corin and Audrey the "earthy rustics" of an earlier English tradition with the figures of Silvius and Phoebe (the refined and gentle shepherds of Sidney's aristocratic Arcadia) Shakespeare plays off the two conventions against each other. While, as Barrell and Bull point out, "almost all the weight of Shakespeare's satire is brought to bear against the genuinely low-life shepherds" there is a constant insistence

> that there is a pastoral life which is both real and difficult, [and which] creates the context in which we can evaluate the pastoral tradition inhabited by Silvius and Phebe, and indeed the pastoral elements in the play as a whole. We are invited to enjoy this courtly pastoral, but for what it obviously is - a masquerade, a game for the amusement of bored courtiers and not an alternative to the uncongenial and disorderly reality of life in Elizabeth's court.[34]

In a similarly satiric vein Samuel Johnson mocks the pastoral ideal in *Rasselas*, exposing it as a purely textual construct. The Prince and Princess, on journeying to visit a hermit, find their way leads through fields "where shepherds tended their flocks, and the lambs were playing upon the pasture". Rasselas, eager to know whether all his searching for life's meaning is to terminate in the condition of "pastoral simplicity", seeks the opinion of the shepherds regarding their own state. To his surprise they are found to be so "rude and ignorant" that very little can be learned from them; however, they are clearly "cankered with discontent" and consider themselves "condemned to labour for the luxury of the rich, and looked up with stupid malevolence toward those that were placed above them".[35] If there is an irony in their proto-Marxist bearing, there is an even greater one in that the Princess is willing to deny the empirical evidence of such "rustick happiness" preferring to maintain faith in the idealised accounts of pastoral serenity, and despite the evidence to the contrary, still looks forward to the aristocratic vision of pastoral

> when with a few virtuous and elegant companions, she would gather flowers planted by her own hand, fondle the lambs of her own ewe, and

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[34] John Barrell and John Bull, eds. *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, p. 108.
[35] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas: Prince of Abissinia*, p. 49–50.

> listen without care, among brooks and breezes, to one of her maidens reading in the shade.[36]

Williams's reluctance to register the self-reflexive nature of pastoral is consistent with his characteristic privileging of realism, a desire for a naturalistic representation of rural life which the pastoral form is neither suited to nor makes a particular claim for. The status of the form itself, with its fairly strict generic guidelines and aesthetic conventions forged from the classicism of Theocritus and Virgil, and with its integration of Christian myth, restricted the possibilities of an authentic material representation of life, just as in country-house poems the material relations between poet and patron must have discouraged any but the most subtle allusions to the deprivation of the landlord's hired hands. Even the tendency to transfer the shepherd's or labourer's life from the Golden Age to a contemporary world was the subject of an ongoing argument, as evidenced in Pope's discourse on pastoral poetry in which he denounces any urge towards naturalism, though his tone seems to suggest a politically motivated unwillingness for any airing of the unpleasantness of proletarian life.[37]

The intrusion of the politics of social life into the realm of a self-sufficient aesthetic provides the basis of the renaissance embargo against the type of naturalistic representation that Williams is appealing for. Williams is correct in querying the validity of this position, but he is perhaps unreasonable for indicting poets who historically precede the era of philosophical rationalism and the secular science of truth which ushered in the desire to strive for a more naturalistic representation of life. His criticism of them, in effect, is that they are not realists. This privileging of realism becomes particularly significant, for while Williams is suspicious of the lack of concrete materiality in the work of the renaissance poets he examines, he himself falls into the alternative dilemma of wholly disregarding the metaphysics of pastoral in which the abundant and munificent garden becomes a paradise of the imagination, a locus for the substantiation of the "universal" values by which the more immediate characteristics of contemporary material relations may be judged. To be sure, the metaphysics enlisted by the pastoral poets serve to underwrite material realities by appealing to transcendental values and so evoking the divine authority of a higher

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[36] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas: Prince of Abissinia*. p. 50.

[37] Alexander Pope, "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry", *Pastoral Poetry and an Essay on Criticism*, p. 23–33.

order. And it can be argued that the metaphysical construction of the rural estate varies little from the mythical organic community that Williams exposes. However, the metaphysical conceits of pastoral, and particularly its allusions to the ancient gods, largely free it from the type of truth-claims that are made in the valorising of the organic community. In certain respects, the metaphysics of pastoral allow for the establishing of a utopian moment, the creation, however artificial, of a desirable alternative prospect that allows for the substantiation of "difference" by which the "real" may be seen, known and criticised. For instance in the Augustan period pastoral can be an aristocratic device for attacking an emergent individualist and materialist bourgeoisie, just as later Cobbett and Morris can use the same pastoral imagery to attack this class from a radical political perspective. In this respect the concern of pastoral is to provide a metaphorical correlative for a more desirable form of life, particularly in its implicit connection with the Christian moral values of a Biblical paradise, and it is the power of these values that are being drawn upon. Williams is being too secular in his thinking, undervaluing the determinism of Christian morality, for in pastoral the relevant sources may be seen to be Classical and Biblical rather than empirical and historical.

Two Voices of Community

When Williams condemns the hyperbolic and metaphysical imagery of pastoral as "myth", and as a wholly negative construction, he begins to work his way into a critical cul-de-sac in that his own nostalgia, which could well be labelled both utopian and mythical, predicates his positive affirmation of the concept of community which he upholds as an alternative to the hierarchical and exploitative nature of the dominant agrarian order. And this is part of an essential contradiction, or ambivalence, or confusion that works its way through *The Country and the City*. For what can be identified in Williams's work are two quite distinct voices when it comes to the concept of community. One is subjective, emotive and autobiographical. The other is objective, analytical and historicist. The first voice belongs to what is a series of personal interventions offering emotional support for his arguments if not empirical validation:

> This book ... though it often and necessarily follows impersonal procedures, in description and analysis, there is behind it, all the time, this personal pressure and commitment.[38]

[38] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 3.

Williams feels no need to justify this "personal cause", but what becomes apparent is that his autobiographical interventions are his own particular version of the "organic" community. They are nostalgic reminiscences of his "honest and willing" father, who like his father before him was "born to the land", and who as a "man in the village, with his gardens and his bees, [took] produce to market on his bicycle".[39] And it was in the Black Mountain village of Pandy that Williams learnt "the meaning of neighbour", learnt it there, in a community, now receding on that same historical escalator. Yet this nostalgia with its evocation of effective communitarian values and personal "independence" clashes quite sharply with that second voice, which belongs to a historical materialist who seeks to destroy the illusion of the "rural democracy" of an "organic" community, and who is then compelled to chart "the long process of conquest and seizure: the land gained by killing, by repression, by political bargains" and the "violent alterations" of engrossing and enclosure which occasioned the destruction of "hundreds of village communities".[40] And when these two voices run together they struggle to mediate between his warm remembrances of a village community and his recognition of the ongoing cycle of "a life of pain". The duality and then contradiction is particularly apparent in the characteristic ambivalence of the following passage:

> When I go back to that country, I feel a recovery of a particular kind of life, which appears, at times, as an inescapable identity, a more positive connection than I have known elsewhere. Many other men feel this, of their own native places, and the strength of the idea of settlement, old and new, is there positive and unquestioned. But the problem has always been, for most people, how to go on living where they are. I know this also personally: ... When I hear the idealisation of settlement ... I know, in just that sense, what neighbourhood means and what is involved in separation and leaving. But I know, also, why people have to move, why so many moved in my own family. So that I see the idealisation of settlement, in its ordinary literary-historical version, as an insolent indifference to most people's needs.[41]

As the Eldridges have suggested, Williams is attempting a subtle mediation between a personal and affirmative response to the idea of community and the "power relations and exploitation" that have been obscured by its "literary historical" representation.[42] Yet clearly at times the

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[39] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 4.
[40] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 97.
[41] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 84.
[42] John and Lizzie Eldridge, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*, p. 183.

distinction between Williams's own nostalgic recollections and the mystification of its literary and historical depiction becomes blurred. Even, as above, where Williams is highly conscious of the problem of idealisation, his rhetorical stance and tone betray him. That first person retrospective, "When I go back to the country", bespeaking the return of the native and ushering in a metaphysical recovery of "identity", a "positive connection" never again to be known, an "idea of settlement" which is "positive and unquestioned", but which is now known only as a distant memory, articulated by someone who is returning from another place. Here and elsewhere Williams's posture is that of the return of an exile driven from his community by enclosure and the crisis of agrarian market forces which dispersed his family, who although "born of the land" could "not live by it". What is frustrating is that Williams refuses to recognise his own anomalous history. After all he was not "exiled" to Cambridge University or forced from the land to take up a scholarship, just as he was not compelled to reside there the greater part of his life. This other biography is the somewhat heroic journey of an individual who transcended the limitations of his origin, who journeyed to a city of light and who profited by it. Williams, in the same passage, attempts to qualify his own sentimentalism by shifting ground in respect to a settled community. "Independence" is now the significant factor. Those unable to achieve it, "and under the pressure of change from a new mode of production these become the majority", are compelled to a "long disheartening and despair" in which what for some is a community is for others now "a prison", an "imposed rigidity", an "implacable hold on men" in which "you fitted where you were; if you went out, you were harried."[43] Throughout *The Country and the City* there is this manifest tension between these two senses of community, what could be defined as Williams's own particular structure of feeling - a mediation between nostalgia and protest - and the more the work evolves the stronger the sense of the latter becomes. Eventually Williams's heartfelt affirmation of communitarian values and characteristics is overridden, initially by a recognition of the social process as one of clearance, eviction and evacuation and then an even more pessimistic, almost Foucaultian, sense of community as a recurring system of power, surveillance and containment.

Ironically it is Williams's thorough tracing of the development of pastoral towards realism, and the increasing degree of veracity in the representations of rural life it brings, that commit

[43] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 85.

him to this more sceptical interpretation of community. It is through his readings of George Crabbe, James Thomson and John Clare, in which rural hardship and dispossession become more incisively observed, that Williams becomes compelled to name the enemy.[44] Against his general position which argues on behalf of a long history of the exploitation of the "permanently cheated" he suddenly adopts a more traditional and romantic approach, claiming that there is a transformative moment in which real community collapses under the weight of a monolithic process:

> And the real origin of change was the developing system of agrarian capitalism, which, as has been characteristic of capitalism throughout its history, succeeded in transforming its environment in a dramatically productive way, by making both men and nature instrumental to a dominating purpose.[45]

This "transforming" moment for Williams is quite specifically located in the mid-to-late eighteenth century and this position links him with the writers of the "culture and society" tradition in which the collapse of a time-honoured and natural way of life is deemed to have been destroyed by the emergence of industrialisation and the cash-nexus of large scale capital investment. But following the logic of Williams's own deconstruction of the myth of an "organic" community, one can never be sure what exactly it is that is supposedly being transformed. In terms of the breakdown of community, it is difficult to see how a capitalism which reduces men and nature to instruments of a "dominating purpose" qualitatively differs from the bleak general history of the rural proletariat, the "long process of conquest and seizure", which Williams has so passionately outlined. For it is the will to power, that "dominating purpose", which is the recurring characteristic of Williams's historical overview, and within this paradigm it is difficult to see the insurgence of industrialisation and capitalism as, in general effect, anything other than the latest chapter of the domination of the powerless many by the powerful few. If the social relations of a capitalist economy are seen to be a distinctly negative "transformation" from the social arrangements of feudalism, Doomesday or the Norman yoke then Williams's argument falters. For while parliamentary enclosure acts and agrarian capitalism precipitated certain phases of "control",

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[44] Crabbe's work provides a particularly salient instance of what was to become a recurring problem for Williams's consideration of realism. Crabbe's social critique tends towards an emphasis on "moral" neglect rather than "social" causation. His paternalist rhetoric of pity is never extended to include any possibility of emancipation. As Hazlitt puts it, he "gladdens no prospect" and "stirs no wish". Crabbe presents an image of the social order as natural and permanent, and Barrell finds Williams uncritical in this respect: "the 'real history' that Raymond Williams has praised Crabbe for introducing into the tradition of rural poetry ... is revealed instead as an attempt to abolish the sense of history altogether." John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, p. 85–88.

[45] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 82.

particularly the institution of workhouses where "the human debris ... could be concentrated and then more directly controlled", the reification of men as labour could only nostalgically be differentiated from the feudal grip on the serf, and the losses in relation to community had to be weighed up against the positive gains of the transformation. As Williams has vigorously asserted in another and earlier autobiographical intervention:

> For one thing I knew this: at home we were glad of the Industrial Revolution, and of its consequent social and political changes ... and there was one gift that was overriding, one gift which at any price we would take, the gift of power that is everything to men who have worked with their hands ... Any account of our culture which explicitly denies the value of an industrial society is really irrelevant; not in a million years would you make us give up this power.[46]

It is not just steam-power and the petrol engine that Williams is considering here, but the general movement within an industrial and capitalist society towards increased political power - "more real freedom ... more real personal grasp ... more real say" - so that the loss of communitarian values must be continually set against the real gains in independence.[47]

Independence is the key, for it is the struggle to maintain it against a hostile environment that reformulates Williams's consideration of the concept of community. As he recognises, the full weight of engrossment, enclosure and the intensifying of market forces began to systematically erode what degree of "general independence" the common life of a rural village had ever sustained. And the relative degree of independence is, for Williams, "the test of community". Importantly this emphasis on independence brings an economic and material factor into play which diverges from the warm qualities of *Gemeinschaft* Williams has previously adhered to. As he suggests, it was under the pressure of diminishing independence that the congenial (if not idealised) attributes of a working community were continually threatened. Williams never makes the point explicitly, but the implication is that in the face of a crisis of living standards communities became fragmented as those who could maintain a living began to consciously separate themselves from those who had lost their means of independence, so that the increasing poverty in the village became "a system of pauperism":

> The friendly and comparatively informal relief of an earlier period gave

[46] Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary", *Resources of Hope*, p. 10.
[47] Raymond Williams, "Culture is Ordinary", *Resources of Hope*, p. 10.

