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Raymond Williams and the Limits of Cultural Materialism

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Declaration

A version of chapter 7, 'Against the New Conformists', is to be published by Macmillan in 1997, in *Raymond Williams Now: Knowledge, Limits and the Future*, ed. by Jeff Wallace et al.

Summary

Cultural materialism has become an influential discipline in recent years, particularly so in 'Renaissance' studies, but also more generally in 'English', as well as departments defined as practising 'cultural' or 'communications' studies. The phrase is usually linked with the name of Raymond Williams, but a cursory examination of Williams's own work quickly establishes that it is a phrase he rarely uses, and only schematically attempts to define. The thesis therefore takes the form of an investigation into the way cultural materialism has come to be understood, by examining in detail the trajectory of Raymond Williams's theoretical development, and how his own engagement with various theoretical positions has helped to set 'limits' on the meaning of cultural materialism.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with some of Williams's earliest work, particularly *Reading and Criticism*, as a way of investigating how reasonable it is to tag him as a 'Left-Leavisite', arguing that Leavis's undoubted influence is resisted (though not entirely rejected) from a very early stage. The first chapter considers in detail Leavis's work at Cambridge, the influence of Eliot, and the significance of the 'Organic Community'. Chapter 2, which is based around a comparative analysis of Williams's and Leavis's readings of Dickens, argues that Williams rejects the 'organic community' in favour of his 'knowable community'. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with specific 'theoretical' issues: the first, based around a reading of Terry Eagleton's critique of Williams's use of the Marxist metaphor of 'base and superstructure', shows some of the problems which arise from Williams's cultural model, as well as suggesting refinements; the second deals with the influence of Volosinov's theories on Williams. Chapter 6 comes out of Williams's readings of the 'Country-House' poems in *The Country and the City*, showing how his practice of literary criticism relies on an acceptance of 'ideology' apparently denied in his more 'theoretical' writings. This analysis is extended as a result of investigations into the 'De L'Isle' manuscripts relating to the Penshurst estate. Chapter 7 argues that it is possible to see the work of Fredric Jameson as developing Williams's cultural materialism into Jameson's debates on postmodernism.

In the Introduction and Conclusion, I have taken the opportunity to look briefly at the activity of cultural materialism as it has developed since Raymond Williams's death in 1988. The Introduction emphasizes what I see to be important methodological differences between 'cultural materialism' and 'new historicism'; the Conclusion deals with the continuing debate over the value of a cultural materialist approach by considering the 'appropriation' of Shakespeare.

I looked myself up once in the *Anatomy of Britain* and found myself described as ‘the Marxist Professor of Communications’ and I thought: ‘well, I’m not a professor, I don’t teach communications; I don’t know whether the first term of the description would be more or less accurate than the others.’

Raymond Williams, 1975

On a visit to the United States in 1988 I was surprised to discover that I was a Cultural Materialist.

Catherine Belsey, 1989

After all most of the work I was doing was in an area which people called ‘culture’, even in the narrower sense, so that the term had a certain obviousness. But you know the number of times I’ve wished that I had never heard of the damned word.

Raymond Williams, 1979

Introduction

Why link the practice of ‘cultural materialism’ with the name of Raymond Williams? The question is not such a strange one as it might first appear. Cultural materialism has not disappeared with the death of Raymond Williams in 1989, on the contrary, as I hope to show here and in the conclusion, it appears to be thriving. Further, despite Williams generally being acknowledged as the ‘founder’ of cultural materialism, as a term it is conspicuous by its absence rather than its presence in his comprehensive oeuvre. Briefly mentioned in one essay¹, it receives its main attention in Williams’s most ‘theoretical’ work, *Marxism and Literature*:

[I] am concerned [...] to develop a position which, as a matter of theory, I have arrived at over the years. This differs, at several key points, from what is known as Marxist theory, and even from many of its variants. It is a position which can be briefly described as cultural materialism: a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism. Its details belong to the argument as a whole, but I must say, at this point, that it is, in my view, a Marxist theory, and indeed that in its specific fields it is, in spite of and even because of the relative unfamiliarity of some of its elements, part of what I at least see as the central thinking of Marxism.²

Much of this, in particular the relationship of Williams's cultural materialism to Marxism, will be the subject of specific discussion in the body of the thesis. My reason for mentioning it here is to emphasize rather the minimalist nature of the 'definition' given by Williams. Anyone assuming that they will be able to define the 'limits' of the practice of cultural materialism by casually referring to one or two of Williams's 'key' works will very soon realise the impossibility of satisfying such a desire. Instead, and this is more like the approach I have followed, it becomes necessary to analyse in detail some of those works, and deduce from there at least the outline of a 'unified' theory. But I want to stress also that this is far from being a disadvantage, because it opens up the possibility of recognizing the faintly-defined 'borders' of Williams's complex and at times contradictory approach to 'cultural analysis'.³ The trajectory of the thesis therefore is *roughly* chronological, starting with some of Williams's earliest writings, and ending with his relationship to the postmodern.

But such a 'teleological' approach does not mean that it is possible to discover a gradually evolving theoretical position, or that elusive 'epistemological' break in his thinking (between perhaps his 'pre' and 'post' Marxist incarnations). Rather, it helps to identify a generally steady attitude towards 'cultural production', while at the same time recognizing that Williams does revise and rethink his ideas in the light of new theories elsewhere. This brings me to an important point about the thesis as a whole. This is not a sort of 'intellectual biography' of Raymond Williams, although

that is something which I believe is overdue.⁴ Although Williams's name and work is prominent, the thesis is more about cultural materialism, considered from the point of view of Williams's relationship with various theories/theorists, so that at times it is their work which becomes central. Also, I have attempted to display both the *theory* of cultural materialism and its *practical* value, by considering in detail specific work in literary and cultural analysis. This helps to emphasize the limitations of the discipline, or, more generously, how the work of Williams and others is not the *end* of a cultural materialist interpretation, but part of a continuing cultural and historical investigation.

Perhaps at this point it would be helpful to emphasize just what the thesis is not. It is not an in-depth investigation into the work of those who call themselves 'cultural materialists'. Originally, this would have been 'Part two' of the thesis, with the first part devoted more directly to Williams's own understanding of the term, as a way of measuring the distance between Williams and some who have taken up his ideas. But this would have restricted too heavily the level of analysis I found necessary in 'Part one' (which has now effectively become 'the thesis'). In particular, it proved important to devote considerably more space to Williams's very early work than I had expected initially. However, that leaves open the possibility for a different sort of work, one more interested in studying the current practice of cultural materialism, something which has been attempted, although I would argue with only limited success to date.⁵ Although that is not now the subject of the present work, its importance means that I am unable to ignore it

completely, particularly since only through such investigation can it be understood just why cultural materialism (however 'defined') is still of some significance. In chapter seven, on theories of the postmodern, I suggest that the American, Fredric Jameson, effectively takes Williams's cultural materialism into the postmodern debate, and that this therefore represents a possible future. The conclusion understands 'future' rather differently, looking at how cultural materialism has been taken up and adapted after Williams's death, particularly in relation to the present state of 'English studies', and even more specifically the public debate over the 'appropriation' of Shakespeare; and at where else it can or should go from here. For the rest of this introduction, I want to concentrate on how cultural materialism is understood, and to deal briefly with some of its critics, before summarising the contents of the thesis.

In the conclusion, we will find a whole phalanx of critics ranged against the practitioners of cultural materialism. Largely (but not entirely) they will consist of conservative critics, apparently threatened by 'theory' and particularly the suggestion that there are non-transcendental ways of reading Shakespeare. But cultural materialism has its critics on the left as well: Fred Inglis dismisses it as a 'ringing oxymoron', and *Marxism and Literature*, where it is given its fullest theoretical analysis, Williams's 'unreadable book'.⁶ A rather more 'theoretical' analysis is given by Robert Young in his *White Mythologies*⁷, and it will be useful to consider some of Young's criticisms briefly, particularly because they relate to an important aspect of the 'limits' of cultural materialism, which is its distinction from 'new historicism'.

Young starts off by appearing to be as straightforwardly dismissive of cultural materialism as Inglis: it amounts merely, he writes, 'to a way of describing British ex-Marxists'.⁸ But as his analysis continues, it becomes clearer that, despite his doubts about its theoretical *validity*, it nevertheless has certain advantages over the more 'academic' new historicism, in that its practitioners are prepared to announce in advance their own political agenda, unlike the new historicists, who tend rather towards hiding their own politics.⁹ For Young, both strategies owe an allegiance to the work of Foucault, in that 'they neither propose, nor utilize, a general theory of history as such; but unlike Foucault they simply tend to shelve the whole problem so as to avoid its theoretical difficulties'.¹⁰

What Young is drawing on here I think is the way the 'historical' and the 'materialist' aspects of historical materialism are 'shared out' between cultural materialism and new historicism, so that neither of them can claim to incorporate a Marxist historical perspective. This criticism has some foundation: in particular it is true that much of what passes for 'cultural materialism' is rather a way of considering contemporary political issues through the 'mirror' of earlier (mainly Renaissance) texts. Although this new 'reflection theory' can thus reveal much of interest about contemporary culture and society, it does so at the expense of sidelining the more specifically 'historical' aspects of the particular texts considered. In other words, as Young emphasizes, the desperate search for (Foucauldian) categories such as subversion seeks not to discover whether such texts actually were subversive, instead the texts are considered to have relevance to

the extent that they can be read today as speaking about subversion.¹¹ Three points though need to be emphasized about Young's arguments. First, it is his own commitment to certain poststructuralist theories (this specific debate appears as a 'coda' to his chapter on Foucault and discourse theory) which makes Young so resistant to those alternative strategies which seem inclined to hold on to 'metaphysical' notions of agency and the subject. Because cultural materialists appear to 'ignore the theoretical consequences of Foucault's work for many Marxist concepts'¹² suggests Young, their own assumptions cannot be defended. But this in turn avoids a proper investigation into Foucault's own idiosyncratic use of 'history', as well as his own trenchant denials of the validity of ideological critique.¹³ Second, although Young is right to show how cultural materialists can appear to 'avoid' history as they relate the past to the present, this is far from being *all* they do. Just as frequently, they attempt to show how certain apparently 'transcendental' cultural concepts are themselves historical by interrogating history in a way rather different from more traditional historicist approaches, which rely on simply 'mapping' text onto context, at the same time tending to privilege the 'literary'. I would suggest that this emphasis on a new understanding of historical contextualization is central to the practice of cultural materialism, and further that it is the approach favoured by Williams, as later chapters will demonstrate. Third, this emphasis on a different understanding of historical investigation is one important way for attempting to distinguish between cultural materialism and new historicism, whereas the tendency in Young's argument is to elide the differences between them.

It is to this differentiation that I now turn. Obviously, there are similarities between the two approaches, and, certainly in their recent practice, both have seemed to owe more allegiance to Foucault than Williams. They have tended to be distinguished by seeing new historicism as concentrating on forms of oppressive power relationships (Foucauldian 'panopticism'), and cultural materialism by contrast concentrating on the possibilities for opposition against dominant ideologies (a Williams-like 'resource of hope'). As Richard Dutton has suggested, 'the two wings concur and overlap in their convictions about the materiality of discourse, about its positive role in the shaping of cultural forms and structures, about its function as an agency of power', so much so that he notes how Carol Thomas Neely prefers to label them all 'cult-historicists' instead.¹⁴ But this merging is not complete. The new historicist emphasis on discourse and representation (their 'flagship' journal is *Representations*) tends to devalue ideological critique in favour of understanding 'history' as 'text'. I would argue that, contrastingly, cultural materialists incline rather to Fredric Jameson's understanding of the relationship between the two: that history is not reducible to text, but that it is only through texts that we are allowed access to history. It also recognizes and emphasizes the 'history of texts', which is why Williams is so keen frequently to indicate how a production today of (say) *Lear* is effectively not 'reproduction' but 'new' production.

These theoretical differences, between on the one hand a cultural *poetics*, and on the other a cultural *politics*¹⁵, are emphasized, I believe, in the practices of the two disciplines. Since both the theory and practice of cultural

materialism are the central concerns of much of what follows, I am able to concentrate here on the methodology of new historicism, as exemplified by the work of its most famous practitioner, and the man who claims to have coined the term 'new historicism', Stephen Greenblatt.¹⁶ My problems with new historicism are not centred on its concentration on oppression always incorporating resistance. Greenblatt himself has argued powerfully that such a reading misunderstands the subtlety of his arguments in an influential essay, 'Invisible Bullets'.¹⁷ The problem rather is one of political significance. Both cultural materialism and new historicism, as I suggested above, indulge in a form of historical contextualization, but one fundamentally different from earlier ('old') historicist approaches. This 'new' historicism refuses to distinguish in any simple way between *the* text, and its context, rather seeing both as part of a whole. In Terence Hawkes's words:

On the one hand [new historicism] represents a reaction against a de-historicized idealism, in which an apparently free-floating and autonomous body of writing called 'literature' serves as the repository of the universal values of a supposedly permanent 'human nature'. [...] Such a historicism's 'newness' lies precisely in its determination to reposition 'literature' altogether, to perceive literary texts as active constituent *elements* of their time, participants in, not mirrors of it.¹⁸

Much of this is also applicable to cultural materialism of course, and will become the subject of further consideration in the Conclusion. But it is in

Hawkes's extension of this explanation that the gap between the two starts to become more evident. Writing that '[Shakespeare's texts] take their place in an extensive symbolic field which must also include royal proclamations, parliamentary debates, architecture, music, song, letters and travellers' reports as aspects of a number of different rhetorical or "textual" strategies available and consistently utilized for the production of meaning'¹⁹, Hawkes suggests the wide field available for analysis. Thus, in an attempt to make the 'literary' inform history at the same time as history helps to 'explain' literature, the analyst has at his or her disposal the whole field of textual 'evidence'. But the risk with such an approach is that it ignores the likelihood that some evidence is likely to be more 'informative' than others: in a discussion of Lear's relationship to his daughters, a song may well be relevant, but a royal proclamation is probably a better starting point. In Hawkes's own case, his choice of parallel text is a *map* (actually in his case the *idea* of a map rather than a specific historical example), particularly appropriate to Lear's calling for the map as his own textual support for the momentous decisions he is about to make about his kingdom. Greenblatt however tends to approach the task much more indirectly, and his method, based on searching for 'homologies' between the historical period and the specific text being considered has tended to become the norm of such new historicist analysis.

Despite Greenblatt's arguments that his reading in 'Invisible Bullets' has been misunderstood, what is undeniable, and manifest, is the great emphasis he places on his chosen 'homologous' text, Thomas Harriot's *Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. As Frank Romany has

argued²⁰, Greenblatt produces from this a typically suave and intriguing essay, but one which is much more concerned with Harriot's text (wherein reside those 'invisible bullets') than the Shakespearean ones whose analysis follows in the second part of the essay. This becomes the method for all of the essays in Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations*²¹. As Romany summarises the approach: 'each chapter juxtaposes a representative play with other texts and documents, some from the hinterland of established sources, others with no formal connections with Shakespeare'.²² Such a technique is reminiscent of Foucault's approach to historical scholarship, and similar qualifications seem necessary. While on the one hand such trawling among the obscurities of the past often nets illuminating examples usually ignored, the danger is that it does so at the expense of more common, but also more *relevant* material. In Foucault's case, this may not be important, since he insists continuously on the futility of equating history with *truth*. Greenblatt, by substituting *histories* for 'history', or as Romany puts it, abandoning the '*grand récit*' in favour of the 'thick description of telling anecdotes'²³ effectively abandons the sort of way Williams would want to understand 'history', and the relationship between text and context.

The worry then, is that if we extend this analogy between the practices of Greenblatt and Foucault, we may find that 'truth' itself, the truth of history, is too easily abandoned in favour of the more interesting 'telling anecdote'. This is certainly the suggestion made in a more recent essay by John Lee devoted to Greenblatt's work.²⁴ Concentrating now on Greenblatt's *Learning to Curse*, Lee argues persuasively that Greenblatt's delight in the

ephemera of history (in this case a hat in the library of Christ Church, Oxford which may have belonged to Cardinal Wolsey) has led him to rewrite history in order to make the hat 'work' and so prove the value of a new historicist approach. Comparing two versions of the same essay ('Resonance and Wonder'), one from the hardback edition of *Learning to Curse* and one from the paperback, Lee carefully reconstructs Greenblatt's textual manipulations, emphasizing in the process how easy it is for the anecdote (necessarily 'personal') to blur the distinctions between story-telling and historical reporting. As Lee points out, this emphasis on the anecdote at once distinguishes the work of new historicists from cultural materialists: whereas the cultural materialists 'will typically concentrate on some aspect of culture that is marginalized within the text that is being studied [...] and begin to contextualize the play from this point, thus giving themselves criteria of relevance', the new historicist by contrast 'contextualize[s] a play by placing it next to an aspect of culture - often to be used synecdochially [sic] to stand for all culture - arguing that play and aspect should be closely associated, even when there is no literal connection'.²⁵ As Lee goes on to argue, the beauty of the anecdote is its appearance of 'newness': however interesting Hawkes may be on maps in *Lear*, someone has probably been there before; whereas 'Lear seen through the Reverend Wayland's disciplining of his son [Greenblatt's reading] has not been written about before'. And Greenblatt's more recent work has tended towards 'a sequence of anecdotes, interwoven with a sequence of moral conclusions'.²⁶

Everyone likes anecdotes, even Raymond Williams²⁷, and this thesis, and cultural materialism, may not be free of them. But I would want to argue that what the thesis demonstrates is that the practice of cultural materialism as developed by Raymond Williams understands history somewhat differently. Interpreting a text requires more than finding something of similar age and then saying something interesting about them, however well this is done. The chapters which follow, and which I will now summarise briefly, attempt to make sense of what Raymond Williams means by cultural materialism, and how it can be put into critical practice - they do not ignore the problems, despite my belief that cultural materialism is valuable in a way which is much less certain of new historicism.

The first two chapters following the Introduction concentrate largely on Williams's earliest critical writing, and try to make sense of that complicated relationship between him and the enormous influence on English studies of the work of F.R. Leavis in particular. They argue, first through detailed analyses of some of that early work, in particular the largely forgotten *Reading and Criticism*²⁸, and later through an examination in detail of the differences in literary critical practice (through Leavis's and Williams's 'readings' of Dickens), why tagging Williams as a 'Left-Leavisite' is both inevitable and reductive. Inevitable, because particularly in *Reading and Criticism* the debt to Leavis is so clear; reductive, because already in that early work Williams makes it clear that he is starting to write in opposition to Leavisian ideas. It is for this reason that I have subtitled the two chapters 'Away from the Organic Community' and 'Towards the Knowable

Community', suggesting both that there are very different ways of looking at the same thing, and that from the beginning Williams wants to reject a dominant strand in Leavisian criticism.

Chapters four and five deal in detail with some of the major theoretical issues which need to be confronted in the development of cultural materialism. 'Base and Superstructure in Terry Eagleton' takes its title from an essay on Williams by Eagleton²⁹, in which Williams's radical rewriting of a central Marxist metaphor of determination, fundamental to a Marxist theory of culture and ideology, becomes almost the defining moment both of the 'limits' and the 'limitations' of cultural materialism. The centrality of this issue requires a re-examination of Marx's and Engels texts in the light of Eagleton's critique, as well as a further consideration of some alternative ways of understanding the internal dynamics of 'base' and 'superstructure' and the relationship between them. Chapter five takes up Volosinov's critique of Saussure's sign theory, and argues that Williams's early engagement with the work of Volosinov and the 'Bakhtin school' allows him to develop a language model which bypasses the 'structuralist controversy', using this as a way of completing his model of cultural materialism.

In chapter six, I use Williams's work from *The Country and the City*³⁰ on 'Country-House' poetry as a way both of examining in some detail the practice of cultural materialism, and to indicate how such analysis needs to be further extended, in particular by an examination of the historical records on the 'Penshurst' estate at the beginning of the seventeenth-century belonging to the De L'isle family. Chapter seven, contrastingly, brings the thesis right up

to the last writings of Raymond Williams, represented by the collection of essays published after his death, *The Politics of Modernism*.³¹ It uses the work of the American critic Fredric Jameson as a way of showing how cultural materialism can be used to interrogate, and try to make sense of, that strange phenomenon 'postmodernity', and how Jameson and Williams are related through their commitment to a sort of utopian 'resource of hope'. Finally, the Conclusion examines briefly what has happened to cultural materialism after Williams's death, in particular through an examination of the debate around the 'appropriation' of Shakespeare. It also suggests some further 'limitations' to the discipline as practised by Williams, and how they may be beginning to be confronted.

Notes and References

¹ 'Cultural materialism is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production', Raymond Williams, 'Crisis in English Studies', in *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 192-211. (this essay is discussed further in chapter 5).

² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; repr. 1989), pp. 5-6. Actually, there is 'another' cultural materialism. In 1979 the American anthropologist Marvin Harris published *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture* (New York: Random House, 1979), in which he writes: 'Although I did not invent "cultural materialism", I am responsible for giving it its name' (p. x). This 'naming' was in his earlier book, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New

York: Crowell, 1968). Neither contains the name of 'Raymond Williams' (similarly, I have found no trace of Harris's name in any of Williams's works). Just as Williams sees cultural materialism in relation to Marxism, so Harris compares his own practice with 'the Marx-Engels-Lenin strategy of dialectical materialism', and argues that he is able to 'improve' on 'Marx's original strategy' by 'adding reproductive pressure and ecological variables to the conjunction of material conditions studied by Marxist-Leninists' (*Cultural Materialism*, p. ix).

³ In his introduction to *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985; 2nd edn 1994), Jonathan Dollimore writes: 'The term 'cultural materialism is borrowed from its recent use by Raymond Williams; its practice grows from an eclectic body of work in Britain in the post-war period which can be broadly characterised as cultural analysis' (p. 2).

⁴ To date, the only biography available is Fred Inglis's *Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 1989), which prides itself on its lack of *intellectual* (i.e. theoretical) discussion of Williams's work. My own, brief review of *Raymond Williams* is in *Diatribes*, 6 (1996), 75-76. There are particular problems with Inglis's approach, besides this emphasis on 'experience' rather than 'theory'. For discussion, see particularly the review by Raphael Samuel in the *London Review of Books*, 4 July 1996, pp. 8-11. There is a full-page response to Samuel's review in *London Review of Books*, 1 August 1996, and various further responses through the following months.

⁵ The only full-length work is: Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). Raymond Williams's name is invoked early on: 'Williams's place in the history of British Marxism as a key figure for the New Left is well known and vitally important, and any book on cultural materialism must acknowledge him and his formative work' (p. 26). However, there are only relatively sketchy summaries of a few of Williams's works. The book works best as an example of what to do with cultural materialism, particularly in the third and fourth parts, on 'History' and 'Community'.

⁶ Inglis, *Raymond Williams*, p. 249.

⁷ Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁸ Ibid., p. 88.

⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 89.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 89.

¹² Ibid., p. 89.

¹³ See e.g.: Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 51-75 (p. 60).

¹⁴ Richard Dutton, 'Postscript' to: *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (Harlow: Longman, 1992), pp. 219-26 (p. 221).

¹⁵ Although the phonetic similarities between these two may suggest that poetics and politics are not as far apart as is sometimes suggested.

¹⁶ For a summary of this particular ‘history’, see; Wilson, *Cultural Materialism*, chapter 3. The intimate relationship between cultural materialism and new historicism is complicated by the knowledge that Greenblatt actually mentions Williams as a defining figure, rather than Foucault, following his days as a Cambridge Fulbright Scholar (Wilson, p. 53). Similarly, despite the subtitle of *Political Shakespeare* being ‘Essays in cultural materialism’, the first essay in the collection is Greenblatt’s ‘Invisible Bullets’ (pp. 18-47). The ‘Afterword’ to *Political Shakespeare* is by Williams. In the second edition of Jonathan Dollimore’s *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 2nd edn 1989) he acknowledges that ‘UK cultural materialism’ was understood by American new historicists as more politically inflected. Nevertheless, when he was preparing to put *Political Shakespeare* together with Alan Sinfield in 1982: ‘[we] thought that, despite obvious differences, there was sufficient convergence between UK cultural materialism and the then just-named new historicism in the US to bring the two together in a collection of essays’ (*Radical Tragedy*, p. lix, n. 18). This suggests that cultural materialism arrived first, but in *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama* cultural materialism is defined as ‘[t]he mainly British wing of New Historicism’ (p. 228).

¹⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 164-66. This ‘alternative’ reading is

supported by Alan Sinfield in *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 39.

¹⁸ Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 122 (emphasis in original).

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 123 (emphasis in original).

²⁰ Frank Romany, 'Shakespeare and the New Historicism', *Essays in Criticism*, 34 (1989), 271-88.

²¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). This includes a version of 'Invisible Bullets'.

²² Romany, 'Shakespeare and the New Historicism', p. 272.

²³ Ibid., p. 272.

²⁴ John Lee, 'The Man who Mistook his Hat: Stephen Greenblatt and the Anecdote', *Essays in Criticism*, 45 (1995), 285-300.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 298.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 299. This slide from 'history' to 'rhetoric' is further emphasized by Lee's noting that in fact 'Resonance and Wonder' actually exists in four different versions, in one of which the 'cardinal's hat' does not exist at all (p. 299).

²⁷ Inglis quotes Christopher Ricks on *The Country and the City*: 'There is this grand use of anecdotes' (Inglis, *Raymond Williams*, p. 237).

²⁸ Raymond Williams, *Reading and Criticism* (London: Fredrick Muller, 1950).

²⁹ Terry Eagleton, 'Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams', in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Terry Eagleton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 165-75.

³⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973; London: Hogarth Press, 1985)

³¹ Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. by Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989)

Reading and Criticism: Away from the Organic Community

At a Cambridge faculty meeting to discuss the radical notion of including a new paper on the novel in Part II of the Tripos, attended by F.R. Leavis and Raymond Williams, the debate centred on the advisability of including 'non-English' novels on the syllabus.¹ To Leavis, any suggestion for including a foreign writer was 'misdirection' and must be resisted. As the debate continued, and Leavis realised he would lose in a vote, he turned to Williams, the committee secretary: 'I put it directly to you, Mr Secretary. The coherent course would be the English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence'.² Williams's remembrance of this relatively small incident says much for the divergence in their positions: 'He knew quite well that this was the title of my main current lecture course. He knew also, I think, that the course was an attempt at a sustained argument against *The Great Tradition*'.³ Leavis's shrewd tactic (although, as it transpired, an unsuccessful one) manages at one and the same time to co-opt Williams in to his English tradition (from the perspective of the other faculty members), and to let Williams know he is aware of the hidden agenda behind the lecture-course structure. It is apparent then, that, by this time (the mid 1960s), there is a recognizable difference in literary approach between the two figures. If, as has been sometimes suggested, Williams was at one time a 'Leavisite' ('Left' or otherwise)⁴ he is obviously something else by this time. I want to suggest that this difference is a consequence of Williams's slowly maturing concept of 'cultural

materialism'; and that it can be specified in the formal differences between Leavis's 'organic' and Williams's 'knowable' community. Based on this anecdote, it would seem appropriate to offer a comparison between Leavis's *The Great Tradition* and Williams's *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*.⁵ But I want to start before this, looking at a number of books and documents relating to Williams's early written work, and comparing them with the pioneering work of Leavis, exemplified by his editing of *Scrutiny*, to test how similar or different their approaches were in Williams's formative period.⁶

We need, I think, to start by stepping back slightly, to acknowledge a real continuity between the work of Leavis, Williams, and previously influential critics, all concerned with the 'definition' of 'culture', a 'selective tradition' which attempts to put culture (however defined), at the centre of critical debate. The names and the texts would then include T.S. Eliot ('Tradition and the Individual Talent'); Matthew Arnold (*Culture and Anarchy*); and Thomas Carlyle ('Signs of the Times').⁷ It is necessary to recognize these continuities as much as the perceived differences: in their different ways, all of these writers (including Leavis and Williams) are confronting modernity after the start of the Industrial Revolution. Their work is thus intimately concerned with ideas about 'progress', 'civilization', the relationship of the individual to an increasingly 'technological' environment, the need for new forms of education, the meaning of 'democracy' etc. There is thus a structure which effectively binds their work together, while at the same time allowing a developing dialectic. Just as *The English Novel from*

Dickens to Lawrence responds to the demands of *The Great Tradition*, so Williams's *Culture and Society* tacitly recognizes and resists the influence of *Culture and Anarchy*. *Culture and Anarchy* starts from the Carlylean position that modern society is increasingly 'mechanical' and 'external'. 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (Arnold, 1865) is taken over by T.S. Eliot, and later forms the basis for an extended debate on literary criticism between Leavis and F.W. Bateson (acknowledged as an influence by Williams).⁸ The first name mentioned by Leavis in 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' (1930) is Arnold; and, as for Eliot, the debt is obvious and enormous: one example must suffice, in 'T.S. Eliot's Later Poetry' Leavis quotes Eliot's own words from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent': '[Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour' to describe the writer of *Four Quartets*, a poet possessed of 'magnificent intelligence'.⁹ And just in case we want to distinguish Williams from all the others by his insistence on the 'ordinariness' of culture, we are reminded by Richard Hoggart that it was T.S. Eliot who 'said "culture is ordinary" long before Raymond Williams elaborated it and made it one of the rallying-cries of the New Left'.¹⁰

1. Leavis and How to teach Reading

From my investigations, I would see the 1950s as the decisive period for a radical split in theoretical position between Leavis and Williams, but, in order to understand this history, it is necessary first to return to the 1930s, and Leavis's pioneering work in editing the Cambridge periodical *Scrutiny*

(along with others such as L.C. Knights, Donald Culver, Denys Thompson and D. W. Harding), which started in 1932, and finally closed in 1953.¹¹ This important work, together with a series of influential full-length texts make up a sustained and dominant oeuvre, which sets the cultural agenda, and offers a critique of the (then) current practice of literary criticism, and its relative importance compared with other disciplines. It attempts to offer nothing less than a totalizing vision, which, nevertheless, refuses to embrace alternative cultural, political or philosophical models. This would include Marxism, which Leavis saw as a complete dead-end, but also, I will want to argue, Cambridge positivism, exemplified for Leavis by the work of I.A. Richards¹², this in spite of the obvious debt owed to Richards's emphasis on 'practical criticism'.

In attempting to categorize Leavis's position, I will start by examining that rather odd offering from 1932, *How to Teach Reading*. Subtitled *A Primer for Ezra Pound*, it takes the form of a rebuttal of Pound's *How to Read*, offering both a very distinctive critique of that work, and, in the second part, Leavis's 'positive suggestions' for a better alternative. Typical of Leavis's very Eliotic conception of 'culture', 'tradition' and 'criticism', it starts with Eliot's belief that 'great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree'. Like Pound, Leavis wants to make a decisive break with one very particular 'tradition', that style of English criticism which has the 'habit of discussing literature in terms of Hamlet's and Lamb's personalities, Milton's universe, Johnson's conversation, Wordsworth's philosophy, and Othello's or Shelley's private life'.¹³ But he

resists absolutely Pound's 'prescription' for 'a minimum basis for a sound and liberal education in letters', both for its ignorance of the practicalities of teaching and learning ('reading what one is supposed to have read would be a full-time business'), and for its insistence on the priority of foreign names at the expense of canonical English writers, particularly Shakespeare and Donne (*HTTR*, pp. 6-11).

For Leavis, Pound's problems arise particularly because, although, like all critics, he insists on a certain level of 'abstraction' (inevitable in Leavis's view), such abstract theorizing will only be fruitful where it is wedded to an acknowledgement of the central importance of 'sensibility' (again the homage to Eliot is clear), otherwise, it becomes abstraction for its own sake, exemplified in Pound by his desire to reduce poetic interpretation to a triad of obscure Greek rhetorical terms (*HTTR*, pp. 12-13). Fundamental here is Leavis's argument that Pound's conception of 'tradition' is misplaced, not only because he sees the canon as merely 'a matter mainly of individual works [...] written by individual artists' (and therefore lacking an 'organic' dimension), but also because he fails to recognize the very real relationship between language and literature, between the consciousness of a people and a literary 'memory': again, Eliot is the guide:

[A] given literary tradition is not merely, as it were by geographical accidents of birth, associated with a given language: the relation may be suggested by saying that the two are *of* each other. Not only is language an apt analogy for literary tradition; one might say that such

a tradition is largely a development of the language it belongs to if one did not want to say at the same time that the language is largely a product of the tradition. Perhaps the best analogy is that used by Mr. Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' when he speaks of 'the mind of Europe.' 'Mind' implies both consciousness and memory, and a literary tradition is both: it is the consciousness and memory of the people or the cultural tradition in which it has developed (*HTTR*, p. 19, emphasis in original).

The movement from 'literary' to 'cultural' is important: for Leavis, literary criticism is much more than a system ('scientific' or otherwise) for aesthetic evaluation, it becomes rather the basis for a whole set of moral and cultural judgements which are 'extra-literary', and thus replaces other such 'meta-narratives', including, most obviously, all those coming under the heading of 'philosophy'.

'One cannot be seriously interested in literature and remain purely literary in interests' (*HTTR*, p. 21): with this, Leavis ends his 'critique' of Pound, and moves on to the second part of his thesis, a series of 'positive suggestions', a mini blueprint for a new university education, and the 'training of sensibility' (*HTTR*, p. 25). This 'training' needs certain standard works of criticism as its basis, and it is useful to compare the advice given here by Leavis, with his slightly amended suggestions in the version of *How to Teach Reading* given ten years later in *Education and the University*. In the earlier version, Leavis is very much in the debt of Richards and Empson: this is his

summary of the value, for instance, of Richards' *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), and *Practical Criticism* (1929):

This apparatus [Richards' two books] will not give [the student] a technique of analysis, but with Dr. Richards' account of 'What is a Poem,'? of rhythm, meaning, sentimentality and so on, *and* a good sensibility trained in constant analytic practice, he will be able to learn, and to teach, how to discuss profitably the differences between particular poems, to explain in detail and with precision why *this* is to be judged sentimental, *that* genuinely poignant; how the unrealized imagery of *this* betrays that it was 'faked' while the concreteness and associative subtlety of *that* come from below and could not have been excogitated; and so on (*HTTR*, p. 26, emphasis in original).¹⁴

Similar praise, although with at least the hint of a reservation, is given to Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930); 'those who are capable of learning from it are capable of reading it critically, and those who are not capable of learning from it were not intended by Nature for an advanced "education in letters"'. In 1932, besides these examples, there is, states Leavis, 'little to recommend' (*HTTR*, p. 26). However, in the version printed in *Education and the University*, all this detail about Empson and Richards is removed, and, instead, a footnote directs the reader back to chapter three of that work, 'Literary Studies'. Now, Empson's work is offered with the equivalent of a government health warning: 'a warning against temptation that

the analyst whose practice is to be a discipline must resist'.¹⁵ Again, it is only the already-able student who will benefit from Empson's work, but it now looks a much less desirable text:

A useful exercise for the moderately seasoned student would be to go through W. Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, or parts of it, discriminating between the profitable and the unprofitable, the valid and the vicious. Empson's extremely mixed and uneven book, offering as it does a good deal of valuable stimulus, serves the better as a warning - a warning against temptation that the analyst whose practice is to be a discipline must resist.¹⁶

By now, Richards, like Empson, offers a combination of 'the stimulating and the aberrant', particularly in regard to his strongly 'scientific' desires, the 'ambition to make analysis a laboratory technique'.¹⁷ Indeed, a comparison of Leavis's later problems with both critics indicates a very important duality in Leavis's method: he both resists prescription, denying regularly any argument which is based on saying 'this is the correct method' (which would presumably be the result of Richards's positivist approach), while, at the same time, wanting to challenge what he calls the 'Empsonian kind of irresponsibility', which delights in ambiguity and language games.¹⁸

This, surely, marks the interest and the real ideological problems in Leavis's approach, and is linked, inevitably, to a whole other debate over the ability of an aesthetic (in this case 'modernism') to offer a critique of

modernity; and it is one reason why T.S. Eliot appears to represent an ideal for Leavis. Eliot, for Leavis, is neither positivist (à la Richards) nor Empsonian relativist. In 'T.S. Eliot's Later Poetry' Leavis summarises these features in Eliot's mature poetry:

The poetry from *Ash-Wednesday* onwards doesn't say, 'I believe,' or 'I know,' or 'Here is the truth'; it is positive in direction but not positive in that way. [...] It is a searching of experience, a spiritual discipline, a technique for sincerity - for giving 'sincerity' a meaning.¹⁹

This description, combining as it does experiential analysis and religious organization fits perfectly with Eliot's own developed persona, but how helpful is it as a method for literary criticism? While giving something *a* meaning is not necessarily the same as *fixing* a meaning, it implies at least that such stability is possible and desirable. But how can it be achieved? - just what is a 'technique for sincerity'? The problem is that 'sincerity' is as loose and 'ambiguous' a term as 'sensitivity'.

Further, it points towards a more extreme version of 'poetic sensitivity', one exemplified for instance in Eliot's extension of his arguments in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', given in 1933 in the series of lectures offered to the University of Virginia, and published as *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*.²⁰ Moving away from what he considers the over-literary emphasis of the earlier essay, Eliot now ties a similarly understood version of 'active' tradition, to 'orthodoxy'. While explicitly insisting that

these terms are not being used in a narrowly religious sense, he nonetheless emphasises the deeply theological structure to his argument by stating: 'that an acceptance of the validity of the two terms as I use them should lead one to dogmatic theology, I naturally believe' (*ASG*, p. 31). 'Dogma' might well suitably summarise the tone of Eliot's lectures, which contain some particularly virulent material, supported by his view that 'a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated' (*ASG*, p. 20).²¹ His main thesis, an extension of the 'lost organic community' theory, is that modern literature has become divorced from any genuine moral perspective as England has suffered 'the decay of Protestantism', and that this discloses itself in a failure of aesthetic achievement (*ASG*, p. 38). In giving examples of this decline, Eliot writes off many of the pioneers of modernism and before, the names that will inform the 'Great Tradition'. Thus he dismisses Pound: 'his powerful and narrow post-Protestant prejudice peeps out from the most unexpected places'; Yeats: who adopted 'the doctrine of Arnold, that Poetry can replace Religion'; George Eliot: 'we must respect her for being a serious moralist, but deplore her individualistic morals'; Hardy: his 'extreme emotionalism' is 'a symptom of decadence'; Hopkins (a Jesuit priest): 'not a religious poet in the more important sense in which I have elsewhere maintained Baudelaire to be a religious poet' (*ASG*, pp. 41-55). Only Joyce is saved: he is 'the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of [Eliot's] time', and his work is 'penetrated with Christian feeling' (*ASG*, pp. 38,48). Eliot is far from illuminating about his privileging of the very unorthodox (certainly in religious terms) Joyce, but it may be linked to Eliot's belief that he can no longer talk

of blasphemy, since only a believer can blaspheme (*ASG*, p. 52). For surely, Joyce, at least as much as Hardy or George Eliot, is guilty of the 'heresy' of shifting his writing towards the 'personal', or of intruding the 'diabolic' into modern literature (*ASG*, pp. 53,56). For it is this, above all else, which has led, in Eliot's view, to the 'crippling effect of [the] separation from tradition and orthodoxy' (*ASG*, p. 56). As an example of this fall, Eliot singles out Lawrence for particular attention. From the failure of his mother to give him a sound religious education, to the production of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which shows Eliot that he was a 'very sick man indeed', and 'spiritual' but 'spiritually sick', Lawrence is for Eliot 'an almost perfect example of the heretic' (*ASG*, pp. 38-39, 60-61).

This represents a very significant point of difference between Eliot and Leavis, and, although Leavis starts his *Scrutiny* review of *After Strange Gods* by rather wishfully dismissing it as 'not a book the author would choose to have written',²² he obviously cannot ignore what amounts to a radical dismissal of much of what has previously informed his own critical position. He therefore rejects both Eliot's critical argument, that moral analysis should replace literary criticism ('moral or religious criticism cannot be a substitute for literary criticism'), *and* accuses Eliot of being a bad critic ('the criticism seems painfully bad - disabblingly inadequate, often irrelevant and sometimes disingenuous').²³ In particular, Leavis rescues Lawrence, using the very terms reserved by Eliot as marks of value: 'it must be plain why for those preoccupied with orthodoxy, order and traditional forms Lawrence should be especially a test'.²⁴ Lawrence stands, argues Leavis at the end of his review,

‘for something without which the preoccupation (necessary as it is) with order, forms and deliberate construction cannot produce health’.²⁵

2. The Organic Community

The remainder of *How to Teach Reading*, Leavis’s ‘positive suggestions’, summarises many of the ideas which underpin much of his life’s work; the concentration on the relationship between art and morality, the necessity for a ‘critical approach’ to criticism, and, significantly, the notion of ‘tradition’ as intimately linked to the *present* as much as to the past (again, the model, inevitably, is Eliot, but the Eliot of ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’). It is this insistence which fuels his continual resistance to that other notion of ‘tradition’, represented in Cambridge English by the emphasis, for instance, on the study of Anglo-Saxon and ‘The History of the Language’ as prerequisites to ‘understanding’: for Leavis, the ‘traditional’ training in Cambridge English rather prevents the student from ‘acquiring any real understanding of anything’, and produces ‘not merely a deadening waste of time and energy, but exposure to a deadening and dehumanizing spirit’ (*HTTR*, pp. 46-7). This, for Leavis, is not ‘tradition’, but ‘traditionalism’, a disregard for the present (including of course contemporary literature) which ‘means usually an incapacity for any real interest - the kind of interest that understands the meaning of “technique” - in literature at all’ (*HTTR*, p. 39). The focus, then, is on the present, but the solution to the ‘present problems of art’ can only be by bringing the ‘forces of the past to bear upon the solution of these problems’ (*HTTR*, p. 39, quoting Eliot). Only once this type of

critical sensibility has been achieved, can there be any profit in spending significant time on 'other literatures' or 'the classics' (a link here to Leavis's later rejection of European novels as 'misdirection'). In this, Leavis admits to being very much a product of Romanticism, citing both the Wordsworth of *The Prelude* and the Coleridge of *Biographia Literaria* as exemplars of the rejection of Augustan 'rule[s] and precedent', a system of 'language divorced from experience' (*HTTR*, p. 44).

It is here, in the interaction between 'language' and 'experience', that we enter into what will form the most important point of comparison between Leavis and Williams, between what I want to call the 'organic community' and the 'knowable community'. Coming out of a long historical debate about the methods of literary criticism, and the desirability to 'place' a text (conventionally a short poem) within a suitable context, this becomes, for the Leavis of the 1930s, a crucial moment of distinction between his understanding of the activity of criticism, and that practised under the heading of 'Practical Criticism'. This latter term, the title of Richards' book from 1929 (*Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement*), relates to Richards' Cambridge experiments, in which he forced his students to sharpen their critical awareness by making them write comments on unsigned poems, concentrating, therefore, on the 'words on the page'. While applauding the effort at close reading which this obviously entails, for Leavis it ignores a large part of the 'function of criticism', which requires that literary appreciation has to be linked to 'training in the awareness of the environment' (*HTTR*, pp. 48-49). [Before continuing, it is important to emphasize here that

Leavis's arguments are complex and sometimes contradictory: in particular, we will later have to confront more carefully exactly how he understands the distinction between 'text' and 'context' by examining his debate in the 1950s with F. W. Bateson]. For Leavis, writing in the early 1930s, 'awareness of the environment' means a recognition of the development of what he will want to stigmatize as 'mass culture', a cultural environment which acts as a 'pervasive counter-influence', and for which 'the literary training of sensibility in school is an inadequate reply' (*HTTR*, p. 49). This extended sensibility, one which links the activity of literary criticism to cultural practices such as advertising and the cinema, is the subject of much of Leavis's work in the 1930s, including 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' and *Culture and Environment*.²⁶

Culture and the Environment confronts head-on Leavis's and Denys Thompson's fears about the encroachment of 'mass culture', and the loss of the 'organic community', and thus completes a set of critiques embracing Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold in the nineteenth century, and continued into the twentieth by the likes of Eliot and E.M. Forster. Indeed, we can see one small, ironic example of such historical continuity in Leavis's reworking of Arnold's anxieties over the decline of popular reading matter in 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture': Opening his article by complaining about the 'much more desperate plight of culture to-day' (compared with the 1860s), he adds, in a footnote, Arnold's argument, from *Culture and Anarchy*, that the decline in cultural standards is evidenced by the success of the *Daily Telegraph*. Leavis completes this by adding, without comment, 'It

is the *News of the World* that has the largest circulation to-day'.²⁷ Like the full-length work, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' offers an overview of contemporary culture, and promotes the idea of an educated minority (again, following on from the work of Coleridge, Carlyle and Arnold). Both works denigrate the Press, cinema, advertising and most of what had, through the nineteenth century, gone under the heading of 'progress'. Although 'minority culture' is promoted, Leavis and Thompson expected *Culture and Environment* to help a wide cross-section: though 'designed for school use', they hope it will prove of use also to trainee teachers, workers in adult education, debating societies, even the 'general reader'.²⁸ The book's anxieties, fuelled by a belief in the physical and spiritual debilitation caused by the Industrial age: mass-production, standardization, a general 'levelling-down', find their apotheosis in a loss of tradition and the 'organic community'. This decline, the opposite of a Whig theory of continual progress, is one to be investigated again when we consider Williams's *Country and the City* and his analysis of 'golden age' rhetoric. For now, it is worthwhile noting just what importance Leavis attaches to his discipline of literary criticism, given his intense pessimism at the 'plight' of culture. Nevertheless, despite an insistence on the increased need for training in 'sensitivity', Leavis is reconciled to a structural faultline - no amount of literary education can replace 'the organic community with the living culture it embodied' (*CE*, p. 1); and, like any good village nostalgic, he remembers the 'good old days':

Relics of the old order are still to be found in remote [sic] parts of the country, such as the Yorkshire dales, where motor-coach, wireless, cinema and education are rapidly destroying them - they will hardly last another decade. In those parts speech is still an art. And the cultivation of the art of speech was as essential to the old popular culture that in local variations existed throughout the country as song, dance and handicrafts (*CE*, p. 2).

This is the 'organic community' which mass civilization has destroyed. Leavis and Thompson base most of their analyses on the writings of George Sturt, from the 1910s and 20s.²⁹ Following Sturt, Leavis and Thompson describe a (pre-dominantly) rural economy subject only to slow change over time (what will be categorized later by Williams as a 'residual' formation); a community where 'tradition' is embodied in the daily activities of tradesmen, who inherit ways of working with 'natural' materials which offer them aesthetic and spiritual fulfilment, as well as physical satisfaction. The danger with standardization and the 'levelling-down' associated with the machine age, is a loss of what Sturt calls the 'picked experience of ages' (*CE*, p.80); and Leavis and Thompson link this back again to a concern with the effect on culture and language. They see the activity of communication as dependent for its well-being on that sense of order which we saw earlier: a link back to the past, which 'depend[s] for [its] life, vigour and potency on being used in association with such traditions as the wheelwright' (*CE*, p. 81). If this last link with the past, a linguistic one, is lost, then, so their argument goes,

‘culture’ is dead, and language is only used ‘in association with advertising, journalism, best-sellers, motor-cars and the cinema’ (*CE*, pp. 80-82). This is the reason literature, and literary criticism are now of such central importance to a ‘definition of culture’:

It now becomes plain why it is of so great importance to keep the literary tradition alive. For if language tends to be debased [...] instead of invigorated by contemporary use, then it is to literature alone, where its subtlest and finest use is preserved, that we can look with any hope of keeping in touch with our spiritual tradition - with the ‘picked experience of ages’ (*CE*, p. 82).

It is here where the cultivated minority are so important, only they have the right level of sensibility, a ‘tradition of taste’ which goes beyond the individual, and matches, at the linguistic level, that ‘picked experience of ages’ which Sturt senses in his own agrarian economy and history. Sturt’s vision of the ‘organic community’ is now commonplace: it represents stability, continuity, no ‘division of labour’, a society where village life represented a symbiotic relationship between human and nature, and the town, though ‘different’, still had to tune itself to the demands of the country, demands that were regulated and sensitized by the rhythm of the seasons (*CE*, pp. 87-92). But it is to D.H. Lawrence that Leavis and Thompson turn for the literary evocation of Sturt’s social history, the Lawrence, contra Eliot’s *After Strange Gods*, of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, offering Connie’s description of

her drive through Tevershall, the drab monotony of the devastated, urbanized landscape figured in the repetition of key words - the 'black' of the buildings and streets, the 'blot on the landscape' which turns England into a gigantic palimpsest, overwritten with new narratives which destroy its history:

The car ploughed uphill through the long squalid straggle of Tevershall, the blackened brick dwellings, the black slate roofs glistening their sharp edges, the mud black with coal-dust, the pavements wet and black. [...] This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical (quoted *CE*, pp. 94-95).

It is only reasonable to acknowledge that, despite what I will later want to call 'village nostalgia', or the 'Golden Age' mentality, Leavis and Thompson are not straightforward post-Romantics, yearning for a simple return to pre-industrial society, like the inhabitants of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*; or hoping, with Lawrence, that new forms of building will in themselves transform society (an idea we will return to much later in the 'postmodern' notion of 'critical regionalism'). Interestingly, they often appear more like George Orwell, with his familiar anxiety about the abuse of language, and the need to sustain a form of 'linguistic memory' which holds on to the past.³⁰ If the

organic community really is something that is irrecoverable, then it becomes the job of education, the training of sensibility and the rigours of literary criticism, to act as a positive antidote to what remains. Once 'work' was 'leisure', so that, for instance, for earlier generations 'their work trained them aesthetically and morally', a society where everyone 'had a fine code of personal relations with one another and with the master, a dignified notion of their place in the community and an understanding of the necessary part played by their work in the scheme of things' (*CE*, p. 105).³¹ Now, with work reduced to repetitive toil (the link to a theory of 'alienation' seems clear but is not acknowledged) leisure is similarly filled with passive 'substitute-living' which relies on day-dreaming and 'fantasying' (*CE*, pp. 99-103). This failure, a failure specifically at the literary level, represents a serious decline in our reading habits, away from 'literature' and towards 'mass culture'. It is a central concern of Q.D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public*, and is also confronted in 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', where Leavis makes a direct link between popular cinema and pulp fiction, by quoting a letter from Edgar Rice Burroughs. Burroughs, the creator of Tarzan, describes his writing technique in terms of lessons learned from the cinema: his readers are not required to think, for he has, he argues, 'evolved [...] a type of fiction that may be read with the minimum of mental effort'.³² To this, Leavis merely adds, 'the significance of this for my argument does not need comment'.³³

By concentrating until now on the formation of Leavis as a literary and cultural critic, I have attempted to indicate a set of parameters within which we can identify something as specifically 'Leavisian', since this will form the 'starting point' for Raymond Williams's own cultural formation, and the discipline now described as 'cultural materialism'. The most concrete by-product of this influence is Williams's *Reading and Criticism*, published in 1950 in the 'Man and Society' series.³⁴ Some critics see *Reading and Criticism* as overwhelming evidence of Williams's total reliance on the working methods and arguments of Leavis.³⁵ It is certainly true that this early work is within the Leavisian tradition, as evidenced both by its concerns, and its acknowledged influences. Denys Thompson 'read the manuscript and suggested some improvements' (RC, p. x); Leavis is praised for being 'largely responsible for the intelligent development of critical analysis as an educational discipline', and Williams is 'indebted' to the work of *Scrutiny* (RC, p. ix); a short list of recommended books of criticism includes four by F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, as well as a number from the same critical background, including Eliot and Arnold (RC, p. 109). However, as we work through some of Williams's arguments from *Reading and Criticism* and related work from the same period, I hope to show that, even this early, there are clear, and important points of difference between the two critics. Indeed, such differences are insisted on by Williams himself in the 'Preface', where his acknowledgement of influence is followed immediately by a denial that he is part of any 'school of criticism' (RC, p. ix). Any common ground, for

Williams, is at the level of recognizing 'the text as the starting-point of criticism', beyond that, he acts as an 'independent student' (*RC*, p. x).

Two central chapters, 'Critics and Criticism' and 'What is Analysis?' summarise much of Williams's defining arguments. In the first, besides dismissing much popular (newspaper) 'criticism' for lacking anything like 'serious reviewing' (*RC*, p. 24), he confronts the very real problem of deciding what, if anything, represents a 'standard' by which valuable criticism can be measured and recognized. And, rather like Leavis, he rejects basing such decisions on abstract systems, since 'a preoccupation with theories of literary judgment and value seems quite frequently to be of little relevance to the actual judgment of literature' (*RC*, p. 25). Continuing, Williams encapsulates much that has been used over the years to judge him as 'anti-theory':

Often, indeed, one has seen a theoretical interest of this kind distract attention from literature. I must not be understood as implying that all literary theory is distraction. It is my experience, however, that it is not in theory (of a kind) that the general reader is lacking, but rather in straightforward practical reading ability (*RC*, p. 26).

In fact, unlike Leavis, for whom the training of 'sensitivity' as we have seen, is both paramount and technically unproblematic, Williams sees problems in this just as much as with any 'scientific exposition' (*RC*, p. 26). However, as Williams's interlocutors point out in *Politics and Letters*³⁶, when Williams

rejects theory in this way, and supports instead a system of literary evaluation and the setting of literary standards based on the pre-existing category 'literature' (*RC*, p. 26), he is adopting 'the classic Leavisite argument, at its most circular'.³⁷ It will be some time (as we shall see), before Williams is able easily to move away from such a formulation. In the meantime, while consciously attempting to expand and redefine the 'definition of culture', he holds on to a canonical understanding of 'literature', which, while accepting the adoption of new entrants to the 'canon' (in particular the works of literary modernism) fundamentally recognizes a sense of stability and order which is decidedly Leavisian, not to say Eliotic. Williams's response to the criticism, that he 'wasn't thinking so much of the theory of literature as of the theory of literary judgment'³⁸ is barely adequate, but, as *Reading and Criticism* makes explicit, Williams, in 1950, already had a concept of literary criticism (if not 'theory') which was starting to question those very tenets which his critics want to stigmatize as 'Leavisite'. Firstly, rather than an emphasis on 'sensitivity' defined by an 'educated' elite, Williams sees the setting of standards as 'inseparable from the values of the larger culture' (*RC*, p. 27), which presumably has to be defined in relation to just that 'mass culture' seen as inimical by Eliot and Leavis.

Criticism, for Williams, is 'essentially a social activity' (*RC*, p. 29), although, as for Leavis, it consists largely in a form of what we might now call 'reader-response' theory, where the *activity* of reading, or what Leavis calls 'analysis', takes over the text in an act of 're-creation' (*RC*, p. 31, quoting Leavis). Williams expands on this idea, to offer what is surprisingly

similar in explanation to a proto-structuralist conception. As I will want to argue later, cultural materialism shows strong affinities with versions of semiotics. Here, it is useful to quote Roland Barthes at his most 'structuralist':

[W]e must speak of a structuralist *activity*: creation or reflection are not, here, an original 'impression' of the world, but a veritable fabrication of a world which resembles the first one, not in order to copy it but to render it intelligible. Hence one might say that structuralism is essentially *an activity of imitation*, which is also why there is, strictly speaking, no *technical* difference between structuralism on the one hand and literature in particular, art in general on the other.³⁹

Rather like Barthes in 1963, Williams in 1950 sees the activity of criticism as the production of new structures. He specifically rejects traditional notions of structure, particularly what is commonly called 'thematic' criticism, arguing instead that 'the structure or pattern of a work is more than the text; it is the text *and* the response' (RC, p. 73, emphasis in original).

This advance in the evaluation of the practice of criticism carries with it the difficulty that it would seem to legislate against an approach which makes literary judgments on the basis of small extracts, the general technique of criticism when short poems are abandoned in favour of longer prose works. And yet, just like the work of Leavis, Thompson and Richards,

Reading and Criticism relies on just such small extracts for its analysis. Indeed, introducing his 'extracts for analysis', Williams conforms to Richards's schema in *Practical Criticism*, arguing that the pieces shown are anonymous because 'it has been found that names create irrelevant responses' (*RC*, p. 110; presumably the student who recognizes one of the pieces, or guesses at its author, must reject this piece, tainted as it must be by such debilitating knowledge). While recognizing and endorsing the reservations of Q.D. Leavis, to the effect that even 'great' novels may have serious lapses (*RC*, p. 73), Williams counters this by arguing that a 'trained reader' will make selections which recognize this risk and select accordingly (*RC*, p. 73). The critic's assessment consists primarily in finding the over-riding structural 'pattern', and then seeking out 'adequate passages which convey this pattern at a length susceptible [sic] to demonstrated analysis' (*RC*, p. 74). But how is the critic to discover the 'fundamental pattern', other than by selecting passages which appear to show shared characteristics, and then stand in for this overarching 'pattern'? Like the definition of the 'literary', this too represents circular thinking, emphasizing how each act of reading has to negotiate the 'hermeneutic circle', and play the game of preconception and anticipation. What must actually be happening, as Williams later acknowledges, is that what appears to be objective evaluation from close textual analysis, is in reality reliant on judgments from 'outside' the text and predating the analysis.⁴⁰ In fact, though not in 1950 recognizing this further difficulty, Williams points out that in other respects he was already uneasy about 'conventional' literary practice, since the methods which seemed to

work for a self-contained poem (i.e. a 'complete' work), appeared more precarious when applied to anything as vast and complex as a novel. This method, of small-scale textual analysis, dates back to work on poetry, and typically took the form of a comparison of two poems from different writers, or different periods, thus allowing comparative analysis. An example can be found in *How to Teach Reading*, where Leavis recommends doing 'comparisons between representative poems of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, in order to bring out the advantage the seventeenth-century poets enjoyed in being in the "tradition of wit"' (*HTTR*, p. 37). As Williams explains later, he had doubts about such methods, particularly as applied to the novel, from a very early age. In *Reading and Criticism* he selects two pairs of passages each from George Eliot and D.H. Lawrence, and 'proves' that, in one instance, Eliot is the better writer, and in the other Lawrence. This ironic challenge to the *Scrutiny* method dates back to Williams's Cambridge 'Tripos', in which he offered a special paper on Eliot which included just this comparison.⁴¹ It should be added though, that this 'evidence' of problems with the methods of close reading did not, at the time, push Williams away from a basic belief in the validity of the system, and he concludes his analysis with very positive support:

Analysis will lead us to judgments of particular pieces of writing, and will develop a capacity for close reading. From a number of such judgments certain general ideas about reading will be constructed, so that in our normal reading of complete works our response is more

aware and more controlled. This is the use of analysis for reading. Its use for criticism may be suggested by the examination of the Lawrence and George Eliot passages which we have briefly undertaken. By analysis of representative successes and failures one may slowly build up, and in written criticism demonstrate, a total judgment of a work and of an author which will avoid reiterated generalities and which will indicate certain facts about the author's actual writing (*RC*, pp. 44-45).

Here then we have a summary of the twin values of close textual analysis: at the general level, it tends to sharpen up our reading 'awareness', so that our responses become more 'aware' and 'controlled'; more specifically, in relation to the activity of literary criticism, it enables us to come to a 'total judgment' about an author. There is no evidence, in *Reading and Criticism*, that Williams shared in the Leavisian vision of literary criticism as the road to cultural salvation. It has importance 'only' in relation to the habits of reading, and the teaching of English. For Williams at this time, as the 'Introductory' makes clear, acknowledges, like Leavis, that 'modern' society is significantly different, in that communications (the 'media') has accelerated. But that is not a reason for overestimating the importance of literary criticism, or, for that matter, for denigrating all new 'mass' culture as inferior and debilitating. Leavis's problems seem to derive largely from his complete refusal to confront anything beyond an *impression* of this new culture, added to a willingness to confuse new artistic production with other types of cultural

production, such as advertising, so that the obvious commercialization and 'levelling-down' of the one tends to infect the others. This is the reason he can dismiss formations like cinema, the 'main form of recreation in the civilized world', and argue that they are bad because 'they involve surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals the more insidious because they are associated with a compellingly vivid illusion of actual life'.⁴²

This failure to recognize any value in film, and the privileging of 'literature' which goes with it, stems, I believe from two sources. Firstly, in 1930, Leavis's knowledge of anything other than 'popular' American cinema appears to have been slight. This is particularly true if we compare his attitudes with those of Williams, who, even as an undergraduate, took a great interest in 'avant-garde' (predominantly European) cinema, and appears to have believed, in the 1930s, that being 'new' equated with being 'radical'.⁴³ Secondly, I think Leavis's views in the early 1930s are determined to a large extent by his concentration on contemporary 'literature', which inevitably meant literary modernism (particularly of course the work of T.S. Eliot). Hence the act of literary criticism, like that of reading generally, becomes, as he searches for a new critical idiom to cope with the demands of a new, more allusive medium, a much more obviously 'active' pursuit, which helps to reinforce a sense of the superiority of literature over other cultural forms, considered in comparison as merely 'passive diversion'.⁴⁴ (Since the name of Roland Barthes has already been mentioned in relation to Williams's 'structuralist' tendencies, it might be useful to mention here that Barthes also

wanted, at one stage, to differentiate between modernism and its predecessors in terms of a more 'active' role for the reader).⁴⁵ Hence his ideas about reading are influenced very much by his own recent concentration on modernism, at the expense of ignoring much that, even for Leavis, actually comes under the heading of 'literature' (including, of course, most of the 'Great Tradition').