> way, under just this pressure, to the cold and harsh treatment of a separate class of "the poor".[48]

As Williams remarks, under these conditions the idea of "neighbourliness was, at best, relative." And this recognition is symptomatic of a change in his way of thinking as his investigation and analysis begins to confront his own nostalgia in a way that he is finally too honest to ignore. Coming to a recognition of the stratification of communities Williams admits that the social order in "the old open-field village" was not "so dissimilar from the ordinary social structure of mature rural capitalism as to suggest a radically different social order."[49]

> The inequalities of condition which the village contains and supports are profound, and nobody, by any exercise of sentiment, can convert it into a "rural democracy" or, absurdly, a commune. The social structure which will be completed after enclosure is already basically outlined.[50]

As his critique of the myth of an "organic" community and the real processes of agrarian capitalism steadily begins to erode the very possibility of community in *Gemeinschaft* terms so Williams is forced to pose the essential problem:

> To what extent, then, was there ever a genuine community ...?[51]

Certainly within Williams's rather limited terms of reference the idea of community is difficult to sustain in any circumstances. Part of the difficulty he creates for himself is associated with the type of moral strictures he places on any type of economic activity that can be construed as capitalism. Rather than considering it in the Marxist terms of a form of centralised ownership of the means of production with its attendant system of wage-labour, Williams virtually denounces all forms of "dealing" and this seems to be a denial of the basic materiality of the type of market economy that is one of the traditional centres of village and rural life. Williams might have done well to remember where the modern capitalist term "marketing" stems from. It certainly seems to be absent from his thinking when he eyes suspiciously Thomas Bewick's beekeeper, who, in

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[48] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 104.
[49] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 102.
[50] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 102.
[51] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 103.

a pre-enclosure village, sold some of his honey "at a distance" and is for Williams "already on the way to independence in another sense: that of the private entrepreneur who has at best an ambiguous relation to his community."[52] If the beekeeper's trading is enough to create a tenuity of connection with community, then Williams is virtually limiting community to subsistence living, upholding the myth of an "organic" community, as if the driving of hard bargains, buying at the cheapest market and selling at the dearest, the exploitation of opportunities for expansion and the extension of credit are somehow the exclusive considerations of a developed capitalist economics. This censoriousness towards an individual rather than collective attainment of independence is evident as a crucial thematic tension in Williams's first novel *Border Country.* Here the communitarian values of a Welsh border town are embodied in the relationship between Harry Price and Morgan Rosser. After the failure of the General strike of 1926, the relationship and the values it personalises are seen to be dissolved as a consequence of Rosser's speculative investment in a smallgoods business. Harry Price, placing his faith in a settled way of life and trying to maintain self-sustaining values unfettered by commercial expansion, distances himself from his friend, though paradoxically Price himself is a beekeeper supplementing his railway signalman's wage by trading his goods at market. Admittedly Rosser is a true middle-man who neither produces nor consumes the goods he deals in and although Williams makes it quite clear that he exploits no-one and actually provides an important low-cost service, the relationship between the two is unalterably fractured by what Rosser comes to recognise as an inverted snobbery on Price's part, an unreasonable prejudice against "business" of any kind. Harry Price is based to a large degree on Williams's own father and the author's attitude and tone suggests that he himself is deeply sympathetic to Price's perspective. This same censorious attitude and tone permeates *The Country and the City* so that all those who actively participate in the given system are branded with the same iron as the magnates, monopolists and gross exploiters of the economic organisation. This form of snobbery against the changing social and economic conditions makes it largely impossible for Williams to sustain the notion of community in the *Gemeinschaft* terms he favours.

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[52] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City,* p. 100.

Recognising this Williams increasingly adopts a position on community which, as the Eldridges have rightly noted, is a shift towards a resistant and subversive notion of community, a position which now aligns Williams with that other powerful socialist in the field, E.P.Thompson.[53] As *The Country and the City* begins to engage with the era of industrialisation, Williams begins to see that in order to survive the visible stamping of power of a capitalist class community had to adopt a more militant stance. Within these changing terms Williams then traces the development of the "community of struggle", a community that is born out of the process of industrialisation:

> In many villages, community only became a reality when economic and political rights were fought for and partially gained, in the recognition of unions, in the extension of the franchise, and in the possibility of entry into new representative and democratic institutions. In many thousands of cases, there is more community in the modern village, as a result of this process of new legal and democratic rights, than at any point in the recorded or imagined past.[54]

In this respect real community becomes a post-enclosure phenomenon, not lost as a consequence of rapid social change, but formed as a defiant response to a particular crisis in which humane values are overridden by the aggressive acquisitiveness of a free market economy. What then becomes problematic for Williams's general argument is that his tendency to see "Power" as inextricably associated with capitalism, and community as quite exclusively the domain of rural life, leads to a reductive polarity between the two concepts which is further exacerbated by his representation of the hostility of urban capitalism and its exploitation of the rural sector. Within this configuration the tensions entailed in the terms "Country" and "City" become politically activated as pseudonyms for the less neutral terms, "Community" and "Capitalism". Here there is a silent alteration in Williams's stance. In the early chapters he develops what Gorak describes as the "ambitious argument, that urban capitalism merely intensified and reorganised a system of exploitation originating in the country", but as the work progresses the sense of a totalising system of power relations common to country and city recedes, and Williams reverts to the more orthodox position that capitalism is the child of industrialisation and urbanisation, now making the claim that, as the "agents of profit and power" become "self-generating" and politically dominant, "there is what can be seen as a factual exploitation of the country as a whole by the

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[53] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. In his chapter on "Community" Thompson writes that one of the most enduring impressions of Industrialisation is "the loss of any felt cohesion in the community, save that which the working people, in antagonism of their labours and to their masters, built for themselves." p. 488.

[54] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 104.

city as a whole."[55] This overarching generalisation of the "city as a whole", can in Williams's more rhetorical moments lapse into a fictional litany of "parasites", "engrossing lawyers", "confidence men", "professional sharpsters", "hucksters", "informers", "fixers" and "prostitutes". A representation of the city which obscures from view the actual history of the thousands or millions of working people who live, labour and produce within the given system, at the same time indicting them under the general banner of direct or indirect "exploiters" of "the country as a whole". Now it seems the victims of the process of clearance, eviction and evacuation instituted by agrarian capitalism and driven to the cities in search of an "independence" are, at best, reified as a system of economic organisation, and at worst, demonised. Here and elsewhere Williams betrays an anti-urban bias that taints the equanimity of his analysis of the correspondence between country and city. The bias can be accounted for by Williams's nostalgia for rural values and manners but its fund of emotive suggestion subjectivises his critical perception in quite damaging ways.

People of the City

Raymond Williams's privileging of the rural community over urban society is in part a reaction to Marx's derisive quip regarding "the idiocy of rural life".[56] Williams clearly resented the phrase and his anti-urban prejudice appears to be an overly strident response to Marx's implication. For despite Williams's shift in emphasis he omits the next logical step in his analysis, foregoing an examination of real community within the urban metropolis. It appears self-evident that if community is now to be considered as a response to industrialisation, then it is in the industrial centres that the new community will form itself. Williams is reluctant to draw this conclusion, primarily because of the weight he places on "face to face" relationships which he sees as inevitably destroyed by the structure of city life. In this respect he seems almost perverse in his inattention to the urban working-class culture he had, in *Culture and Society*, defined in terms of its creative institutions of which a resistant trade unionism with its co-operative and collective ethic was the most notable instance. This would seem the logical ground to explore in any extension of the meaning of community.

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[55] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 51.

[56] Karl Marx uses the phrase in both *The Communist Manifesto* and "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte". See *Politics and Letters* for a discussion of the implications of the phrase. p. 319.

However, in *The Country and the City* Williams seems largely unprepared to accept that the heterogeneity, mobility and pluralism of conurbation can provide a site for the cultivation of communitarian values. He mentions only belatedly the "new kinds of organisation" urbanisation produced, the "creation of the unions out of the network of urban and friendly societies", the "active neighbourliness" of the city's "human reply". And against this reply is his deep identification with the scepticism of Wells and Gissing in which

> the new freedoms could be corrupted or incorporated, and the city would breed their degraded substitutes on an unimaginable scale. Even the new social and political movements, the bearers of civilisation, could be confused, corrupted, incorporated: the cancerous growth could overwhelm them.[57]

In this respect Williams's position takes on a strangely modernist bent. The city is darkly unknowable, a centre of mass alienation. In Blake's description of London Williams places a weighty emphasis on the "organised repression" that is the social condition of the capital, "the mind-forg'd manacles" of a human system the city concentrates and embodies. As if intent on substantiating this emphasis he glides over the communitarian potential of the metropolis in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, in which the "huge city", "more than elsewhere", provides the possibility for "the unity of men". Williams is quick to qualify this optimism by stressing its paradoxical juxtaposition with the "shock of recognition" through which "threat, confusion and loss of identity" become the dominant symptoms of urban existence.[58] For this, after all, is the direction in which Williams's argument is unsystematically proceeding, towards the thought behind other Wordsworthian lines in which

> All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man
> Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.[59]

This is the persistent emotional response of the nineteenth century representations of the city. Disparate, miscellaneous and random, the metropolis defies recognition, escapes meaning in terms other than that of an alien and indifferent system governed by an invisible hand of omnipotent power. This can be the prevailing, apocalyptic sentiment of Blake and Wordsworth but it becomes also that of the pre-eminent novelist of the city, Charles Dickens. The appealingly

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[57] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 232.
[58] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 151.
[59] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* cited in *The Country and the City*, p. 150 from *The Prelude: a Parallel Text*, ed. J.C. Maxwell, London: 1971, p. 261.

picturesque images of the city in the "Sketches" and early novels gives way over time to a darker vision in which "the crowds, the bustle, the heterogeneous population, the neglected byways, the profusion of smells and sounds" seem to lose their novelty, richness and colour and instead contribute to the disease and slow decay of the metropolis the later Dickens records.[60] Williams's view is that Dickens's great achievement lies in his ability to penetrate the labyrinthine magnitude of London and make the connections between its apparent randomness and the paradoxical existence of a deeply determining system which hidden from normal view seemed to impose a fixed and common condition on its inhabitants. A system so powerful that it appeared to have the effect of fragmenting and disassociating individuals from each other while simultaneously providing the conditions of their aggregation. In coming to terms with the city Dickens forged narrative techniques that corresponded to the experience of the city, techniques by which the apparently random and discontinuous cityscape could be revealed as possessing "profound and decisive connections" through which "the necessary recognitions and avowals" were forced into consciousness. In this respect Williams accredits him with the achievement of a new "way of seeing", "a way of seeing men and women that belongs to the street" and which is capable of recognising relationships which are normally "obscured, complicated, mystified, by the sheer rush and noise and miscellaneity of this new and complex social order."[61] For Williams Dickens is capable of penetrating and dramatising the life which the multitudinous character of the city renders inaccessible to "ordinary physical observation". As such Williams attributes to the author that "potent and benignant hand" of *Dombey and Son*:

> Oh for a good spirit who would take the housetops off, with a more potent and benignant hand than the lame demon in the tale, and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying Angel as he moves forth among them.[62]

For Williams this is "Dickens seeing himself". It is the authorial hand which removes the housetops and "shows the shapes and phantoms which arise from neglect and indifference; which clears the air so that people can see and acknowledge each other".[63] But this particular "way of seeing" can be extraordinarily complex. It offers a heightened panoptical perspective with an inherent

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[60] Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens on England and the English*, p. 89.
[61] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 155.
[62] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 696.
[63] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 156.

implication of moral authority, an authority which mediates the intimate knowledge of the insiders who are capable of penetrating the city's fog-shrouded by-ways.

In this sense the strength of Dickens's work is that its multi-visual perspective seems capable of evading affiliation with a single dogmatic ideology. However, the plurality is itself of a fairly controlled and determined kind. Mikhail Bakhtin has essayed this plurality in his consideration of "heteroglossia" in *The Dialogical Imagination*.[64] He credits Dickens with achieving a polyvalent narrative structure which incorporates a broad spectrum of verbal styles and linguistic sources. He describes this range of "voices" as a "common language". Yet this "common language", as Bakhtin implies, is always undergoing a dialogue of values, a moral discourse in which a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate narratives is arranged by the author "forcing his own intentions to refract and diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embodied in language."[65] This oscillation of speech types is finally governed by the author's distinction between the voice that will represent his "truth" and that which will be confined to "parodic stylisation". The diversity of speech represents a subtle selection and authorisation of dominant and subordinate modes. The spatial relations of Dickens's narrative points of view reflect a similar structure. Dickens's diversity of point of view offers a breadth of social perspective, but it is the omniscient view that becomes associated with the author's moral authority. The gaze of the alternative perspectives given to his characters is more subject to the random confusion and opacity of the unfathomable world at close quarters. In certain respects the dominant point of view becomes a dominating watchfulness and moral scrutiny of the subject.

The problem is there in the passage from *Dombey and Son*, where Dickens's consideration of the "dark shapes" and "pale phantoms" as a way of seeing and recognising, a clearing of the air, is also a means of obscuring. The formulated juxtaposition of a Christian people with the hidden phantoms of the urban multitude is a way of identifying a problem, but not really an adequate way of seeing people. They remain hidden, hardly people at all, reduced to rhetorical effect as the malevolent "shapes" and "phantoms" of the dead on earth. These grotesques are obscured not only from the gaze of the Christians but often from the reader as well.

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[64] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin.*
[65] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, p. 302.

What is significant about Williams's reading of Dickens is that he registers the novelist's "decisive transformation" of representations of the city by consistently praising Dickens's method of seeing the interdependence between people and their environment, so that individual and society are not segmented within the text, but are represented in such a way that you cannot see one without seeing the other. Theoretically this is an advance in consciousness, as Williams suggests, but in practice there are times when the fictional process of typification and caricature leads to a disturbing reification of living people. Williams enthusiastically highlights the analogy Dickens makes between houses and their inhabitants where the characteristics of each are consciously exchanged. The effect is brilliant and has been profoundly influential, but the conscious exchanges are always negative, always an endorsement of the distorting power of the city, "a way of seeing the city as a destructive animal, a monster, utterly beyond the human scale".[66] And it is this loss of the "human scale" that Williams accepts uncritically in his chapter on Dickens, rather ironically entitled, "People of the City". Here Williams's anti-urbanism acquiesces with Dickens's depersonalisation of people as "a stream of life setting that way and flowing indifferently", so much "food for the hospitals, the churchyards, the prisons, the rivers, fever, madness, vice, and death", and where a living people are undifferentiated from the "alienated human forces" of "the law, the civil service, the stock exchange, the finance houses, [and] the trading houses".[67]

By the personification of institutions like the Railway, Chancery and the Stock Exchange, Dickens gives the inanimate the characteristics of living protagonists who, unlike his actual characters, are capable of determining the social and human condition. It also metaphorically corroborates the view of the all-consuming nature of the social system, delimiting the prospect of an effective response capable of resisting the hegemonic power of that system. This may be an acceptable world-view but it is hardly one that Williams himself would endorse. Dickens's emphasis effectively denies the possibility of a liberating and redemptive impulse existing within the terms of the given social structure. His positives are the sentimentally rendered virtues of love and innocence, a recourse to mysticism in the shape of a miraculously intervening goodness

[66] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 159.
[67] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 156.

which cannot be identified as emanating from any recognisable source within the urban social structure he defines. Here the indissoluble unity of individual and social experience that Williams considers to be the transforming achievement of Dickens's method breaks down. As Williams's inquisitors in *Politics and Letters* put the case, Dickens's essential humanity strives to evoke and substantiate certain "fundamental and liberating impulses" only to find that the attempt is blocked by the over-riding structure of his method. The problem, they claim, is a consequence of his "overtotalisation of the system" which recognises no feasible recourse to the capitalist order.[68] In this respect Dickens's technique can appear double-edged. On the one hand it serves to attack, as Mark Spilka puts it, "dehumanisation, or the reduction of humanity to thinghood", while on the other, it can reinforce the perception of humanity as fully determined, taking its very shape and form, language and morality, from the "thinghood" that dominates and encloses it.[69]

Dickens's reification or depersonalisation of human beings does not so much break through the maze of apparently disconnected relationships and institutions as consistently and vigorously reinforce the romantic perception of a city's alienated condition, with its "air of cold, solitary desolation", its "drunken and dissipated" throngs wandering indifferently down its "promenades of profligate misery". It is significant that while Raymond Williams has gone to great pains to illustrate the myths and falsity of literary representations of the country, and particularly the obscuring of the real relations of its working people, he is nevertheless quite prepared to accept Dickens's extravagantly rendered and highly metaphorical representations of the city at face value.