4. Culture - 'Sport, Food, and a Little Art'

We have here then, at least the beginnings of some evidence that, even at his earliest, Williams's views of 'culture' in general, and 'literature' / 'literary criticism' in particular, were similar to, but different from, those of Leavis. While not yet prepared to reject wholesale the rationality of practising literary criticism, or the parallel rejection of 'literature' as a 'special' area⁴⁶, Williams already refuses to make literary criticism the new moral framework, and recognizes the potential problems in relying on small textual fragments as the basis for overarching views about literary value. But, more importantly for the development of cultural materialism, he wants to challenge the fundamentally Arnoldian definition of 'culture' taken over by Eliot and Leavis, and, as I will argue, this 'democratization' of culture goes alongside a very important literary debate about the relationship of text to context, which will again offer the opportunity both to examine Leavis's own techniques, and contrast them with Williams's. All of this must inevitably be linked to the formal differences in academic development pursued by the two, with Williams spending fifteen years working outside the academic 'establishment',

in adult education.⁴⁷ The culmination of this period would be the publication of *Culture and Society* in 1958.⁴⁸ But the 1950s saw a considerable body of work concerned with this new definition of culture and its relationship to the literary establishment, all of it clearly influenced by, and developed in relation to, the real activity of adult education. Thus, in 1950, acknowledging that by this time 'Culture and Environment' has become a standard course title, Williams once again recommends a predictable list of *Scrutiny* critics, alongside Eliot, Arnold etc.⁴⁹ However, he rejects the 'conventional' approach, marked by Leavis and Thompson in their support for George Sturt and the 'organic community', and, in particular, its development by other 'Scrutineers' into 'the assertion of a "minority"', which he finds 'largely irrelevant and, in certain social terms, idle and harmful'.⁵⁰ More 'masses', less 'culture', this was the approved *Scrutiny* formula, summarised twenty years earlier in 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture'. But other ways of thinking were also beginning to take hold, not least from within the arena chosen by Williams from the late 1940s for his work, adult education and the Workers' Educational Association ('W.E.A.'). As late as 1954, correspondents to the W.E.A.'s house journal, the *Highway*, could write letters like that from one Rev. W. M. Collins, complaining that the casual use of Christian names was a 'sign of deterioration in what we have learned to call the British Way of Life'.⁵¹ Two years later, Donald Macrae initiated a whole series of articles and correspondences concerned directly with a new definition of culture, and a reformulation of 'mass' civilization⁵², in which he started to argue against just this 'learned' response and assumption that there is general agreement

about just what constitutes a 'way of life' for the majority of people. While accepting, like Williams, that much which goes under the heading of 'mass culture' may be inferior, he refuses to accept that this is any reason to dismiss everything 'popular' as worthless. More importantly, like Williams he has a distaste for the word 'masses' itself and its inevitably homogenizing tendencies. Rather, he shares with Williams almost an amazement that, in the face of an ever-expanding capitalism, 'the continued capacity of the common people in the face of circumstance is, after all, the most surprising and heartening thing in history'.⁵³ Similar points are made by Williams in 'Culture is Ordinary'. 'There are in fact', writes Williams, 'no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses'.⁵⁴ 'Masses' has taken over as the new word to replace 'mob', and, with the advance, post 1870, in the availability of 'mass' education, 'culture' has given way to the commercial and the material.⁵⁵

Williams completely rejects this, privileging a new version of culture which refuses to succumb to an elitist definition based on exclusion and privilege, and instead recognizes that one of the potential *benefits* of 'progress' is the possibility for expansion both in the 'popular' and 'minority' senses of the term. As he makes clear in his critique of Leavis in *Culture and Society*, much of Leavis's own radical reworking of past 'traditions' refuses to recognize the deep complexities in all of this. Earlier, in considering the work of T.S. Eliot, Williams had criticised a narrowness of vision, as Eliot, in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, reduces culture to 'sport, food, and a little art - a characteristic observation of English leisure'.⁵⁶ Now, in analysing Leavis, Williams shows how Leavis is subject to a particular

ideological position (unannounced), by apparently not needing to ask the hard questions which precede analysis:

If our civilization is a 'mass-civilization', without discernible respect for quality and seriousness, by what means has it become so? What, in fact, do we mean by 'mass'? Do we mean a democracy dependent on universal suffrage, or a culture dependent on universal education, or a reading-public dependent on universal literacy? If we find the products of mass-civilization so repugnant, are we to identify the suffrage or the education or the literacy as the agents of decay? Or, alternatively, do we mean by mass-civilization an industrial civilization, dependent on machine-production and the factory system? Do we find institutions like the popular press and advertising to be the necessary consequences of such a system of production? Or, again, do we find both the machine-civilization and the institutions to be products of some great change and decline in human minds? Such questions, which are the commonplaces of our generation, inevitably underlie the detailed judgments.⁵⁷

This recognition of the inherently complex nature of cultural definition is explored in 'Culture is Ordinary', and linked directly to a consideration about 'progress' and the products of modern civilization. Early on in the essay he stresses the real advantages to working people resulting from the Industrial Revolution, and summarises them in one word, 'power': 'steam

power, the petrol engine, electricity, these and their host of products in commodities and services, we took as quickly as we could get them, and were glad'.⁵⁸ He then attempts to rid himself of 'a legacy from our most useful critics; a legacy of two false equations, one false analogy, and one false proposition'.⁵⁹ The 'false equations' I have already dealt with, relating as they do to a belief in simple relationships between education and culture; and between 'bad' culture and the general lives of individuals. The 'false proposition' is that dirt and ugliness are the price always to be paid for new power. Williams, here at his most utopian, dismisses this, arguing that new sources are capable of giving us more power and a better environment.⁶⁰ The 'false analogy' takes us directly back, again, to Leavis, since it relates to what Leavis and others wanted to call a 'Gresham Law', a law of diminishing returns, based on the proposition ascribed to Sir Thomas Gresham, that 'bad money drives out good'.⁶¹ Williams quickly disposes of this analogy - bad money will drive out good : bad culture will drive out good, by arguing (as so often with only minimal supporting evidence it has to be said), that we live in an expanding culture, where 'bad' culture is increasing, but not at the expense of 'good': 'the editions of good literature are very much larger than they were; the listeners to good music are much more numerous than they were; the number of people who look at good visual art is larger than it has ever been'. And he ends his rebuttal by once again arguing that new questions have to be asked: 'about relative rates of expansion; about the social and economic problems raised by these; about the social and economic answers'.⁶² This is

the work which will take up much of Williams's time post *Culture and Society*.

5. Williams, Leavis, and Marx

It would be too easy to argue either that Williams never was influenced in any real way by Leavis, or that he never really stopped being a Left-Leavisite. The first is clearly untenable, as Williams acknowledges in 'Culture is Ordinary' and elsewhere.⁶³ I have tried to develop an argument which also gives the lie to the second, since it seems that this is a more difficult position to refute. If 'cultural materialism' is to be seen to have any defining characteristics at all, it has to be so defined in relation to, and ultimately in opposition to, what I have tried to summarise as the Leavisian conception of culture and tradition. 'Culture' is a word which will have to be defined again, but 'materialism' has rather been ignored up until now, and for a good reason, for it is in their respective relationships to materialist theories of culture, pre-eminently Marxism, where the clearest divisions in method start to appear. The theoretical debate about 'materialism', and whether the term carries the same meaning in 'cultural materialism' as it does in 'historical materialism' will be examined in a later chapter. Rather like the European novel in relation to English studies, Marxism, as a tool for cultural analysis (or anything else), was always a 'misdirection' for Leavis. Williams was well aware of this, and regretted it: 'Leavis has never liked Marxists, which is in one way a pity, for they know more than he does about modern English society, and about its immediate history'.⁶⁴

As we shall later see, the relationship with Marxism was no easier for Williams during this period, than for Leavis, but their reactions to it were very different. As Leavis made clear in 1940, looking back at the first decade of *Scrutiny*, one of its prime motivations was to promote the relative autonomy of the 'human spirit', something for the Scrutineers not possible by adopting Marxist positions.⁶⁵ Eight years earlier, in 'Under Which King, Bezonian?', this avowedly anti-Marxist position was made explicit. In this essay, Leavis condemns 'the dogma of the priority of economic conditions', which relegates culture to the 'methods of production'; and argues that: 'if there seems to be no reason why supporters of *Scrutiny* should not favour some kind of communism as the solution of the economic problem, it does not seem likely [...] that they will be orthodox marxists'.⁶⁶ Leavis, relying on Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* for his summary of the Marxist position on culture, argues that Trotsky, 'that dangerously intelligent Marxist', makes culture 'derivative from the methods of production'. Against this, Leavis offers his version of organicism as if it was an answer to Trotsky, offering a pre-industrial system where the 'methods of production' *are* intimately linked to cultural production: 'an art of living, involving codes, developed in ages of continuous experience, of relations between man and man, and man and the environment in its seasonal rhythm'.⁶⁷ More than once, Leavis returns to a 'Sturt'-like evocation of a lost, organic past, a culture destroyed by 'the progress of the nineteenth century'. 'What survives of cultural tradition', argues Leavis, 'survives in spite of the rapidly changing "means of production"'.⁶⁸

Several things are important about Leavis's arguments here, and some of the inconsistencies in his approach were confronted by A.L. Morton, in a response to the essay, published in the following issue of *Scrutiny*. Leaving aside Morton's assessment of the appropriateness of Trotsky's model, what is most significant is Morton's recognition that Leavis fails to distinguish between 'methods of production' and the 'totality of productive relations' or 'mode of production'.⁶⁹ In Morton's words, this failure of definition has 'led Mr. Leavis to conceive the connection [between culture and production] as a rigidly determined, mechanical one rather than a fluid, dialectical one. Though secondary, the cultural level reached by a society at any point becomes in its turn a factor helping to determine productive relationships'.⁷⁰ This, of course, summarises a central debate within Marxist theory, to which we must return later, since the dialectic of the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure' becomes a fundamental point of crisis in the definition of Williams's cultural materialism. For now, I want rather to emphasise the other half of Leavis's misconception, that culture has disappeared 'through the progress of the nineteenth century'. First, as Morton points out, and as Williams stressed in 'Culture is Ordinary', it just is not true: for Morton neither the novels of Lawrence, nor the 'methods of salesmanship described in Mr. Denys Thompson's article *Advertising God*' would have come into existence without Imperialist capitalism.⁷¹ Most significantly for this thesis, Leavis, by failing to differentiate clearly between 'mode' of production and 'methods' of production, does not just hold on to a too-rigid, deterministic model of culture, but also gives way to what we will later define as

‘technological determinism’, which sees the activity of technological ‘progress’ as self-determining. Or, rather, his version privileges ‘methods of production’ (‘technology’), over basic economic production, reversing the fundamental order of Marxist determination.

It seems clear, from Leavis’s ‘retrospect’ in 1940, that he never moved very far from this fundamental position. Designating the 1930s as a ‘Marxist’ decade, the contributors to *Scrutiny* largely maintained their resistance to any recognized ‘system’ (bar their own unacknowledged ideology). Thus, in 1940, Christopher Hill, reviewing Henry Parkes’s *Marxism: A Post-Mortem*, has once again to challenge an unreconstructed version of Marxist theory. ‘Dr. Parkes’, he writes, seems to have met the phrase ‘ownership of the means of production’, but ‘its meaning eludes him’.⁷² At the root of what Hill sees as the fault in Parkes’s method is that difficulty which has fundamentally problematized cultural debate from Carlyle and Arnold to Eliot and E.M. Forster: all of these thinkers want to resist what they see as the cultural impoverishment of capitalism, while clinging on to a set of beliefs, ‘liberalism’, which depend for their maintenance on that very mode of production. Such a situation is evidently contradictory, and Hill makes this clear as he points to a number of inconsistencies in Parkes’s analysis, as he offers at once the right to ‘individual freedom’ and the need for ‘order’ and ‘co-operation’; where the ‘free market’ must be preserved at all costs, and yet controls are needed to give much needed social services.⁷³ ‘*Scrutiny*’, writes Leavis in ‘Retrospect’, invites the description “liberal””.⁷⁴ Leavis is attempting here to remove ‘liberalism’ from its identifiably

ideological connotation. But, from the editors' comments before Hill's review of Parkes, their alignment is essentially liberal in its specifically political sense.⁷⁵

A later chapter will look in detail at Williams's theoretical responses to his own difficulties with Marxism. For now, it will be worth examining briefly how this particular set of beliefs interacted with and influenced his formative years at Cambridge; and, specifically, how he understood the relationship between Marxism and the practices of reading and criticism. As I noted above, the Williams of 'Culture is Ordinary' believed that the average 'Marxist' was more knowledgeable about our recent history than Leavis. But he also privileges Leavis, who: 'knows more than any Marxist I have met about the real relations between art and experience'.⁷⁶ By this time (1958), Williams has clearly settled for a position which accepts fundamentally the Marxist interpretation of culture which emphasises its ultimate dependence on the mode of production (thus rescuing this fundamental analysis from its deformation by the Scrutineers); and alongside this recognizes that 'education' is always for the minority only. But he rejects absolutely the extension of these ideas: that 'since culture and production are related, the advocacy of a different system of production is in some way a cultural directive, indicating not only a way of life but new arts and learning'.⁷⁷ What has to be stressed here, I think, is that Williams's difficulties with this extension of Marxism is much more a product of his own resistance to 'socialist realism', than a product of his adherence to Leavisism. This is made explicit in *Reading and Criticism*, where he rejects both a Zhdanovite push

towards 'social' works which ignore quality in favour of ideology; *and* the appeal to 'minority' culture, which fails to acknowledge its capitalist base.⁷⁸ This position is supported in his interview in *Politics and Letters*, where he notes that, in the 'Writers' Group' at Cambridge, they were more interested in modernism and the avant-garde than socialist realism.⁷⁹ By supporting, therefore, albeit without its Stalinist overtones, the Marxist understanding of literature, Williams adopts at least the beginnings of a cultural materialist model, which will be particularly sensitive to the relationship between literature and cultural production; between text and context. Here we encounter a further, and fundamental point of comparison between the early methods of Williams and Leavis. It will be necessary therefore to return once more to the work of Leavis, as he struggles to make sense of this boundary (real or imagined), between the work of art (the 'words on the page') and its conditions of production and consumption. I will want to argue that, despite what is frequently a level of analysis far superior to many of his contemporaries, Leavis fails properly to theorize this relationship, and that it is in Williams's development of the analysis that we can see most clearly the beginnings of a significant shift in his thinking away from the constraints of the Leavisian model.

6. Text and Context: Leavis v Bateson

The best way to understand Leavis's own position is through the series of exchanges between him and the Oxford critic F. W. Bateson conducted in the pages of *Scrutiny*, and its Oxford rival *Essays in Criticism*,

in 1953.⁸⁰ Briefly, Leavis holds to the position that the text is something 'determinate', from which meaning can be taken; whereas Bateson takes the 'historical' side, arguing that meaning is the product of contextual matters. But this summary suggests a simple differentiation between their two approaches, which reinforces also a notion of 'text' and 'context' as occupying different 'spaces'. In fact, as Leavis will make clear, his understanding of 'determination' is not one fixed by the 'self-contained text'. Rather, as he argues with the philosopher René Wellek⁸¹, Leavis understands the text as 'determinate' in the sense of an active production of meanings, and this is linked intimately with a sort of 'intertextual' relationship between the text and its historical relations. This is the basis of his analysis in *Revaluation*⁸², where he develops Eliot's work on the Metaphysical poets and the 'dissociation of sensibility', to argue that there is a 'line of wit' which 'runs from Ben Jonson (and Donne) through Carew and Marvell to Pope'.⁸³ I want to examine the differences between Leavis and Bateson, and then offer a way past what appears to be an unresolvable breach, by using the arguments of the philosopher Quentin Skinner, to suggest that Skinner's response to 'Leavis v Bateson' represents a model for Williams's own developing understanding.

Bateson's essay⁸⁴ is divided into two main parts: the first half gives examples of what he calls the 'irresponsible' critic, exemplified by American 'New Critics' like John Crowe Ransom; and their English counterparts, the 'Practical Critics' like Richards, and those wedded to analysis based on ambiguity and irony like Empson. All of these critics (the list inevitably will

include Leavis) are 'irresponsible' because they concentrate on the 'words on the page' to the exclusion of 'all that lies behind the words and the word-order - the forces, conventions and precedents that have made and modified them' (Bateson, p. 13).⁸⁵ Bateson's response to this 'irresponsibility' is to emphasize the value of 'literary context', which he differentiates from 'literary background' (author's biography, social history of the age, earlier critical accounts etc.). This background, though of interest, is for Bateson 'extrinsic', whereas his 'literary context', defined as 'the framework of reference within which the work achieves meaning', is 'intrinsic' (Bateson, p. 14). [He 'explains' this position by using an example from Leavis to which I shall return]. Bateson summarises his method of contextual reading into four 'stages', which successively resolve ambiguities and lead to the possibility of arriving at determinate meaning:

1. The 'verbal' stage ('plane of dictionary meanings'), where 'the black marks on the page' are translated 'into their mental equivalents'. This still leaves open the possibility of multiple interpretation, although some initially possible meanings are excluded 'by considerations of word-order or grammar'.
2. The 'literary' stage, 'at which the surviving meanings acquire an extra dimension, as it were, as they dovetail into a familiar tradition or genre'.
3. The 'intellectual' stage - relating the work to the main currents of philosophical 'thought patterns' pertaining to the date of production.

4. The 'social' stage - 'Behind the intellectual context lies a complex of religious, political and economic factors that can be called the social context' (Bateson, pp. 16-18).

Thus, as 'context' extends from the words on the page outwards towards the social context, so meaning is pinned down, and the 'ultimately social content of critical responsibility' is achieved (Bateson, p. 19). This, for Bateson, is not 'value-free' judgment, since, once the social context has been determined, 'the values implied in the poem become explicit, and its relative goodness or badness declares itself' (Bateson, p. 19). Finally, rather like Williams, Bateson also rejects the 'sociological' critics ('Marxists or semi-Marxists'), and for very similar reasons: while acknowledging their greater awareness of society compared with the 'textual' critics, 'their contact with literature is proportionately precarious' (Bateson, pp. 23-24).

This then is a summary of Bateson's 'contextual' approach. To demonstrate it, he chooses to use a piece of comparative analysis from Leavis's *Revaluation*. It is obviously outside the scope of this enquiry to analyse in detail Bateson's reading, or Leavis's response, but it will still be helpful for what follows to have the lines of verse available:

A Soul hung up, as 'twere, in Chains
Of Nerves, and Arteries, and Veins.
Tortur'd, besides each other part,
In a vain Head, and double Heart.

(from Marvell's 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body')

First slave to Words, then vassal to a Name,
 Then dupe to Party; child and man the same;
 Bounded by Nature, narrow'd still by Art,
 A trifling head, and a contracted heart.

(Pope, *Dunciad* IV, 501-04)

Bateson does not mention that Leavis introduces the Marvell by stating that 'It is, then, plain enough that Pope's reconciliation of Metaphysical wit with the Polite has antecedents'.⁸⁶ Further, immediately after the Marvell, and before the Pope, Leavis writes:

The familiar turn of that close, a turn not confined to Marvell, of whom, however, the supreme representative of seventeenth-century urbanity, it is most characteristic, surely has affinities with a characteristic effect of Pope's longer couplet.⁸⁷

This suggests that Leavis chooses the two passages, not as Bateson argues because they share the 'head and heart' conceit (although that is a pleasant bonus), but because they indicate the 'line of wit', and Leavis emphasizes this by following the two examples with a third, chosen, as he puts it, because it is 'insistently unlike anything Pope could have written'.⁸⁸

Following his schema given above, Bateson progressively ‘contextualizes’ the two extracts, in the process coming to a set of increasingly surprising conclusions about the ‘real’ meanings of each. Among his long list of criticisms and doubts about the value of the two poems, the following are relevant:

1. The ‘verbal identity’ of the two last lines, which he assumes to be Leavis’s specific reason for choosing them, is ‘contradicted by the very different figures of speech and stylistic conventions employed by the two poets’.
2. ‘The Metaphysical style in which he was writing has *forced* Marvell to say what he cannot have wanted to say. And Pope’s Augustan style has forced his hand in the same way’.
3. In the Pope, there is a lack of linguistic precision, so that ‘slave’, ‘vassal’ and ‘dupe’ are ‘virtually interchangeable’, as are ‘Bounded’, ‘narrow’d’ and ‘contracted’.
4. ‘There is an obvious connection between Marvell’s metaphors and the analogical thinking of the Tudor and Stuart divines. [...] And the abstract character of Pope’s diction can be related without difficulty to the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume’.
5. The early seventeenth century is a ‘world of appearances’, which ‘came to a disastrous end, of course, in the 1640’s, and a certain *grotesquerie*, bordering at times on farce, in Marvell’s ‘Dialogue’ can be taken as a half-realization that his medium was on its last legs and could no longer be taken with complete seriousness. [...] “Common sense” inevitably left its

rationalist imprint on the language and the literary tradition from which Pope's poetry was created' (Bateson, pp. 15-17, emphasis in original).

I can here only glance at Leavis's response, although it will perhaps be apparent from the examples given above how it will proceed. What is most noticeable about Bateson's 'progressive' contextualization, is how it allows him to become increasingly confident about the poems, as he moves further away from them. This is emphasized in the developing certainty of expression: 'obvious connection', 'can be related without difficulty', 'of course', 'inevitably'. Leavis's reply is the opposite of stunned silence: 'How can we explain such a performance? Can it be said that the critic who can tell us, with this serene assurance, these things about such a poem has, in any serious sense of the verb, *read* it?'⁸⁹

Leavis's essay needs to be read in full to see why he perhaps deserves the epithet 'responsible'. I will refer here only to two of the many ways in which he attempts to rescue Marvell and Pope from Bateson's criticism. First, Leavis proves more than a match for Bateson's 'verbal' analysis, by offering a reading of Pope which justifies Pope's choice of 'slave' 'vassal' and 'dupe' in terms of a development from child to man in which an initial inability to master language, leads to personal subservience to a 'Name', and ultimately 'dupe' to Party politics.⁹⁰ Leavis's work on the Marvell is equally subtle and convincing. In particular, he denies Bateson's assumption that Marvell's 'Dialogue' represents a simple and conventional approach to the mind/body dualism, arguing from specific textual example that 'this poem has for theme

the *difficulty* of the distinction - its elusiveness; it explores with remarkable originality and power the perplexities and problems that, for one bent on distinguishing, must, in concrete experience, be found to lie behind the distinction as conventionally assumed'.⁹¹ Thus Leavis recognizes what Bateson refuses to: that the 'Dialogue' is no simple support for a dualist interpretation of consciousness, but a much more subtle 'dialectical' analysis, in which the problems caused by accepting such a dualist position are acknowledged, while at the same time a materialist rejection of such a position is refused.

Leavis asks of Bateson just what he means by invoking the 'complex of religious, political and economic factors that can be called the social context', and how one is to arrive at such a context, which apparently allows the poem to be reinstated in its original historical setting, within which 'the human experience in it begins to be realized and re-enacted by the reader?'⁹² Against this, Leavis offers his own version of 'responsible' criticism:

If [Bateson] had really *read* the poem, and kept himself focused upon that - have seen that in the poem, whatever minor difficulties of convention and language it might present, he had something determinate - something indubitably *there*. [...] The poem as I've said, is a determinate thing; it is *there*; but there is nothing to correspond - nothing answering to Mr. Bateson's 'social context' that can be set over against the poem, or induced to re-establish itself round it as a kind of framework or completion, and there never *was* anything.⁹³

Here we have the crux of their theoretical differences. Leavis insists on his 'determinate' approach, arguing that Bateson's 'contextualism' cannot be a proper discipline because he does not produce a determinate object. For Leavis, the poem produces its meanings through its own determinate activity, whereas for Bateson only a form of deep historical contextualization can achieve what for him can only ever be *the* recovered 'meaning'. But this approach is clearly shown to be flawed. All Bateson can do is produce an assortment of empirical odds and ends (like the 'Pope-Warburton' note) which reduce the specificity of the poem's productive activity to a set of literary clichés. For Bateson, despite his argument that his analysis differs from a reliance on 'author's biography' etc., his aim is to recover the intentions of the author by recreating the 'context' from within which 'intention' can be identified. This is made explicit in their later exchanges, where Bateson rejects Leavis's notion of the poem as determinate, as 'indubitably *there*' prior to analysis:

[S]trictly speaking, of course, there is nothing *there*, nothing objectively apprehensible, except a number of conventional black marks. The meanings of the words, and therefore *a fortiori* the meaning of the whole poem, are emphatically not *there*. To discover their meaning we have to ask what they meant to their author and his original readers.⁹⁴

On one level this looks like a sophisticated denial of language as stable and complete in itself. But Bateson's response to such undecidability is a return to origins which reinstates a sense of order and makes Pope and Marvell, like Shakespeare, speak 'for all time'. In essence, his approach is reminiscent of a particular brand of new historicism, which hunts around for a suitable text to place alongside the object-text, and then reads one off against the other, or rather, as Leavis argues, somehow 'completes' what is immediately available. Leavis, meanwhile, insists on a form of reception theory which puts great demands on the abilities of the reader to interpret, while still ultimately privileging something beyond interpretation, in this case the 'words on the page'.

Initially, it might be thought that the historical criticism favoured by Bateson would be more closely aligned to Williams's methods than Leavis's approach, but this is then problematized by the evident faultlines in Bateson's analysis when his method is put into practice. The problem, fundamentally, is that in a sense we are dealing with a false opposition, between Leavisian 'textualism' and Batesonian 'contextualism'. If, as I have attempted to indicate, this opposition is not straightforward, then what is needed is a way past, towards a different understanding of analysis. This question of 'determination' will be important in later chapters, particularly in relation to Williams's re-writing of the base/superstructure paradigm, and his work in the later chapters of *Marxism and Literature* where he attempts to produce a sort of conceptual hierarchy of determinations.⁹⁵ But work from a different direction may help to suggest a way past the 'text/context' opposition, and

for this reason I want to consider Quentin Skinner's philosophical investigation of the 'history of ideas'.⁹⁶

7. Skinner: Text and Context Redefined

Skinner actually uses the summarised positions of Leavis and Bateson to represent the two 'orthodox' approaches to interpretation, although he soon moves away to concentrate more specifically on philosophical and political texts and critics. As an 'historian of ideas', it is perhaps unsurprising that he rejects out of hand the 'textual' orthodoxy:

I have argued that the danger of writing historical nonsense, in direct consequence of concentrating on the text in itself, is often incurred, and indeed very seldom avoided altogether in current practice. I now wish to claim that even if all the dangers I have outlined could be avoided [...] the underlying assumption of this whole approach - that one should focus simply on the texts themselves, and study what each classic writer has to *say* about each doctrine - must necessarily remain a wholly inadequate methodology for the conduct of the history of ideas (Skinner, p. 31, emphasis in original).⁹⁷

Skinner cites a number of specific examples to support this view, and, in particular for our discussion relating more directly to *literary* texts, makes the reasonable point that unless we have some understanding of writing *strategies*, no amount of close reading will help, as say in the case of Swiftian

irony (Skinner, p. 32). But this, of course, immediately requires information and evidence ‘outside’ the texts, without which we are left in the position of a reader of Swift, who, without any biographical apparatus, finds it impossible to read his work *obliquely* or against the grain. Skinner spends some time exploring this position, and concludes strongly that ‘the text in itself is shown to be insufficient as the object of our inquiry and understanding’ (Skinner, p. 35).

Having dismissed ‘textual’ analysis as insufficient, Skinner explores the alternative, a Batesonian ‘contextual’ approach, and uses, as his example, the notion of following an ‘idea’ through an historical period, attempting to identify its ‘essential meaning’ (Skinner, p. 35). Specifically mentioning Bateson as an example of someone operating in this way, Skinner writes:

The great mistake lies not merely in looking for the ‘essential meaning’ of the ‘idea’ as something which must necessarily ‘remain the same,’ but even in thinking of any ‘essential’ meaning (to which individual writers ‘contribute’) at all (Skinner, p. 37).

That this ‘idea’ based methodology is faulty, Skinner emphasises by pointing out that what is missing from such an account is any attempt to account for the particular *status* such an idea may have had at any particular moment of history, because no proper consideration has been given to the *use* of particular utterances, as opposed to their mere occurrence. In practice, as Skinner points out (using as his example the ‘idea’ of Utopia), it is often the

case that the historian can only describe what appears to be an undefined and apparently limitless set of meanings, so that the only ‘proper’ history of ‘Utopia’ would be in fact ‘a history of the various statements made with the given expression, [...] an almost absurdly ambitious enterprise’ (Skinner, p. 39). But when Skinner reaches this point in his analysis, something strange starts to happen, because it is of course just here where Bateson’s desire to give a context within which meaning is stabilized would appear to offer a solution to the difficulties otherwise encountered. In other words, Skinner’s ‘idea’ problem looks, from Bateson’s perspective, to be simply an extension of the limitations of the textual approach. Acknowledging that just such a contextual approach has started to become something of an orthodoxy in the humanities in the late 1960s, Skinner recognizes that it could be seen to respond to many of the difficulties he has put forward against text-focused analysis, but stresses that such accounts tend to put text and context into a relationship of cause and effect. This is problematical, because it tends to assume that ‘knowledge of the causes of an action’ is ‘equivalent to an understanding of the action itself’ (Skinner, p. 44). But, as he shows by example, there are plenty of situations where this is just not true, such as the case of statements about the *intention* to do something. Drawing on speech act theory, Skinner uses J.L. Austin’s notion of an ‘illocutionary act’⁹⁸ to make the point that, however well contextual study might manage to *explain* a text, it would not necessarily aid *understanding*, without having some knowledge of the illocutionary force involved (Skinner, p. 46, emphasis in original). Skinner supports this view with a neat example, using the statement

‘a prince must learn how not to be virtuous’, from chapter fifteen of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. Skinner then shows that two historians, relying on a combination of textual and contextual evidence, come to opposing conclusions about the import of this statement: either Machiavelli’s cynical advice was commonplace in Renaissance moral tracts, or such advice had hardly ever been offered before. Obviously, as Skinner argues, only one of these conclusions can be true, even though the context appears to allow for either illocutionary act to have force. Therefore, whichever method we adopt, it would appear that we cannot with certainty come to any single agreed ‘meaning’:

It cannot in consequence be enough to study either what the statement meant, or even what its context may be alleged to show about what it must have meant. The further point which must still be grasped for any given statement is *how* what was said was meant, and thus what *relations* there may have been between various different statements even within the same general context. [...] To concentrate either on studying a text in itself, or on studying its social context as a means of determining the meaning of the text, is to make it impossible to recognize - let alone to solve - some of the most difficult issues about the conditions for understanding texts.⁹⁹

The last part of this statement still appears to suggest that what Skinner is offering is in effect some sort of collaboration between these two

distinct methodologies, but this is not in fact the case. In his conclusion, he stresses again that what all of this analysis shows is how unreasonable it is for historians to claim that somehow there are a set of transcendental ideas, which can be recovered, and then used to 'answer' our present problems. This is of course just the method so frequently used by that branch of literary studies which 'appropriates' canonical authors. But, as Skinner points out, even assuming we can identify what appear to be equivalent *questions* over time, is no guarantee that the *answers* given in the past will be at all relevant to our present condition (Skinner, pp. 50-52). Rather than relying on the past ('tradition') to solve our own present problems, Skinner suggests that the real value in the history of ideas is in offering us the chance to distinguish between 'what is necessary and what is the product merely of our own contingent arrangements' (Skinner, p. 53). Skinner's way of going past the impasse between Leavis and Bateson is to recognize first that what is missing is any consideration of the *linguistic* dimension to the study of texts. Rather than following Bateson, and treating 'context' as the determinant of text, Skinner prefers the study of context to take its place within a different framework of meaning which concentrates on 'delineat[ing] the whole range of communications which could have been conventionally performed on the given occasion by the utterance of the given utterance and this wider *linguistic* context as a means of decoding the actual intention of the given writer' (Skinner, p. 49, emphasis in original). Thus 'social context' can now be used in a rather different way from that seen earlier. Now, it is to be 'treated as an ultimate framework for helping to decide what conventionally

recognizable meanings, in a society of *that* kind, it might in principle have been possible for someone to have intended to communicate' (Skinner, p. 49, emphasis in original). This move into a sort of linguistic contextualization must have some implications for Williams's own developing methods, and, as we shall see later, he is able at one point even to equate cultural materialism with 'historical semiotics', in a way which appears close to Skinner's ideas. In addition, this refinement of the other methods can lead to a study of texts which concerns itself also with their actual conditions of existence, or, in other words, makes textuality itself the object of study. Of course, what has been left out of Skinner's analysis is that particular brand of 'deterministic' theory, i.e. Marxism, which forms the other part of Williams's approach. This will have to wait for further chapters, but it is reasonable to mention here that much of what Skinner agonizes over in relation to deterministic models of text and context is also a feature of Williams's own difficulties with a Marxist approach, and that Williams's 'solution' is also similar, in that he amends the Marxist model to play down this particular emphasis. For now, I will complete this 'early' phase of the defining and limiting of cultural materialism, by considering briefly Williams's own approach to the text/context opposition. This will then be followed by the first of two experiments in testing the theory against its use as a tool for literary criticism, in the process making clear the real and fundamental differences between the approach of Williams and Leavis.