Williams's consistent recognition of the disparity between the literature and "the real history" in his account of pastoral collapses in his reading of the city. The sense of the "deformation" of the city which consistently underwrites Dickens's representation is necessarily based on the differential ideal of the "formation" of an easily recognisable and identifiable human settlement such as the rural township or village. In this way the city of nineteenth-century literature, through

[68] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 253.
[69] Mark Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*, p. 85.

this establishing of difference, pays its own silent homage to the myth of a transparent and organically related community. Williams provides no identification or critique of the urban myth of moral degeneracy that Dickens plays his part in propagating. Nor is there any analysis of Dickens's own "mythic vision of pastoral innocence" as in the idealised rural retreat that his sympathetic characters like Nickolas Nickleby, Oliver Twist, Little Nell, and Mr Pickwick are allowed to retire to.[70]

In Dickens's city communitarian values are seemingly crushed under the weight of an all pervasive state bureaucracy and the exploitative relations of industrial capitalism, and Williams tends to accept this as self-evident, declining to examine the possibilities of both resistant and affirmative social and political formations that can establish themselves within the enclaves of a city in which national origin, religious, occupational, class and political affiliations form the basis of shared beliefs and interests upon which certain community values can be initiated and maintained.[71] Even in the midst of a sprawling metropolis like London inhabitants will display, as Dickens has himself demonstrated, a deep psychological need to define themselves in terms of a spatial relationship. Not so much an identification with the city as a whole, but a shared recognition of their particular place within that city. An identification with an East End, a Thames waterfront, "The Seven Gables" or a "Bleeding Heart Yard" which do offer the prospect of "face to face" relationships, though not in the terms of a settled domestic ideal. As Iris Marion Young has pointed out, "in the city persons and groups interact within spaces and institutions they all experience themselves as belonging to, but without those interactions dissolving into unity or commonness."[72] For Young the city life finds its strength not in being "a community of shared final ends, of mutual identification and reciprocity" but in recognising its areas of mutual interest within the wider recognition of its essential plurality and difference.[73] The city, in this respect, is best seen as the composition of "clusters of people with affinities" or "the being together of strangers".[74]

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[70] F.S. Schwartzbach, *Dickens and the City*, p. 213. See also Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*. p. 127: "there is no satisfactory withdrawal into the mystifications of pastoral."

[71] In referring to the growth of religious communities in mediaeval cities Richard Sennett claims that "the almshouses, the hospitals, and the convents in the city opened their doors more freely to strangers than in the countryside, taking in travellers, homeless people, and abandoned babies, the unknown sick and the insane." In this respect the religious community served as "a place of moral reference" by which to "measure behaviour in other parts of the city". *Flesh and Stone*, p. 158.

[72] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 237.

[73] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 238.

[74] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 237.

In this light Williams's overriding implications that positive human relationships are inevitably swallowed up by the sheer rapacity of the city and capable of no socially productive end seems unduly pessimistic. In much the same manner Dickens can be quite oblivious to the gains in the reforms of parliamentary process, education, protective legislation and the proliferation of inquiries into, and improvement of, housing, health and sanitation. Just as his personal politics never allows sympathy for the development of the communitarian values of trade unionism, nor do they allow for a recognition of the emergence of a radical bourgeois culture that undeniably exerted pressure for reform within the given system.[75]

When Williams uses his reading of Dickens to link the absence of community with the condition of the city his general argument loses much of its dialectical sophistication as well as its polemicism. In *The Long Revolution* he had emphatically asserted the need to accept "the real miracle" of the Industrial Revolution which produced the "extraordinary release of man's powers" which now required

> [i]n a quite different way, in new institutions, the slow creation of *different images of community*, different forms of relationship, by the newly-organising workers and by middle-class reformers.[76][my italics]

This need to seek out new "images of community" becomes paramount in his introduction to *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*:

> From Dickens to Lawrence, over nearly a hundred years, this bearing seems to me decisive. What community is, what it has been, what it might be, how community related to individuals and relationships; how men and women, directly engaged, see within them or beyond them, for but more often against them, the shape of a society: ... For this is a period in which what it means to live in a community is more uncertain, more critical, more disturbing as a question put both to societies and to persons than ever before in history.[77]

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[75] Dickens's powerful insistence on the cataclysmic nature of the city and the indifference of the system it produces, with "no man seeking to remedy or redress it" seems symptomatic of that highly charged response which Walter Benjamin in his study of Baudelaire has expounded on in his consideration of the Freudian sense of "shock".(*Illuminations*, p. 162–165.) Here a consciousness disturbed by the overwhelming effects of the city responds reflexively to its "gross and violent stimulants" so that in the case of Dickens the artistic form begins to reproduce the apparently fractured sensibility of mechanical reproduction in his characterisations of human life. Jonathan Arac suggests that Dickens's "urban grotesques" are related to the widespread "fear of urban experience".(*Commissioned Spirits*, p. 53.) A fear which may well be justified in certain terms but which in its overall effect is a powerful negation, a codification and justification of defeatism. It is as if to say, this is the world, its structures are overwhelming and intractable and resistance is futile - so many "Blue Books", so much "Gradgrindery".

[76] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*. p. 71.

[77] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p.11–12.

The strength of this commitment is so integral to Williams's work that a reluctance to pursue this programme, this "decisive bearing", in his engagement with the city novel, and with Dickens in particular, is puzzling. In seeing Dickens's city as "not only an alien and indifferent system but as the unknown, perhaps unknowable, sum of so many lives" Williams is interpreting the city by negative association with a "face to face" community, as if this was the essential value by which any human settlement, no matter how large, was to be critically assessed.[78]

As Williams has insisted, knowing a city, the sum of so many lives, required new and transforming ways of seeing, but he was himself (and with a great deal more of urban history on his side than Dickens) unable to see the city outside the limiting structure of his own latent organicist ideology. What Dickens could show him was the futility of that perspective. As Terry Eagleton suggests, the world of rural England and the cult of nature is for Dickens "a locus of sentimental moralism rather than of sociological law."[79] Arguing that for the most part Dickens's recourse to pastoral is to be associated with "social disengagement rather than paradigm", Eagleton, by devaluing the structure of a rural community as a positive standard by which the city must be judged, offers a valuable amendment to Williams's reading of Dickens.[80] Eagleton argues that Dickens's radicalism lies not in his attempt to secure a reconciliation of individualism and community but in his development of "the novel of the decentred totality" in which the heterogeneity of experience evolves into "a set of conflicts and non-relations now grasped as systemic."[81]

Within this consideration Dickens's work is to be read not as an organic totality or unified overview (a comprehensive knowing) but as an articulation of the unresolved nature of contradiction. In this sense Dickens's work is neither organicist in ideology nor in its formal structure. His novels do not so much deal with the resolution of these contradictions through the individualised dramas of his characters, but with the unending and unfulfilled search for social coherency, meaning and knowledge of the real nature of social and material relationships. The search for a knowable community in an unknowable city: Dickens expresses the real difficulty of this paradox.

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[78] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City,* p. 164.
[79] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 127.
[80] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 127.
[81] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 130.

The problem of seeing and knowing, identifying the social complex in any totalising way, is coterminous for both character and author, a general problem of vision and perspective, where the attempt to penetrate the dislocating contradictions of experience leads to an engulfment by those very contradictions. James M. Brown has remarked that "a radical criticism of the materialistic values and loss of community in the wider environment" is circumvented by Dickens's enlisting of "the middle-class myth of the Victorian hearth to clarify (by opposition) what is wrong with the system", so that his polemic is cloaked "within a cosy, sentimental gloss" to the point where it becomes as comfortable as the hearth around which it was read.[82] This is a fairly orthodox Marxist indictment of Dickens as a "bourgeois writer", but it fails to take into account the deeper nature of the contradictions. For it is exactly the domestic unit which is consistently seen as one of the major casualties of the system in Dickens's fiction. The idealised but then fractured image of the family, unable to sustain itself against external and material pressures, is a further instance of the totalising effects of an omnipresent system of power. The idea of the family as a possible source of redemption is consistently strained.[83] As J. Hillis Miller notes, orphans, neglected children and bad parents are the constant characters of Dickens's fiction.[84]

The family, the basic unit of the communal ideal, is like other socially derived prospects of redemption, seen to be perpetually challenged and undermined by the all pervasive organisation of power. Despite his critique of the corrosive nature of "systems" Dickens's negation of liberating prospects creates an uneasy ambiguity in relation to the power structure he appears to condemn. This tension is often apparent in the paradoxical structure of his narrative method. The analogous association between an authorial overview and the "benignant hand" who could lift the housetops off to peer inside carries much of the weight of this ambiguity. For the problem of ways of seeing and knowing is never removed from the more general issue of the politics of vision itself, from the chosen standpoint and point of view from which the subject is scrutinised. Seeing is a way of ordering, and for Dickens it was a way of interpreting the "unintelligible mess" of London.[85]

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[82] James M. Brown, *Dickens: Novelist in the Market Place*, p. 44.

[83] Lukacs's reading of Balzac is relevant here. Lukacs argues that the illusions seen in the novel as empty are the ideals of the heroic stage of bourgeois development, now destroyed by the ongoing movement of their own economic base. He believes that the "heroic pioneers" of the early stage of capitalist development had to make way for the "humanly inferior exploiters of the new development, the speculators and the racketeers". James M. Brown, *Dickens: Novelist in the Market Place*, p. 41.

[84] J. Hillis Miller, Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Bleak House*, p. 15.

[85] Richard Sennett, *The Eye of Conscience*, p. 34.

Yet as Jonathan Arac argues, Dickens's "spatialising overview" reproduces an ideological perspective which "relies heavily upon the Utilitarian principles of inspection and centralisation".[86] Even while intent on attacking Benthamite individualism and its political economy for "reducing human beings to ratios and percentages" Arac suggests that Dickens is subsumed by its powerful ethos of control and categorisation, just as John Carey prompts a consideration of "the side of Dickens which yearns to see people regimented, uniform in their behaviour, obeying rules".[87] Such an authorial disposition does not find accord with the image of Dickens as a humane and deeply sympathetic observer of his world, an image enduring and deserved. Certainly Dickens's optical penetration of the city has its profoundly positive aspects. His ability to illuminate the human suffering that was consistently obscured from the general view, incarcerated or shuffled out of sight and told, like Jo the crossing sweeper, to "move along" is a real gain. The acuteness of his vision allows him to delve into the inequities of a social structure that systematically produced homelessness, poverty, crime and despair. What Dickens at his most sympathetic can offer is a recognition and face to face confrontation with suffering, a suffering beyond individual moral failing and beyond self-help. Not a social statistic or generalized impression, but an actual life being lived under the most destructive of circumstances. This is indisputable, but against it a powerful ambiguity arises. For "lifting the housetops" may be a way of exposing pain and loss, but it also carries quite negative associations in that as a way of seeing it can move quite subtly from an exposure in order to damn and embarrass a system to what is in effect an intrusion, an intervention and a penetration that is an ordering of experience on behalf of a social "order" it ostensibly attacks.

Recent Dickens criticism by D.A. Miller and Peter Thoms has provided a Foucaultian interpretation of *Bleak House* which impressively highlights the analogous relationship between the role of the author and the role of the police detective. It is Mr Bucket, the first detective in English fiction, who provides an essential structural function within the text. Through his investigations, the detective pieces together the apparently disassociated fragments of the plot and serving as a unifying device he breaks through the confusion of apparently unrelated matter to reveal to the reader the relationship of the parts to the whole. By elucidating the obscurities,

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[86] Jonathan Arac, *Commissioned Spirits*, p. 53.
[87] John Carey, *The Violent Effigy*, p. 32.

errors and false judgements operating within the text, Bucket acts, in an authorial sense, as the reader's guide, just as the real-life Inspector Field escorted Dickens through the "impenetrable streets" of London.[88]

Bucket follows leads, disentangling the false from the profitable line of inquiry. He confronts dilemma, seeks the facts, reveals the truth in a climactic moment, arrests disorder and orchestrates the terms of closure. Like an author Bucket leads both protagonists and readers through the text, withholding crucial information only to reveal it at the appropriately melodramatic moment. His ability to discern the real nature of events lies in his acute perception, seeing what others cannot:

> He has a keen eye for a crowd - as for what not ? ... nothing escapes him.[89]

Yet en route to exposing criminality and shedding light on disorder Bucket takes on a darker aspect, an unsettling malevolence. For what Miller and Thoms have both noted is the extraordinary mobility Bucket possesses. "Time and place cannot bind Mr Bucket", he is everywhere and knows everybody.[90] As Jo remarks, "he's in all manner of places, all at wunst."[91] He moves in and through people's homes with the licence only reserved for the omniscient narrator. He moves with the same freedom through Tom-All-Alone's (where he is called "master") as he does through Chesney World (to which he has his own key). He "walks in an atmosphere of mysterious greatness". There is "no knocking or ringing for Mr Bucket."[92]

As houses in Dickens take on the characteristics of the people within them, and the people themselves seem to be an extension of the places they inhabit, Bucket's frequent intrusions into the domestic space can be interpreted as disquieting "acts of violation"[93] contesting the ideal of

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[88] Although Williams does not explore the relationship between the detective and the narrator in his critique of Dickens, he is very aware of the narratorial implications of detective fiction. As he writes in his consideration of Conan Doyle: "Indeed the urban detective, prefigured in a minor way in Dickens and Wilkie Collins, now begins to emerge as a significant and ratifying figure: the man who can find his way through the fog, who can penetrate the intricacies of the streets. The opaque complexity of modern city life is represented by crime; the explorer of a society is reduced to the discoverer of single causes ... the eccentric sharp mind ... which can unravel complexity, determine local agency, and then ... hand the matter over to the police and the courts: the clear abstract system beyond all the bustle and fog". *The Country and the City*, p. 227.

[89] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*. p. 770.

[90] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*. p. 769.

[91] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*. p. 690.

[92] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*. p. 771.

[93] Peter Thoms, "'The Narrow Track of Blood': Detection and Storytelling in *Bleak House*", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Vol. 50, No. 2, Sept. 1995. p. 155.

the home as "the 'outside' of power".[94] The sanctity and refuge Esther enjoys in Jarndyce's "Bleak House" is exceptional. Elsewhere the domestic space is disturbingly penetrated. The relationship between the law and the home is given a quite bizarre twist with the revelation that the novel's murderer, Hortense, actually resides in Bucket's own house, and as a consequence is under the constant watch of Mrs Bucket, "a lady of natural detective genius", who "takes an interest" in her lodger. The whole novel is one of deep secrecy and detection and these become the dialectical terms of the novel. Yet the exposure of secrecy as an authorial imperative is not merely revelation in the name of truth, it is also knowledge in the name of power.[95]

The great paradox surrounding Bucket is that as the acute, precise and dynamically effective police detective he is directly contrasted with the sloth and ineffectualness of the system of Chancery which is lost in a fog of its own making, producing nothing but obsession, derangement and more business for itself.[96] While Chancery can never resolve the "Jarndyce and Jarndyce" case, eating up the sum to be settled in its own costs, Detective Bucket expediently unravels all complications and resolves the mystery. Yet the apparent opposition between the derided legal system and the wholly sanctioned Mr Bucket has to be mitigated by the recognition that both serve as arms of the one legal system and power structure. Bucket effectively acts as the eyes of the legal establishment, an agent in the field, who with the aid of a "bull's-eye lantern" is capable of penetrating the density of the fog. Rather than being at odds, Bucket and Chancery serve the same ideological function.[97] Bucket effectively serves a dual purpose within the text in that he reveals social ills while simultaneously keeping them in their place.[98] Keeping them contained

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[94] D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. 76.

[95] In varying degrees Nemo, Lady Deadlock, Mr George, Hortense, Boythorn and Esther all mask their true identity, just as Vholes and Tulkinghorn mask their true motives. But this deep secrecy is countered by an almost feverish desire within the text to expose and reveal the lives of others. Besides Bucket's professional role, Tulkinghorn seeks empowerment as the "master of the mysteries of great houses" (p. 567) and Guppy, Mrs Snagsby, Mrs Bucket, the Smallweeds, Chadbands, and "the interlopers" of the press, form a cavalcade of amateur sleuths in quest of intimate knowledge.

[96] There is a radical edge to Dickens's depiction of Chancery, particularly in regard to Sir Leicester's self-interested fear of legal reform, in which any change to the system is paranoically associated with the legendary radical Wat Tyler.

[97] As D.A. Miller points out, it is well to remember that Bucket although technically a public servant, is also at different times, and very ambiguously, in the personal employ of both Tulkinghorn and Dedlock. These are the people Bucket represents, figures of legal and political authority. D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. 75.

[98] To Dickens's large middle-class readership Bucket embodies an effective police reassuringly operating on their behalf, identifying, regulating and deterring the unruly and threatening underclass. Through his investigations the detective allows the reader dramatic access to the social evils of a negligent society, but he also plays his part in containing them, either forcing the derelict population to "move along" out of London and out of sight, or by monitoring and regulating their activity within a space "cut off from honest company" and "avoided by all decent people". As Miller puts it, the "*raison d'etre* of Tom-All-Alone's is that it *be* all alone." D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. 77.

within a specifically known location, so that knowledge could more easily be consolidated into power.[99]

While Dickens longed for a "benignant hand" that would lift the housetops and reveal human and institutional ills, he also recognised that in certain quarters "the roofs shrink down and cower together as if to hide their secrets from the handsome street hard by."[100] And there were of course very legitimate reasons why people desired to evade the scrutiny and observation of surveillance, why people would resist being fully known. As Foucault suggests "knowable man" is the object and effect of "domination-observation".[101] This position can at times appear to be a *zeitgeist* of modern alienation, a neurosis and paranoia of Orwellian dimensions, but there is a well documented historical validation for this anxiety.[102] For the victims of the city's disordered state, the oppressiveness of its conditions and the authority which seeks to order it at their expense are doubly threatening, but the resilience of its disaffected population takes a subversive form so that they turn the poverty of the city's conditions to account by embracing the unfathomable character of its sprawling disordered space into which they have been pressed. In this respect the city becomes a site of "refuge", where the interminable and apparently impenetrable byways offer at least the limited protection of a darkened underworld against the illuminating light of "knowledge".[103]

The ideal of a fully "knowable community" opens up the possibility of exposure and vulnerability if the act of knowing is itself a process engendered on behalf of a dominant power

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[99] See Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault considers the relationship between the narratalogical strategy of an omniscient overview and Jeremy Bentham's "Panoptica", a model for surveillance and incarceration which, originally conceived as a plan for a prison, had its design principles extended for implementation in factories, schools and workhouses. Dickens's desire to come to terms with the city can be interpreted as an immersion into this ideological structure, a prison-house of language in which the reformist spirit of his liberalism is regulated if not nullified by its incorporation into a strategy of authorial control, a discourse in which exposure serves the power of knowledge and containment. It is an instance of what Edward Said claims as the nineteenth-century European novel's consolidation, refinement and articulation of "the authority of the status-quo". For Edward Said, the novel's consolidation of authority is built into the fabric of institutions which appear in the text as both "normative and sovereign", validating themselves in the progress of the narrative. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 91–92.

[100] Charles Dickens, *Master Humphrey's Clock: and, A Child's History of England,* p. 107–8.

[101] See Jeremy Tambling, "Prison-bound: Dickens and Foucault" *Essays in Criticism* Vol. 36, 1986, p. 11–30.

[102] Michael Ignatieff has pointed out that by the 1840s police surveillance had grown to an unprecedented level and along with the increasing number of penal laws contributed to a higher degree of criminalising and incarceration. Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary of the Industrial Revolution 1750–1850*. E.P. Thompson has recorded the history of nineteenth-century urban radicalism and the extreme need for secrecy in all their dealings for fear of government spies and anti-combination laws in *The Making of the English Working Class*, just as Mayhew's pioneering work on London's poor empirically affirms the deep psychological fear of the police, the workhouse, the poor-law inspectors and the prison. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and London Poor.*

[103] In his discourse on mediaeval cities Richard Sennett suggests that "sanctuary was the point of community". *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, p. 159.

structure. Williams's insistence on the positive sense of a knowable community tends to disregard the persistent desire for anonymity as a defence against the pressing conformism of a social milieu governed by the habit of surveillance. Walter Benjamin has made an important distinction between the romantic sense of being "lost in the crowd" as an alienating experience, and the more affirmative association of losing oneself in the crowd, a positive abandonment, as a liberation from the constant recognition of the eyes of the world and its constraining social and moral codes.[104] From this perspective the city offers the subject a freedom to experience life in a less restrained and tethered way than a rural community which, through its "face to face" relationships, can quite immediately recognise a deviation from the encoded norms. The city can offer not merely the liberation of deviancy but the positive potential of difference and plurality as well as gratifying the desire for anonymity.

Intoxicated by Dickens's transformative techniques of examining the subject Williams glosses over the broader social implications of this Dickensian method. Placing his primary critical emphasis on "point of view", he avoids the testing evaluating questions of what Dickens actually makes of the subject, not simply how he views it. Dickens's "way of seeing" is not just observation but also construction, and in this respect Williams momentarily neglects his own obligation and commitment to the actual subjects of scrutiny. If, in the case of pastoral, Williams can take umbrage over Jonson's writing out of the labourer in the name of an "affiliation" with that class, there would seem a political incongruity and lack of "affiliation" in his willingness to overlook the treatment of an urban proletariat in Dickens's work.

Significantly this inconsistency with regard to the plight of the subject is encoded in his conceptualisation of "the knowable community" in which he writes:

> For what is knowable is not only a function of objects—of what is there to be known. It is also a function of subjects, of observers—of what is desired and what needs to be known.[105]

The emphasis here is telling, for what "needs to be known" is seen in terms of a subjective enterprise, a relation to available "objects" of knowledge, rather than on behalf of the subject as

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[104] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", *Illuminations*, p. 157–202.
[105] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 165.

the observed, as the recipient of a sustained ideological gaze. While one of Williams's real contributions to criticism has been his rallying cry against exclusion, his analysis of Dickens lacks the full recognition that "exclusion" from the narrative is not necessarily detrimental if to be included is to be incorporated, co-opted, contained and enclosed. For if in Foucault's sense "knowledge is power", then escaping subjection to knowledge would appear to offer the prospect of subverting enclosure. In this sense, to be excluded from the narrative is to enjoy a positive aspect of marginalisation, in that it is also to elude the totalising impulse of the authorial project and consequently to remain outside and independent of its hegemonic structure. For instance the trade union movement gains absolutely nothing by its inclusion in *Hard Times* in which the grotesque union official Slackbridge conforms wholly to the reactionary perception of that movement.

The "Knowable Community"

While for Williams the city is the site of an "unknowable community" when he comes to focus his critical attention on the early novels of George Eliot, where the dramatic action returns to the "face to face" and relatively transparent world of the small rural village, he is more compelled to explore community in terms of the relations between narrative, knowledge and power. Those subjects within Eliot's work who are seen to be living under the class pressures of social and economic domination are seen also, through Williams's critique, to be enclosed within the selected narrative perspective of the text, even when Eliot's narrator appears to hold out every intention of liberating them from their exclusion at the hands of the master-narrative of the novel form. This is the theoretical problem of the "knowable community".

Williams defines the "knowable community" in a two-fold way. In its most immediate sense it is deemed to be present within those novels which actively achieve "an effective range of social experience" through the representation of "sufficiently manifest immediate relations".[106]

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[106] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 247.

For example, a novelist such as Thomas Hardy is capable of reaching

> a very wide range of social experience through a series of relations which were wholly knowable to him in manifest ways, and which he could render concrete in his fiction. This was not possible, for example, for Dickens, who had to devise different fictional strategies for a much more complex urban world ... a community unknowable in terms of manifest experience.[107]

Initially this is no more than to suggest that the greater the scale and complexity of a community, the greater the difficulty of defining its social and material connections, of giving concrete embodiment to it in terms of a singular experience. In this respect the relations unfolding within the city remain "essentially opaque" while conversely the rural community, because of its manageable capacity, is capable of revealing an "essentially transparent" set of relations. This is straightforward enough, yet the numerical, spatial and geographic factors of community are, as Williams himself says, "not the whole story", and as his account unravels his concept of a "knowable community" deepens in complexity. It is, as he has pointed out "a term used with irony" in that it registers an awareness of the improbability of a totalising narrative perspective, and an acceptance of the "darkly unknowable" world beyond the narrative gaze.[108] The irony invested in the term challenges the actual notion of social transparency. The concept of the "knowable community" is self questioning, it acts as a device by which Williams can explore what he describes as "the paradox of language and community". This "paradox" is manifest in the narrative itself, apparent as a linguistic differentiation between the knowable subject and the ideological and moral point of view encoded in the language and formal structure elected to represent it. As Forest Pyle suggests, it is a concept that reveals "an inherent disconnection between story and discourse".[109] This "problem of language" is effectively illustrated by Williams through his now famous comparison between the communities of Jane Austen and George Eliot.

Austen's work has always been renowned for its authorial control and composed equanimity of tone, and critics have tended to see this in terms of a moral and aesthetic unity, but as Williams implies this sense of unity is largely achievable through Austen's representation of a community that is "very precisely selective" in that her whole attention is focused on a quite specific social

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[107] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 247.
[108] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 171.
[109] Forest Pyle, "A Novel Sympathy: The Imagination of Com nunity in George Eliot" *Novel*. Vol. 27 No. 1 Fall, 1993. p. 17.

group, "a network of propertied houses and families", who are not seen to interact with those outside their own social coterie. The narrator clearly belongs to this particular milieu. Observer and subject share a common identity and common language, so that "the idiom of the novelist" has a very direct correspondence with "the idiom of her characters". Austen's world is that of "relative equals" within a class specific narrative:

> Neighbours in Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less nearby who, in social recognition, can be visited. What she sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen. To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class. No other community, in physical presence or in social reality, is by any means knowable.[110]

It is in relation to Austen's "stylised convention" that George Eliot's contribution to the form of the novel can be readily assessed. As Williams points out, Eliot orchestrates an alteration in literary bearings, an altered point of view, which accommodates the representation of "other kinds of people" and other kinds of community. The real strength of this development is not just in the documentary inclusion of "rustic types", but in the breadth it allows for the recognition of the complex connective processes of social and economic relationships within a society. The moral emphasis on conduct so integral in Austen and so influential on the Victorian novel in general, is, in Eliot, not abstracted as an independent value, but seen as largely determined by the material relations that both bind and divide classes. Undeniably the problems of human conduct in Austen's novels have an evident material base in which the personal dramas of the romance run concomitantly with the processes of inheritance and the transmission of wealth accrued from the profits of trade, colonisation and military exploits.[111] However, the materiality of these processes, the economic base upon which the middle-class superstructure is founded, is never, for Williams, finally connected within the text, so the moral and the material are seen as isolable elements within the one narrative. A middle class ideal of moral discrimination is seen in contrast to, rather than an aspect of, the cruder facts of economic power. Citing an impressive example from *Mansfield Park*, Williams alerts us to the correspondence between the return of Sir Thomas Bertram and his reimposition of moral conduct within Mansfield Park, and the fact that both the country-house and its domestic morality are supported by a colonial interest in

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[110] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 166.

[111] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 21.

Antiguan plantations, in which a more dubious moral conduct is at play.

It is Williams's point that in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, the author's expanded point of view, which allows for the inclusion of a broader account of the social organisation, provides her with a clearer perspective on the real nature of the economic relationships that sustain the country-house ideal. Here the moral discrimination and good conduct of its inhabitants are seen in the light of the dominating social relationship between landlord and tenant. The relations between the Donnithornes and the Poysers, despite their fragile air of the polite and neighbourly, are seen to be, in effect, power relations based on the prevailing threat of eviction and the coincident desire for possession. When Donnithorne, as the proprietor of the Poyser's Mill Farm, enters that domestic space and then, under the proposition of making "improvements", none too subtly reminds his tenants of his power to terminate their tenancy, his demonstration of authority is actually designed to bring them into service by monopolising the produce of their dairy, binding them to the manor and rendering them dependent. Donnithorne's tone of paternal civility is punctuated by the aggressive economics of an acquisitive rural gentry. As Williams points out, the same sense of acquisition underlies Arthur's "taking up" of Adam to manage his woods, just as he takes possession of Hetty as his lover.[112] Both relationships, ostensibly social, are acts of purchase as well as a consolidation of authority.

While Eliot's point of view allows for the representation of such relationships and is in this respect a significant gain, it also, as Williams's thesis recognises, entails deep formal difficulties. Whereas in Austen's work because only "one class is seen", in effect, "no classes are seen" the breadth of social relationships that Eliot allows into her narrative forces a confrontation not only with the existence of classes but also with the recognition of class conflict. In this respect Austen's equanimity of tone and "confident way of seeing and judging" are never really attainable within Eliot's pastoral novels, for the unified narrative of the fiction of resolution is strained by the unresolved nature of the crises and conflicts she actually dramatises. Exactly because there is class conflict there are also contesting world-views, diverse ways of seeing and interpreting and importantly different modes of expression, all of which makes a "unity of idiom" impossible to sustain:

[112] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 167.

> There is a new kind of break in the texture of the novel, an evident failure of continuity between the necessary language of the novelist and the recorded language of many of the characters.[113]

Williams's proposition is that despite the gains in Eliot's representation of the materiality of social relationships, "she still slips against her will" into a "self-consciously generalising" mode of representing her rural characters so that they are never sufficiently individuated, and are reduced to a collective or choral presence. So that what begins as an important "inclusive" representation and appeal to social veracity becomes under certain types of narratological pressure a paternal condescension and tone of apology:

> I am not ashamed of commemorating old Kestler: you and I are indebted to the hard hands of such men - hands that have long ago mingled with the soil they tilled so faithfully, thriftily making the best they could of the earth's fruits, and receiving the smallest share as their own wages.[114]

There is here an uncomfortable recognition of that "uneasy contract in language" between the imagined reader and the cosmopolitan writer and their mutual difference from the less refined life of the subject. A "placating and appealing to what seems a dominant image of a particular kind of reader."[115] And as Williams asks, "who made the compact of 'you and I', who must be shown as indebted? Who, finally, provoked the consciousness which requires the acknowledgment 'I am not ashamed'".[116]

As Terry Eagleton confirms, in extending the range of the realist novel to include the treatment of "socially obscure figures", Eliot reveals a problematic relationship to both her readers and her subject matter in that "while she insists on the latent significance of the apparently peripheral lives she presents, she also apologises, with a blend of genial patronage and tentative irony, for choosing such an unenlightened enclave as the subject matter of serious fiction".[117] Within this aesthetic and ethical conflict there is also a profound appeal to the "sympathy" of the reader in order to encourage, somewhat didactically, a sense of "wide fellow-feeling", which is ultimately the guiding moral imperative of Eliot's fiction.