8. Literature in Relation to History

That Williams, in his early phase, is close to accepting something like Skinner's revision of the Leavis / Bateson opposition, we can see from some of his work in adult education in the early 1950s. One way of thinking about the relationship between text and context, would be to argue that 'textual' criticism is predominately a 'literary' affair, whereas the 'contextual' approach is a kind of historical investigation (we will see later how Volosinov attempts to deconstruct this opposition between the 'literary' and the 'historical' through a form of semiotics). The interdisciplinary nature of much adult teaching has had the effect of drawing the disciplines of 'English' and 'History' closer together, though often without much of an attempt to investigate properly just how they can relate to each other. In 1950, this state of affairs prompted the organization of a week-long course for tutors held at Hertford College, Oxford, under the title 'Literature in Relation to History', focusing on the period 1850-75. As Director of Studies, Williams wrote up a brief 'Formal Report' of the events, and with it a much longer 'Personal View' of his impressions.¹⁰⁰

The list of active participants to the course was a distinguished one. It included Humphrey House running seminars on Dickens and Hopkins, and Isaiah Berlin and Asa Briggs lecturing on 'Scientific and Philosophic Thought', and 'Religion in England' respectively. Williams himself ran a seminar on George Eliot. Despite this level of expertise, it is clear from Williams's personal comments that he was less than impressed with the general level of understanding of some of the fundamental issues involved in

relating literature to historical studies. Most significantly, he is against the historical approach which either uses details from literature to support historical 'evidence', or (worse still), reads off such 'internal' historical information against alternative contextual evidence, in the process finding a failure on the literary writer's part to treat history 'properly'. Williams gives two examples from his own seminar group on George Eliot to show what he means. In the first (a hypothetical example), he points out how only a bad historian would use *Felix Holt* as 'evidence' of 1830s radicalism without recognizing the very specific, ideological viewpoint Eliot adopts from her perspective in the 1860s. Secondly, he highlights what he calls the 'This is where I get interested' school of historical criticism, evidenced by a moment when the group considers 'in passing a letter by George Eliot in which she commented on the revolutions of 1848'.¹⁰¹ Almost inevitably, the result of this discovery is to prompt the historian to condemn Eliot for her lack of knowledge of international affairs of the period. But, as Williams comments: 'Is it as a commentator on international affairs that George Eliot is *historically* important?'¹⁰²

For Williams, more stress needs to be put on literary production. This is obviously particularly important in the context of this particular course, in the case of 'historical' novels, which tended to be the main source of interest for the historian. For Williams, this is mistaken for two reasons: first, because 'all novels are historical novels, except historical novels', by which he means that, even where an historical novel is the result of careful research, it is still research from the perspective of the present, and it is therefore the history of

its own production which is the valid location of scholarship.¹⁰³ Second, this emphasis on the 'significance' of the historical novel, ignores the very real value of other sorts of literature for historical research. At this point, he takes the opportunity to shift his criticism onto his own 'literary' colleagues, whom he sees as condoning a reductive 'fact-finding' approach because of their own 'old sense of guilt', an insecurity about the validity of their own particular discipline, exacerbated by a concentration on biography at the expense of a more rigorous literary criticism:

I had assumed that historians would be naturally interested in an account of the nature and quality, at any given time, of specific, though unpolitical, human experience; or of the particular workings of social institutions; or of the effect of economic change upon differentiated individual persons, as well as upon a class. [...] The poem which states in particular terms the fantasies of an adolescent is as much a part and a product of [a complex whole] as the novel which deals with the conditions of workers in an industrial town; and may indeed be just as valuable a clue to a general understanding.¹⁰⁴

Part of achieving this redefinition of the relationship of literature to history can be simply translated into the text/context opposition. By treating literature in itself, context is only invoked as it were when the text demands it, or, rather, when the reading of the text brings out the requirement for historical investigation to explain something specific.¹⁰⁵ This treating of literature in

itself brings with it the element which formed the conclusion of Skinner's argument: the most significant 'contextualization' of literature is one related to language use, which Williams describes as 'the changes in language as a medium of expression, changes which reflect subtle and often unconscious changes of assumption and mental and emotional process'.¹⁰⁶

One obvious feature of cultural materialism is its emphasis on the central importance of language, and we will see this becoming of increasing significance in later chapters. Skinner's sensitivity to language use will then find its counterpart in Williams's 'going beyond' the Leavis / Bateson opposition, and his substitution for the text/context polarity of an emphasis on first the 'knowable community', and ultimately on a community of language.

Notes and References

¹ Raymond Williams, 'Seeing a Man Running', in *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), pp. 15-23 (p. 18).

² Ibid., p. 19.

³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴ Most (in)famously, I suppose in Terry Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1976; London: Verso, 1976; 1988), p. 22.

⁵ F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948; new edn. 1973); Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970; London: Hogarth Press, 1984).

⁶ In particular: Raymond Williams, *Reading and Criticism* (London: Frederick Muller, 1950). This is the period of Williams as adult educator. A comprehensive selection of his work is collected in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, ed. by John McIlroy and Sallie Westwood (Leicester: NIACE, 1993). Some reference will be made to *A Selection from Scrutiny*, ed. by F.R. Leavis, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). Other works by Leavis under consideration are: *How to Teach Reading: A Primer for Ezra Pound* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1932); [with Denys Thompson], *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933; 1948); *Education and the University: A Sketch for an 'English School'* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1943; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) [includes an updated version of 'How to Teach Reading']. Also, Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932; London: Bellew Publishing, 1990). The best account of Leavis and 'Scrutiny' is still Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* (London: New left Books, 1979).

⁷ T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920; repr. 1972); Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* [1869] (in *Culture and Anarchy and*

Other Writings, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)); Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', orig. in *Edinburgh Review*, June 1829; repr. in *Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings*, ed. by Alan Shelston (London: Penguin, 1971; repr. 1986).

⁸ F.W. Bateson, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', *Essays in Criticism*, 3 (1953), 1-27; F.R. Leavis, 'The Responsible Critic: or The Function of Criticism at any Time', *Scrutiny*, 19 (1953), 162-83; F.W. Bateson, 'Correspondence: The Responsible Critic', *Scrutiny*, 19 (1953), 317-21; F.R. Leavis, 'A Rejoinder', *Scrutiny*, 19 (1953), 321-28. The pieces from *Scrutiny* are collected in *A Selection from Scrutiny*, II, pp. 280-316, which also includes a 'Postscript' by Bateson from 1966. Williams's acknowledgement of Bateson's influence is given in *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; repr. 1979).

⁹ F.R. Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' [1930], in *Education and the University*, pp. 141-71 (p. 143); 'T.S. Eliot's Later Poetry', in *Education and the University*, pp. 87-104 (p. 88).

¹⁰ Richard Hoggart, 'Mysteries of Mass Appeal', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 July 1993, p. 8. 'Culture is Ordinary', orig. in *Conviction*, ed. by N. McKenzie (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1958), pp. 74-92; repr. in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, pp. 89-102.

¹¹ For a full analysis of its significance, and the dominance of F.R. Leavis (and his wife Q.D. Leavis), see Mulhern, *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'*.

¹² I acknowledge that this stance is contentious, and does not really conform to the analyses of either Mulhern, or the Eagleton of *Criticism and Ideology*, but I feel that what is most important in Leavis's desire for a new rigorous discipline of literary criticism is his resistance to the 'scientism' inherent in Richards' approach. For further analysis of this debate, see: Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984); Michael Bell, *F.R. Leavis* (London: Routledge, 1988); Barry Cullen, "'I Thought I Had Provided Something Better'" - F.R. Leavis, Literary Criticism and Anti-Philosophy', in *The British Critical Tradition: A Re-evaluation*, ed. by Gary Day (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 188-212.

¹³ *How to Teach Reading*, pp. 8-9 (hereafter references are given within the text as 'HTTR, page number').

¹⁴ 'Unrealized imagery' becomes, for Leavis, a key way of deciding on the success or failure of writing. For an explanation of 'realization' see *Education and the University*, pp. 77-80, on *Macbeth*. Williams also used the notion of 'realization' in his early criticism. Thus, he denigrates P.H. Newby's *Agents and Witnesses*, for its 'slightness of the realized theme', *The Critic* 2 (1947), 79-81 (p. 80).

¹⁵ *Education and the University*, p. 71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 72. Leavis's resistance to this aspect of Richards is linked, presumably, to the latter's involvement with C. K. Ogden and 'Basic English'. With Ogden, Richards published two books on the subject in the 1920s, reducing English down to its 'essential' 850 words. Ogden continued with the project into the 1930s: see e.g. *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar* (London: Kegan Paul, 1932). This contains a list of the full vocabulary, and is published as a 'Psyche Miniature'. Ogden's obvious utilitarian leanings are evidenced by his publication, in the same series, of a work on Jeremy Bentham. Richards also published in this series the appropriately titled *Science and Poetry*.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁰ T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber, 1933) [hereafter, references are given within the text as *ASG*, page number].

²¹ This dogmatic orthodoxy extends to Eliot being able to write: '[R]easons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable' (p. 20). It is this particular aspect of *After Strange Gods* which has been the subject of so much controversy through the years, and is linked to debates about the particular reasons for Eliot's decision to refuse having the volume reprinted. For the most recent renewal of this debate, see: Anthony Julius, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The debate has been continued in the

pages of the *Times Literary Supplement*, starting with a review of Julius's book on June 7th, p. 13.

²² F.R. Leavis, 'Mr. Eliot, Mr. Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence', *Scrutiny*, 3 (1934), 184-91 (p. 184).

²³ Ibid., p. 185. Similarly, Vincent Buckley, writing of *After Strange Gods* in 1959, from the standpoint of Christian and critic, denies the validity of separating moral from literary criticism, and argues that 'the notion of tradition becomes an evasive abstraction'; Vincent Buckley, *Poetry and Morality: Studies on the Criticism of Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959; 1961), pp. 120-22.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

²⁶ Full reference for *Culture and Environment* is given under note 6. 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', written in 1930, forms Appendix III of *Education and the University*, pp. 141-71.

²⁷ *Education and the University*, p. 143.

²⁸ *Culture and Environment*, p. vii (hereafter references are given within the text as 'CE, page number').

²⁹ George Sturt, *Change in the Village* (London: Duckworth, 1912); *The Wheelwright's Shop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923).

Mulhern makes the interesting point (relevant to much which follows later), that Leavis's and Thompson's reading of Sturt ignores Sturt's 'idiosyncratic socialism', and, in particular, his argument that 'the forces that had disrupted

the old village life were internal to the economic structure of the countryside: it was the enclosure of the local common that had driven the inhabitants into regular wage-labour', *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'*, pp. 74-75. In fact, even the image of 'village' evoked by Leavis and Thompson does not really square with the facts as given by Sturt, who emphasises that it actually came into existence *after* the adjoining town, of which it was originally just 'waste' land (*Change in the Village*, p. 3). Sturt himself displays plenty of characteristics likely rather to alienate him from Leavis - he approves of the accessibility of the modern newspaper to awaken consciousness (ibid., pp. 299-300), supports political agitation (pp. 301-03), and is less than nostalgic about this particular 'organic' past: 'The old system had gone on long enough. For generations the villagers had grown up and lived and died with large tracts of their English vitality neglected, unexplored; and I do not think the end of that wasteful system can be lamented by anyone who believes in the English' (p. 308). For a more sustained challenge to Leavis's and Thompson's reading of Sturt, see: David Gervais, 'Alive or Dead', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 17 (1988), 397-403; also Gervais, 'Late Witness: George Sturt and Village England', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 21 (1991), 21-44.

³⁰ As Francis Mulhern has noted, 'Orwell seems to have subsisted on the very margins of *Scrutiny*'s collective consciousness, unobtrusively present but very little discussed - at least in print', *The Moment of Scrutiny*, p. 229. n.9. But the 'Scrutineer' T.R. Barnes suggested that he was 'well worth following' despite 'a certain bluntness of sensibility' (Ibid.); and, somewhat inevitably,

Q.D. Leavis compared him favourably with 'Bloomsbury', Orwell having 'grown up' and having a 'special kind of honesty' (p. 209).

³¹ A curious mix, this, of the utopian and the authoritarian. It is of course conventional in utopian fiction to see a collapse of the distinction between 'work' and 'leisure', a form of reintegration where the aesthetic no longer needs to be separately identified; although usually work relationships are also democratized. See e.g. William Morris's *News from Nowhere: or An Epoch of Rest* [1890], ed. by James Redmond (London: Routledge, 1970; repr. 1993).

³² *Education and the University*, p. 150.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³⁴ *Reading and Criticism* (London: Frederick Muller, 1950). Further references are given in the text, as *RC*, with page references.

³⁵ Most recently, Fred Inglis, in his biography of Williams. See: Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 126.

³⁶ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979).

³⁷ *Politics and Letters*, p. 238.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

³⁹ Roland Barthes, 'The Structuralist Activity' [1963], in *European Literary Theory and Practice: From Existential Phenomenology to Structuralism* (New York: Delta Books, 1973), pp. 157-163 (p. 159, emphasis in original).

⁴⁰ *Politics and Letters*, p. 237.

⁴¹ *Politics and Letters*, p. 62.. The same anecdote is repeated later, where Williams adds: 'Later, of course, I would have said that the very selection of a passage for close analysis usually presupposed an unexamined judgment of the work from which it was taken, derived from other sources' (p. 237).

⁴² *Education and the University* ('Mass Civilization and Minority Culture'), p. 149. He does somewhat grudgingly recognize the possibility for 'artistic' cinema, but concludes by arguing that fundamentally, 'Hollywood' represents a 'levelling-down' which, like modern broadcasting in general 'tends to make active recreation, especially active use of the mind, more difficult' (p. 150).

⁴³ See particularly, Raymond Williams, 'My Cambridge', in *What I Came to Say* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989); pp. 3-14, esp. p. 6; and c.f. his 'Cinema and Socialism', in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 107-18.

⁴⁴ *Education and the University*, p. 150.

⁴⁵ Most influentially in *S/Z* [1973] (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), where he distinguishes between the 'readerly' (passive) text of classical realism (exemplified here by Balzac's *Sarrasine*), and the 'writerly' (active) text of modernism (although, this being Barthes, such distinction is deconstructed within *S/Z* itself, as Barthes's reading transforms *Sarrasine* from 'readerly' to 'writerly').

⁴⁶ 'My Cambridge', in *What I Came to Say*, p. 13 (this idea is developed later when we consider the 'literary paradigm').

⁴⁷ As his interviewers in *Politics and Letters* point out, *Reading and Criticism* was directed to a generally working-class audience. Williams plays down the difference between this and the work of Leavis / Richards, but acknowledges that 'taking the practice of criticism to [working-class students] inevitably led to its modification: the altered social relations necessarily produced an altered social tone' (p. 242).

⁴⁸ *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961; repr. 1979).

⁴⁹ 'Books for Teaching "Culture and Environment"', in *The Use of English*, 1,3 (1950), 134-40; repr. in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, pp. 174-80.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵¹ *Highway*, 45 (1954), 184-85.

⁵² *Highway*, 47 (1956), 174-76. See also: Margaret Cole, 'Mass Media', D.G. Macrae, 'Mass Culture Again', M. Cole, 'Mass Media and Mass Culture', D.G. Macrae, 'Mass Media and Mass Culture', all in *Highway* (1956/57), pp. 5-8, 110-11, 149-50, 178.

⁵³ *Highway*, 47 (1956), p. 176.

⁵⁴ 'Culture is Ordinary', in *Conviction*, ed. by N. Mackenzie (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958), pp. 74-92; repr. in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, pp. 89-102 (p. 96).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁵⁶ *Culture and Society*, p. 230.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 251.

⁵⁸ 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 95. This section, recommending the 'empowerment' of working people, is given apparently without irony.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁶¹ For a typically historicist analysis, see Williams's 'A Kind of Gresham's Law', *Highway*, 49 (1958), 107-10; repr. in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, pp. 84-88. For its use by Leavis, see 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', in *Education and the University*, pp. 148-50.

⁶² 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 98.

⁶³ See e.g. 'Our Debt to Dr. Leavis', *Critical Quarterly*, 1 (1959), 245-47; repr. in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, pp. 103-05.

⁶⁴ 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 94.

⁶⁵ F.R. Leavis, 'Retrospect of a Decade', *Scrutiny* 9 (1940), 70-72; repr. in *A Selection from Scrutiny*, I, pp. 175-77 (p. 175).

⁶⁶ F.R. Leavis, 'Under Which King Bezonian', *Scrutiny* 1 (1932), 205-14; repr. in *A Selection from Scrutiny*, I, pp. 166-74 (p. 167). Graham Pechey reads this last sentence of Leavis's, with its 'tortuously qualified and doubly negated declaration of the journal's anti-capitalist stance', as evidence of a certain ambivalence in his thinking, compared with the more explicit 'socialist commitment' of L.C. Knights. See Pechey, 'Scrutiny, English Marxism, and

the Work of Raymond Williams', *Literature and History*, 11 (1985), 65-76 (pp. 68-69).

⁶⁷ 'Under Which King', pp. 167-69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁶⁹ A.L. Morton, 'Culture and Leisure', *Scrutiny* 1 (1933), 324-326 (p. 324, emphasis in original).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁷² Christopher Hill, 'Mr. Parkes on Marxism', *Scrutiny*, 9 (1940), 277-84 (p. 277).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-82.

⁷⁴ 'Retrospect of a Decade', *A Selection from Scrutiny*, I, p. 175.

⁷⁵ 'We [the editors] are anxious that the critical rigour of the review shall be patent beyond all possible suggestion of partiality in the approach. Mr. Parkes's book is reviewed below by a Marxist. But Mr. Hill knows that we think much more highly of Mr. Parkes's work than he does; and, if the hazards of communication across the Atlantic do not frustrate us all, Mr. Parkes will have an opportunity for a reply' (Hill, p. 277).

⁷⁶ 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 94.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

⁷⁸ *Reading and Criticism*, p. 104.

⁷⁹ *Politics and Letters*, p. 45. This is around 1940/41, and Williams is honest enough to admit any antagonism they held towards socialist realism was

probably kept private: 'Of course, we would probably have denied that we were against socialist realism. We would have claimed that much more complex and dynamic techniques were needed for it than those that were officially recommended' (ibid., p. 46).

⁸⁰ Actually, they had crossed swords much earlier, and confronted similar problems: F.R. Leavis, 'Criticism and Literary History', *Scrutiny*, 4 (1935), 96-100; and, in the same volume, F.W. Bateson, 'Correspondence' (pp. 181-85; and F.R. Leavis (pp. 185-87).

⁸¹ F.R. Leavis, 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy: A Reply', *Scrutiny*, 6 (1937), 59-70. His 'reply' is to René Wellek's review of Leavis's *Revaluation*: 'Literary Criticism and Philosophy', *Scrutiny*, 5 (1937), 375-83.

⁸² F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition & Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936; 1969).

⁸³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁴ F.W. Bateson, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', *Essays in Criticism*, 3.1 (1953), 1-27 (hereafter, references are given within the text as 'Bateson, page number'). As Bateson acknowledges at the start of the essay, the title is taken from Arnold.

⁸⁵ It is important to note here that Bateson recognizes the very real improvements made to literary criticism by these same critics, who have moved criticism away from the 'How many children did Lady Macbeth have?' style of the 'Watts-Duntons and the Stopford Brookes [...], those eminent bores and charlatans' (p.2).

⁸⁶ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p. 73.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

⁸⁹ F.R. Leavis, 'The Responsible Critic: or The Function of Criticism At Any Time', *Scrutiny* 19 (1953), 162-83 (p. 169, emphasis in original). Inevitably, this is not the end of the debate, see also: F.W. Bateson, 'The Responsible Critic', *Scrutiny* 19 (1953), 317-21; F.R. Leavis, 'Reply to above', *Scrutiny* 19 (1953), 321-28; F.W. Bateson, 'Postscript' [1966], *A Selection from Scrutiny*, II, ed. by F.R. Leavis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 315-16.

⁹⁰ Leavis, 'The Responsible Critic', p. 171 (Leavis does something similar with Bateson's other 'tautologies' - 'Bounded', 'narrow'd', and 'contracted' (pp. 171-72).

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 169 (emphasis in original).

⁹² Ibid., p. 173, quoting Bateson.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 174 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁴ Bateson, 'The Responsible Critic', p. 320 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; repr. 1989), particularly Part III; and c.f. chapters 2 and 3 of Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1976; London: Verso, 1976; 1988), and chapter 1 of Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* [1981] (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁹⁶ Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8 (1969), 3-53 (hereafter, references are given within the text as 'Skinner, page number'). Understandably, Skinner's concentration on the history of 'ideas' will pose 'textuality' rather differently from Bateson and Leavis. It has also to be acknowledged that Skinner is not over-impressed with Williams, at least the Williams of *Keywords*. See: Quentin Skinner, 'The Idea of a Cultural Lexicon', *Essays in Criticism*, 29 (1979), 205-24. I do not feel, though, that either of these considerations is enough to negate the value of his argument, particularly since the chosen essay actually uses Bateson and Leavis as 'examples'.

⁹⁷ I hope I have said enough already to suggest that *if* this is supposed to represent Leavis's own position, it misses the specificity of his own 'textual' approach, which relies not just on the 'words on the page' but various 'contexts' - linguistic relations, poetic traditions, literary conventions etc., while still somehow privileging the *poetic* text by according it a potential for re-working its 'context'.

⁹⁸ Briefly, an illocutionary act for Austin is the act performed as a direct result of an utterance (e.g. in utterances relating to promising, warning etc.). For more on such 'performatives', see: J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). A slightly different approach is adopted by J.R. Searle, in *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 47-48. Skinner makes a point of avoiding simple statements of the 'Fred put on his hat' variety, in order to test out his ideas in more complex situations. I find his arguments largely convincing, although on occasions there would seem to be scope for challenge, e.g.: 'Consider, for example, the failure of Locke to use any historical arguments in the *Second Treatise*. Since the discussion of political principles in seventeenth-century England virtually hinged on the study of rival versions of the English past, a strong case could be made for saying that Locke's failure to mention these issues constituted perhaps the most radical and original feature of his whole argument. As a clue to the understanding of Locke's text, this is obviously important: but it is a clue which the study of the social context (still less the text itself) could never be made to yield' (Skinner, pp. 47-48). The recognition of Locke's 'failure' is obviously recognizable from the text itself. *Knowing* that this is an unusual occurrence must, it seems come directly from work on 'social context', through which the regular use of 'historical arguments' in discussing political principles would presumably be discovered. In which case it is difficult to understand why Skinner wants to argue in this example that social context is of no use.

¹⁰⁰ Raymond Williams, 'Literature in Relation to History', in *Rewley House Papers*, III, I (1950), pp. 36-44; repr. in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, pp. 166-73.

¹⁰¹ *Border Country*, pp. 168-69.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 169(emphasis in original).

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 168. He acknowledges a few paragraphs later that, of course, historical novels are also 'historical', and 'all literature is history' (p. 169).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 169, 171. It ought to be added here I suppose, that in a work like *Culture and Society* there is rather more emphasis on 'industrial novels' than 'adolescent fantasy'.

¹⁰⁵ Williams argues this point a few years later, giving *Troilus and Criseyde* and courtly love as his example. See: 'Text and Context', in *The Tutors' Bulletin of Adult Education*, 93/4 (1953/54), 19-22; repr. in *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, pp. 199-202 (p. 200). This conference took place, of course, as Williams continued his involvement with the Workers' Educational Association. In 1996, the W.E.A. runs an accredited 'Access' course which combines work on History and Literature and the relationship between them: *WEA/OU DCE Access Certificate Course: Student Handbook* ([Oxford]: [n.pub.], [1996]).

¹⁰⁶ 'Literature in Relation to History', p. 172. This is obviously of paramount importance when dealing with foreign literature, as Williams emphasises in 'Text and Context', p. 200; but here he extends it to all literature.

Novel Ideas: Towards the Knowable Community

If, as I want to suggest, Williams's developing cultural materialism forms itself to some extent as a reaction to Leavisian textual criticism; if Williams rejects that cultural image which writes our history in terms of the gradual loss of the 'organic community'; if he tries to build on the value of close textual criticism by attempting a sort of synthesis or going beyond of the Leavisian and Batesonian approaches to reading, then it should be possible to see the effects of this shift in his own literary criticism. Later, as we confront a more sophisticated level of the underlying theoretical position, we will be able to test Williams's ideas by looking at his work in one particular area, the seventeenth century 'country-house' poem. As we have seen in following the Leavis / Bateson debate, the argument tends to be conducted around the reading of poems. When anything as 'loose and baggy' as a novel is confronted, very small extracts are selected for analysis, so that similar techniques can be used. This is also true of course for the early Williams, as we have already seen, although even in *Reading and Criticism* there is at least the recognition that 'complete' works need to be tackled.¹

1. Leaving the Organic Community

Leavis's determination to define the 'great tradition' is well known. What still surprises on re-reading his early work on the novels, is how absolutely sure he is that he is capable of making these very large,

generalizing decisions about what should be in the canon and what should not. This confidence is not, it must be said, because he simply offers a summary of what is already 'canonical'. Rather, he uses his Eliotic notion of 'tradition' to redefine the canon from a present perspective, so that it can include Jane Austen and D.H. Lawrence; George Eliot and Henry James.²

There is little doubt that Leavis was one of the first, and almost certainly the most influential of University critics to champion the modernist writers of the 1920s, and we have already seen his praise for T.S. Eliot's experiments. It is therefore something of a surprise to realise how little value he appears to place on the work of James Joyce, and it is therefore useful to examine briefly why this must be so. A clue is given in *The Great Tradition*, where Leavis praises *Ulysses* for its 'extraordinary variety of technical devices', and its 'attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness', but nevertheless argues that there is no 'organic principle' acting to control the text. Rather than a 'new start', this is for Leavis a 'dead end', confirmed for him by the later production of *Finnegans Wake*, which 'engaged the interest of the inventor of Basic English'.³ Leavis has a long memory. He had made the same connection, between the literary experimentation of Joyce and the linguistic reductiveness of C.K. Ogden, fifteen years earlier when reviewing chapters of *Work in Progress* (later *Finnegans Wake*) for *Scrutiny* in 1933.⁴ In the *Scrutiny* article, Leavis extends his criticism back from *Work in Progress* to *Ulysses*. Again, it is the word *organic* which defines Leavis's criticism, and now it is linked to a reference to Vico which emphasises again Leavis's distrust of philosophy:

A certain vicious bent manifested itself very disturbingly in *Ulysses*, in the *inorganic* elaborations and pedantries and the evident admiring belief of the author in Stephen's intellectual distinction, and the idea of putting Vico's theory of history into the concrete would seem rather to derive from this bent than to be calculated to control it.⁵

Surely Leavis's generally astute literary judgement has failed him here. That there is an intimate relationship between the author of *Ulysses* and the character of Stephen Dedalus is of course clear. But far less certain is Joyce's celebration of his alter-ego's 'intellectual distinction'. This seems true, firstly, because it becomes increasingly difficult in *Ulysses* to distinguish between any originating author and the multiple narrators who inhabit the text; secondly, because even in the passages which directly explore Stephen's 'intellectualism', most significantly the debate over Shakespeare in 'Scylla and 'Charybdis' (chapter 9), Stephen is frequently exposed as someone with an overdetermined sense of his own 'theolologicophilolological' intellectual abilities, and this is often made explicit by the ironic juxtaposition of Stephen's deep 'aesthetic theorizing' alongside some other character's satiric comment.⁶

More directly relevant here, is Leavis's insistence on the lack of the 'organic' dimension in Joyce's work, which Leavis ties in to an historical analysis comparing this 'failing' on Joyce's part to the success of Shakespeare. Recognising their shared interest in puns and word-play, Leavis

argues that this is merely an end in itself in Joyce, whereas for Shakespeare there is 'complete subjection [...] of the medium to the uncompromising, complex and delicate need that uses it'.⁷ This might be seen almost as a negative summary of the modernist experiment. Certainly, Leavis sees Eliot's attempt to reconcile 'concrete particularity with inclusive generality' as a limit text for this kind of experimentation.⁸ Joyce's work, as Lawrence suggests, is for Leavis a linguistic dustbin: 'old fags and cabbage-stumps of quotations from the Bible and the rest, stewed in the juice of deliberate, journalistic dirty-mindedness'.⁹ Returning to the comparison with Shakespeare, Leavis replays all the 'organic community' rhetoric, this time in the form almost of an Eliotic 'dissociation of sensibility'. Shakespeare's advantage is that he wrote from within 'a genuinely national culture, to a community in which it was possible for the theatre to appeal to the cultivated and the populace at the same time [...] a national culture rooted in the soil'.¹⁰ Reacting predictably to the sort of cultural pessimism displayed in his other writings from the period, Leavis once more invokes the name of George Sturt ('Bourne') as support for his views about the loss of the organic community, tying it in now to a belief that modern culture has taken away from us the ability to talk to each other. Instead of the old *order* (it is Leavis's own emphasis), we are left now with 'cultural disintegration, mechanical organization and constant rapid change'.¹¹

I suppose it could be argued that the literature of the modernist period, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, all in various ways chart this feature of the twentieth century, a landscape marked by this

‘cultural disintegration, mechanical organization and constant rapid change’. However, with the notable exception of Joyce, the other writers make every attempt to show the contempt they feel for this ‘loss’ of tradition and past culture. It is this surely which brings together the ‘Bloomsbury Fraction’ and the miner’s son, and marks them off from the self-exiled son of Dublin, who does not so much *celebrate* this change as just *accept* it as the state of things, within which there is still a culture to be shared and understood, a community which needs to be identified, a ‘knowable community’. This too, is surely the mark which distinguishes Joyce from Lawrence for Leavis, and means he cannot admire Lawrence without finding Joyce a failure.¹² Actually, this division is apparent too in the early criticism of Williams, but in the opposite direction. At Cambridge, the texts Williams and his associates ‘most admired’ and set up in opposition to socialist realism were *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, and Joyce was ‘much more attractive than Lawrence’.¹³

Williams is very clear that one of the most significant features of Lawrence’s work is his ‘critique of industrialism’, which links him directly back to Carlyle. Taking this lead, we can then see a clear line of influence: Carlyle, Arnold, Eliot, Leavis, although it is only fair to recognize, as Williams explicitly acknowledges, that this historical thread is denied by Leavis.¹⁴ Lawrence represents, for Leavis, the latest point in a long line of ‘English’ novelists stretching back to Jane Austen, who have succeeded, like Shakespeare, in bringing the past to bear on the present; who, through aesthetic innovation, act to resist ‘mass civilization’ and reintegrate us with

our cultural history, thus exemplifying what Leavis describes as ‘the creative human spirit and its power to ensure fulness of life.’¹⁵

2. The Knowable Community

When Leavis begins *The Great Tradition* with: ‘The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad’,¹⁶ he is not, as Catherine Belsey has suggested, accepting ‘greatness’ as an unarguable category.¹⁷ Belsey is too quick to condemn a writer like Leavis for his ‘failure’ to deconstruct transcendental concepts like ‘greatness’. She fails to recognize that, while Leavis is sure what he means by ‘great’ (as he composes his introduction), he also recognizes the historical mutability of such a term. This is clear, because he willingly excludes from this list names which are already canonical (here in particular Hardy, and Dickens with the exception of *Hard Times*); and further, because, as we have already seen, by the end of the same introduction, just twenty-odd pages later, Lawrence has joined the list.