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[113] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 169.
[114] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 172.
[115] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 172.
[116] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 172.
[117] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 114.

As a predetermined stance and primary initiative this is bound, as Williams claims, to inhibit an intimate knowledge and representation of a rural community. Yet even within the limitations of Eliot's "problem of language" her representation appears more "knowable" than Williams seems willing to explore. For what would seem to be critically relevant to Williams's general study of the notion of community is the extreme tension between the principles of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* that are operative within Eliot's early fiction. As Susan Graver has pointed out, these terms are not intended to embody actual or concrete forms of life, but to provide the polarities within which a knowledge of the elemental nature and mechanism of social life may be negotiated.[118] What Eliot achieves is an articulation of the crisis produced by the challenge to a traditional, ancestral and often mythical conception of community that is thrown down by the *Gesellschaft* principles of a more mobile and acquisitive society. These are the dialectical terms of the novels, a dramatisation in which the dichotomy between the ideal and the experiential becomes the framework of the action. And then the difficulty of Eliot's project, as in Williams's, is both to recognise the idealised community as myth, and, paradoxically, to "regain" it, to offer its values as not only desirable but as attainable in the present and future, and again paradoxically, to facilitate both Eliot's conservatism and Williams's radicalism.

Eliot's desire for the human solidarity of a community finds itself, again like Williams's own, caught in a contradiction in which a nostalgic appeal to a way of life now superseded by competitive material values is confronted by her own realist demystification of the pastoral ideal, the recognition of that "hard, real life" which fails to sustain the desire of the individual. Each individual who makes a claim for a life beyond the confines of a stifling fixity is compelled, in the rebellious spirit of romantic individualism, to drift beyond the boundaries of their insular community, tragically seduced by the outside world of unlimited promise.

There is an irony in Eliot's description of her authorial imagination as a "licensed trespasser" that is able to "climb over walls and peep in at windows with impunity."[119] Not only does it display some of the intrusive sense of Dickens's "overview", but the "impunity" of imagination she allows herself is effectively denied to her tragic figures. It is exactly their unlicensed

[118] Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form*, p. 14.
[119] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 78.

imagination that endangers them and puts them at odds with their community. Their inability to accept their given condition, to fatally entertain an expansion of the possibilities of life, exposes them to the hard-hearted conformism of their individual communities. What Eliot presents in both novels is not just the realisation of that "hard, real life" but of the community as a structure of control which oversees the production of conformity, accelerating and exacerbating the tragic consequences of misguided action or moral transgression. Conformism renders the non-conformist suspect, and the sympathy and fellow feeling of the *Gemeinschaft* world are seen to breakdown under their own pressure. Both Hetty and Maggie express a deep dissatisfaction with their place and prospects within the community. When Hetty realises that she will be denied the naive prospect of entering the leisured world of Arthur Donnithorne she has the "sickening sense that her life would go on in this way" and that "she would carry about forever a hopeless thirst and longing."[120] She must repress her sorrow, for she fears exposure as "the sick and weary prisoner might think of the possible pillory."[121] Maggie's sentiments are of the same kind. She lives under an "oppressive spell", a "resigned imprisonment", fearing the repetitive daily grind of "no consequence" and fated never to "know anything better". And then what is striking in both novels is the profound want of sympathy with which the community suffers the transgressions of the two women. Hetty experiences an "irresistible dread from every course that could tend towards a betrayal of her miserable secret."[122] Nothing could be done "that would shelter her from discovery and scorn among the relatives and neighbours who once more made all her world".[123] Her home and community can not offer her protection and "she must hide herself where no familiar eyes could detect her".[124] Journeying into despair and confronted by nothing but immediate beggary she fleetingly considers throwing herself on the mercy of "The Parish!" But as Eliot writes:

> You can perhaps hardly understand the effect of that word on a mind like Hetty's, brought up among people who were somewhat hard in their feelings even towards poverty, who lived among the fields, and had little pity for want and rags as a cruel inevitable fate such as they sometimes seem in the cities, but held them as a mark of idleness and vice - and it was idleness and vice that brought burdens on the parish. To Hetty the "parish" was next to *the prison* in obloquy ...[125]

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[120] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 321.
[121] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 322.
[122] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 349.
[123] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 349.
[124] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 349.
[125] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 361.

What Eliot is registering here in the description of Hetty's people as "hard in their feelings" is that want of sympathy which Hetty does not even have to experience personally to acknowledge. Those who cannot sustain themselves economically and become a burden on the community are seen as figures of "vice" from which the community is to be protected, just as those like Hetty who contravene the moral code of the community are driven into exile. Their "difference" becomes a threat to the commonality which binds the community. It is the constriction of these bindings which Hetty seeks to escape. It is observation she wishes to evade, the gaze of moral authority "whose glance she dreaded like scorching fire".[126] The want of sympathy becomes a real point of tension within the narrative structure, for it is just the need for sympathy which is the moral lesson of the novel and the basis upon which, for Eliot, a genuine community of feeling is to be founded. Yet the lesson must be taught by negative association, for sympathy must be imported into the narrative in the form of Dinah, a Methodist preacher from outside the immediate community, who belongs herself to "a very strict order" whose "brethren and sisters watch out for each other's souls".[127] Dinah's sympathy is a professional one. Her mission is to regain lost souls in the name of a metaphysical community. She is a model of sympathy, but there is a penetrating irony in the fact that the "strict order" of her earthly community outlaws preaching by women and Dinah is compelled to conform and to set "th' example o' submitting".[128] The active open air teacher of sympathy is effectively silenced. But it is not the only sympathy which is silenced. Hetty is not only excluded from the sanctity of the community, she is also excluded from the narrative, literally "transported" out of it as the new authorial impetus becomes the burgeoning affection between Adam and Dinah. It is the working towards a resolution of the crisis along *Gemeinschaft* principles. As Williams remarks:

> Even the changed repentant Arthur is more important than the girl whom the novelist abandons in a moral action more decisive than Hetty's own confused and desperate leaving of her child.[129]

Eliot organises a transfer of the reader's sympathy away from Hetty and towards those who are "shamed" by their intimate connection with the "criminal". Both the Poysers and the Bedes contemplate fleeing their life-long community. The scorn of the community becomes a powerful

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[126] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 363.
[127] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 96.
[128] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 506.
[129] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 173.

inducement to exile. Even the ageing Lizbeth can immediately make up her mind "to being buried in another parish", though such a prospect had been constantly expressed as her deepest fear.[130] It is agreed that they "shall all be better in a new country".[131] Adam's reasons for exodus are obvious enough as his relationship with Arthur is now clearly untenable, but Martin Poyser's incentive is to escape the stigma of disgrace that his family will carry in the eyes of the community:

> "But I doubt we shall ne'er go far enough for folks not to find out as we've got them belonging to us as are transported o'er the seas, and were liked to be hanged. We shall have that flyin' up in our faces, and our children's after us."[132]

Just as the moral bearings of the author are severe on Hetty, so it is that both author and implied community are apt to forgive the redeemable Arthur. His belated intervention on behalf of Hetty in which he is able to have her sentence mitigated from death to transportation is rather inappropriately depicted in a melodramatic and romantic vein - an eleventh hour rescue by the hero on horseback. By the conclusion a repentant Arthur, "much changed", is allowed to reclaim both his previous position and his friendship with Adam. He is in effect welcomed back into the community of the novel which is now embodied in the *Gemeinschaft* harmony of Adam's and Dinah's connubial life. Alternatively Hetty remains in narrative exile, reintroduced only in a single line as "the poor wanderer" who has died "when she was coming back to us".[133]

Williams can detect a similar "contraction of sympathy to the exposed and separated individual" in *The Mill on the Floss.* Maggie grows up amidst the "guarded, unattractive rituals of survival" in which the ideal of an organic life is rudely confronted by a rapacious and litigious commercial sector. The co-operative structure of community is revealed as a hardened, indifferent coterie in which a man has "neighbours that *will* go to law with him" and a family network whose ethos is to correct its members "severely" if they were "other than a credit".[134] With her own family's prospects ruined in the courts, Maggie falls into a life of relative penury and becomes dependent on the Dodson "kin":

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[130] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 438.
[131] George Eliot, *Adam Bede,* p. 439.
[132] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 439.
[133] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 505.
[134] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 86.

> A conspicuous quality in the Dodson character was its genuineness; its vices and virtues alike were phases of a proud, honest egoism which had a hearty dislike to whatever made against its own credit and interest, and would be hard of speech to inconvenient "kin", but would never forsake or ignore them, would not let them want bread, but only require them to eat it with bitter herbs.[135]

The emphasis on the materialism of the terms "credit and interest" is symptomatic of the intrusion of *Gesellschaft* values upon the *Gemeinschaft* ideal of the solidarity of the family. Organic notions are put under stress by what Eagleton describes as the "penetration of urban capital".[136] Economic deprivation is commensurate with Maggie's social deprivation. She is denied her long standing friendship with Philip Wakem, the sympathetically rendered and ironically "deformed" son of the aggressive lawyer and capitalist who has bankrupted Tulliver. From within this oppressiveness Maggie despairs of ever finding "the intense and varied life she yearned for", and fears that her future is "likely to be worse than her past, for after years of renunciation she had slipped back into desire and longing".[137] Her "hungry nature" seeks a "brighter aerial world", the "half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight".[138] Just as Hetty is under the "narcotic effect" of being admired by Arthur Donnithorne, Maggie is seduced by the "agreeable" experience of "receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person whom she herself was conscious of timidity."[139] She is effectively seduced by the trappings and finery of an acquisitive bourgeois society embodied by the "well-bred" Stephen Guest with his "diamond ring, attar of roses, and air of nonchalant leisure".[140] As if in a dream Maggie is erratically borne along by the tide beyond the point of return, compromising herself in the midst of a self-destructive reverie. And although she is innocent of all but desire, she is guilty in the world of appearances. Her family and community pass judgement and she is effectively exiled, to be redeemed only by death.

In the chapter "St. Ogg's Passes Judgment" Eliot satirises the hypocritical grounds upon which the community condemns Maggie. Stephen Guest's infatuation is put down to the excesses of a romantic youth against the clear "culpability" of Maggie's error. Morally Maggie's ennobling

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[135] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 289.
[136] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 115.
[137] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 390.
[138] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 402.
[139] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p.3 92.
[140] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 378.

choice in disengaging herself from Guest is an act in the name of community, in the name of "fellow-feeling" and against self-interest, but her actions are given greater tragic significance because in the end they are not ratified by the community. This community judges in strict consistency with results, and the "post-marital trousseau" of Mrs Stephen Guest with all its attendant advantages would have been a result to judge by, for after all "society couldn't be carried on if we inquired into private conduct in that way, and Christianity tells us to think no evil".[141] But as she was in fact "not" Mrs Stephen Guest, "It was to be hoped that she would go out of the neighbourhood - to America, or anywhere - so as to purify the air of St. Ogg's from the taint of her presence".[142]

Eliot's cynicism is aimed at the self-interest of *Gesellschaft*. An alternative *Gemeinschaft* world is imagined by Dr. Kenn who alone seems sympathetic to Maggie. He invokes the idea of a Christian fraternity in which the Church "ought to represent the feeling of the community" and as "a family knit together" open the arms to the "penitent".[143] However, he must concede that such ideals seem to belong to the past and are "entirely relaxed" in the present. Such a notion of community "can hardly be said to exist in the public mind" and now survives only in "the partial, contradictory form they have taken in the narrow communities of schismatics".[144] Yet for all Kenn's sentiments the pressure of an unsympathetic community reveals his own frailty. Under the weight of "gossip and slander" and opinion both "odious and contemptible", he finds that he also "must advise Maggie to go away from St. Ogg's".[145]

In this respect Eliot's work dramatises what Iris Marion Young describes as "the exclusionary consequences of valuing community".[146] A significant implication of a desire for community is that it tends to ratify an ideal that values and enforces homogeneity, and in so doing "oppress[es] those experienced as different".[147] By contravening community strictures both Hetty and Maggie acutely expose the very social distinctions and prejudices that the "myth of community" actively obscures. They bring difference as a social, economic and political fact into sharp focus, exposing

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[141] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 513.
[142] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 514.
[143] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 518.
[144] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 518.
[145] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 537.
[146] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 235.
[147] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p. 235.

its unresolved nature as a social reality, and subject it to a point of crisis that the belated organicism of the novel's conclusions cannot adequately answer for. In both novels the traditional closure of resolution undergoes a type of suspension, so that the real crisis of the stories is subordinated by the imposition of a diverting narrative strategy. As in the case of Hetty, Maggie's death offers the narrative a fortuitous relief from the tensions between the conventionally idealised and experientially negative representations of community.

Williams has been extremely influential in his recognition of the problem of the "knowable community" in relation to Eliot's work. The "paradox of language and community" which prevents a continuity of idiom between narrator and subject and which manifests itself as a mediating force upon her interpretation of the subject, has been taken up by a number of contemporary critics. Susan Snaider Lanser has offered an amendment to Williams's original insight by locating the narratological quandary of Eliot's technique in the antithetical nature of her realist project.[148] Here the realist endeavour to construct a broad world-view that can adequately capture the complex web of human organisation, as a mirror reflecting the passing life, is confronted by the "pedagogic imperative" that underpins the moral discourse of her fiction. Against the realist programme of presenting *the world as it is*, there is the intrusion of a moral didacticism that constructs a subjunctive prospectus, the way *the world could or should be.*[149] In this respect there is a constant equivocation between descriptive representation and critical evaluation, expressed in the dialectical tension between the *Gesellschaft* world "as it is" and the *Gemeinschaft* world as it "could or should be". Eliot's "problem of language" manifests itself in her inability to adequately synthesise "neutral" transcription and "subjective" moral arbitration. The author strains to mediate this complexity both aesthetically and ideologically. As Snaider Lanser observes, the contradictions between "knowing and judging" can only be accommodated by the "authorisation" of the 'diegetic" voice over the ostensible "mimetic" function of realism.[150] The problem with Snaider Lanser's formulation is that it seems to suppose that a neutral non-subjective description of life is actually attainable, and that there is a mode of realism that is free of ideological property. This is at least questionable, but her general emphasis seems valid. Eliot does go to work with two incompatible objectives, an organic ideal of a

[148] Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice.*
[149] Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, p. 85.
[150] Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*, p. 85.

possible life and a commitment to a faithful account of the material character of actual life. In this respect both Eliot and Williams share a common quandary.

But the problem of the "knowable community" also runs deeper than this problem of language, for as David Miller suggests, the narratable content of Eliot's fiction functions in a manner which serves to maintain the community as an essentially unknowable state, for to be "known" in terms of the narrative is to enter the discourse of difference, the crisis of the "other" against which the community constitutes its normative standing. Borrowing again from Foucault, Miller makes the point that "much as the lunatic both affronts and reassures our sense of mental health" the transgressions of routine in Eliot's work "both scandalise and ultimately confirm its normativeness."[151] By this he means that within any given community there are potentially unlimited sources of narrative, yet the community functions in such a way as to isolate severe transgressions of the accepted code of behaviour, and to direct these transgressions towards a state of "story-worthiness" which represents the "narratable difference" by which a normative condition can then be construed. As he points out this is the function of gossip, the promoting of perceived eccentricities into a narratable form which also reassuringly consolidates conventional behaviour:

> The distribution of the narratable is not a common-sensical recognition of what is inherently interesting. Nor does it proceed according to an arbitrary logic of hit and miss. Rather, it marks the sites where an ideology feels itself in danger and has already begun to counter-attack.[152]

Clearly in both *Adam Bede* and *The Mill On The Floss* the subject of the narrative is centred on characters who threaten the ideology of social routine. The consolidation of a normative condition by isolating the aberrant subject is the means by which that subject attracts narrative attention. Individuated in this way, the subject is now suitable for appropriation by the dominant romantic discourse and its elaboration of the crisis of the individual.

Considering the degree of narrative possibility within any community, there is necessarily a process of selection in order to determine which differences are to be acknowledged and which

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[151] D.A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents*, p. 111.
[152] D.A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents*, p. 113.

are allowed the sanctity of the normative state. In this respect a community of convention is what Miller defines as "the non-narratable equilibrium" which in a reflex fashion deflects its narratable possibilities away from itself and onto the exiled state of the isolated and individual consciousness. Miller's "non-narratable" community is effectively the flip-side of Williams's "unknowable community" in that the latter recognises the paradoxical nature of interpretation and representation from the point of view of the writer and implied narrator, while the former registers the problem from the perspective of the community and its tendency to suspend or deflect its own narratibility and hence knowability. It is not then only a problem of writing, but also a problem of the way a community constructs and defines itself.

The problem of defining a community is revealed in Williams's own study of Eliot. The constant affiliation he makes between a rural proletariat and the idea of community becomes particularly strained in his criticism of her. For while making the point that her choral mode tends to collectivise the rural families into a typology, characters that are "done" in a conventional way, he seems to reproduce that tendency in the very moment of analysing its failings. As he writes:

> One would not willingly lose the Poysers, the Gleggs, and the Dodsons, but it is significant that we can talk of them this way, in the plural, while the emotional direction of the novel is towards separated individuals.[153]

Yet in at least one respect we have to ask what it is exactly that we would lose? For it is questionable as to how accurately we can think of these families in the plural. Williams responds as if the Poysers and the Gleggs (who along with the Bedes, Tullivers and Dodsons he identifies as the "real families of England") were all portrayed by Eliot as a single type, lacking individuation and reduced to stock character and representing the familiar domestic virtues of simplicity, kinship and stability. However, it would be somewhat easier for Williams to stop seeing them in the collective if he were not so intent on pressing them into service as a representation of the residual aspects of a *Gemeinschaft* ideal. For, on the contrary, they represent families immersed in varying degrees of conscious social mobility, displaying a quite utilitarian sense of consolidating social improvement and cultivating the increased social power that attends such improvement.

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[153] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 169.

Unlike his father Adam Bede possesses a rigorous work ethic and ambitiously seeks advancement in the world. Both Burge the Hayslope builder and Poyser see the advantages in making marital connections with him on the basis of his undoubted prospects. Poyser's willingness to accept Adam is strongly based on his certainty that Adam will become "a master-man someday". Yet as Eliot informs us the relationship between Adam and Poyser is already a transcending of the "rigid demarcation" of "rank" between "the farmer and the respectable artisan".[154] Williams has effectively pointed out that economically determined class relations, rather than an idealised organic social order, predicate the connections between the aristocratic landlord and the tenant farmer, but he doesn't press the observation far enough to examine the social hierarchy of what he takes on the whole to be the homogeneous community of the working village life.

In *The Mill On The Floss* Eliot is dealing with a distinctly more complex social organisation. One which makes visible a juncture between a relatively static rural community and an increasingly mobile rural middle-class. The idea of clan and kin suggested by the family network of the Dodson sisters is revealed as a startlingly hierarchical organisation in which power is distributed proportionately to the degree of material wealth. The Dodsons are free-hold farmers and a "very respectable family indeed" whose daughters have married with different degrees of success. Pullet belongs to "that extinct class of yeomanry" but he is now wealthy, just as Glegg has successfully "retired from business". Deane has risen in the world to become manager and partner in Guest and Co., the great mill and ship owning concern with an interest in banking. Tulliver is a miller who has servants and can afford to buy his son an education and make a gentleman of him. Tulliver's sister has married Moss, a farmer without capital working arid land whose plight has disqualified his family from the society of his inlaws. Within this organisation capital establishes its own moral authority. The Tullivers borrow from the Gleggs as the Mosses borrow from the Tullivers. In both cases the lender takes the high moral ground as their form of extracting "interest". And though Tulliver in the end is of too generous a heart to turn his own sister out, Mrs Glegg's insistence on humble deference as the price of rescuing the ruined Tullivers from eviction and "the work-house" is symptomatic of the back-biting, self-interested transmission of power that is constantly evoked in these relations of kin and clan. Even the relationship between Maggie and her brother Tom is highly ambivalent in this respect.

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[154] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, p. 103.

Eliot attempts to construct a belated transcendent and redemptive closure in the final paragraph of the novel:

> The boat reappeared, but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted, living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together.[155]

There is a certain amount of bad faith here, for throughout the course of the novel the relationship between the siblings is seen through Maggie in terms of a "desire" for a loving mutuality and reciprocity that is actually a response to the registered pain, division and betrayal surrounding their relationship. The closure of the novel is a wish-fulfilment outside the real terms of the dramatic action, just as the ideal of community finds no significant grounding as a model for a redeeming life principle.

In an important sense the problem of the "knowable community" as a linguistic paradox is the result of a structural and thematic contradiction in which the application of the organic myth of a *Gemeinschaft* ideal is internally challenged within the text by the realist writer's own counter-recognition of its absence. An alternative way of putting the problem would be to suggest that the ideal of community acts as an absent centre in which the moral imperative and associated utopic moment signified by the term community can be only "negatively" implied, known by what it is not, while never located as a material presence. In seeking a "unity of idiom" that will address the problem of a "knowable community", Williams appears to be appealing for a linguistic model that is not socially available within the stratified structure of the Victorian world.

Class conflict provides the impasse in this respect, and while Williams undoubtedly recognises this, if the paradox between authorial language and the idiom of community is to be overcome, it seems to require a language that transcends the problem of class. It is difficult to see how such a unified idiom would not betray the tendency to become concomitant with a totalising ideology, a unified world-view that would in its effects be incongruous with the crisis of conflict and division that informs much of the dramatic tension of the realist novel. The problem for Williams is that his advocacy of a "unity" and "continuity" of idiom has its own particularly organic

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[155] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 546.

emphasis and seems at times to be in danger of slipping into a formulation of the very type of "monological" discourse he is otherwise at pains to reject. What he seeks from the novel form is a narrative stance in which "the language of the narrator is *at one* with the language of his characters".[156] Yet it would seem, within the terms of Williams's own argument, that the actual extension of the novel form by writers such as Dickens and Eliot to include more than one class would render this ideal either untenable or at least significantly lacking in social verisimilitude. In one sense Williams is seeking a socialism of language, and one that is, contradictorily, ideologically neutral. For if the knowable subject is to be made known, it must find a means of circumventing the ideological perspective of a cultivated language that has, for Williams, impeded this knowledge to date.

In this respect Williams's conceptualisation of the "knowable community" seeks a Bakhtinian "dialogism" in which a polyphony of spoken voices are incorporated into the authorial discourse in a manner which is barely distinguishable from the master-voice of the narrator. As I have suggested this does not necessarily avert the problem of dominant and subordinate voices. For while Bakhtin claims that the distance between the "common language" incorporated in the dialogical narrative and the author's recognisably independent voice can be "almost imperceptible", he makes it clear that the relationship is never static and that the composition and organisation of "heteroglossia" does not prevent the intervention of "the direct authorial word ...which directly embodies semantic and axiological intentions of the author".[157] This recognition of the possibilities of ideological imposition within his "common language" distinguishes Bakhtin's thinking on this matter, while Williams appears to contemplate a democratic unity of idiom uncorrupted by ideology.

The problem in Williams's case is not so much a lack of theoretical sophistication in relation to the ideological power of narrative form, but what is for him the necessity of validating his own cultural and philosophical ideology. For if the tradition of the English novel has demonstrated

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[156] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 140.

[157] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, p. 301. In the English comic novel Bakhtin locates a tradition in which there exists a "re-processing of almost all levels of literary language" so that the authorial voice constructs itself out of a composite of elements such as the eloquence of parliamentary and court rhetoric, the racy hyperbole of news report, the "dry business language of the City", the "pedantic speech of scholars" or the moralising sanctimony of the "high epic" or "Biblical" style. Bakhtin's theory of a "heteroglossia" within the novels of "Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Dickens, Thackeray and others" holds out the promise of a "common language" operating within the novel which goes some way to answering for the type of unity Williams proposes as the solution to the problem of the "knowable community".

a marked tendency to exclude the lives of the majority of people, to dehistoricise and depoliticise their existence, then it is absolutely essential for Williams's critical project to find an aesthetic means by which they can find inclusion and recognition. If the problem of the "knowable community" is to be unresolved and the communitarian values central to his own political beliefs are to remain unrepresented then he cannot break the silence which has enveloped those people whom he claims affiliation with. If his own cultural and political agenda is to find a correspondence between the ideal of social liberation and the development of the realist form, then at some point, if community is not to be forever "unknowable", the novel must answer for his claim that the "knowable community" is realisable in a concrete literary form, and that the "paradox" he identifies is resolvable. The development of his argument in *The Country and the City* is that there is a progressive movement towards this realisation.

It is to Hardy and then to the early Lawrence that Williams looks for the fulfilment of a "knowable community". Hardy provides "a very wide range of social experience through a series of relations which were wholly knowable to him". This breadth has the merit of allowing Hardy to draw on a depth of experience by which he could extend the social range of the novel. And by dramatising the tragedy of common experience he is able to articulate the crisis of a rural community in which the residual aspects of a pre-industrial rural world could be seen to be breaking up under the strain of a mobilising agrarian capitalism. The gain in material observation effectively extends Eliot's earlier project so that the material causation of individual crisis is not just latently residing within the text, but foregrounded as a very central concern of his narrative. While in one respect this is a progression, the "unity of idiom" that could aesthetically realise a "community of speech", creating "affiliation" rather than "observation" by breaking down the distinction between the narrator's educated voice and the actual language of most people is never achieved by Hardy.

Instead what is particularly pronounced in his fiction is how clearly he recognised and articulated this problem of language. Rather than resolving the aesthetic quandary, he highlights its social ramifications as a problem within his novels - the problem of two languages - the tension between the cultivated and the customary. And importantly this is not a discrepancy between two divided cultures, between rural and urban worlds, but an effect of a new mobility

and social transition where people who have grown up in the same community become separated and alienated according to the relative success they achieve in improving their material circumstances. The discrepancy in language becomes emblematic of the transitional fracturing of a community of shared interests and values. The nature of the transition is generational, evident within the same family, as here in *Tess*:

> Mrs Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages: the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality.[158]

In *The Woodlanders* Melbury takes pride in the distinction he has paid "a hundred a year" to purchase for his daughter Grace:

> "A What ? Oh a dictionary word. Well, as that's in your line I don't forbid it, even if it tells against me," he said good-humouredly.[159]

But for Giles Winterbourne, Grace's acquired linguistic refinement marks a distinction of sensibilities that places the young woman he has grown up with beyond his grasp. In Grace the education she has received creates a fatal tension between her "acquired tastes" for the "attainments of an exceptional order" and the strong and tender devotion which "only existed in their purity ... in the breasts of unvarnished men".[160] The sophisticated Fitzpiers, whom she is pressured into marrying by her upwardly mobile father, uses his linguistic skills as an artifice to mask his infidelities. He decorates his lies with what Grace comes to recognise as an artistically ironic flourish. In contrast Giles Winterbourne is direct and blunt in speech, a manner which Grace initially finds abrasive and lacking in subtlety before learning to value its integrity. Yet ironically Grace never fully resolves her crisis of feeling, renouncing her education and acquirements only temporarily before eventually rejoining Fitzpiers.

That same crisis of feeling is evident in Hardy's own narrative method, for his personal desire to authentically represent the custom, language and memory of a life being lost, is constantly subordinated by the "authorisation" of his educated perspective. The participatory sense he tries to imbue his narrative with, that sense of affiliation, is effectively mediated by the more distant

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[158] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 30.
[159] Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p. 84.
[160] Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, p. 207.

perspective of the educated consciousness of the analytical observer. By drawing on "the problem of two languages" as subject matter, Hardy reproduces the schism in the form of his own narrative technique.

In attempting to present a tangible sense of rural crisis, Hardy must inevitably draw on an historical overview in which a specific or immediate aspect of the crisis can be located as a part of what is a more general historical movement. As Williams points out, this type of observation requires a consciously educated perspective, and then to move in from this distance and see living people who themselves do not have this perspective, and to do so without patronising them is where the real problem lies. For it is here that empathy becomes sympathy, and takes the form of a sentimental and contrived picturesqueness, and an attempted realism slips back into the abstractions of the neo-pastoral mode. And there is a second but related problem which Williams fully recognises, indeed must recognise from his own experience, for that educated perspective which has been denounced as metropolitan or bourgeois indifference has also been a means of liberating so many common people from ignorance, limitation and stagnation. It is what Williams describes as the "double movement, of loss and liberation, of exposure and of advantage".[161] Within this acceptance Williams's argument for a "knowable community" loses much of its relevance, for if as he says it was precisely "disturbance rather than continuity which had to be communicated" by Hardy, it is difficult to see how a "continuity of idiom" can serve a plausible function within a narrative in which the expression of "discontinuity" is its desired end.[162]

In this respect Williams's criticism of Hardy tends to arrest the development of his general argument. For while he is constantly suspicious of the ideological power of an educated language that defines a common life in a manner which simultaneously legitimates its own dominance, he is compelled on aesthetic grounds to concede that "the more fully Hardy uses the resources of the whole language, as a precise observer, the more adequate the writing is". The same shift in emphasis is also evident in his claim that "the extension of vocabulary and the complication of construction are necessary to the intensity and precision of the observation which is Hardy's

[161] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 207.
[162] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 204.
[163] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 205.

essential position and attribute."[163] This is a distant remove from the "continuity of idiom" of a "knowable community" he appeals to as the means of overriding the hegemonic practices of the dominant narrative form. To resurrect his position he has to resort to a certain amount of polemical posturing, and declare that the real problem of two languages is that neither would adequately serve Hardy's interests

> since neither in the end was sufficiently articulate: the educated dumb in intensity and limited in humanity; the customary thwarted by ignorance and complacent in habit.[164]

This rather provocative gesture requires qualification, for Williams himself would never adhere to the proposition that the educated language of the Brontes or Eliot or Conrad or Lawrence was "dumb in intensity" or "limited in humanity". The point may be sustainable in regard to the pastoral or neo-pastoral writers Williams has indicted, but even here it is a problem of perspective, of what can actually be seen, and blindness in this regard is not a problem of language itself but that of the politics of vision.

If Hardy's attempt to integrate and connect the languages of education and custom is doomed because neither will accommodate the experience he seeks to represent, it is puzzling to consider how they apparently "do" serve the early D.H. Lawrence in *The Prussian Officer*. For here with unrestrained acclaim Williams locates the apotheosis of the "knowable community". In "The White Stocking", "Goose Fair", "A Sick Collier" and "Second Best" Williams identifies a "miracle of language" in which previously unarticulated "feelings" are now allowed to enter into literary experience:

> What is new here, really new, is that the language of the writer is at one with the language of his characters ...[165]

This is a difficult point, but in general terms it is easy to see what Williams is getting at here. For *The Prussian Officer* is a work of extraordinary power, and its intensity is the result of an achieved intimacy between narrator, character and reader. In this respect there is no reason for challenging Williams's declaration that Lawrence has quite radically altered

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[164] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 204.
[165] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 173.