If Leavis’s notion of ‘greatness’ is more complex than Belsey is willing to allow, it is also true that his decisions on what to include and what to exclude are based on a firm belief in his own ability to make such distinctions, and that the identification of ‘greatness’ (however defined), is the appropriate end of literary criticism. It becomes apparent from very early in Williams’s career that he is far from happy to think in this way, and that, although questions of value remain relevant, his own decisions on what is worth writing about are the result of a different set of thought processes,

most commonly linked to some form of historical identification. Thus, most famously, he chooses in *Culture and Society* to devote a longish section to an examination of what he calls the 'Industrial' novels of the mid-nineteenth century. Similarly, in *The English Novel*, he starts by meditating on the production of key texts in 1847 and 1848, inevitably linking these works to 'revolution' (Industrial and otherwise). This work, continued in *The Country and the City* and elsewhere, focuses its attention not on some lost 'organic community', but on what Williams calls the 'knowable community', one of the 'key terms' around which cultural materialism starts to define and limit itself. It is important to recognize at once the difference in emphasis between the two: the organic community is lost but 'known', the knowable community exists but has to be discovered, 'knowable', not 'known'. As Alan O'Connor has pointed out, what this means in effect is that there is a deep irony built into the term itself, since 'what is being shown is how much of the society is deeply unknowable'.¹⁸

As Williams makes clear in *The English Novel*, it is the 'exploration of community: the substance and meaning of community' which he sees as central to the production of the novels he focuses on there.¹⁹ By concentrating on 'community' (knowable or otherwise), Williams seeks to resist falling into Leavis's cultural pessimism. While accepting that something has happened to change society and its culture, Williams refuses to stigmatize it as the 'bad after', a wasteland of despair, of cultural pessimism. If 'community' still means *something*, then there is still a value to society, and the novel's function then is to explain change rather than merely reject it. This

is a point he makes explicit in a slightly earlier essay, which is introduced ironically with a paraphrase of Sturt: 'there is always change in the village':

[T]he difference between Jane Austen and George Eliot and Hardy is not the sudden disintegration of a settled, traditional order but a change in literary bearings which brings into focus a persistent rural disturbance hitherto unrepresented in fiction. Thus we can say that the traditional novel, by which is meant very often the traditional novel of country and provincial life, depends essentially on a knowable community. This is a point to consider with Dickens, who, responding to the scale and complication of the city, had to remake the novel in a quite different direction. But a real continuity from Jane Austen to George Eliot, and then on to Thomas Hardy, can focus our attention on the problem of the knowable community within country life.²⁰

This essay, published in 1969, is the first time Williams uses the phrase 'knowable community' in print (an amended version of it becomes chapter sixteen of *The Country and the City*), and it is important as a clear mark of difference between himself and Leavis, not just in the sense that other writers, most notably Hardy, become the focus of interest; but also because the 'knowable community' represents a different way of thinking about literary and cultural production, 'a matter of consciousness as well as evident fact'.²¹ This then finds its fuller analysis in *The English Novel*, published in the following year. Despite Williams's insistence that *The English Novel* was a

challenge to the Leavisian model of criticism, Leavis is notable in the text by his absence (only one brief, throwaway mention). But, nevertheless, the whole work does offer a clear and radical break with everything we have seen to date, including of course Williams's own achievements in *Reading and Criticism*. This then, to utilise Harold Bloom's terminology, represents the agonistic site of struggle for Williams, where he finally throws over that 'anxiety of influence' which was Leavis, in a desperate and necessary oedipal reversal, only after which, as the archetypal 'strong' critic, he can really open up a critical space for his own personal version of literary theory.²² As Williams's interlocutors argue in the *Politics and Letters* interviews, this throwing-over manifests itself in *The English Novel* in 'its apparently sustained, virtually symmetrical inversion of the authors, evaluations and emphases to be found in *The Great Tradition*'.²³ Williams's reply is that Leavis's domination of literary studies in the 1950s and early 1960s, particularly in relation to canon formation and the novel, made it inevitable that Williams's own work would have to be a form of response; even at the expense of him 'starting' in the 1840s instead of the 1790s.²⁴ The theoretical shift of influence, from Leavis's 'organic community' to Williams's 'knowable community', can, I think, be recognized by looking more closely at their responses to the significance of specific writers, and I will want to argue that, ultimately, Leavis himself succumbs to what is effectively a 'reverse' anxiety of influence, as he redefines his own great tradition. Asked years later why he appears to have amended his opinion of Dickens he bypassed the question, but held on to his insistence on 'the right to contradict [him]self'.²⁵

But change he certainly did, and it seems appropriate to suggest that, if Williams started out being a 'Left-Leavisite', Leavis turned into a 'Right-Williamsonian'.

In *The English Novel*, It is not altogether clear that 'knowable community' is being used in his literary analysis, although, in the introduction, Williams makes frequent references to the centrality of 'community', arguing that the mid-nineteenth century represents the historical moment at which the sense of community radically changes, as the landscape becomes predominantly urban and industrial. The effects of this are then not only to produce accelerated social change, which makes 'community' itself possibly less certain, but also to tend towards obscuring the processes of social change (*EN*, pp. 11-12). Williams makes the interesting point in *Keywords*, that, alone among terms of social organization, community 'seems never to be used unfavourably'.²⁶ I suppose what this suggests is that it has been appropriated at various times by groups with opposing ideologies, who have then appealed to it as a measure of a form of consensus or local agreement. The word 'knowable' then, added to community, rather than tying down meaning, acts in the opposite direction, by recognizing that there are then question-marks over understanding community, and that this relates to personal relationships, and also to society as a whole: both in effect tend to be perceived as 'unknowable', but are capable of becoming 'known' (or at least more 'knowable') through analysis. This is where the term becomes useful as a key to reading strategies, since novels too can be defined as 'knowable communities' (*EN*, p. 14). For Williams, in their 'classic' mode, novels offer

us sets of 'known' relationships realised as parts of a 'wholly known social structure'. But this only works, of course (if it can ever be said really to 'work' at all), where the society being represented in the novel is already known and understood. If, as Williams suggests, such a situation breaks down some time in the nineteenth century, coincident that is with the coming to maturity of the realist novel as a dominant mode of literary production, then it must presumably be the case that this development in some way represents a real crisis of representation, a desperate search for the 'real', which will move the novel from the certainty of a Jane Austen to the doubt and confusion of a Virginia Woolf. And this is the reason for Williams's belated recognition that, by starting his narrative in the 1840s (like Leavis leaving Austen as the silent precursor of the realist text), he is really too late to identify fully the historical effects of this change in the knowable community.

It might be thought that what has so far been said of the knowable community is really just a sort of paraphrase of the Leavisian organic community, which itself represents a break-point between a known past and an unknown present. But this only works if we link the idea of community directly to the perceived differences between rural and urban formations. Williams emphasises that this division assumes that we can somehow 'know' a rural community more fully than an urban one. If, as he argues, these relationships are ones of consciousness as well as 'fact' (i.e. social and material circumstances), then similar problems of representation present themselves, in effect *all* communities are essentially unknown, and the novel is a site of exploration, within which often very narrow and selective parts of

that community are investigated and discovered. This must in fact be true for country and city alike, and it effects writers and critics. Thus, Dickens's London is a very carefully delineated space, a literary selection within which relationships of an essentially narrow range can be successfully explored; just as Austen's 'England' excludes large sections of community, because they were effectively 'unknown' (or uninteresting) to her. All writers, however 'realistically', produce facsimiles of the real which allow them to avoid the complexities of the real, which is why the Petersburg of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* looks so different from that of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, even though less than ten years separates them.²⁷

Whether or not it was ever valid to talk about the 'loss' of an 'organic community', there is little doubt that in many ways the Britain of 1850 looked very different from the England of 1800 or 1750. The time of the Great Exhibition and the 1851 census marked the dominance of the capitalist mode of production, and, alongside it, the first recorded time in history where more people lived and worked in 'urban' rather than 'rural' formations.²⁸ Aesthetically, this produced a growing body of art which celebrated or criticised the new situation, from the visual art commissioned by the new industrialists, to the 'Industrial' novels; the new industry bringing into being the new cities. Conveniently for our comparison of Leavis and Williams, it is one such novel, Dickens's *Hard Times*, which can act as a measure of those differences, and help to make clear some of the constituents of Williams's cultural materialism.

At the beginning of the previous chapter I noted the relationship between Williams's *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* and *The Great Tradition*. As Williams commented, his work in the 1960s (first the Cambridge lecture series and later the book) was a sustained attempt to challenge the by then hegemonic influence of Leavis over matters of the 'canon' and literary criticism. Without mentioning Leavis by name, Williams begins his chapter on Dickens by recognising the partiality of previous approaches, which have bemoaned the loss of 'traditional culture', and produced a belief that only an 'educated minority' deeply connected to its cultural past could maintain correct moral standards. Against this, Williams argues that it forgets another culture, the 'ordinary culture' which, rather than closing itself off from the present, responds to it actively:

What is missing is that element of authentic popular response to the new conditions of life, through which in many ways - in new radical institutions and beliefs, but also in the crowded many-voiced anonymous world of idioms, stories, songs, jokes, parodies, sentiments, caricatures - people described and responded to their unprecedented experiences (*EN*, p. 28).

This language is strongly Bakhtinian²⁹, describing a Rabelaisian counter-culture which escapes the dominant and produces a new 'structure of feeling'. Structure of feeling becomes for Williams another way of defining and limiting cultural materialism, and, in his work on Dickens, will be

intimately related to the 'knowable community', so it will be useful here to spend some time investigating more fully what it means to him.

3. Structures of Feeling, the Organic Community Refined

'Structure of feeling' reappears throughout Williams's long writing career. The first reference I can find is in *Reading and Criticism*, where he writes of 'the structure of personal feelings of many writers and readers'.³⁰ The phrase also appears in *Culture and Society*, but the first extended discussions are in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* and *The Long Revolution*.³¹ Like everything in Williams, the term is inherently 'historical', so it will not necessarily mean the same, or have the same critical use, throughout his work.³² Indeed, we will need to return to it later, when the discussion of the postmodern will intersect with that more 'fluid' understanding of structures of feeling given in *Marxism and Literature*.

In *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* he uses it as one half of a relationship, between structure of feeling and 'convention' (convention both as tacit consent to the 'necessity of tradition', and as 'dramatic method' for displaying essentially 'new modes of feeling').³³ Structure of feeling, as a tool of dramatic analysis, then explores what Williams sees as the 'essential relationship' between the conventions of a period which are adopted by the dramatist, and his own transformation of this received position. Williams here makes a particular claim for art, one which will find its counterpart in the work of structuralist Marxism, and bears an ironic relationship to the beliefs of Leavis : the work of art is privileged, in that it contains within itself some 'element' which does not seem to appear 'external' to it.³⁴

The work on structure of feeling is really just sketched in here, but the treatment is much more detailed in *The Long Revolution*, and tied in to an ‘analysis of culture’ which concentrates, appropriately for this chapter, on the literature (predominately the novels) of the 1840s. He introduces the term by writing about the problems different generations have in understanding one another, and how this can then be extrapolated to indicate the more serious problems to be overcome when we as social critics examine past periods, relying only on the cultural remains. This sense of what we might call here a ‘knowable community’ in the sense of one which we want to analyse and come to understand, is now designated a ‘structure of feeling’:

The term I would suggest to describe it is *structure of feeling*: it is as firm and definite as ‘structure’ suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization. And it is in this respect that the arts of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance. For here, if anywhere, this characteristic is likely to be expressed; often not consciously, but by the fact that here, in the only examples we have of recorded communication that outlives its bearers, the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon.³⁵

There is obviously a lot to be said about all this, not least that, even for Williams, it is far from clear from his 'explanation' just what a 'structure of feeling' is (perhaps this uncertainty is reinforced, ironically, by Williams's certainty that structures are always 'firm' and 'definite', a notion soon to be questioned by deconstruction). He appears to see it primarily as a way of defining a particular 'group' epistemology, which is dependent on generations sharing a similar world view, one which changes as generations change, at which point 'the nearest we can get to this vital element is in the documentary culture, from poems to buildings and dress-fashions, and it is this relation that gives significance to the definition of culture in documentary terms'.³⁶ As earlier, there is an emphasis here on the special nature of 'documentary culture' (a rather wider term than the use of art in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*). Williams continues: 'The significance of documentary culture is that, more clearly than anything else, it expresses that life to us in direct terms, when the living witnesses are silent'.³⁷ 'Expressing life to us in direct terms' carries with it I would argue, two related problems. One, connected with a rather Leavisian debate about the value of 'experience', which I will return to. The other is more directly concerned with ideology, since Williams appears to be suggesting that we can get direct access to the 'real' through its documentary culture, in a sort of unmediated, and curiously complete condition. This is obviously a very serious problem for cultural materialism, since it seems to ignore all sorts of difficulties, including the likelihood, as Williams later recognizes, that in general, 'culture' is 'dominant' culture; and the effect of the 'selective tradition' in filtering out all but a very specific

version of the totality of cultural production. Yet (again a point made by Williams), if the 'structure of feeling' is not even fully known to those living it, what can it mean to suggest that we, as archivists, can be given that life 'in direct terms'? In other words, what relationship exists between the structure of feeling, and any actual social conditions?:

In some respects, the structure of feeling corresponds to the dominant social character, but it is also an expression of the interaction [between competing social characters]. Again, however, the structure of feeling is not uniform throughout the society; it is primarily evident in the dominant productive group. At this level, however, it is different from any of the distinguishable social characters, for it has to deal not only with the public ideals but with their omissions and consequences, as lived.³⁸

I would suggest that this rather tortuous argument reflects in 'indirect terms' Williams's increasing difficulties in finding a way of writing about the relationship of culture to society while avoiding confronting directly Marxist theories of ideology, a crisis which will find its catharsis much later, in the work of the 1970s, particularly *Marxism and Literature*. And this is where 'ideology' and 'experience' come together in the analysis of culture using a concept like structure of feeling. As his interviewers in *Politics and Letters* suggest, we can use these two terms to locate the opposing forces of Williams's cultural materialism in the 1960s, and the 'scientific' Marxism of

Louis Althusser.³⁹ For Althusser (or so they argue), experience is equivalent to illusion, ideology in its pure state, whereas the Williams of *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* frequently promotes the value of experience as a necessary antidote to the 'false fixity' of the world of doctrines. At their extremes, both interpretations are faulty - there are plenty of examples where our immediate experience can be seen to be 'true' without the need for scientific thought ('we can look out of the window and tell whether the sun is shining or not without any knowledge of meteorology'); on the other hand absolute reliance on immediate experience may not be enough (without some knowledge of planetary rotation we will 'believe' that the sun rotates around the earth). All of this is further problematized in the case of reliance on 'documentary culture' (whether in the form of 'official' ideology or creative experience in the novels say), since its 'selective' nature means that key areas are ignored completely (in the 1840s for instance the Irish Famine).

In other words, to use again Williams's alternative terminology, the 'knowable community' (in this case, say, the society represented by the novels of the 1840s) cannot be known in its totality through this very restricted version of 'experience', even if the novel is capable of somehow materializing something of the 'unsaid' of ideology (since, in ideology or experience, the Famine is excluded). Williams's response to this apparent aporia is significant, because it engages directly with his work on the novels, and, particularly, on Dickens. He notes that the period being investigated intersects importantly with the development of statistical theory, and the advanced arrangements for the collection of data, 'symbolized by the

foundation of the Manchester Statistical Society'.⁴⁰ This work, obviously related at some level to 'Blue Books', utilitarian theory and the rest, was a way past the limitations of experiential research, a method which offered to the efforts of personal observation a degree of scientific analysis which could at least attempt to penetrate the new, unknowable society of the Industrial Revolution.

The literary example Williams uses here (the same one is used in *The English Novel*), is the passage from *Dombey and Son* 'where he envisages the roofs of houses being taken off', so that some 'good spirit' can show the actual social relationships not 'empirically observable'.⁴¹ That good spirit is of course the novelist himself, and we will see a similar device being used, an appeal to the novelist to lay bare the workings of ideology, in *Hard Times*. But the mention of *Hard Times* might also suggest here another connection. Because it is in that novel, from the post-revolutionary 1850s, that scientific knowledge, the 'deadly statistical clock' of utilitarian theory, is given no credence at all as a method to enhance empirical observation. In effect, *Hard Times* answers to an extreme version of the theory versus experience debate, with theory only identified with abuse and lack of humanity.

4. Re-reading *Hard Times*

Returning then to the novel criticism, it is worth noting the very long lead-time between *The Great Tradition* (1948), and *The English Novel* (1970). By the time Williams publishes his 'response' to Leavis, we have Leavis's own revision of his earlier position, in *Dickens: The Novelist*,

published in the same year as *The English Novel*, and co-authored by F.R. and Q.D. Leavis.⁴² This then gives us a curious sort of symmetry between their two positions on Dickens. Williams includes a piece on *Hard Times* in *Culture and Society*, just as Leavis offers it as an 'analytic note' to *The Great Tradition*. Leavis then includes *Hard Times* in *Dickens*, using almost an identical version to that in *The Great Tradition*, but it remains absent from the 'Dickens' chapter in *The English Novel*. These inclusions, repetitions and absences can tell us a great deal about the two critics' differing attitudes to the literary. For Leavis, it represents, to adopt an appropriate Dickensian description, a 'change of heart' ('the right to contradict myself'). In *The Great Tradition*, Dickens is 'great', and a 'genius', but it is 'the genius [...] of a great entertainer'. Excluding *Hard Times*, in which 'his distinctive creative genius is controlled throughout to a unifying and organizing significance', the value of Dickens is restricted to being a good bedtime read: 'The adult mind doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to an unusual and sustained seriousness'.⁴³ By comparison with other Dickens' novels, *Hard Times* is on a small scale, and this allows it to manifest its structure in a way which is impossible in the other 'loose baggy monsters': it 'leaves no room for the usual repetitive overdoing and loose inclusiveness'. It is a 'completely serious work of art', in which Dickens is 'for once possessed by a comprehensive vision'.⁴⁴

Looking in detail at Leavis's chapter on *Hard Times*, it soon becomes clear how this 'greatness' manifests itself. Originally the first of a series of essays in *Scrutiny* under the general title: 'The Novel as Dramatic Poem'⁴⁵,

the chapter displays to the full all of Leavis's deepest beliefs about the value of his brand of literary criticism. As Michael Bell has suggested, Leavis's decision to read the novel as a 'dramatic poem' makes it possible for him to re-evaluate the work of writers like Lawrence, who appear resistant to a straightforward 'realist' approach, by subsuming 'mimetic reference to the world' into 'that inner dimension of mimesis encapsulated in the enactive conception of language'.⁴⁶ Relying on a formula which equates 'literariness' with poetic device, Leavis turns the metonymy of the novel into the metaphorical richness of a Shakespearean sonnet:

[B]y texture, imaginative mode, symbolic method, and the resulting concentration, *Hard Times* affects us as belonging with formally poetic works. [...] The excerpt in itself suggests the justification for saying that *Hard Times* is a poetic work. It suggests that the genius of the writer may fairly be described as that of a poetic dramatist, and that, in our preconceptions about 'the novel', we may miss, within the field of fictional prose, possibilities of concentration and flexibility in the interpretation of life such as we associate with Shakespearean drama. [...] The final stress may fall on Dickens's command of word, phrase, rhythm and image: in ease and range there is surely no greater master of English except Shakespeare. This comes back to saying that Dickens is a great poet.⁴⁷

Accepting that any piece of writing may display 'formal' poetic devices is not the same thing at all as suggesting, based on a few carefully chosen extracts, that *Hard Times* represents some novelistic equivalent to a piece of Renaissance poetry. In order to make such claims Leavis is forced to adopt an intensely selective approach. Extracts are chosen which press his case for that 'comprehensive vision', and it is evident that what particularly impresses him is Dickens's sustained critique of Benthamite utilitarianism, which itself represents all that is wrong with modern society and the loss of the organic community, figured for him by the community of the Circus, which brings to the downtrodden 'Coketowners' 'not merely amusement, but art'.⁴⁸

But what Leavis misses is the city itself and its people, Williams's 'crowded many-voiced anonymous world of idioms, stories, songs, jokes, parodies, sentiments, caricatures'. In one sense this is understandable, since Coketown seems strangely lacking in such a community, neither known, nor even unknown but knowable, just non-existent. Even so, it is strange that Leavis does not even comment on that startling use of 'poetic' language, in which the machinery of the Industrial Revolution is offered in the imagery of Circus animals, the 'melancholy mad elephants' etc. I am not sure why this should be, perhaps it is uncomfortable for Leavis to see Dickens breaking down, through his imagery, the stark difference Leavis wants to maintain between the moral richness of the Circus performers and the 'moral stagnation' of the Coketowners. It helps to illuminate just how different Williams's approach is, since, for him, the city is *the* central concern of the novel, and further, although like Leavis he relies on short extracts, these are

not used for literary evaluation, but to illustrate rather 'the central preoccupation of the work'.⁴⁹ Thus, *Hard Times* is in *Culture and Society* because it counts as an 'industrial novel', not because it is judged to be 'good' Dickens. Similarly, it is excluded from *The English Novel*, I believe, because it offers a completely inadequate account of the 'city'. Relying on Dickens's brief exposure to Preston and industrial agitation, it fails to turn the alienation of the industrial city (as opposed to the commercial city, London), into a knowable community.

This failure is seen both in the description of Coketown, and in the very limited characterizations of its inhabitants, particularly the working population. Perhaps wisely, Dickens avoids following Blackpool and Co. into the factory, but only there would he be able to test out more fully his ideas about the relationship between a philosophical system (utilitarianism) and an economic formation. For Williams, *Hard Times* is 'an analysis of Industrialism, rather than an experience of it' (a deeply ironic comment given the novel's abandonment of analysis in favour of 'experience'), and as a 'whole response' it is 'more a symptom of the confusion of industrial society than an understanding of it', albeit 'a symptom that is significant and continuing'.⁵⁰ This lack is exposed most crucially in the language, and particularly in the use of dialect. Despite Leavis's praise for Dickens's 'command of word, phrase, rhythm and image', those qualities seem sadly absent in the speech given to Stephen Blackpool, where Dickens makes it apparent how difficult it is to impersonate the speech of an unknown culture.⁵¹

But perhaps a more fundamental concern is the way Dickens's narrative is dominated by the equation of industrial exploitation and utilitarian philosophy; to such an extent that, as Williams notes, many commentators confuse Gradgrind with the mill-owners.⁵² Dickens is therefore unable to acknowledge (and neither is Leavis), the genuine reforming desires of much which goes under the heading of utilitarianism, at the same time recognizing the double bind which welds it to that very economic system it wishes to transform. Effectively, as the *Politics and Letters* interviewers suggest, the industrial, economic mode of production is overdetermined⁵³, squeezing out alternative modes of existence, so that the only possible 'alternative' is the quasi-mystical Circus, which only ever exists, if it 'exists' at all, on the outer fringes of Coketown. This is enough for Leavis, since he would prefer to locate the organic community 'outside' modern industrial society. For him, the Circus can represent a sort of time capsule, in which the values of the organic community are preserved in perpetuity. Sissy then becomes the means through which these timeless virtues are re-introduced into the barren household of Gradgrind, and, through her unswerving loyalty, trust and honesty, a Dickensian 'change of heart' becomes at least possible for some of the Coketowners. For Leavis, Sissy's confrontation of Harthouse after Louisa's panicked return to her father's house signifies her 'quiet victory of disinterested goodness', and is 'wholly convincing'.⁵⁴ As Williams argues, this is all very well, but, whether or not *Hard Times* can be judged an 'aesthetic' success, it is a serious shortcoming that every reference to Parliament or

'Blue books'⁵⁵ sets Reform not in opposition to Exploitation, but as 'two sides of the same coin, Industrialism'.⁵⁶

The analysis by Williams in *Culture and Society* is necessarily limited by the comparative format, but he also produced an article on the novel, reprinted in *Writing in Society*.⁵⁷ Introducing *Dickens: The Novelist*, Leavis had rather optimistically suggested that 'ideologically slanted interpretations' of Dickens were a thing of the past.⁵⁸ Williams confounds this suggestion in 'The Reader in *Hard Times*', offering in the process a much more complex interpretation of the novel than he had previously attempted.

'The Reader', rather like *The English Novel*, clearly differentiates Williams's approach from that of Leavis. 'Traditional' (Leavis's 'key-word' now weighed down with negative signification) literary criticism is seen by Williams as inadequate to the task of dealing with a novel like *Hard Times*, relying as it does on an essentially empiricist approach : 'annotating [its] questions, assembling their instances, evaluating their effect by some imputed criterion of "successful writing", soon reaches its limits, and with *Hard Times* especially soon'.⁵⁹ Instead, contra Leavis, Williams offers both an 'ideological' reading, and an extension, based on his argument that the deep structure of *Hard Times* is effectively *incoherent*. For Williams, perhaps here prefiguring some of the anxieties which will manifest themselves later in *Marxism and Literature*, ideological critique may be able to negotiate successfully 'immovable tensions and contradictions', but does this from a position which assumes a deep level of coherence ('The Reader', p. 169). That *Hard Times* displays tensions and contradictions, Williams evidences by

pointing out that the 'Key-note' (I, 5) offers a version of Coketown where everybody is the same, and 'Time' stands still, whereas the narrative shows us a very varied cast of 'Coketowners' engaged in an unfolding and changing history ('The Reader', pp. 166-67). This in itself tends to undermine the homogenizing tendency of the epithet 'Coketowner', which Leavis is so willing to use, a description which suggests homogeneity rather than difference. But, more significantly for Williams, *Hard Times* is composed from two incompatible ideological positions, which are unevenly held both by Dickens and by many of his intended readers' ('The Reader', p. 169).

These 'incompatible ideological positions' are the same ones Williams refers to in *The English Novel*: indeed, they are two fundamentally opposed ways of understanding our relationship to the world; an idealist understanding that 'some virtues and vices are original and both triumph over and in some cases can change any environment', against a materialist analysis, in which 'environment influences and in some sense determines character' ('The Reader', p. 169). Obviously, as Williams mentions, the first has a much older history than the second, and links directly on to various religious debates. Restricting the examples to the novel, I suppose we can see a general move towards the second, from the innate 'good-heartedness' of a 'Tom Jones', to the tendency in much nineteenth-century fiction towards a much more Darwinian, deterministic vision, exemplified in, though not exhausted by, the web-like structure of *Middlemarch*. This movement then finds its ultimate end in the naturalist novels of Zola and Gissing. Any novel worthy of interest would of course be likely to show versions of both epistemologies, although,

again as Williams suggests, in practice one tends to be favoured over the other, so that 'the deep formative effect [...] is usually quite evident' ('The Reader', p. 170). Thus we have the effect of education on morals ('Bitzer'); the movement from the streets 'all very like one another', to the people 'equally like one another'; but then also characters suffering their environment, but not succumbing to it (Blackpool, Rachael, and, in a slightly different sense, Sissy). We can see here how the underlying ideological formation that produces the novel transgresses any simple difference between 'fact' and 'fancy': Coketown and Circus; and this finds its aesthetic counterpart therefore in the adoption of circus imagery to describe the (apparent) uniformity of city and factory. We confront here a particularly intriguing and complex textual 'political unconscious'. Dickens appears to choose deeply metaphorical language to show that the drive to utilitarian 'fact' is always fragile, and at the mercy of 'fancy' (so that the language of 'mad elephants' re-enacts Sissy's 'invasion' of the Gradgrind household). But his decision to adopt specifically 'circus' imagery also reminds us that it is in zoos and circuses (not factories) that elephants go 'melancholy mad'. Thus Dickens's desire to privilege circus over city, 'fancy' over 'fact' is undermined by the contradictory epistemologies (idealism/materialism) in the novel's political unconscious.

One response to all of this, presumably one of which Leavis would have approved, would be to say that this shows how inadequate any sort of ideological critique is for dealing with anything which approaches the complexity of the real. Life is, as Stephen Blackpool insists, 'aw a muddle',

and incapable of reduction to a simplifying model ('The Reader', p. 171). 'Model' or 'muddle', neither seems ideal as a reading strategy, and this would appear to be confirmed by Williams's insistence that the novel lacks coherence. But at this point, Williams 'rescues' Dickens, by arguing that the end of the novel, in itself a deeply conventional 'realist' tactic, which takes the novel beyond its own present into an uncertain future, and then offers resolutions to these 'uncertainties', offers a different sense of 'coherence', by appealing directly to an implied reader: 'Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not'. This is an intriguing construction, since, as Williams indicates, one 'field' is manifest in the text itself, the other has to be constructed. The assumption, common enough in realist fiction, is that there is so to speak an ideal presence beyond the text, but not one to be sought through a Batesonian contextual criticism. However, Williams now recognizes that this is a paradoxical position to assume, given that we have already seen that within the text itself, another 'ideal', the 'Coketowner', has proved to be a fiction, even within the imaginary 'reality' of Coketown. Similarly, despite the desires of the reception theorists, no actual 'implied' or 'ideal' reader is likely ever to take up the novel: 'any actual reader, among readers contemporary with the text, might be the real-life counterpart of Stephen Blackpool or Thomas Gradgrind, Louisa or Rachael, Sissy Jupe or Mr Sleary' ('The Reader', p. 173). If then, as Williams suggests, Dickens 'is looking for a general effect', such effect can only be identified by investigating 'the social relations of its specific composition' ('The Reader', p. 172). But what can this be, given that

the appeal to action on the part of his 'dear reader' would seem to be confounded by the fact that, to use our previous terminology, this particular 'knowable community' seems inherently unstable and contradictory? Or, to put it another way, how can Dickens expect his 'reader' to identify with the structure of feeling, given that that reader is just as likely to be a Bounderby as a Blackpool?

The answer to this, at least the one Williams offers, is indicated by those very names, since a further level of 'contradiction' or 'incoherence' can be recognized in the fact that the characters of the novel seem to refuse to adopt those 'typical' characteristics which tend to be privileged in the realist text. As Williams suggests, *Hard Times* actually appears to alienate all potential readers, in that it condemns a wide range of social institutions, including churches and chapels, parliament and trades unions, schools and workplaces. But this is mediated through the selection of individuals who are atypical, and can therefore be distanced from any particular reader, whatever that person's actual relationship to the fictional representation:

All the fundamental economic and political conflicts are then mediated in a specific mode. Capitalist employer confronts worker, but as a particularized Bounderby (from whom many employers could distance themselves) against the humble Blackpool, himself distanced from the anonymous workers led (misled) by Slackbridge. Capitalist economics is attacked, but in so close an association with philosophical radicalism that what is left to oppose it (given the other general exclusions) is not

easily generally identified, in ways that might divide the composed ideal reader ('The Reader', pp. 173-74).

Hence, the text, in pointing towards an 'ideal reader', manages to override any particular ideological partisanship by allowing any actual reader to distance himself from any character who initially seems similar. All this 'typical' reader has to display is a suitable mix of 'sympathy, indignation [and] concern', and, unlike the narrator, whose action is implicit within the text, the field of action of the reader is 'left undefined, within the composed response, since specifications would fracture his ideal composition' ('The Reader', pp. 173-74). This almost concludes Williams's analysis, and it has to be acknowledged that, rather like the general work on Dickens in *The English Novel*, it represents a much more positive response to Dickens than that given in *Culture and Society*. It needs to be stressed here I think, that the essay risks over-valuing the novel, in a curious replaying of Leavis's own privileging technique. Williams does not select *Hard Times* because of its apparent canonical attributes, and even starts by recognizing its manifest contradictions. But his own analysis then rehabilitates the text, turning certain key 'faults', in particular with regard to the characters of Bounderby and Blackpool, into a textual strategy designed to co-opt the largest possible audience to the overarching social argument. We might, by analogy, then see this strategy as akin to some of those more overt 'ideological' readings of structuralist Marxism, from which Williams will want to distance himself, in which the discovery of 'absences' and 'silences' is not the key to adverse

criticism but to celebration, as the text, under suitable critical 'therapy', successfully reveals its ideological genesis.⁶⁰ Thus, whether the novel is criticised for its faulty content, or, as the *Politics and Letters* interviewers had done, for offering 'an overtotalization of the system - essentially the brute early industrial capitalist mode of production'⁶¹, Williams can conclude by arguing that it 'is then a moment, an ideal moment, of a generalized unease' ('The Reader', p. 74). He just manages to avoid turning *Hard Times* into a Leavisian masterpiece by emphasising its uncertainties, and by arguing that it is the expression of a structure of feeling, rather than an ideology. Presumably what he means is that the competing ideological positions mentioned earlier represent a sort of transitional structure which exists before the later more generalized acceptance of social explanations for individual behaviour, as he explains it in *Marxism and Literature*.⁶²

5. 'Taking the Housetops Off' - *Dombey and Son*

We can develop this, and compare once more the 'organic' criticism of Leavis with the 'knowable' criticism of Williams, by looking briefly at their treatment of another Dickens' novel, *Dombey and Son*. In *The Great Tradition*, Leavis had rejected Dickens, with the exception of *Hard Times*, because it is essentially not adult enough. He turns this argument back against himself in *Dickens*, arguing that Dickens was rejected because it was associated in his mind with his own childhood, and being read aloud to by his father.⁶³ *Dickens* represents something of a Leavisian personal 'revaluation'. Whereas earlier, only *Hard Times* offered a 'comprehensive vision', now,

compared say with *Little Dorrit*, which gives ‘something like a comprehensive report on Victorian England’, *Hard Times* is a novel of ‘comparative simplicity’. Previously, the ‘simplicity’ of *Hard Times*, which laid bare its structure, was a positive attribute, now it shows its relative failure (*Dickens*, p. 228). I want to argue that, by 1970, we can again identify certain characteristics shared by Williams and Leavis, but that, by this time, any influence is by Williams on Leavis, rather than in the opposite direction. Leavis’s analysis of *Dombey and Son* is traditional enough, concentrating on the theme of pride, albeit arguing that ‘pride’ functions differently in the earlier and later parts of the novel. And, once again, its success is measured in poetic terms, in direct comparison with the Shakespearian paradigm (*Dickens*, p. 29). Much of the language of his criticism is by now familiar: ‘we respond as to the fulness of immediately felt life [...] the whole passage is consummate in its ironic trenchancy and its natural truth’ (*Dickens*, pp. 3 and 9).

But there is evidence, I believe, of a different way of thinking about the Dickensian novel. I have suggested that one reason Williams leaves *Hard Times* out of *The English Novel* is because, for once, Dickens fails to concentrate on an urban environment which represents a knowable community, so that the structure of feeling is one based on an incoherent understanding of society. This is unlikely to be a problem with *Dombey and Son*, firmly based in Dickens’s London. Indeed, I think it is reasonable to suggest that, for a modern reader, there is almost an over-identification between the actual city of the mid-nineteenth century, and our imaginative construct of it, dominated by Dickens’s novels. In some ways, there is an

irony in this, since, as Leavis emphasizes, Dickens's London is often the London portrayed by William Hogarth in the previous century (*Dickens*, p. 26). This London, as Dickens stresses in the preface to *Oliver Twist*, is Hogarth's London of the 'miserable reality' of low life, so evocatively portrayed in *The Harlot's Progress*, *Gin Lane*, and *Southwark Fair*. As such, it is a London only just undergoing the dramatic changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. *Dombey and Son* then represents a definite turning away from this pre-industrial vision, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say it enacts the transition to a fully 'industrialised' city, exemplified by the building of the railway. Both Leavis and Williams concentrate on the way the railway is used. For Leavis, perhaps surprisingly, the organic community is not invoked, and that intense technological determinism we saw earlier appears to have been suppressed. Contrasting the treatment of the urban working-classes in *Hard Times* and *Dombey and Son*, Leavis argues that Dickens is able to offer a positive identification in the latter, between the 'titanism and romantic sublimity' of the railway and the 'human betterment' of the working-class, exemplified by Mr Toodle, the engine stoker (*Dickens*, p. 11). This is obviously a rather different Leavisian stance from before, effectively acknowledging a sort of structure of feeling linking the fictional representation of the railway, and the Toodle family, unquestioningly 'just a working-class family belonging to the workaday Victorian world' (*Dickens*, pp. 10-11). There are though problems with this analysis, perhaps suggested by Leavis's confidence about the representative value of the Toodles, and it is

developed with the example Leavis gives of Dickens being ‘profoundly impressed by the energy and the promise’ of the railway:

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress, and, from the very core of all this dire disorder trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilization and improvement.

(Dickens, p. 11)

Leavis summarises this by writing that Dickens ‘sees the railway as the triumphant manifestation of beneficent energy’ (*Dickens*, p. 11). I suppose, taken out of its literary context like this, the passage could be read in a clearly positive way, although the ‘old’ Leavis would probably be more wary of easily equating ‘improvement’ with ‘civilization’. The problem is, this short paragraph follows a much longer one, from chapter six of the novel, in which the building of the railroad is described using the language of earthquakes, as the narrator describes the devastation caused to local communities as whole streets are removed. The paragraph quoted by Leavis thus functions as a typical example of Dickens’s ironic understatement, summarising what has come before by offering what looks like its opposite, the comedy emphasized by that ‘in short’ which introduces the paragraph. In fact, the effect of the railway on the community (one clearly known to Dickens, based as it is on the work carried out in Camden during the construction of the Euston to Birmingham line, started in 1834)⁶⁴, is handled twice, once in chapter six, and then in chapter fifteen; the narrative gap mimicking the time scale of the

changes made. *Dombey and Son*, much more clearly than *Hard Times*, gives us the rapid development of the new urban environment and its complex effects, and it is this which interests Williams in *The English Novel*.

We saw, in 'Culture is Ordinary', how Raymond Williams tried to redefine the limits put around the word 'culture', and also imply that the results of economic power and scientific invention did not necessarily have to be rejected. In *The English Novel* he argues that Dickens, given his intimate relationship to the city, was able to actualize in his fiction something 'uniquely capable of realising a new kind of reality - just because he shared with the new urban popular culture certain decisive experiences and responses' (*EN*, pp. 31-32). At one level, this is straightforward - the city is shown as producing atomisation, people ignore each other, there is no communication, and apparent chaos. To an observer, it is then a city which is meaningless and unknowable, Wordsworth's 'Babel din / The endless stream of men and moving things / From hour to hour the illimitable walk / Still among streets'.⁶⁵ But this is not Coketown, London is 'knowable', and Dickens is able to develop a fictional method which both emphasizes the new structure of feeling, and shows how humans adapt to it and once more come to live within it, so that 'unknown and unacknowledged relationships, profound and decisive connections, definite and committing recognitions and avowals are as it were forced into consciousness' (*EN*, p. 33). A similar point is made by Williams in *Politics and Letters*, where he explains the 'knowable community' by arguing that Dickens had to 'devise different fictional strategies for a much more complex urban world [...] a community unknowable in terms of manifest

experience', so that a central issue in *The English Novel* is actually the notion of the *unknowable community* and its fictional representation.⁶⁶

We have already seen how Dickens, as narrator, contributes to this by 'taking the housetops off'. Similarly, through the further analysis of the railway-building, he forces us to realise that that sense of people permanently alienated from their labour, so powerful in *Hard Times*, is not the whole story. In this more subtle epistemology the continuing sense of a relationship between man and his environment, 'his making, his manufacture, his interpretation' (*EN*, p. 40), is explored. Bridges which once went nowhere now lead to 'villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks'. Indeed, the whole passage from chapter fifteen is one dominated as much by people as by city and railway: people now interacting with each other, and with the new forms of living which the changed environment has produced. The railway has ceased to be a symbol only of threat, as it still will be in Eliot's *Middlemarch* say, or Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*, and this is so, I believe, because the railway functions as evidence of the urban, so that it can transform London in a positive way, seemingly impossible for the more rural settings of the two novels mentioned. But despite this 'resource of hope', Williams is quick to recognize that such positive evaluation is usually close also to its opposite:

[I]n this dramatic enactment Dickens is responding to the real contradictions - the power for life or death; for disintegration, order and false order - of the new social and economic forces of his time.

His concern always was to keep human recognition and human

kindness alive, through these unprecedented changes and within this unrecognisably altered landscape (*EN*, p. 44).

We can now equate this 'transitional' vision of the railway, with the idea used by Williams earlier, of a gradual movement away from viewing society as some sort of convenient backdrop in front of which a drama of vice and virtue is played out, to one where there is more of a causal relationship between society and personal morals. In effect, Dickens, in *Dombey and Son*, represents an advance in the novel, a 'creative intervention', which allows us to become aware of a new structure of feeling, in which 'an individual moral question has become a social question' (*EN*, p. 48).

Dickens has to rely on a form of 'magic' to reveal this new structure (taking the rooftops off), because in 'reality' ideology has made it increasingly impossible for individuals to properly understand their inter-relationships, or their relationship to the mode of production. This seems appropriate, given that 'creativity' is not just centred on the aesthetic, but also on that new technological advance which is always the visible by-product of Victorian capitalism. Thus, magic and miracle, usually confined to art and religion, find their realization too in the world of the railways and the cities. This is what Williams emphasises as he completes his analysis of the culture of the 1840s in *The Long Revolution*:

We cannot understand any period of the Industrial Revolution if we fail to recognize the real miracle that was being worked, by human

skill and effort. Again and again, even by critics of the society, the excitement of this extraordinary release of man's powers was acknowledged and shared. The society could not have been acceptable to anybody, without that. 'These are our poems', Carlyle said in 1842, looking at one of the new locomotives, and this element, now so easily overlooked, is central to the whole culture.⁶⁷

One last point needs to be discussed before we can move on from Williams's 'novel' criticism. I have argued that Dickens is selected in *The English Novel* predominately because he writes of the city, a new 'knowable community', and that *Hard Times* is excluded because it fails the test. Dickens reveals there that he is trying to work with a structure of feeling which is really beyond his knowledge, and this manifests itself most obviously in his difficulties with the use of dialect. Williams is sensitive to the frequent failure of writers to write in an idiom close to the 'customary speech' of their intended readers, which leads to another form of alienation. Writing not just for, but from within, a popular culture, Dickens is generally able to bridge this gap, so that the dominant 'omniscient' authorial voice epitomised by the narrator of a 'classic realist text' like *Middlemarch* is frequently mediated by other voices in ways which diminish the obvious gap between 'educated' and 'customary' speech.⁶⁸ This may be one reason why Williams, so often a rather Lukácsian privileger of the realist novel, can promote Joyce in a way impossible for Leavis. Joyce 'speaks' for the city of Dublin in the early-twentieth century, just as Dickens had done for the London of the mid-

nineteenth century. As Dickens had to search for a suitable language, so to does Joyce, to speak and write of a more fragmented, chaotic, unconnected, potentially unknowable community. Here, the structure of feeling is pre-eminently a structure of language, one where the alienated, 'educated' language of an omniscient narrator rapidly gives way to the customary speech of the street, the pub and the bedroom.:

[I]t is a paradox that in *Ulysses*, through its patterns of loss and frustration, there is not only search but discovery: of an ordinary language, heard more clearly than anywhere in the realist novel before it; a positive flow of that wider human speech which has been screened and strained by the prevailing social conventions: conventions of separation, reduction, in the actual history. The greatness of *Ulysses* is this community of speech (*EN*, pp. 167-68).

The speech - of Molly, or Leopold Bloom, or Stephen, then takes the place of the characters themselves. Like them, it passes by without recognition, voices not so much competing as just avoiding one another, until a sense of some new community, a sort of family based not on biology but on words - myth and language games, becomes known. Language, fundamental to any cultural analysis, is here sedimented, materialized, made not just the medium but the message too.

Notes and References

- ¹ Williams chooses Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. See: Raymond Williams, *Reading and Criticism* (London: Frederick Muller, 1950), pp. 75-86.
- ² F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948; new edn. 1973). Lawrence's name is notable here by its absence, and, indeed, no chapter is devoted to him. But he is included in the 'greats' at the end of the introductory essay (p. 27).
- ³ *The Great Tradition*, pp. 25-26.
- ⁴ F.R. Leavis, 'Joyce and "The Revolution of the Word"', *Scrutiny*, 2 (1933), 193-201.
- ⁵ 'Joyce and "The Revolution of the Word"', p. 197 (emphasis added).
- ⁶ E.g., in *Ulysses*, Stephen's careful explanation of why Shakespeare can be considered the 'father of all his race', is followed by this from Buck Mulligan: 'Himself his own father, Sonmulligan told himself. Wait. I am big with child. I have an unborn child in my brain. Pallas Athena! A play! The play's the thing! Let me parturiate!', *Ulysses* [1922], the corrected text, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986; repr. 1987), p. 171. Stephen's pretensions were similarly pricked in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen's famous estimation of the artist, who 'like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails'; is immediately followed by Lynch's 'Trying to refine them also out of existence', *A Portrait of the*

Artist as a Young Man [1916] (London: Panther, 1977; repr. 1985), pp. 194-95.

⁷ 'Joyce and "The Revolution of the Word"', p. 194.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199. Leavis is sensitive to his very 'agricultural' language here: 'the commonplace metaphor is too apt to be rejected' (*ibid.*, p. 199). For Williams on 'culture' and its derivatives, see his 'Postscript' to *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961; repr. 1979), pp. 324-25; and c.f. the entry for 'culture' in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976; repr. 1989), pp. 87-93.

¹¹ 'Joyce and "The Revolution of the Word"', p. 200.

¹² E.g.: '[I]f you took Joyce for a major creative writer, then, like Mr Eliot, you had no use for Lawrence, and if you judged Lawrence a great writer, then you could hardly take a sustained interest in Joyce', F.R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955; repr. 1967), p. 10.

We might reformulate this distinction, using the earlier references to Joyce's 'Stephen', into a debate about methods of producing fictional 'impersonality' through formal means. Lawrence would then be preferred for his intensely 'personal' authorial voice, actually another version of 'impersonality' but this time from within the textual subject. This point is made by Michael Bell in *F.R. Leavis* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 64; although, as he goes on to

remind us, this 'opposition' is 'in some respects more apparent than real. There comes a point at which the specific metaphors drop away; the fundamental necessity for authorial impersonality, considered as a general truth, is more essential than the vehicles it, perhaps arbitrarily, employs' (p. 65).

¹³ Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 45.

¹⁴ See: *Culture and Society*, p. 200, f.n.; and c.f. *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, p. 15.

¹⁶ *The Great Tradition*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Catherine Belsey, 'Re-reading the Great Tradition', in *Re-Reading English*, ed. by Peter Widdowson (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 121-35 (p. 122).

¹⁸ Alan O'Connor, *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 69.

¹⁹ *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970; London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 11 [hereafter, references are given within the text as 'EN, page number'].

²⁰ Williams, 'The Knowable Community in George Eliot's Novels', *Novel*, 2 (1969), 255-68 (p. 255).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²² I have obviously only glanced at Bloom here, to make the point. For a full and sophisticated version of this particular Freudian 'revisionism' see: Harold

Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

²³ *Politics and Letters*, p. 244.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245. Williams makes amends for this 'lapse' later, see: 'The Fiction of Reform', orig. in *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 March 1977; repr. in *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 142-49.

²⁵ Ivar Alastair Watson, 'Who's for Lunch with Leavis?', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 July 1995, pp. 14-15 (p. 15).

²⁶ *Keywords*, p. 76. This is in 1976. Perhaps, in 1996, Williams might have to amend this, given the problems over phrases like 'care in the community'.

²⁷ *Crime and Punishment*, 1866. *Anna Karenina*, 1873-77. David Lodge's 'helpful' note to his *Nice Work* (London: Penguin, 1989), seems apposite here: 'Rummidge is an imaginary city, with imaginary universities and imaginary factories, inhabited by imaginary people, which occupies, for the purposes of fiction, the space where Birmingham is to be found on maps of the so-called real world.'

²⁸ Obviously this comment assumes that we understand 'urban' and 'rural' as they were used in the 1851 census, which shows the urban population as 54% of the total in 1851. See: Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* [1971] (London: Fontana, 1979; 1987), p. 24.

²⁹ Bakhtin is one of those theorists who Williams takes up rather ahead of the critical orthodoxy, and is certainly a strong influence on the development of

cultural materialism. See particularly the later chapter on Williams's relationship to another of the 'Bakhtin' school, V.N. Volosinov.

³⁰ *Reading and Criticism*, p. 19.

³¹ Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968; London: Hogarth Press, 1987); *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961; London: Penguin, 1965; 1980). I have chosen to deal with these in 'reverse' historical order, because *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* is the revised edition of *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952; rev. edn Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). The phrase 'structure of feeling' does not appear in the earlier work, but Williams does write of 'the pattern or the structure of experience' and the 'context of feeling' (pp. 24-26). He also relates this to dramatic 'convention' in a similar way to that used in the later work.

³² I'm not sure this sensitivity to change in Williams's use of key terms is always adequately recognised. David Simpson, for instance, in an otherwise useful summary of structures of feeling, takes issue with Williams for the term's lack of stability. See: David Simpson, 'Raymond Williams: Feeling for Structures, Voicing "History"', *Social Text*, 30 (1992), 9-26.

³³ *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, p. 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁵ *The Long Revolution*, pp. 64-65 (emphasis in original).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65. In response to questioning, Williams stresses that he is thinking of the emergent generation of artists etc. with a median age of 30, i.e. the

group most likely to be actively contributing to a new structure of feeling. This gets around the problem that, at any one time, there will be roughly three 'active' generations, but only by adopting a very artificial device (See: *Politics and Letters*, pp. 161-62).

³⁷ *The Long Revolution*, p. 65.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁹ See: *Politics and Letters*, pp. 168-70.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴² F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, *Dickens: The Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970).

⁴³ *The Great Tradition*, p. 19. In a footnote to the new edition of 1960, obviously looking forward to *Dickens*, he recognizes how his own 'childhood memories' have clouded his judgement.

⁴⁴ *The Great Tradition*, pp. 20, 227-28.

⁴⁵ F.R. Leavis, 'The Novel as Dramatic Poem: I, *Hard Times*', *Scrutiny*, 14 (1947), 185-203. The series continued with G.D. Klingopulos on *Wuthering Heights*, and then a long series, through the late 1940s and early 1950s, all by Leavis, first on *The Europeans*, and then several devoted to various novels by Lawrence, mainly in multi-part analyses (See *Scrutiny* 17 and 18).

⁴⁶ Michael Bell, *F.R. Leavis*, p. 122. There are obviously difficulties with this approach, which looks so willing to ignore real differences between 'novels', 'poems' and 'drama', and I would suggest Leavis's approach is based more

on his desire to reduce the novel back into its more manageable 'poetic' form, linked to an insistence on the inherent superiority of poetry to fiction. Other writers have tried a similar tactic, for somewhat different reasons: Henry Fielding parodically challenges the generic distinctions by describing *Joseph Andrews* as a 'comic epic poem in prose'; the later Bakhtin opposes Leavis's generic hierarchy by arguing in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981; 1990) that the novel 'devours' all other genres, becoming a sort of 'super genre' in the process. In passing, Bell notes that despite Leavis's frequent privileging of Shakespeare, his writing on Shakespeare (specifically as *drama*) is inferior to his work on poetry or prose fiction (p. 128).

⁴⁷ *The Great Tradition*, pp. 234, 242 and 246 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁴⁹ *Politics and Letters*, p. 265.

⁵⁰ *Culture and Society*, pp. 104 and 107.

⁵¹ The comparison with Elizabeth Gaskell is relevant here, since she is another novelist Leavis is fairly dismissive about. But, as David Craig mentions in the Penguin edition of *Hard Times*, she is much better at reproducing the Lancashire dialect, benefiting from her 'many years in Manchester and the help of her husband, a classical scholar whose "Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect" were printed in the fifth edition of *Mary Barton*', *Hard Times* [1854] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969; repr. 1986), note 21, p. 325.

⁵² *Culture and Society*, p. 105.

⁵³ *Politics and Letters*, p. 253.

⁵⁴ *The Great Tradition*, p. 235. Intriguingly, this is one of the *very* few places where there is an amendment in the version of the chapter in *Dickens: The Novelist*. In the later work, instead of: 'The quiet victory of disinterested goodness is wholly convincing', we get the slight qualification of: 'The victory of disinterestedness is convincing enough' (*Dickens*, p. 196).

⁵⁵ Re-reading *Hard Times*, it still seems to me that Dickens's account is far too one-sided to be genuinely helpful. But it has to be acknowledged that the work of marxist historians like E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm has tended to challenge the simple equation between 'Blue books' and reform. For discussion of this point see David Craig's useful note to the Penguin edition: note 26, pp. 327-28.

⁵⁶ *Culture and Society*, pp. 105-06.

⁵⁷ Raymond Williams, 'The Reader in *Hard Times*, orig. in *Contrasts*, ed. by G. Storey (n.p.: n.b, n.d.); repr. in Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 166-74.

⁵⁸ *Dickens*, p. xiii.

⁵⁹ 'The Reader in *Hard Times*', p. 168 [hereafter, references are given within the text as 'The Reader', page number].

⁶⁰ See e.g. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* [1966] (London: Routledge, 1978; repr. 1986), especially chapter 15.

⁶¹ *Politics and Letters*, p. 253.

⁶² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; repr. 1989), p. 134.

⁶³ Leavis, *Dickens*, p. 1 (hereafter, references are given within the text as '*Dickens*, page number').

⁶⁴ See: Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* [1848], ed. by Peter Fairclough (London: Penguin, 1970; repr. 1988), chapter 6, note 2, pp. 982-83.

⁶⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* [1805], VII, lines 157-60.

⁶⁶ *Politics and Letters*, p. 247.

⁶⁷ *The Long Revolution*, p. 88.

⁶⁸ This is an extension of the points made by Williams in *Politics and Letters*, p. 268.

**The Limits of Cultural Materialism:
Base and Superstructure in Terry Eagleton**

Williams's cultural materialism appears to develop out of a complex and developing relationship between the discipline of 'close-reading', a more general concern with the 'definition' of culture and our relationship to it (most particularly in its historical context), and the work of materialist critics, specifically those working within the discipline summarised as 'Marxism'. Up until now, though - that is until around the time of the publication of *The Country and the City*, the last of these appears to have been sidelined by Williams, as he has attempted to negotiate a personal path of development which maintains his central belief in socialism, but remains troubled by the work of Marxist critics, and particularly by those developments, such as 'Zhdanovism' which seek to impose a cultural model reliant on a simple reflectionist relationship between culture and production. In the 1970s though, just at the time, that is, when Western Marxism was being transformed by the new developments coming out of Europe, in particular structuralism (Althusser and his co-thinkers like Macherey and Balibar then the 'prime movers'), Williams decided it was time to confront much more directly his relationship to Marx, and to attempt to produce a more fully-defined cultural materialism.

The major result was the publication, in 1977, of *Marxism and Literature*.¹ But four years earlier, Williams initiated this shift of emphasis

with an article in *New Left Review*, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory'² Taking as his starting point one of the central structural metaphors in Marxist theory, and one already the subject of a long history of debate, Williams's radical rewriting of the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure', including redefinition of the terms themselves, opened up another series of debates over his own relationship to Marxism. The significance of this is indicated by Terry Eagleton's decision, sixteen years later, to choose as his contribution to a set of essays dedicated to Williams, another investigation of the problem, including what he saw as the mistakes in Williams's own analysis.³

This chapter, acknowledging that the problem has not gone away, takes as its starting point Williams's theoretical position as explained in the 'Base and Superstructure' essay and expanded in *Marxism and Literature*, and reads it in the light of Eagleton's critique. This will help to indicate the historical variability of the Base and Superstructure metaphor, and, in particular, how its value may be threatened by deconstructive criticism. Williams's selective reading and interpretation of Marx and Engels then leads on to a re-appraisal of their own understanding of the position, to show that a lot of the problems with the model have been caused by an overly mechanistic reading of the early works, and a refusal to recognise the usefulness of Marx's and particularly Engels's own explanations of their positions. The third part of the chapter opens up the analysis, using in particular Bertell Ollman's work on Marxism as a theory of internal relations, and the work of Philip Corrigan and others on 'State formation' to illuminate further the

complex, historically contingent relationship between evolving relations of production, and the 'superstructural' forms developing out of them. Finally, I will return briefly to Williams's own work, and specifically his reply to challenges made to his position in the *Politics and Letters* interviews⁴ to see how he too responds more flexibly to the complexities of the model; and how his notion of 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' tries to 'flex' the model to cope with changing relationships, while holding on ultimately to a notion of determination.

1. 'Frère Jacques': Marxism and the Politics of Deconstruction

Eagleton begins, not with a direct response to Williams's article, but with a more general analysis of recent received opinion on the Marxist model:

Few doctrines of classical Marxism have fallen into greater disrepute than the 'base/superstructure' model. However much the model may be refined and sophisticated, and however much mediation and dialectical interaction may be inserted between its twin terms, this whole binary opposition would seem to remain stubbornly reductive and mechanistic (*RWCP*, p. 165).

This, to paraphrase Raymond Williams, is not where we might choose to begin.⁵ It would be more convenient to take the model as a given, and then test Williams's reformulation of it, and Eagleton's critique. However, Eagleton's apparent unease at the 'bad press' such a fundamental Marxist

conceptual complex has had, requires me to consider first his own anxieties, before those of Williams.

Eagleton's essay is unusually elusive, in that he does not directly reference the names and sources of his concerns (a more common criticism, of course, of Williams, notorious for his lack of footnotes and other 'scholarly apparatus'). But it is easy enough to deduce from the argument itself what his particular targets are. A clue is available in his categorising the base and superstructure metaphor as a 'binary opposition', and is reinforced by his later comments:

Is [the base/superstructure model] not a particularly notorious instance of what contemporary post structuralism would brand as a 'metaphysical' mode of thought, in which a single determining essence or transcendental principle is arbitrarily isolated from the complex textuality of historical existence and elevated to some theologically privileged position (*RWCP*, p. 165, emphasis in original)?

Much of this is typical Eagletonian irony: in particular, he would not hold to an understanding of 'base/superstructure' as 'essence' or 'transcendental principle' outside historical contingency, although that is how the model has often been perceived (by 'Marxists' as well as their opponents). But that concern with transcendental signifieds and binary oppositions, and the critique of metaphysics, of being and presence, suggests that the ghostly presence of 'Frère Jacques', M. Derrida, hovers behind Eagleton as he writes this. It is as

if the combined forces of textual criticism, represented by the 'anti-representationalism' of Richard Rorty, and postmodernism's insistent flight from the real⁶, together with more tangible displays of the failure of Euro-communism and our own country's resistance to even a watered-down version of socialism, together make post-structuralism's potential onslaught on classical Marxism's central formulation a more pressing problem than might otherwise seem likely. Keen as Eagleton is to evaluate Williams's formulation, he has to start by convincing us that there is any point to holding on to such a notion in the first place. Having raised the question, it remains for me to look again at Derrida's deconstruction, and decide whether or not the threat is a real one, before returning to Eagleton's arguments in favour of the model.

In 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', Jacques Derrida argues that making the 'passage beyond philosophy' consists 'not in turning the page of philosophy (which usually amounts to philosophising badly), but in continuing to read philosophers *in a certain way*'.⁷ We must now read Derrida in a certain way, which, I will suggest, removes the problem Eagleton is concerned with, that is the deconstruction of the binary opposition between 'base' and 'superstructure'. In his reading of Claude Levi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Derrida recognizes the inherent potential of any binary opposition to deconstruct itself, using the example of the incest taboo, which Levi-Strauss sees as instituting a transition from 'nature' to 'culture', effectively destroying the sense of them remaining as pure opposites (their 'mutual exclusivity').

Briefly, Levi-Strauss defines everything which has a universal character as 'natural', and everything 'subject to a norm' (i.e. not of a universal form) as cultural. As he investigates the incidence of the incest prohibition in various cultures, he recognizes what he describes as a 'scandal'. Levi-Strauss argues that:

[The prohibition of incest] presents, without the slightest ambiguity, and inseparably combines, the two characteristics in which we recognize the conflicting features of two mutually exclusive orders. It constitutes a rule, but a rule which, alone among all the social rules, possesses at the same time a universal character.⁸

Levi-Strauss's arguments have been the subject of much anthropological dispute. For Derrida, the 'scandal' exists not in the incidence of the incest prohibition, but rather 'within a system of concepts which accredits the difference between nature and culture'. Either the incest prohibition shows how fragile the simple opposition assumed between nature and culture really is, or else it exists outside this domain. This metaphysical paradox, obviously a product of philosophical problems concerning language itself, allows Derrida to press a more generalizing conclusion:

This example, too cursorily examined, is only one among many others, but nevertheless it already shows that language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.⁹

It is here surely that Eagleton senses the potential for a deconstruction of the base/superstructure opposition. Derrida develops his argument by recognizing language as a finite field open to an infinity of substitutions: a 'movement of play' across a field permanently de-centred:

This movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a centre or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. [...] The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified.¹⁰

In the particular example examined, culture possesses the supplement (its universal nature normally present only in nature) which fills the lack in nature.¹¹ Before returning to the debate between Eagleton and Williams, two points need to be considered. First, even in a case such as nature/culture, deconstruction of the binary opposition does not necessarily result in an abandonment of the model. In Levi-Strauss's case, Derrida recognizes and seems to accept as valid, that, as 'bricoleur' (someone who uses 'the means at hand'), Levi-Strauss, while accepting the 'ontological nonvalue' of the concept, can still work with the nature/culture opposition as a methodological tool.¹² Second, Derrida ends his essay by stressing that there are always 'two interpretations of interpretation'. True, his sensuous writing gives a certain

privilege to the deconstructive option, the '*seminal* adventure of the trace'. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the alternative interpretation (Levi-Strauss's bricolage), 'share[s] the field which we call [...] the social sciences'.¹³

Given then that Derrida's deconstruction does not *have to* force the undoing of the binary opposition between base and superstructure, Eagleton's nervousness seems surprising; even more so when we find that in his own reading of Derrida, he appears to conform to Derrida's 'certain way'. Indeed, in 'Frère Jacques: The Politics of Deconstruction', Eagleton goes so far as to recognize Derrida as 'evidently some kind of Marxist sympathizer' (what kind he leaves open).¹⁴ In the same essay, Eagleton argues that there is 'a left- and right wing of American deconstruction', and he clearly places Derrida on the left. In another essay in the same anthology, he berates Perry Anderson for ignoring the 'threat' posed to Marxism by the challenges of structuralism and post-structuralism, and again highlights what he sees as the two 'wings':

Anderson's polemic quite fails to distinguish between 'left' and 'right' deconstruction - between those for whom the theory merely offers an opportunity for hermetic textualism and self-indulgent word-play, and those who have discerned in it [...] political possibilities.¹⁵

Eagleton clearly defends Derrida against the charge that, like some of his 'less canny acolytes, on both sides of the Atlantic', he has given himself up absolutely to the sway of the signifier, and unlimited semiosis:

Derrida himself has specifically defended the place of authorial intentionality in discourse, acknowledged the determinate forces of productive matrix and historical conditions in the construction of meaning, and firmly denied that he is a pluralist.¹⁶

It now seems more clear why Eagleton is so sensitive to the claims of post-structuralism. It is not so much Derrida and his philosophy of deconstruction which is the problem, but the Derrida industry and 'deconstructionism'; a team of 'acolytes' all too ready to deconstruct at the drop of a metaphysical hat, depressingly certain (if such a thing as certainty can be tolerated here) that there is 'nothing outside of the text'. Now, this could reasonably be argued to be nothing more than a straw target, hardly worthy of Eagleton's concern. Except that straw targets have an irritating habit of resisting the arrows of critique. Eagleton may be right to be concerned about the growing challenges to the philosophy of Marxism.¹⁷

However, in 'Base and Superstructure', Eagleton adroitly exposes the more serious flaws in deconstruction's desire to deny 'opposition' (and therefore determination). Pointing out that there is an inherent dogmatism in arguing that 'the positing of *any* privileged cause in any situation is automatically idealist', he acknowledges nevertheless that the claim that such a notion can be applied to something as immense and complex as 'history' has 'a kind of implausible ring to it, which forces us to ask why anyone would want to say such a strange sort of thing in the first place' (*RWCP*, p. 166).