> the novelist's language of description and analysis to the colloquial and informal from the abstract and polite.[166]

It is quite remarkable when one considers the rhetorical excesses of his later work to notice how unobtrusive Lawrence's authorial voice is in these early stories, and how this restraint and subtlety effectively closes the sense of distance that a self-consciously educated perspective creates upon engagement with common life. In this respect Lawrence answers for the necessary breadth of experience that the aesthetic realisation of a "knowable community" requires. Because of his own background Lawrence can get in close to a working class subject in a way that neither Eliot nor Hardy legitimately could, and it comes through in the fine descriptive touches, in the rendering of nuance and habit, in the way colliers squat on their haunches or the way women clean a corpse, in the unaccountable ways fear and anxiety wear on the spirit, observations often beyond the limits of external observation. It is easy to accept Williams's insistence that in these stories Lawrence is not writing "about" or "of" a people, but "simply writing where he lived", not with patronage or sentimentality, not self-consciously judging it by enforcing a moral imperative or adorning it with a rustic picturesqueness, but finding a balance in which both a general way of life and the individual persons who live it are there and absolute. What Lawrence can do is get inside the houses in a way his predecessors could not. He is not lifting the housetops like Dickens or following Bucket through the door or peering in through the window like Eliot. He is actually living in there, looking out, and finding the hard real life both outside and in. It is an art Williams describes as "given", written within "a particular flow":

> What really comes alive is community, and when I say community I mean something which is of course personal: a man feeling with others, speaking in and with them.[167]

There is actually more sentimentality in Williams's response than in Lawrence's stories. But even in accepting the general nature of his response, there are certain complexities within Lawrence's narrative method that pose problems for an unqualified acceptance of the notion of an existing "unity of idiom" in which the language of the writer is inseparable from the idiom of his characters. The problem is there in the phrase "his characters" as if they somehow can be reduced to a community of common consciousness, united in language. A close look at the

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[166] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 173.
[167] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 172.

stories themselves reveals a quite tangible structure of difference at work. Even within the type of community Lawrence represents, there is still a strong sense of class distinction, often there as something which must be overcome by the protagonist. But perhaps more urgently "the problem of two languages" manifests itself in a significantly altered form, for beyond the fact that each of the stories Williams has highlighted is set in a working class environment, the particular point of commonality is that within each story there is a clear sense of collaboration between the narrative voice and the central female character. This is the dominant point of view from which the stories are told and the point where his real sympathies seem to be engaged. Lawrence himself of course was the son of a collier and an ex-school teacher and he was born into the tension between conflicting attitudes towards education and refinement. In the largely autobiographical *Sons and Lovers* Walter Morel marries a woman more educated than himself who shrinks from his own lack of fine feeling. She attempts to project her youngest son outwards in to a world of possibility and away from the mines. In *The Rainbow* this same expansionary desire is expressed as an elemental characteristic of "the Brangwen women" who "faced outwards" in the hope of enlarging their own and their children's "scope and range and freedom".[168] The women recognise that the Brangwen men were "lacking outwardness and range of motion" and decided "it was a question of knowledge".[169] They come to comprehend that the social dominance of the Vicar and his family is the result of "education and experience" and they desire entry into this "finer, more vivid circle of life". This is a clear expression of what Lawrence was already working towards in the stories of *The Prussian Officer* and it is with this consciousness that he essentially identifies in the emotional struggle between the outward looking female and the inward looking male. In these stories the struggle becomes reducible to a tension between a more enlightened female consciousness and the inarticulate, less refined male characters. In each case the female is seen to have her potential social mobility arrested by her reckless attraction to the sexual vitality of her lover, an attraction which is simultaneously alluring and repellent, touching the nerve of some deeper primal essence as a type of brute animal sexuality.

The question the stories implicitly raise is how sustainable such relationships can be once the initial sexual hunger has dissipated. Against the erotic impetus of their liaisons looms the harsh

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[168] D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, p. 43.
[169] D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, p. 44.

material conditions of the working life they must endure, and its insistent pressures threaten to augment the apparent incompatibility of their social aspirations. The innocent young lovers of "Goose Fair" and "Second Best" are tragically destined to become the world-weary and disillusioned figures of "A Sick Collier" and "Odour of Chrysanthemums". At root the source of tension between the dissatisfied lovers amounts to a cultural incongruity, and the sense of difference is reinforced by Lawrence, not as overt declaration, but in the audible sign of linguistic demarcation.

"A Sick Collier" addresses this cultural tension with immediacy, revealing the essential structure of difference. "She was too good for him, everybody said. Yet still she did not regret marrying him."[170] This opening line conveys the gossip of a community voice in which the narrator is implicated (it is not "they" said), but it is an observation conveyed via the personal contemplative aspect of the woman's own negation of regret. At least temporarily the collective and individual responses are quite seamlessly connected. This fusion between narrator and character and community persists as Horsepool the collier is described in a manner which serves the narrator's backgrounding of fact, but as fact transmitted through the meditative consciousness of the collier's wife. This is what Williams is so impressed with, this collective narrative, which is not external observation of a working class subject but the expression of internalised feelings. And what is really effective is that by creating the sense of the woman telling her own story as if through the eyes of others, the narrative voice is never clearly the possession of either the third person or first person. This ambiguity produces an indivisibility between narrator and subject, blending emotional resonance and descriptive analysis. Even as the official narrative voice becomes more of a presence the balance is sustained by the simple directness of speech:

> He was taken with her, he did not drink, and he was not lazy. So, although he seemed a bit simple, without much intelligence, but having a sort of physical brightness, she considered, and accepted him.[171]

But just as Lawrence's lovers have difficulty sustaining equilibrium under the pressure of cultural difference, in the end, the narrative integration is fractured once he turns his attention toward the woman herself and begins to set up a rather conventional metaphorical structure that elaborates

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[170] D.H. Lawrence, "A Sick Collier", *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, p. 165.
[171] D.H. Lawrence, "A Sick Collier", *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, p. 165.

the distinction between the couple. Returning from the pit Horsepool enters the house "indescribably black and streaked" to confront his wife's "picture of beautiful cleanliness". The distance between them and the moral weight the impression bears begins to come through in the verbal discrimination of their conversation:

> 'Why is your *vest* so black on the shoulders ?' she asked.
> 'My *singlet* ? That's wi'th' water dreppin' on us from the' roof.[172]

And here the unity of idiom breaks down as Lawrence shares the standard pronunciation with Lucy as opposed to the colloquial orthography of Horsepool:

> 'Th' peen, Lucy, th' peen; oh, Lucy the peen!'
> 'I know th' pain's bad, Willy, I know.[173]

In effect Lawrence is having Lucy "correct" Willy's pronunciation to inform the educated reader of Willy's meaning. This self-conscious regard for the distinction between character and reader is close to reproducing the ballad or choral quality Williams finds in Eliot and Hardy and becomes more emphatic and obtrusive in the need he feels to intervene in order to explain the idiosyncrasies of common speech to his readership:

> 'Sorry!' bawled a voice. 'Sorry!"
> The word is a form of address, corruption probably of 'Sirrah'.[174]

This type of explanation inserted within the text is in the name of a consciously educated perspective and hardly bespeaks the unity of idiom of a "knowable community" in Williams's terms. Here as elsewhere Lawrence's affiliation is only "at one" with the characters he imbues with a more refined consciousness, to the point where he can identify with the fear and revulsion Lucy feels towards her husband's body as if its muscularity and stain of toil is itself a kind of moral affront :

> He was so muscular, he seemed so intent on what he was doing, so intensely himself, like a vigorous animal. And as he stood wiping himself, with his naked breast towards her, she felt rather sick, seeing his thick arms bulge their muscles.[175]

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[172] D.H. Lawrence, "A Sick Collier", *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, p.166.
[173] D.H. Lawrence, "A Sick Collier", *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, p. 167.
[174] D.H. Lawrence, "A Sick Collier", *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, p. 169.
[175] D.H. Lawrence, "A Sick Collier", *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories*, p. 166.

While in "Second Best" the mood is lighter and more playful in accordance with the youth of its characters, the same pattern is evident. The "detached and ironic" feminine perspective of Francis confronts the "quaint ways", "ignorance" and "slow masculinity" of the field labourer Tom, and once again language becomes the gauge of the discrepancy that must be overcome:

> 'Such language'
> 'Oh, what's up wi' it?'
> 'I can't bear you to talk broad.'
> 'Can't you?'
> 'It isn't nice,' Francis said. She did not care, really. The vulgar speech jarred on her as a rule; Jimmy was a gentleman.
> But Tom's manner of speech did not matter to her.
> 'I like you to talk *nicely,*' she added.[176]
> (the italics are Lawrence's)

Like the story itself the tone is ironic, but it nevertheless gives the sense of how little Williams can actually take from Lawrence to substantiate his claims for a "knowable community" in his work. Once class becomes an issue in his writing "the problem of two languages" becomes manifest and he clearly associates his narrative voice with the "higher" characters. An equanimity of language only occurs in stories such as "The Odour of Chrysanthemums" (though even here there are distinctions) in which the characters are all of the same type, and this only appears to be a reorientation of the single class community he finds in Jane Austen's world in which "where there is only one class there are no classes at all". Any notion or treatment of community must recognise the fact of difference if its formulation is to be seen in relation to the real historical forces that create its necessity and threaten its stability.

Despite Lawrence's significant contribution to the representation of working class life he does not offer the sustained continuity of idiom Williams makes a claim for, nor in the brevity of his stories, in their limited number of characters, and their preoccupation with personal and emotional feeling does he allow for the presentment of anything but the most economic rendering of a living community. Williams places a great emphasis on the need for the writer "to compose some actual community" so that individuals can be represented not as "types" or "around an idea or a theme" but as beings who are "irreducible" from the consciousness which forms and is formed by collective identity and values. Yet Lawrence, in the stories that Williams has

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[176] D.H. Lawrence, "Second Best", *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories,* p. 119.

highlighted, can offer almost nothing in this respect. Beyond a vague reference to "the union" or a fleeting recognition of the relations between manager and "hands", or between the miner and "the careful authorities" there is little attempt to represent a community in terms of its social structure and its values are only latently present in the occasional acts of solidarity, neighbourliness and understanding. What is much more forceful is the sense of isolation and deprivation. Williams remarks that:

> It's no part of any intelligent case about the reality of community that its experiences are only positive.[177]

But "only positive" doesn't seem the relevant expression. Lawrence's accounts are so seldom positive that the "experience of a community" is once again difficult to apprehend and define, seldom evident in the text as a manifest structure or in any active and connecting relations between people. Williams is still confronted by his own enduring question, "to what extent was there ever a genuine community?" or perhaps more pertinently, what exactly constitutes a genuine community and where are its positive values to be located?

Rethinking Community

In attempting to rethink community Georges Van Den Abbeele asks what it is about "the peculiar evocative force of the notion of community" that compels us to "so quickly subscribe to its ideological prestige?"[178] Contemporary thinkers on community have sought to identify its attraction in its tragic presentment of an "otherness", an unrealised ideal that is always the expression of its own absence. As Christopher Fynsk has put it, "*What is said in our time* is the absence of community."[179] In this respect community serves to articulate the "lack" in modern society, not something empirically known or even materially achievable but a symbolic construction of what Scott Wilson has defined as a product of "social desire". A desire which manifests itself

> either in the form of imagined "lost" communities, or of a community to come that would be defined by some sort of communal "spirit" or material essence that homogenises singular beings in a common identity."[180]

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[177] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*. p. 174.
[178] Georges Van Den Abbeele, Introduction to *Community at Loose Ends*, p. ix.
[179] Christopher Fynsk, "Community and the Limits of Theory", *Community at Loose Ends*, p. 19.
[180] Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism*, p. 202.

Community expresses the anguished "desire" for connecting and collective praxis, registering itself not as a referential sign but as a "call or appeal".[181] It is an emotional and psychic protest against the disintegrating pressures of modernity. A protest reflected in the fact that amidst the conceptual ashes of community, and within the massed humanity of urban conglomeration, people are insistently and aggressively asserting claims for their particular local, ethnic, religious and cultural identity. Against one official narrative which seeks to evoke the ideological prestige of community in the name of "globalisation", there is a profound desire to achieve and preserve selective membership.

The "social desire" of community's lament has lead Jean-Luc Nancy to pronounce the myth of community's immanence and the testimony of its dissolution, dislocation and conflagration as among the "gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world".[182] For Nancy no *Gesellschaft* has evolved to aid "the state, industry and capital" in dismantling a previous *Gemeinschaft*. As he says, "society was not built on the ruins of a community", rather, community is "what happens to us ... in the wake of society".[183] It is the critical position we adopt in order to rationalise and then attempt to think beyond the disassociating and alienating forces that confront us. As he says, nothing has been lost:

> We alone are lost, we upon whom the "social bond" ... our own invention, now descends like the net of an economic, technical, political snare. Entangled in its meshes, we have wrung for ourselves the phantasms of the lost community.[184]

Yet the desire to recover the lost community has not only been the province of what we come to think of as a "liberating" politics. It has been the shared refrain of diverse and antithetical political ideologies. Under the banner of a "unitary" politics the quest to recover community has provided the rhetorical justification of the most appalling repression by regimes of both the extreme "left" and "right" of the political spectrum. While it hardly needs to be stressed that the ideal of community has been quite central to the authoritarianism, cultural purges and atrocities of eastern European and Oriental Communism, Jean-Francois Lyotard has pointed out that the political apparatus of Fascism pays its own lip service to the idea of community as it directs its

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[181] Linda Singer, "Recalling a Community at Loose Ends", *Community at Loose Ends*, p. 125.
[182] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 1.
[183] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 11.
[184] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 11.

attention towards attaining a single-minded consensus of legitimate subjects by eliminating political debate, by rejecting, dispersing and terrorising "otherness". As Lyotard argues, this sanitising operation is also sustained by the "phantasm of oneness and totality" as it isolates that heterogeneous and "unmanageable thing" which it seeks to objectify as Jew, homosexual, communist. Heterogeneity is Fascism's enemy while conversely democracy, as Ernesto Laclau argues, requires a plurality of public spheres and is constituted upon an inherent acceptance of "antagonism" and diversity. In this respect the problem Raymond Williams faces is how to affirm community while distancing himself from the conformism elicited by his largely homogeneous notion of community and, at the same time, to keep faith with the radically democratic procedures he extols as the substantive principle of an ideal community. Of course not even democracies have proved exempt from exploiting the appeal to community. As Scott Wilson notes,

> "democratic" societies routinely demand the ultimate sacrifice - that subjects give up their lives for the sake of the community, most notably in the shape of the nation".[185]

The paradoxical utilisation of the concept of community by both the "left" and "right" is consistently evident in contemporary "democratic" politics. The "left" continues to employ a strategic emphasis on "community activism" to rebuild support against the domination of a Thatcherite and Reaganite ideology which itself evokes the ideal of community as a means of justifying decentralisation in the name of returning organisational and administrative functions back into the control of local communities.[186] This, as Van Den Abbeele observes, is nothing more than "a cynical euphemism for the dismantling of the welfare state at the hands of so-called private enterprise".[187]

The contradictory and multivalent character of the term community and the mystification it has been used in the name of, render it suspect as a "knowable" property both in terms of textual representation and as an ideological model of resistance. Nancy's formative work *The Inoperative Community* and Lyotard's concept of the "differend" have heavily influenced attempts to rethink

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[185] Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism*, p. 202.