But the reason for such a 'strange' suggestion is not difficult to discover. Despite history's *apparent* plurality and heterogeneity, it is in fact, 'as Mr Ford wisely commented, bunk, or at least the same old tedious story' (*RWCP*, p. 167). In other words, we remain within not 'history', but rather Marx's notion of 'pre-history', a realm of necessity which displays not change and difference but monotony and repetition. Obviously this less fluid and shifting model is one much more amenable to a model like base/superstructure. If Marx is right, and 'history' to date has been marked by a series of moves which seem to repeat themselves, then presumably this must be because it is working to a certain underlying logic, and that logic may well be analysable using the base/superstructure model of determinacy.

2. Materializing Culture/Cultural Materialism

In our attempt to account for Williams's formulation of Marxism, and Eagleton's critique, it may be a useful first move to note Eagleton's definition of the 'specificity' of Marxism as he saw it in the mid 1980s:

The specificity of Marxism is in my view at least twofold: it lies, first, in its claim that material production is the ultimately determinant factor of social existence, and, secondly, that the class struggle is the central dynamic of historical development. I am tempted to add a third distinguishing feature, one which perhaps belongs more properly to Marxism-Leninism, and which concerns the *revolutionary* nature of

the doctrine: marxism is among other things a theory and practice of political *insurrection*.¹⁸

Note in passing, that Eagleton is quick to offer a third definition to his first two, one which recognizes that Marxism involves theory *and* practice; and also conforms to Marx's eleventh of his 'Theses on Feuerbach': 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it'.¹⁹ Holding on to this, I am in a position to deal more specifically with the two 'Base and Superstructure' essays, while recognizing that these do not represent, for either theorist, the limits of their concerns with the model.

Williams's 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', takes as its starting point Marx's classic definition of Marxist theoretical practice:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that

determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.²⁰

There are a number of things worth considering about this extract. First, the 'real foundation' (i.e. 'base') consists of a totality of 'relations of production' which constitutes the 'economic structure of society'. These relations are the relations of 'real' men, and they are historically defined by applying to 'a given stage in the development of their material forces of production'. This unravelling of Marx's formulation is important, because most versions of 'vulgar Marxism' ignore the part human beings and their history play in the formulation. Having defined the base, Marx then appears here to offer two alternative versions of the superstructure: either it consists of 'a legal and political superstructure' together with their corresponding 'definite forms of social consciousness'; or it is made up of 'the general process of social, political and intellectual life'. Further, we are then offered yet another binary opposition, in Marx's famous dictum that 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'. As Eagleton rightly points out, these two pairs are very different objects, and only the first requires the believer in it to be a Marxist:

The case that social being determines consciousness is an ontological doctrine, consequent upon the material structure of the human body, the material nature of its environment, the necessity for a mediatory labour between the two, and the fact that consciousness is therefore

always in the first place, as Marx says elsewhere, 'practical' consciousness. That this is not the same kind of claim as that made by the base/superstructure metaphor is evident in the fact that one does not need to be an historical materialist to support it (*RWCP*, p. 172).

Eagleton notes also that Williams is rare among Marxian thinkers in recognizing this difference at the start of his 'Base and Superstructure' essay, making clear his unease about the base/superstructure model which 'with its figurative element, with its suggestion of a fixed and definite spatial relationship, constitutes, at least in certain hands, a very specialized and at times unacceptable version of the other proposition' (i.e. that social being determines consciousness) (*Problems*, p. 31). But inheriting as he has, a large body of Marxist theory which concentrates on the first proposition, Williams is forced to start from there, otherwise 'it would be in many ways preferable if we could begin from a proposition which originally was equally central, equally authentic: namely the proposition that social being determines consciousness' (*Problems*, p. 21). He makes the same comment in *Marxism and Literature*, published in 1977, four years after the article, and in which the second section can be read as an expanded version of the arguments raised in the essay.²¹ Indeed, and as he himself has pointed out, there is no 'epistemological break' between different periods of his work, and substantially the same concerns are apparent as far back as *Culture and Society*, in which he recognizes a certain cautiousness in Marx's formulation:

We have Marx's word that changes in the [superstructure] are necessarily subject to a different and less precise mode of investigation. The point is reinforced by the verbal qualifications of his text: 'determines the *general* character'.²²

That 'general' is crucial as a pointer to the fact that, while the economic base may be determining in the last instance, there is no simple correspondence between the two. There is not, in other words, the universalizing sense inherent in the phrase 'social being determines consciousness'. The possibility of some form of dialectical relationship is already inherent in the base/superstructure model. Yet, even in the second formulation, it is apparent that the relationship is less straightforward than it first seems, since 'consciousness' effectively appears in both parts, and this is central to E.P. Thompson's quarrel with Althusser:

What Althusser overlooks is the dialogue between social being and social consciousness. Obviously, this dialogue goes in both directions. [...] Obviously, consciousness, whether as unselfconscious culture, or as myth, or as science, or law, or articulated ideology, thrusts back into being in its turn, as being is thought so thought also is lived.²³

Thompson, like Williams, prefers to use the social being/consciousness model in his work. Williams opens up his critique by pointing out the regular qualifications and amendments necessary in the

definition of superstructure since Marx's original formulation. Interestingly, he notes that 'qualifications were made' even in the later writings of Marx and Engels, but does not consider them here (*Problems*, p. 32). He does though list the main shifts in the concept: time lags, reflection, mediation, allowing certain activities a greater distance, and therefore less obvious relationship with the economic base (philosophy for instance), and finally the idea of 'homologous structures' (a 'correspondence of structures' open to analysis) (*Problems*, pp. 32-33). Williams points out that generations of theorists have gone to great lengths to refine the model, which (for him) remains structurally flawed. He is certainly right to highlight these efforts, and to be cautious of embracing a theory which seems so resistant to definition. Take the idea that certain cultural forms seem to possess a 'relative autonomy', allowing them to transcend their historical moment. This has always been a problem for Marxists, not helped by Marx's consideration of Greek art in the *Grundrisse*:

In the case of the arts, it is well known that certain periods of their flowering are out of all proportion to the general development of society, hence also to the material foundation, the skeletal structure as it were, of its organization.²⁴

Marx then uses the example of Greek art to question the idea of relative autonomy:

The difficulty lies not in understanding that the Greek arts and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model.²⁵

Marx's answer to these difficulties is to argue that Greek art gives back to us the joy of childhood, arising as it does in 'the historic childhood of humanity':

The charm of their art for us is not in contradiction to the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. [It] is its result, rather, and is inextricably bound up, rather, with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could alone arise, can never return.²⁶

In 1976, Eagleton had argued in favour of Marx's analysis because 'the Greeks [...] were able to produce major art not *in spite of* but *because of* the undeveloped state of their society': they inhabited a time when there was still a measure of harmony between man and Nature.²⁷ A year later, Williams is less impressed, commenting only that '[Marx's] solution to the problem he then discusses, that of Greek art, is hardly convincing'²⁸ (although he recognises also in Marx's analysis a suggestion that the relationship - between art and society, is far from a simple determinate one). Despite this negative reaction, elsewhere Williams has himself considered the problem of relative autonomy, and even offered some solutions. One possibility, the subject of

earlier discussion, is that certain forms of art are endowed with a 'biological constant' or 'structure of feeling' which somehow escapes ideology in its transfer through history.²⁹ Another idea, closely linked to certain reception theories, is that each 're-introduction' of a work counts as a new production:

We do not now read Shakespeare, we read editions of Shakespeare and this is not just in the technical sense of when the pages were printed, but in a very much more substantial sense of the reproduction of the text in a quite different culture. I would certainly regard the conditions of production of a classic author who is continually re-introduced and widely read in every period as including that process of re-introduction. [...] The conditions of production thus always include the conditions of making a text contemporary.³⁰

I will return to this idea later, when discussing Marxism as a philosophy of internal relations, in contradiction to the necessarily 'external' nature of the base/superstructure opposition. For now, it is worth noting that Williams's thoughts on the relationship between the *originating* production of a work of art, and its re-introduction into contemporary society helps to emphasize that more is needed in understanding the relationship of art to history than only measuring its relevance to the contemporary, since that particular society is itself the product of a history - which includes the history of aesthetic production.³¹

If Williams has put forward possibilities for redefining the superstructure, it is also true that he believes too much time has been spent on it, leaving the base to fend for itself. He argues that 'the base is the more important concept to look at if we are to understand the realities of cultural process'. Referring to Marx's own formulation, and later interpretations, he argues that the base has tended to be objectified: as 'the real social existence of men', or 'the real relations of production corresponding to a stage of development of the material productive forces', or 'a mode of production at a particular stage of its development' (*Problems*, p. 33). Both here, and in the corresponding chapter in *Marxism and Literature* (pp. 81-82), Williams emphasizes the very 'static' versions of base put forward, missing as they do Marx's own stress on productive *activities*. Similarly, his well known sensitivity to semantic shifts makes him uneasy about the uncritical understanding of determination in the model, and he therefore offers revaluations of all the key terms:

We have to revalue 'determination' towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue 'superstructure' towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental

contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process (*Problems*, p. 34).

There is always the risk of revaluing the terms until they bear little relation to classical Marxism, and it is here that Eagleton takes issue with Williams. Using his redefinition of base allows Williams to include within it cultural processes previously located in the superstructure, which he considers to be 'secondary':

If we have the broad sense of productive forces, we look at the whole question of the base differently, and we are then less tempted to dismiss as *merely secondary*, certain vital productive social forces, which are in the broad sense, from the beginning, basic (*Problems*, p. 35, emphasis added).

It is that 'merely secondary' which will worry Eagleton, as I will show. Williams's reservations come out of his reading of Lukács, and particularly the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, in which he privileges a Marxist theory based on 'totalities' rather than base and superstructure:

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of

the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science. [...] Action, praxis - which Marx demanded before all else in his *Theses on Feuerbach* - is in essence the penetration and transformation of reality. But reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration.³²

As a 'reformed' Lukácsian, Williams takes from Lukács a theory of totalities, and refines it by including the notion of 'intention', as embodied in a Gramscian hegemony, which for Williams leaves intact an idea of determination. Williams argues that 'the language of totality has become common, and [...] is indeed in many ways more acceptable than the notion of base and superstructure' (*Problems*, pp. 35-36), but recognises also that this relational model of interacting social practices can lead to a complete rejection of any notion of determinacy (too much Hegel and not enough Marx). Thus, he offers Gramscian hegemony, which reinserts into the Lukácsian model a sense of determination. Reactions to this amendment are not all negative: Alan O'Connor writes that 'the fundamental strategy of "Base and superstructure" is to deconstruct a category which had been treated as an absolute: the Marxist category of the "base"'. Suddenly, Williams is portrayed as joining ranks with the anti-metaphysicians against Eagleton's cherished concepts.³³ But by 'materializing' cultural processes, Williams drains off the superstructure, leaving it with at best a realm of

immaterial consciousness. Further, as Eagleton notes, Williams's version of determination is actually equated with the power of a ruling class, and relies on domination. His 'intentions' are those of a 'particular class' (*Problems*, p. 36). Eagleton's contention is not that we cannot recognize a power relationship working in one direction, but that taking this as the fundamental definition of society places too great a strain on individual persons to regulate the system, rather than the workings of capitalism underlying the traditional formulation. This is not to argue that Williams is blind to the weight placed on a few to regulate the whole system in their favour. Indeed it is because of this difficulty that he offers hegemony, rather than ideology, as a regulating device. Further, contra Eagleton, for Williams it is the necessity for *ideology* to be imposed which is its main weakness:

If what we learn there [in the institutions of education, the family etc.] were merely an imposed ideology, or if it were only the isolable meanings and practices of the ruling class, or of a section of the ruling class, which gets imposed on others, occupying merely the top of our minds, it would be - and one would be glad - a very much easier thing to overthrow (*Problems*, p. 39).

Those two 'merely's and one 'only' suggest a curious blind-spot in Williams's formulation. His downgrading of ideology misses out on Marx's own very specific conceptual focus, which emphasizes the 'double inversion' nature of ideology: there is an inversion/occlusion at the level of thought/representation

that is produced by an inversion at the level of practice. Jorge Larraín has argued that this idea of a 'double inversion' in consciousness and reality is a consistent feature of Marx's theory, 'although in the end it is made more complex by distinguishing a double aspect of reality in the capitalist mode of production'.³⁴ It is this further complexity, the relationship between 'market forces' and the relations of production, which effectively allows social life to be 'explained' using the discourse of the market.³⁵

Such an omission in Williams's formulation, which leads him to reject the notion of ideology in 'Base and Superstructure' and *Marxism and Literature* is all the more surprising given his allegiance to this more sophisticated understanding when he decides to put the theory to work (see, for example his own version of 'Ideology Critique' in the 'Penshurst' chapter, which relies particularly on an understanding of the Marxian problematic of occlusion and inversion). Here, he insists on reducing ideology to a form of 'imposition', and it is against this 'weak' sense of ideology that he offers his version of hegemony, a sort of 'scientific' structure of feeling which permeates society. In Gramsci's original formulation, he differentiates between 'domination' and 'intellectual and moral leadership', and places the category of hegemony firmly in the latter, so that hegemony works not by coercion, but by consent, as an integral part of 'civil society'.³⁶ In Williams's hands, it becomes a flexible tool of analysis which can allow for various apparently 'rogue' elements, but Eagleton is surely right to indicate the 'category mistake' Williams makes in replacing ideology with hegemony:

Hegemony [...] can be differentiated into its various economic, political and ideological regions. It is not simply a 'deeper' version of ideology, a more profoundly internalized, experientially pervasive diffusion of meanings, as Williams would seem to have it (*RWCP*, p. 171).

In other words, ideology and hegemony are not 'alternatives', but, rather (and this is how Gramsci understood it) ideology is a necessary tool of hegemony. Eagleton sees Williams's 'cultural materialism' as a way of completing Marx's challenge to an idealist philosophy, rather than being, as Williams has argued, a sub-category within historical materialism. Eagleton believes that Williams's version of determination is a distorted one, missing the key point for Marxism, that 'in the production of human society some activities are more determining than others' (*RWCP*, p. 169). Williams's attempt to re-think the terms of a classical Marxism leads, argues Eagleton, to a 'notable irony':

The effect of Williams's increasing *rapprochement* with Marxism during the 1970s was not, paradoxically, to lead him closer to the base/superstructure model, but to lead him further away. Essentially Marxist concepts [...] were transplanted into the cultural realm to 'materialize' cultural processes, thus rendering them equivalent with other forms of materialist production, and so *intensifying* Williams's pre-Marxian 'circularity' (*RWCP*, pp. 171-72, emphasis in original).

With this Eagletonian summary of what cultural materialism means to Williams, we have reached a defining moment in the thesis. Already in this chapter I have had to reconsider the ‘common-sense’ meaning of history as change, in the light of Marx’s writings and Eagleton’s critique. Now, the word ‘material’ and its derivatives must be given further scrutiny.

Terry Eagleton’s main criticism of Williams’s cultural materialism is that Williams elides the distinction between ‘material’ as ‘physical’ and ‘material’ as ‘determining’. If, as Eagleton emphasises, Williams’s method materializes *everything*, the term itself is drained of force. For Williams, as Eagleton notes, the word ‘superstructure’ is equated with a suggestion of something being less *real* than ‘an element of material production’ (*RWCP*, p. 168). But, again as Eagleton points out, this notion effectively turns the base/superstructure model into an *ontological* thesis, instead of insisting on its specificity as a question of *determination*. If ‘material’, then, is not here a matter of ‘physicalism’, but rather a materialism of *practice*, this still leaves open the possibility for two distinct ways of understanding ‘practice’: either in a ‘technicist’ sense (as in Althusser’s structuralist Marxism)³⁷, or in a more ‘relational’ mode that stresses the internal relations between the agents of a practice and its relation to other practices. It is this second, ‘relational’ model which I will want to investigate further later. It is possible, by thinking of ‘materialism’ in this way, to take over Williams’s ‘limits’ and ‘pressures’, to argue that the internal structure of *one* practice (cultural materialism perhaps) may be formed by the overriding setting of ‘limits’ and exertion of ‘pressures’

of *another* set of practices (historical materialism), although such a reformulation would be different from Williams's own understanding of cultural materialism as a material practice within historical materialism.³⁸

Williams's decision to privilege hegemony over ideology, stems at least partly from the historical confusion over just what ideology is. Like definitions of the superstructure, this term has gone through a chameleon-like array of guises going right back to Marx and Engels. Williams can hardly be blamed for treating the concept of ideology with suspicion. After all, Eagleton himself has taken a whole book to attempt a reasonable classification of the term, and yet concludes by still leaving open the possibility of alternative definitions. Williams's own sensitivity to change over time would allow him to accept Eagleton's historical analysis, but he would surely resist using 'ideology' as a tool of analysis, given Eagleton's final attempt at definition:

Very often, it refers to the ways in which signs, meanings and values help to reproduce a dominant social power; but it can also denote any significant conjuncture between discourse and political interests. [...]
My own view is that both of these senses of the term have their uses, but that a good deal of confusion has arisen from the failure to disentangle them.³⁹

This attempt at something like a summary of the 'definition' of ideology follows his long final chapter, where he tackles head on the relationship of 'ideology' to 'discourse', effectively expanding on some of the themes

tackled in the Williams essay. 'Discourse and Ideology' takes on a whole raft of 'anti-ideologists', from Barthes, Kristeva and the 'Tel Quel' group, celebrating the ceaseless disruption of language, to Hindess and Hirst and Laclou and Mouffe, 'post-Marxists' substituting poststructuralist theories of discourse and power for Marxist notions of alienation and ideology.⁴⁰ Eagleton, acknowledging again that the Marxist theory of ideology, and base and superstructure, ignores at its peril these more recent theories of knowledge and interpretation, attempts in his Conclusion to summarise his own views on the continuing value of these notions, and, in so doing, is forced to adopt some of their ways of thinking about the world. If, as Eagleton seems to suggest in the quotation given above, his second definition is (ideologically) more neutral than the first, it is also much wider. But then, what sort of 'political interest' is there which is not 'ideological'?

We seem to have something of an impasse here: Eagleton challenges Williams's use of hegemony because of its totalizing nature, but offers an equally amorphous ideology in its place, one which Williams doubts is up to the job of radical critique.⁴¹ Instead of trying to mediate between the two, it may be more useful to respond to Eagleton's three definitions of the specificity of Marxism: material production as ultimately determining, the central importance of class struggle, and its revolutionary nature. By treating Williams as 'bricoleur', we can see him using what comes to hand, and moulding it to a philosophy of praxis which can only be evaluated in terms of its success. Pechey views Williams's materializing of culture as a 'prefigurative move, [...] an ethico-political impulse of disalienation informing

all of his analysis and participating in a praxis of the future'.⁴² What Williams offers us is a form of cultural revolution, a gradualist 'long revolution' which accepts the paradox inherent in Marx's recognition that only a highly developed society was equipped to overthrow capitalism, and was also very unlikely to try.

3. Engels and the Dialectic of Base/Superstructure

It may be true, as Eagleton has pointed out, that much of Williams's problems with the concept stem from his over-attention to the 'vulgar Marxist' Marx of *The German Ideology*, where the superstructure tends to be dematerialized (*RWCP*, p. 168). The restless historical search for an adequate reformulation of the base/superstructure opposition has been hindered by the frequent time delays in making the whole of Marx and Engels easily available. Hindered further, because Althusser, a major influence on Western Marxism in the early 1970s (not least on Eagleton), was extremely doubtful about the value of the late letters by Engels, in which the whole base/superstructure concept is effectively redefined.⁴³

In 'What is an Author?', Michel Foucault privileges Marx and Freud as 'founders of discursivity', whose work 'made possible not only a certain number of analogies, but also (and equally important) a certain number of differences'; a 'reexamination of Marx's [texts]', he argues, 'would modify Marxism'.⁴⁴ Carrying out such a reexamination, what is so striking about Marx's later work, and the letters of Marx and Engels, is the great flexibility of the concepts. More than that, any simple relationship between two separate

conceptual complexes: here base/superstructure, there social being/consciousness, is abandoned in favour of a synthesis. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, for instance, where the theory is put to work, 'material foundations' and 'social relations' are made equivalent.⁴⁵ Jorge Larraín has pointed out that, rather than worrying away at the differences between the pairs base/superstructure and consciousness/social being, it may be preferable to see the model as including both together.⁴⁶

Reading the letters, what is *first* apparent is the insistence of Marx and Engels that the material base is determining: 'men are not free to choose their *productive forces* - which are the basis of all their history'; 'the material mode of existence is the "primum agens"'; 'the economic movement finally asserts itself'; 'in the last instance production is the decisive factor'; from the 1840s to the 1890s the 'basic' message remains the same.⁴⁷ It is this uni-directional model of the base which still holds sway in analyses of 'classic' Marxism. This, too, which provoked Marx's outburst directed at the French 'Marxists' of the 1870s: 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist'.⁴⁸ Despite Marx's assertion that 'every productive force is an acquired force, the product of former activity', nevertheless 'the productive forces are [...] the result of human energy'.⁴⁹ Human beings inherit a productive force always already in place, and in this sense are always determined by it, but once this happens there is a dialectical relationship between base and superstructure. As the first 'informed' reader of Marx, Engels goes to great lengths to emphasize this two-way relationship, as in his famous letter to Bloch of September 1890:

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms the proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.⁵⁰

Williams is critical of Engels's response because it fails to do what Williams wants, that is, to revise the definitions of 'base' and 'superstructure' and 'materialize' culture.⁵¹ But it does respond directly to those criticisms of the model which insist on assuming that Marx and Engels were ever wedded to a simple deterministic model which relegated some of the most important structures which categorize us as 'social beings' to a 'merely secondary' role, as Williams often appears to believe. Engels continually stresses the point that, for him, Marxism entails both the concept of an economic base which is determining in the last instance, and a superstructure which in its turn reacts back on that base. Adopting the discourse of deconstruction, we might reformulate the opposition, to the extent that the superstructure, as 'supplement', completes a 'lack' on the part of the base as signified. There is no 'scandal' here for Eagleton, just as there was never any scandal for Levi-Strauss, except one of definition. Like the French 'Marxists' of the nineteenth century, we can only be shocked at the potential for deconstruction of the base/superstructure opposition, if we do not recognize that it already carries within it the potential for self deconstruction, and that this is what makes it a

useful tool of analysis. For, without it, the possibility for revolution would be an impossible dream. At times, Engels can even be read as an ancestor of Derrida, as he berates his contemporaries for their ignorance of the subtleties of post-structuralism:

What these gentlemen all lack is dialectics. They always see only here cause, there effect. That this is a hollow abstraction, that such metaphysical polar opposites exist in the real world only during crises, while the whole vast process goes on in the form of interaction - though of very unequal forces, the economic movement being by far the strongest, most primordial, most decisive - that here everything is relative and nothing absolute - this they never begin to see.⁵²

Three years later, in 1893, Engels writes to Mehring that 'once an historic element has been brought into the world by other, ultimately economic causes, it reacts, can react on its environment and even on the causes that have given rise to it'.⁵³ It is this more complex understanding of the relationship between base and superstructure (and indeed to the relative relations between elements of the superstructure) to which I now want to turn.

4. Relations of Production and the Role of the State

Most of the criticisms of the base/superstructure model (whether originating from within a fundamentally Marxist discourse, or from some

alternative approach such as deconstruction) are directed at the notional inflexibility of the model, with its apparently rigid differentiation between the mode of production and the rest of 'society', and a very deterministic one-way relationship between the two. I have tried to show how reductive this understanding of the position really is, but it is fair to add, that as a 'model' of reality, it needs to retain some element of 'rigidity' to be of any practical use at all. Any model which is over-deterministic is unlikely to be able to account for the real complexities of existence, and certainly would be incapable of accounting for *alterations* in the relations of production, such as the transition from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production, which is central to the debate in a later chapter. But there is undoubtedly something particularly unhelpful and alienating about the model as presented above, which seems just too abstract and removed from that other opposition in Marx's original formulation, which equates consciousness with social being, and therefore reinstates human activity at the centre of the debate. This 'externality' in the model is one of the reasons why it so easily degenerates into a form of 'economic determinism'. The problem, as Bertell Ollman has emphasized, is one of language and translation.⁵⁴ Unless we are sure what Marx means by 'mode of production' or 'determines', we are unlikely to derive much satisfaction from a model which appears, in its crudest interpretations to speak for all time and always with the same understanding of the relationships. As we have seen, and as Engels reminded his correspondents, these brief statements of theoretical position have to be read for their *practical* use (as Marx does in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*), but they have also

to be read in the light of the many amendments to Marx's opening position, some of which I have already indicated. Ollman gives the very useful example (from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*) of Marx's claim that 'religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc. are particular modes of production' (Ollman, p. 10), which would presumably find favour with Williams. But, helpful as this is as a counter to those more 'fundamentalist' critics who refuse to allow for any complexity in the model, it still leaves us with a relatively static, and 'external' sense of the relationship. Ollman's radical solution to this is to re-read Marx's theory as a theory of *internal relations*.⁵⁵

Arguing that the philosophy of internal relations is 'a central facet of Hegel's and Marx's dialectic' (Ollman, p. 35), Ollman explains that, for Marx, 'relation' does not (only) refer to a relationship *between* things (such as between base and superstructure), but has been 'extended to cover what is related, so that either term may be taken to express both in their peculiar connection' (Ollman, p. 26), and he gives as an example his own immediate environment:

[T]he book before me expresses and therefore, on this model, relationally contains everything from the fact that there is a light on in my room to the social practices and institutions of my society which made this particular work possible. The conditions of its existence are taken to be part of what it is, and indicated by the fact that it is just this and nothing else (Ollman, p. 27).

This fertile model is a long way from the crude fundamentalism of some understandings of the base/superstructure paradigm, but the problem with it is that it seems to deny the possibility for *any* notion of determination, thus draining the model of its historical specificity, and once again shifting the theoretical ground in favour of Hegel and away from Marx. Despite Ollman's insistence that there is no necessary conflict between a theory of internal relations and a desire to emphasize that certain social relations are more important than others (Ollman, p. 39), his discussion did not really indicate how such a balancing act could be achieved, and this led to a number of specific criticisms of his work, to which he responded in later editions. Acknowledging that it is a valid question to ask of him: 'how can any system based on the philosophy of internal relations single out any process or set of processes as "primary" or "ultimately determining"' (Ollman, p. 264), Ollman recognized that the danger with his formulation (or rather, with the formulation he attributes to Marx), is a draining out of the specificity of the opposition between base and superstructure (rather akin to Eagleton's claim that Williams drains off the superstructure by materializing cultural practices). Referring specifically to the 'materialist conception of history', Ollman again maintains that 'the mutual dependence of all elements in the world is conceived of in terms of a constant, multi-faceted interaction (Ollman, pp. 273-74), which does not seem to have got us very far. But he continues by arguing that:

This does not rule out causal relationships, where one element or structure or event is primarily responsible for a change in the form or function of others, but simply qualifies them. Whenever a causal claim is made, the interactive context limits the possibilities of what is being asserted and what, apparently, is being denied. [...] The actual working through of the causal role of the mode of production in capitalism as through history, given the assumption of reciprocal effect, is the central concern of the materialist conception of history (Ollman, p. 274).

What Ollman's theory of internal relations helps to do, as he himself emphasizes, is to remind us that all of these terms - 'mode of production', 'alienation', 'base and superstructure', even 'history' (so often offered in a guise which looks rather too much like the Hegelian 'Idea'), are themselves 'historical' and evolving. This reminder gives me the opportunity to offer a further refinement to the model, one which helps to emphasize the complex 'internal relationships' between elements of the base and superstructure, and to indicate that an emphasis on 'causal relationships' is not the same thing as a reliance on economic determinism. It also acts as some sort of positive response to Williams's sense of superstructural activity as 'merely secondary'.