[186] In President Bill Clinton's 1997 election victory speech he nominated America's first priority as the creation of "the community of the twenty-first century".

[187] Georges Van Den Abbeele, Introduction to *Community at Loose Ends*, p. xi.

community from a position which seeks to rearticulate the concept by focusing attention on our "being-in-common" through an awareness and acceptance of that which differentiates us. Against what Lyotard calls "the tyranny of imposed consensus" is an insistence on "our being in common precisely through the commonality of our differences."[188] By amplifying the terms of our common dissent we are able to peal away the mask of a mythical communion, and to expose what is necessarily "left out" in order for that effect to be sustained. Community as a totalising concept reduces the field of social differences so that they avoid any testing "face to face" engagement. As such, the sources of dispute remain obscured and hinder the prospect of an accepted commonality of difference becoming the platform for an assault on authoritarianism. As Chantal Mouffe suggests:

> Our choice is not at all between an aggregate of individuals without public concern and a premodern community organised around a single substantive idea of a common good.[189]

Unfortunately, perhaps tragically, such a position has resolutely abandoned the possibility of unification and synthesis that a more orthodox and material conception of community maintains. The privileging of difference tends to relinquish any significant claim for social determination or the formation of collective consciousness. Richard Terdiman has argued that it is difficult to deny that individuals are recipients of "the larger processes of the whole" and while they may be in one respect "victims of its servitudes" there is also a process at work in which a social element is formed out of the synthesis of individual consciousnesses.[190] Language itself seems to act as one such synthesising unit, for against the claims of difference and the interminable free play of codes it is difficult not to recognise the social determinacy of language which even within the limits of its incarcerating potential is still constructed upon a social consensus drawn from a vivid and material life. In this respect Terdiman offers a perspective closer to Raymond Williams's own, affirming the latter's consideration that "the most deeply known human community is language itself":[191]

> Communication is the process of making unique experience into common experience, and it is, above all, the claim to live ... the process of communication is in fact the process of community.[192]

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[188] Georges Van Den Abbeele, Introduction to *Community at Loose Ends*, p. xviii.
[189] Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community", *Community at Loose Ends*, p. 72.
[190] Richard Terdiman, "On the Dialectics of Postdialectical Thinking", *Community at Loose Ends*, p. 118.
[191] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 245.
[192] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 38.

John Killham has expressed particular annoyance at Williams's apparent shift in the nature of the term community which he claims "has been deflected into another region of meaning by the attraction of its neighbour 'communication'".[193] And it is true that while this linguistic sense of community offers ground for the conceptualisation of "synthesis" and commonality, it also tends to obscure the realisation that language also encodes a fragmentation and fracturing of the desired unity, so that the community of language is always already writing its own boundaries, reproducing the class structures which deny community and support authorisation. Language as the property and product of a living community is still subject to the impregnation of authority, the dubious and questionable authority to constitute the "we' of community.

In attempting to think community as a response to capitalism Williams has found himself sliding uncomfortably between various discursive strategies. A recognition of its mythical dimensions overlaps with his general claim for its availability and validity as a descriptive and therapeutic concept. At the same time he inadequately recognises the positive aspect of myth and its capability to produce a discourse of desire that bespeaks the absence of that which initiates the consideration of community. His recognition of the "lack" of community activates him to pronounce community as the cure for alienation and subjugation while excluding contemplation of its effect as itself an apparatus of hegemony, or as Linda Singer puts it, a "politics of false inclusion" and a "denial of difference" through which the authority of community is constructed.[194] To this extent Williams is unable to manage the polyvalence of his collective signifier and leaves us in dark confusion as to what he finally comes to mean by "a genuine community".

This problem of definition has been a persistent characteristic of Williams's work. Ten years after writing *The Country and the City* his 1982 lecture on Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* brought a redefinition of his communal archetype, overly determined as it had been by the *Gemeinschaft* sense of kinship, stability and "kindness beyond calculation". Effective community, he now sees, can also find its basis in resilience and fortitude, a community "hammered out in very fierce conflict", and importantly, not just against the captains of industry, but in the midst of its own deep internal disputes. Williams explains that the common element

[193] John Killham, "The Idea of Community in the English Novel", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Vol. 31, No. 4 1977. p. 395.
[194] Linda Singer, "Recalling a Community at Loose Ends", *Community at Loose Ends*, p. 126.

of such communities is that they form themselves around one dominant mode of economic production as in the working communities of industrial cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle. Their common relation to a specific mode of production provides the basis of their homogeneity, the governing structure of community. Yet as he goes on to argue, there are working class settlements that do not "deliver class consciousness" for they are "mixed" communities with a diffuse character that inhibits the chance of its members binding in response to one common and recognisable adversary. Again plurality and diversity appear at odds with effective community. Without the unifying potential of a major labour process as the basis of commonality, solidarity becomes problematic in the face of the diminished possibility of undivided loyalties without barriers and contradictions. This type of urban settlement in which a plurality of labour processes does not provide workers with a "community which gives you a common identity from the beginning" can, according to Williams, precipitate problems of self-perception and common identity which stem from the fact that the type of heterogenous working class community of a mixed economy lacks the "over-riding loyalty" possessed by a mining or manufacturing centre.[195] In this respect the idea of mutual obligation to something called community which is not actually manifest in real relationships can become the very ground on which exploitation is precipitated and justified. As Williams was prepared to point out in "The Importance of Community", we should be suspicious of any term which is habitually used in the affirmative:

> If you have the sense that you have this kind of native duty to others it can expose you very cruelly within a system of the conscious exploitation of labour. And it is for a long time a very powerful appeal, one that is still repeatedly used in politics, that you have this kind of almost absolute obligation to 'the community', that the assertion of interest against it is merely selfish.[196]

Here Williams acknowledges the negative and exploitative appeal to community, that "ideology of service" which is the false community of cynical political rhetoric used as a disguised form of "social and political control and obedience". It is on these grounds that Williams fully rejects the notion of the community as "nation". For Williams this is "nationalism" masquerading as community, often in the cause of imperialism. The jump from community to nation-state is he argues "entirely artificial":

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[195] Raymond Williams, "The Ragged-Arsed Philanthropists", *Writing in Society*, p. 246.
[196] Raymond Williams, "The Importance of Community", *Resources of Hope*, p. 114.

> What has then happened is that the real and powerful feelings of a native place and a native formation has been pressed and incorporated into an essentially political and administrative organisation, which has grown from quite different roots.[197]

Williams's rejection of the nation-community is significant for it represents a conceptual impasse regarding his insistent emphasis on wholeness and totality. The fully realised homogeneous community of the classless state he envisages must finally bear a deep resemblance to the unitary concept of the nation. There seems to be an incongruity at work in his formula that in a capitalist society community is local and resistant, while in a post-revolutionary socialist society, where the need to resist capitalist structures has been removed, community will now serve as the cohering and unifying principle behind the national organisation of the state. The theoretical transition from the community of the present to the community of the future seems far more precarious and problematic than Williams allows. In effect he is advocating a paradoxically "decentralised" socialism maintained by a democratic network of local affinities. In any case the priority he now places upon distinct and diverse communal affinities against what he sees as the false totality of the nation-state directs his thinking towards a broader acceptance of diversity and heterogeneity, diminishing his earlier impulse towards his own form of abstract totalisation.

Williams's last essays reveal a desire to distance himself from his previous assertions of a common, rational "public interest" and to reassess his emphasis upon "connection". Against what he increasingly considered as socialism's "arrogance of monopoly" inherent in their supposition of a common unequivocal political goal, he began to take tentative steps towards theorising the plurality of community.[198] The singular interpretation of community based on homogeneity submitted to the "complex and interactive network of different real interests" in which the processes of sharing and negotiation were founded upon an "acknowledgment of diversity".[199] It was becoming clearer to him that a socialism that embraced only a unilinear conception of political and social integration, "overriding and flattening real cultural diversities and identities", would be redundant and irrelevant as a consequence of its inability to harness

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[197] Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000*, p. 181.

[198] Raymond Williams, "Walking Backwards into the Future", p. 286 and "Hesitations before Socialism", p. 294, *Resources of Hope*.

[199] Raymond Williams, "Walking Backwards into the Future", *Resources of Hope*, p. 286.

"the negative alliances of conflicting popular interests".[200] Yet even the belated acceptance of a vital heterogeneity is never entirely able to overcome the residual organicism that mark his thinking and which has disabled his prospects of theorising an affirmative politics of difference. For what persists, despite the effort, is the emotional preference for "wholeness", for the organic and foundational conceptions of "rooted settlements" and the "deeply grounded" experience of "natural communities".[201]

Paul Gilroy has found that Williams's organic metaphors have the effect of excluding certain groups from his "imagined community" by ideologically constructing a division between "authentic and unauthentic types of national belonging".[202] In exploring the cultural politics of race and nation Gilroy indicts Williams for latently initiating a closure of community which possesses dangerous undertones of cultural purity and endorses the propositions of the "new racism" of British social and institutional life. His attack is primarily founded on Williams's stress on social identity as the product of "long experience" and speaking on behalf of England's black population he asks how long is long enough to belong. The sense of what Gilroy objects to is evident in the earlier *The Long Revolution* which reveals the type of dubious construction of a normative cultural ideal that he is suspicious of. Attempting to define a particular "community of experience", Williams locates its specific character through a consideration of those "outside the community" who have "learned our ways yet [were] not bred in them". Their difference in style, speech and behaviour do not express that 'quite distinct sense of a particular and native style".[203] Yet Gilroy's grievance is actually with the much later work of *Towards 2000* in which he finds "strategic silences" which refuse to negotiate the problematic issues of race and community and delimits the comprehension of culture as the "creolised and hybrid" thing that it is.[204]

Francis Mulhern provides support for Gilroy's concerns in his review of *Towards 2000* when he finds that Williams has neglected

> to consider that the British state is itself racist, with its battery of immigration laws whose leading function is to isolate and harass black

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[200] Raymond Williams, "Hesitations before Socialism", *Resources of Hope*, p. 294.
[201] Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000*, p. 177–199. See also John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, p. 11.
[202] Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, p. 49–50.
[203] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 48.
[204] John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, p. 11.

> people already living here (nearly half of them from birth), and a police force to match. And in neglecting this, he mistakes the character of popular racism, which is not merely the xenophobia of settled neighbourhoods but part of the politico-cultural inheritance of the *British "national community"*.[205]

There is certainly justification for this type of critique of Williams. While he is arguing correctly that the problems of social identity are not solved by merely administering the formal and legal definition of national citizenship, there is something uncomfortable about his unwillingness to reconcile the idea of a "native" community with the presence of "newcoming other peoples" who by definition do not have "the strongest forms of placable bonding" that he puts such an emphasis upon. Williams seems to reinforce the isolation of minority ethnic groups by finding no place for them in his consideration of "natural" community, and while this silence may not be as "strategic" as his critics claim, there is a strong sense that he too has been incorporated by the myth of community. It is not a charge Williams would argue strongly against himself. As he has said:

> I have learned the reality of incorporation, I have learned the reality of hegemony ...[it requires that] we make the effort [to] uncover layers of this kind of alien formation in ourselves and deep in ourselves.[206]

Mulhern believes that Williams's criticism has been hamstrung by the idea of community which he finds to be an "untrustworthy category":

> It obscures the real object of socialist analysis, which is the existing order of collective identifications, and can seriously confuse the corresponding task of socialist politics; the effort, which may be supportive but will at least as often be antagonistic, to create a 'community' of anti-capitalist interest.[207]

It is ironic that the traditional idea of community, which seemed so fundamental to socialism, is now registered by a writer of the new left as a confusing hindrance to "socialist analysis" and "socialist politics". Yet as suspicious as Mulhern may be of community's "negative expressions" he nevertheless calls again on its ideological prestige in the name of the collective identifications of anti-capitalist interests. Here he seems to be subject to the same ambiguity he identifies in

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[205] Francis Mulhern, "Towards 2000, or News From You-Know-Where", *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Terry Eagleton, p. 88.

[206] Raymond Williams, "Your a Marxist, Aren't You?", *Resources of Hope*, p. 75.

[207] Francis Mulhern, "Towards 2000, or News From You-Know-Where", *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Terry Eagleton, p. 88.

Williams's work. The difficulty is in how to strip community of its conservatism, to conceptually free it from its incorporation by a dominant value system, and then to remobilise its radical and dissident potential. What must be negotiated is the positive appeal and negative dimensions of community's own internal dialectic. Mulhern looks towards a politics of difference through the establishment of a community of collective antagonisms, but as late as 1987 Williams was directing our attention back to a communal tradition. A tradition he claimed as present in "the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century" and which could still provide the basis for a "modern *future* in which community may be imagined again."[208] But this appeal to a prospective renewal of community is, in its own way, a reluctant acceptance of its loss in the present. Williams has somewhat despondently joined the chorus of those who would pronounce the death, absence or corruption of community.

In his later work the desire to identify the tangible and material character of community recedes, and while never missing from Williams's critical lexicon, the term tends to carry weight only as a moral reference point, as an abstract end to which his more general critique of culture can be directed. Community in this sense becomes the teleological horizon of the journey towards a fully equitable and democratic culture. As Forest Pyle has noted:

> The function of culture in Williams is invariably linked to the possibility of "community", to the prospect that a common existence - a shared subject position "we" - can be formed or recovered from the reified social relations of the present; that "culture" can, in other words, make the communal body of a people.[209]

Community for Williams is now only the imagined resolution of culture's ongoing narrative. As he progressively moved away from specific literary studies he also left behind his preoccupation with the "knowable community" of the realist novel. His discovery of the radical cultural critique in the work of Goldmann, Benjamin and Adorno profoundly affected the direction his work was to take in the last ten years of his life. His immersion into cultural theory represented a rapprochement with continental Marxists as well as a willingness to engage with his political adversaries at a contemporary theoretical level. It allowed him to shift his immediate critical

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[208] Raymond Williams, "When was Modernism?", *The Politics of Modernism*, p. 35.

[209] Forest Pyle, "Raymond Williams and the Inhuman Limits of Culture", *Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics*, p. 264–65.

focus from the struggle to know a "material" community towards the theoretical investigation of a "material" culture. And this shift allowed Williams to unburden himself of some of the limitations that the conceptual emphasis on community had fostered. Historically at least the emergence of modernism and its contemporary influence had undermined notions of community. Its effectiveness for Williams as a conceptual tool and liberating social form was constantly and radically challenged by modernist narratives of dislocation and alienation. Community was a "traditional" social relationship which seemed irrevocably at odds with the modern. It seemed unable to take part in modernism's discourse with the same dexterity that culture could. Culture had divested itself of its organic root, it had *become* a modernism, semantically available to express the mechanical, heterogeneous, technological, multiracial and urbanised life of modernity. Culture, unlike community, was not class-bound, nor was it necessarily collective. Its flexibility allowed it to express the forms of all classes while it could also define particular individual practices. In this sense it could enter the realm of art, literature and criticism very directly, addressing all forms while community seemed critically bound to realist modes of representation. Indeed it was at this juncture that Williams ceased, in effect, to be a realist literary critic. Forsaking close textual analysis of specific works of literature, he began to forge what for English speaking Marxists was the new polemical ground of cultural politics, theory and production.