In the chapter on 'Penshurst', I will attempt to reveal the relationship between a particular form of cultural production (the 'Country-House' poem), and the society out of which it may be said to have evolved. Since we are dealing there with a particularly complex set of relations of production

(towards the end of the transition from feudalism to capitalism), it would be expected that the function of this particular superstructural activity, what purpose it serves, how, if at all it functions to maintain existing relations, would itself be complex, and this indeed appears to be the case, as we shall see later. The suggestion, itself a product of a particularly reductionist understanding of ideology, that all those 'ideological state apparatuses' (religion, education, law, culture, communications)⁵⁶ spring in some simple way out of the dominant mode of production, and then exist for all time doing their bit to shore it up, is confounded by the huge variety of which these structures are made up, and their evolving relationship to each other, and particularly to the 'State' itself, which appears to inhabit some ambiguous region within base *and* superstructure. As Simon Clarke has argued, we cannot begin to fully understand 'the development of the relations of production without seeing the state, and the exercise of state power, as having a central role in their defence and even in their definition.'⁵⁷ We have returned here, effectively, to the theory of internal relations, since, as Philip Corrigan and others have shown⁵⁸ :

State-forms are related to the social relations and conditions of specific modes of production *in their historical development*. State-forms are not related contingently and accidentally, nor are they externally related [...] but, rather, internally.⁵⁹

As Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer emphasize, the development of civil society tends to go along with a shift in organizational functions from individual to State, but it is a mistake to think of the State either as *secondary* to production (that is 'superstructural'), or somehow 'above' it.⁶⁰ Corrigan and his colleagues, relying on a Gramscian model of hegemony, argue for the State operating through 'legitimacy' and the 'active consent' of those 'over whom it rules', but emphasize also that 'legitimacy' and '*active* consent' are not 'static or abstract'.⁶¹ Further, to argue that the State's power is simply a matter of the operation of *force* or *will* (or a combination of the two) ignores Marx's own emphasis on the State as the creation of 'actual, material relationships concerning property rights, the division of labour, the class structure and the relations of production'.⁶²

This does not mean that we can safely think of the State as a sort of 'neutral' region of influence which attempts to regulate activity to give an 'average' effect across society, in a kind of super-utilitarian sharing out, because the categories Marx identifies - 'property', 'labour', 'class' and the 'relations of production', all tend to be skewed in one way, in favour of the dominant class interest, and history shows us that this is the general alignment of the 'State' as well. Thus, as Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer comment:

Who could be against better sanitation, public parks, libraries or galleries, and the wider provision of education? But these were never offered *in vacuo* as 'social goods'; they were made available in specific social forms of State provision which, moreover, marginalized

and suppressed *pre-existing* class and other alternatives. Again, the means used to establish these social forms were acts of categorization and classification - the construction of that social vocabulary or 'public languages', through which social experience is increasingly articulated.⁶³

These examples, linked to the construction of a specific discourse, a 'public language' which tends to occlude or marginalize other ways of thinking and behaving, is supported fictionally, as we have seen already, by the representation of 'utilitarian' education in *Hard Times*, where the provision of a more universal system of education goes along with an emphasis on intense abstraction in English teaching, at the expense of other worldly epistemologies (Bitzer v. Sissy). The lack of an *alternative*, indeed, the impression that there is no alternative, helps to reinforce that hegemonic acceptance of a form of education which silently privileges forms of behaviour most in line with the dominant ideology. This attempt at universalization, which tends to offer a particular ideological construct as 'natural', itself involves an often complex and contradictory set of cultural practices: Pierre Macherey and Étienne Balibar, applying Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses to literature, have noted how, in the French educational system, there is a contradiction in the teaching of a '*common* language', such that effectively *two* versions of the same language are taught, in an attempt to reserve a particular site for 'literary' activity.⁶⁴

These examples help to indicate some of the ways in which thinking of the base/superstructure paradigm in its 'vulgar Marxist' formulation is completely inadequate to any actual social formation (particularly so, as I will show later to that form of 'late' capitalism we now live under). But even this does not indicate how much the relationship can *vary* over time. Given that we accept the fundamentals of the Marxist model: that is, that the superstructures are determined (in the '*first*' instance), by the dominant mode of production, that is not at all the same thing as suggesting that they therefore function in support of that mode and help to reproduce it. First, any cursory look at particular superstructural activities shows clearly that certain 'superstructural' practices (such as the legal system) are more likely to actively participate in reproduction of the dominant than others (abstract art, say). This is why some base/superstructure models want to allow varying levels of 'relative autonomy' (although, even starting from something seemingly as 'autonomous' as abstract art leads us quite easily into the *institutionalization* of art, via which we are taken back to the base and the extent to which art can be considered capable of resisting its own commodification). Second, even within one particular formation there are wide differences, both of *determination* and *functionality*. Despite evidence that the Country-House poem is not a simple reflection of a dominant set of relationships, it is unlikely to generate the satiric and de-mystifying strategies of stage drama. Within an evolving system of relations of production, there is likely to be a continual struggle by the dominant to maintain hegemony, partly through the superstructures, but always with the possibility that internal

contradictions will result in some of them turning from a functional to a distinctly dis-functional role. While it would be a mistake to assume that superstructural changes were responsible for the transition from feudalism to capitalism, it is also true that specific activities helped to fuel the change. Thus, the production of a surplus population of under/un-employed intellectuals in the first few decades of the seventeenth century became an essential pre-condition for a culture of political and religious discontent which lead to the English Revolution.⁶⁵ The only way that a Marxist analysis can hope to reveal these complex relationships, and attempt to account for them, is by avoiding at all costs a sort of economic determinism which so easily follows a simplistic understanding of the base/superstructure paradigm. Williams, in an attempt to recognize this complexity, while refusing to abandon the notion of determinacy (as he had appeared to do in some of his earlier work)⁶⁶, refines his cultural materialism by using the notion of dominant, residual and emergent formations.

Responding to his *Politics and Letters* interviewers, Williams argues that he was always sensitive to the variability and 'temporal unevenness' between and within different superstructures.⁶⁷ It is to try to account for this historical discrepancy that Williams invokes the vocabulary of dominant, residual and emergent formations. As I intend to deal with this aspect of Williams's cultural materialism in detail in a later chapter, I will merely summarise his ideas here: Williams identifies alternatives to the 'dominant', which he categorizes in 'Base and Superstructure' (and develops in *Marxism and Literature*) as 'residual' - that is, practices, experiences etc. which are

lived, but reflect a formation pre-existing the dominant (certain religious practices would be an obvious example); and 'emergent', that is new practices being created. Both of these have at least the potential for *oppositional* or at least *alternative* activity, although they are also both subject to possible *incorporation* by the dominant, particularly where perceived as a threat.

This refined model, although immensely suggestive, still appears to fall short of the level of complexity that the theory of internal relations offers (for instance in the very difficult set of relations and negotiations between church and State, particularly in a country which has an hereditary monarch who is head of the 'Church of England'). Williams actually appears to recognize this, arguing strongly in favour of an understanding of society which acknowledges the 'inextricable interrelations between politics, art, economics [and] family organization', the 'indissoluble elements of a continuous social-material process'.⁶⁸ The problem is, he again invokes a totalizing model which seems to exclude determination. Actually, contra the *Politics and Letters* interviewers, Williams's understanding of determination appears quite close to those more subtle reformulations of the model suggested by the work of Ollman and Corrigan. By reinterpreting Marx's 'bat-like' language⁶⁹ Williams can suggest for instance that the industrial revolution was a revolution 'in the production of culture as much as an industrial revolution in the production of clothing', and that 'the steam press was as much a part of the industrial revolution as the steam jenny or the steam locomotive'.⁷⁰ What this occludes though (by thinking of 'culture' as 'cultural production') is the fact that

cultural practices changed, were 'revolutionized', by changes in industrial production and not vice versa.

In conclusion, I suppose what I would like to suggest is that, in a sense, Williams's analysis is not as far removed from Eagleton's 'classical doctrine' as he suggests (*RWCP*, p. 166), but that it appears to be because of the language Williams uses, particularly in the 'Base and Superstructure' essay. By categorizing superstructural activity as 'merely secondary' (and hence ideology as inadequate), he appears to hold on to a 'vulgar Marxist' model which relies heavily on a clear division between the base understood as a region of 'fixed economic or technological abstraction' (*Problems*, p. 34) and an always merely dependent superstructure. In fact, as I have shown, this is a gross mis-reading of the actual relationship, as formulated by Marx and Engels, and understood by recent Marxist critics. Williams's reformulation of the model, as given above, still relies on the primacy of the 'mode of production', but now defined in a more useful way than one which conflates 'mode of production' with the 'economic', instead of recognizing that the 'economic' is merely a (very important) part of the larger structure. Far from simply collapsing the superstructure into the base, it suggests rather that by attempting to understand more fully just what the 'economic' means, it is possible to hold on to the Marxist model (as a theory of internal relations), and continue to argue that 'historical causation must be seen primarily in terms of production and changes in modes of production'⁷¹.

Notes and References

- ¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; repr. 1989).
- ² Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *New Left Review*, 82 (1973), 3-16; repr. in Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 31-49 [hereafter, references are given within the text as '*Problems*, page number'].
- ³ Terry Eagleton, 'Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams', in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Terry Eagleton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 165-75 [hereafter, references are given within the text as '*RWCP*, page number'].
- ⁴ Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979).
- ⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 75.
- ⁶ Postmodernism and its relevance to Williams and cultural materialism is discussed in chapter 7. Terry Eagleton's response to postmodernism is, as he freely admits, 'generally a negative one'. See: Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. viii.
- ⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 278-93 (p. 288, emphasis in original).
- ⁸ Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play', p. 283.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-84.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 289 (emphasis in original).

¹¹ For evidence that such a notion may have been common over three hundred years before Derrida, see the argument between Perdita and Polixenes in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, IV. 4. 78-97.

¹² Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play', pp. 284-85.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 292-93 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴ Terry Eagleton, 'Frère Jacques: The Politics of Deconstruction', in *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 79-87 (p. 79). There have always been problems in deciding on Derrida's relationship to Marxism, almost inevitably perhaps, given the resistance to 'meta-narratives' so apparent in much deconstruction. But in 1980, he could write: 'Though I am not and have never been an orthodox marxist, I am very disturbed by the antimarxism dominant now in France so that, as a reaction, through political reflection and personal preference, I am inclined to consider myself more marxist than I would have done when Marxism was a sort of fortress'. Quoted by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Marx after Derrida', in *Philosophical Approaches to Literature: New Essays on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Texts*, ed. by William E. Cain (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), pp. 227-46 (p. 245). Derrida has made a recent attempt to confront the spectre in: *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994). An abridged version appears in *New Left Review*, 205 (1994), 31-58. For responses to this work, see: Aijaz Ahmad, 'Reconciling Derrida: "Spectres of Marx" and Deconstructive Politics', *New Left Review*, 208

(1994), 88-106; Fredric Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter', *New Left Review*, 209 (1995), 75-109; Kate Soper, John Fletcher and Alex Callinicos, 'Spectres of Derrida' (symposium), *Radical Philosophy*, 75 (1996), 26-41. Derrida read *Spectres of Marx* as a plenary address to a conference held at the University of California, Riverside, on April 22, 1993. Other conference papers are collected in: *Whither Marxism?: Global Crises in International Perspective*, ed. by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, 'Marxism, Structuralism and Post-structuralism', in *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 89-98 (p. 95).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁷ For a particularly vigorous recent example, see: Richard Rorty, 'We Anti-Representationalists', *Radical Philosophy*, 60 (1992), 40-42. Of course, Marxism is experiencing not only *philosophical* difficulties. As Eagleton rather sadly comments in *The Illusions of Postmodernity*: 'It would be intellectual dishonesty to pretend that Marxism is any longer a living political reality, or that the prospects for socialist change, are anything but exceedingly remote' (p. ix).

¹⁸ Eagleton, *Against the Grain*, pp. 81-82 (emphasis in original).

¹⁹ Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One* [1846], ed. by C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2nd edn 1974; repr. 1989), pp. 121-23 (p. 123, emphasis in original).

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- ²⁰ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859] (London: Lawrence & Wishart; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970; repr. 1981), pp. 20-21.
- ²¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 75.
- ²² Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961; repr. 1979), p. 259 (emphasis in original).
- ²³ E.P. Thompson, 'The Poverty of Theory or an Orrery of Errors', in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 1-210 (p. 9, emphasis in original).
- ²⁴ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* [1858] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 110.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 111.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 111.
- ²⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976; repr. 1987), p. 12 (emphasis in original).
- ²⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 78.
- ²⁹ See e.g. the Introduction to Williams's *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Hogarth Press, 1952; rev. edn 1987), pp. 11-21.
- ³⁰ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, pp. 344-45; and c.f. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 219-53 (p. 245).
- ³¹ This point is stressed by Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, p. 13.

³² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* [1923] (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 27 and 39.

³³ Alan O'Connor, *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 106. A number of critics have tried in recent years to rescue Williams from his image as a 'Left-Leavisite' or unreformed realist. Another startling example is given in Tony Pinkney's *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1991), where he is given the title 'postmodern novelist'. In the case of O'Connor, Williams is said to 'deconstruct' something or other six times in less than four pages, so we may be entitled to question whether the term is given the rigour demanded by Derrida and understood by Eagleton, who has not to date described Williams as a post-structuralist.

³⁴ Jorge Larraín, 'Ideology', in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottomore, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; 1995), pp. 247-52 (p. 249).

³⁵ This notion is used by Marx in *Capital I*, where the bourgeois concepts of 'Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham [i.e. Individualism]' are understood through the language of commodity exchange. For further discussion, see: Stuart Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology - Marxism Without Guarantees', in *Marx: A Hundred Years On*, ed. by Betty Matthews (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983), pp. 57-85 (pp. 68-71).

³⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart; New York: International Publishers, 1971; repr. 1989), p. 57. Earlier, in his chapter on 'The Intellectuals', Gramsci explains in detail how he perceives the

structure of society being divided between coercive state power, and a sort of 'spontaneous' consent to the dominant, which is ' "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production' (p. 12). Obviously, this analysis bears a close relationship with Louis Althusser's division between the 'repressive' and 'ideological' state apparatuses, which I discuss later.

³⁷ For critiques of such an approach, see the essays by Simon Clarke et al, *One Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980); E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (op.cit.).

³⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 5.

³⁹ Terry Eagleton. *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 221. It may be more useful in understanding these 'chameleon-like' changes to consider say the analysis given by Jorge Larrain in his entry on 'ideology' in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, and expanded in *The Concept of Ideology* (London: Hutchinson, 1979; repr. 1984). Larrain's account, which is historically based and conceptually specific, is particularly illuminating on the confusion in the Marxist tradition between 'positive' and 'negative' interpretations of the concept, caused at least in part by the irregular publication of Marx's primary works.

⁴⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology*, pp. 193-220. For criticisms of Eagleton's approach, see: Rorty, 'We Anti-Representationalists'; also David Couzens Hoy, 'Deconstructing "Ideology"', *Philosophy and Literature*, 18 (1994), 1-17.

⁴¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 71.

⁴² Graham Pechey, 'Border Country', *Radical Philosophy*, 57 (1991), 44-45 (p. 45).

⁴³ See e.g. Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1969; new edn 1990), pp. 117-28.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1986; repr. 1991), pp. 101-20 (pp. 114 and 116).

⁴⁵ Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' [1852], in *Surveys from Exile*, ed. by David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 143-249 (p. 173).

⁴⁶ Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, particularly pp. 64-67.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1953; [London]: Lawrence & Wishart, [n.d.]), pp. 40, 496, 498, 501 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁸ Quoted by Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 496.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 498 (emphasis in original). It is this letter which is the subject of Althusser's specific structuralist criticism in *For Marx*, pp. 117-28.

⁵¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 80.

⁵² Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 507.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

⁵⁴ Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971; repr. 1978), pp. 3-11 [hereafter, references are given within the text as 'Ollman, page number'].

⁵⁵ For a useful example of using such a theory to examine cultural production, see: Terry Lovell, 'The Social Relations of Cultural Production: Absent Centre of a New Discourse', in *One Dimensional Marxism*, pp. 232-56.

⁵⁶ To adopt the distinction Althusser makes between 'repressive' state apparatuses that operate (mainly) by violence, and 'ideological state apparatuses' that operate (mainly) through ideology. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 121-73.

⁵⁷ Simon Clarke, 'Socialist Humanism and the Critique of Economism', *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979), 138-56 (p. 147).

⁵⁸ *Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory: Historical Investigations*, ed, by Philip Corrigan (London: Quartet, 1980).

⁵⁹ Corrigan, Harvie Ramsay and Derek Sayer, *Capitalism*, p. 5 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 11-12 (emphasis in original).

⁶² Ibid., p. 45.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 18 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁴ Pierre Macherey and Étienne Balibar, 'Literature as an Ideological Form: Some Marxist Propositions', *Oxford Literary Review*, 3 (1978), 4-12 (p. 7).

⁶⁵ See: Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution: 1529-1642* (London: Routledge, 1972).

⁶⁶ See e.g. *Communications* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; rev. edn London: Chatto & Windus, 1966); also the comments in *Politics and Letters*, p. 137. In *Communications* Williams claims that the 'experience' of systems

of communication shows that people are not 'confined to relationships of power, property and production' (p. 18). This conforms rather to a simple 'talking-heads' model of communication (as used by Saussure), and ignores theories (following Foucault) which argue for a power relationship to be an inherent component in 'communication'.

⁶⁷ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 138.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

⁶⁹ Ollman, quoting Vilfredo Pareto: 'Marx's words are like bats: one can see in them both birds and mice', Ollman, *Alienation*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 144.

⁷¹ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 145.

5

The Critique of the Sign: Volosinov v Saussure

‘Monkey always tells the truth,’ Norman added. ‘But selectively. Precisely selected messages to precisely selected receivers’.

How could she ever make him understand things? Couldn't he see that when people were really living together what passed between them was much more than the words?¹

We have seen how Williams, in constructing the concept of cultural materialism, attempts to move beyond a version of ‘Left-Leavisism’; uses and rather abandons Lukácsian totality and Gramscian hegemony; and ultimately feels able to re write the base/superstructure paradigm to materialize culture itself. This neglects the problem of language in Marxist discourse; and, in particular, a theorization of the relationship of language to literature and ideology. How, we may ask, can Williams refine the cultural materialist model to take account of the significant debates this century around the issue of language, and how will this feed into his model of literary and cultural analysis? Specifically, how does Williams deal with Ferdinand de Saussure's work on the sign? The answer, I want to argue, will bring along with it clarification of Williams's relationship to structuralism, including the work of the structuralist Marxists, particularly Louis Althusser. It should also open up the opportunity to question his often perceived ‘resistance to theory’; by

indicating how his early appropriation of the work of the 'Bakhtin school'² allows his own theory of language to avoid the more reductive application of a structuralism which continued to take up a restricted version of Saussure's theories, long after various newer theories had begun to reconsider its implications. But it will also indicate how his determination to favour the 'dialogic' model of the Bakhtin school leads to a surprising inability to confront the more radical implications of the Saussurean model as taken up by Derrida and his British adherents in the 1970s, including many names familiar to Williams from Cambridge (Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe etc.). This chapter concentrates on the language models of Saussure and particularly Volosinov, showing how Volosinov's reading of Saussure feeds into Williams's apparently idiosyncratic approach compared with many of his colleagues, and allows cultural materialism to embrace a specific understanding of the relationship between language and social being.

1. Saussure's Synchronic System

In 1963, Roland Barthes wrote: 'watch who uses signifier and signified, synchronic and diachronic, and you will know whether the structuralist vision is constituted'.³ The implication is clear enough: Barthes identifies the 'structuralist activity' directly with Saussure's work on the sign. For Williams, this appropriation will be disastrous for theory. The reading of Saussure, concentrating almost exclusively on the binary opposition between signifier and signified, and on *langue*, the pre existing language system, rather than *parole*, its operation in practice, brackets out any historical sense of

language as active. He will argue that such a misrepresentation could have been avoided, had the significant contribution of the Bakhtin school not been lost from Western history for so many decades, since that work already (in the 1920s) offered a critique of Saussure, as well as identifying the flaws within a classical formalist approach. As I have already indicated though, Williams, like Volosinov, offers at best a partial reading of Saussure which itself distorts an understanding of the full implications of his research. We need, therefore, to untangle this complicated set of interconnected histories (Volosinov's, the formalists, the structuralists, and Williams's), in order fully to understand the approach adopted by Williams in his later work, as well as his mistrust of structuralism.

In *Politics and Letters*, Williams makes it clear that his theory of language in *Marxism and Literature* is 'pivotal' to the overall focus of the book's argument; and, further, that it developed out of 'discussions with people [he was] close to about structuralist theories of language'.⁴ In that earlier work, he starts by stressing what he sees as the 'key moments [for Marxism] in the development of thinking about language, [...] first, the emphasis on language as *activity* and, second, the emphasis on the *history* of language'.⁵ 'Activity' and 'history': these two must bring along with them thoughts of Marx, and, indeed, the very opening of the chapter on language makes the Marxian claim that 'a definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world' (*M&L*, p. 21). Marx's own specific comments on language are sparse enough, although, in *The German Ideology*, he does argue that 'language is practical consciousness',

and, effectively repeating the claim that 'social being determines consciousness', writes that 'consciousness is [...], from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all'⁶ (and, as we saw in the previous chapter, this is the Marxian formulation Williams appears happier with). As Williams starts to investigate language, he adopts a position in line with Marx's belief in 'Man' as a 'species-being', a being aware not only of himself, but of his relationship to the rest of society.⁷ In this, he therefore starts out from a position which will implicitly challenge the simple opposition between social and individual, *langue* and *parole*.⁸ This chapter, then, will attempt to tease out Williams's theory of language, by investigating the difference in approaches exemplified by Saussure and Volosinov (and later Bakhtin).

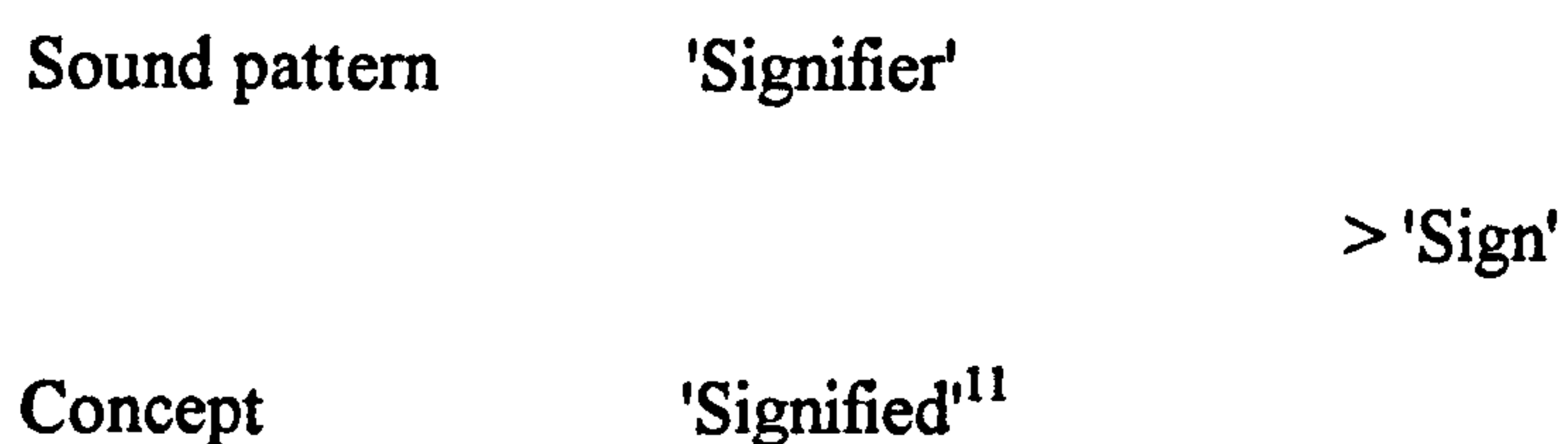
The two quotations from Williams's novel *Loyalties*, which form the epigraph to this chapter, encapsulate some of the issues which will be central to the investigation into Saussure and Volosinov. The first takes as a given that it is possible to pass messages from A to B in a way which will ensure a perfect one-to-one correspondence; and it suggests further, that the medium in which the message is transferred is neutral as regards meaning, so that there can never be 'mis'-interpretation. The second, contrastingly, recognizes the inherently social aspect of communication and that what passes is always in various ways 'much more than the words'. 'Precisely selected messages' and 'precisely selected receivers': these phrases presuppose a language system close to Saussure's 'talking-head' model of communication given in the *Course in General Linguistics*.⁹ The *Course*, based on lectures given

between 1907 and 1911, relies on an unproblematical notion of sound transmission and reception between 'perfect' speakers and listeners. Any particular language is a 'social institution', but one in various respects distinct from 'political, legal, etc. institutions' (*Course*, p. 15). In distinguishing between the language system (*langue*), and an individual speech act (*parole*), Saussure describes *langue* as the social side of language, and he opposes it to the individual, unsocial *parole*: 'In separating language from speaking we are at the same time separating: (1) what is social from what is individual, and (2) what is essential from what is accessory and more or less accidental' (*Course*, p. 13). He argues that the *langue* is a 'well-defined object' that may be studied separately (*Course*, pp. 14-15).

It is the homogeneous nature of the underlying language system, its stability, which makes it worthy of study. *Langue* represents a uniting of the speaking community, a shared system fully available and always in place. But, of course, none of this means Saussure is ignorant of the obvious fact that any language changes over time. Indeed, prior to his appointment to deliver the series of lectures which became the *Course*, he spent much of his life actively engaged in the study of historical linguistics.¹⁰ Such diachronic shifts had been the object of consideration long before Saussure; but for Saussure, it tells us nothing about the underlying system. Therefore he argues in favour of a synchronic linguistics 'concerned with the logical and psychological relations that bind together coexisting items and form a system, in the collective minds of speakers' (*Course*, pp. 99-100). I will have to return to this privileging of a synchronic approach later, as we see Volosinov start to challenge its validity

as a realistic method of analysis. For now, I will concentrate on Saussure's theorization of *langue*, to discover just what sort of 'object' we are dealing with. This is significant, since it forms one important strand in Volosinov's (and therefore Williams's) critique of the Saussurean position.

Saussure defines the linguistic sign as a link between a 'concept and a sound image', a 'two-sided psychological entity' (*Course*, p. 66). He distinguishes therefore between the (then) current terminology, which called the sound pattern the 'sign', by offering a triadic definition:



Saussure stresses the arbitrariness of the sign: there is no 'natural' ('Adamic') relationship between signifier and signified, language is not a 'nomenclature' (*Course*, pp. 65-7). But further, he insists on the arbitrariness of both the signifier and the signified. What generates meaning in the signifier, for instance, is not something which is pre-existing, but rather, a matter of how it is defined by its relationship to other signifiers around it. The language system is a 'differential' system:

Instead of pre-existing ideas then, we find [...] *values* emanating from the system. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential. [...] Their most

precise characteristic is in being what the others are not' (*Course*, p. 117, emphasis in original).

This relationship of negativity extends syntagmatically, along the signifying chain, and paradigmatically, from within the relevant paradigm class; and Saussure offers a proto-structuralist model, seeing relationships working within this syntagmatic / paradigmatic model, from the phonemic level, right up to the most complex combinatory forms allowed within any language. If, to quote Saussure, 'although a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up, [...] in language there are only differences, *without positive terms* (*Course*, p. 120, emphasis in original)¹², then we are investigating a form of relational identity, and it is therefore to the system which defines such relationships that the linguist must turn. Further, the 'arbitrariness' of relationships is what allows for historical change, which has produced a myriad series of shifts in meanings across time.¹³ Synchronic analysis ignores these random alterations, to offer a study of *langue* at a particular time, even though Saussure recognizes that the concept of a synchronic 'slice' through time ignores the permanently active nature of actual speech communities, in favour of an analysis which sees a generally stable community of language use at any one point of time. Thus, as Jonathan Culler has pointed out, despite the rather idiosyncratic organization of the *Course*, Saussure's argument about the arbitrariness of the sign leads inevitably to a concentration on *langue* instead of *parole*.¹⁴

2. Volosinov's Dialogic Dialectic

Saussure's argument in favour of the study of *langue* is powerful, and more subtle than some detractors have allowed, but it does open up difficulties, some of which are taken up by Volosinov in his critique. His criticism hinges on Saussure's location of the social aspect of language within *langue*, leaving *parole* as the space of individualization. For Volosinov, Saussure's linguistics represents the most striking form (c. 1929/30), of what Volosinov calls 'abstract objectivism'.¹⁵ He opposes abstract objectivism to its antithesis, 'individualistic subjectivism', as the two predominant 'trends of thought' in the philosophy of language, with Wilhelm von Humboldt as the foremost representative of the latter, and Saussure as representative of the former. Volosinov summarises the main characteristics of each as follows:

Individualistic Subjectivism

1. *Language is activity, an unceasing process of creation (energeia) realized in individual speech acts.*
2. *The laws of language creativity are the laws of individual psychology.*
3. *Creativity of language is meaningful creativity, analogous to creative art.*
4. *Language as a ready-made product (ergon), as a stable system (lexicon, grammar, phonetics), is, so to speak, the inert crust, the hardened lava of*

Abstract Objectivism

1. *Language is a stable, immutable system of normatively identical linguistic forms which the individual consciousness finds ready-made and which is incontestable for that consciousness.*
2. *The laws of language are the specifically linguistic laws of connection between linguistic signs within a given, closed linguistic system. These laws are objective with respect to any subjective consciousness.*
3. *Specifically linguistic connections have nothing in common with ideological values (artistic, cognitive or other). Language phenomena are not grounded in ideological motives. No connection of a kind natural and comprehensible to the consciousness or of an artistic kind obtains between the word and its meaning.*
4. *Individual acts of speaking are, from the viewpoint of language, merely fortuitous refractions and variations or plain and simple distortions of normatively identical forms; but*

language creativity, of which linguistics makes an abstract construct in the interests of the practical teaching of language as a ready-made instrument.

precisely these acts of individual discourse explain the historical changeability of linguistic forms, a changeability that in itself, from the standpoint of the language system, is irrational and senseless. *There is no connection, no sharing of motives, between the system of language and its history. They are alien to one another.*¹⁶

I have given the two tables in full to show clearly how Volosinov sets up the 'two trends' of thought as a pair of binary oppositions, his thesis and antithesis. Most relevant to the present discussion are those specific details assigned to abstract objectivism, in particular: language as a 'stable, immutable system of normatively identical linguistic forms', the idea of a 'closed linguistic system', and the relegation of speech acts to an area of irrationalism and irrelevance. Volosinov characterizes all this as a species of Cartesian rationalism, particularly in respect of its stress on 'the idea of *the conventionality, the arbitrariness of language*'.¹⁷ When Volosinov looks in detail at the *Course*, it is to the social nature of language that he gives his deepest consideration; and he exemplifies the split between individual and social as the 'pseudos proton' [sic] of Saussure's thought:

Let us underscore Saussure's main thesis: *language stands in opposition to utterance in the same way as does that which is social to that which is individual*. The utterance, therefore, is considered a thoroughly individual entity. This point, as we shall see later, contains the *pseudos proton* of Saussure's views and of the whole abstract objectivist trend.¹⁸

For Volosinov, the problem with Saussure is fundamentally one of alignment: Saussure could have concentrated on the ‘historical’ aspects of language, just as he could have chosen to concentrate on a linguistics of the utterance. For instance, in the *Course*, Saussure notes that it would be perfectly possible to construct a linguistics of language (i.e. of *langue*), and one of speech (*parole*) [*Course*, pp. 19-20]. Similarly, in a chapter on the ‘internal and external elements of a language’ (pp. 20-23), he acknowledges the importance of ‘external’ issues (the effect of demographic changes, and of political history for instance).¹⁹ Effectively, the internal method is taken up not just because external features are ‘unsystematic’, but because part of Saussure’s project relies on a rejection of a traditional linguistics which concentrated solely on such externalities. Switching therefore to a systemic approach, he also rejects concentration on the individual speech act because of its lack of ‘collectivity’. Yes, there could be a linguistics of the individual speech act, but this could never be ‘linguistics proper’, because there is nothing collective about speech: ‘its manifestations are individual and momentary’ (*Course*, p. 19).

Volosinov is wrong to accuse Saussure of completely rejecting a diachronic approach. In fact, Saussure characterizes synchronic and diachronic as the ‘two parts of linguistics’ (*Course*, p. 99), and dedicates parts 2 and 3 of the work to investigations of each in turn. However, Volosinov is correct in recognizing in Saussure an assessment of the diachronic approach as irrational because unsystematic. Diachronic linguistics, argues Saussure, concerns itself with the study of ‘relations that bind together

successive terms not perceived by the collective mind but substituted for each other without forming a system' (*Course*, p. 100); and, in summarizing the differences between the two approaches later, he sees diachronic analysis as actually a series of synchronic slices at intervals over time, rather than being characterized by an historical logic or intelligibility (*Course*, p. 182).

In effect, Volosinov's approach is to deconstruct the simple opposition between individualistic subjectivism and abstract objectivism. He wants neither simply to reject both approaches, nor come up with some simple mediation between them. If, as Volosinov states, language is a 'purely historical phenomenon', then its analysis cannot be properly achieved by a Saussurean objectivism. Contrary to Saussure's representation of himself as advancing beyond a traditional linguistics, Volosinov stigmatizes his work as emanating from the same emphasis, a philological concentration on the 'alien word', and the analyst's 'outsider' relationship to his object of study.²⁰ The Saussurean system rejects the utterance as something individual and unsystematic, and this represents its '*proton pseudos*'. Contrastingly, the subjective approach embraces the speech act, but it 'likewise defines this act as something individual and therefore endeavours to explain it in terms of the individual psychic life of the speaker'. Thus, it too in fact relies on the same '*proton pseudos*'.²¹ For Volosinov, what is required is a dialectical synthesis of the two positions, which redefines the utterance as a 'social phenomenon':

[T]he truth is not to be found in the golden mean and is not a matter of compromise between thesis and antithesis, but lies over and beyond

them, constituting a negation of both thesis and antithesis alike, i.e., constituting a *dialectical synthesis*.[...] [T]he speech act or, more accurately, its product - the utterance, cannot under any circumstances be considered an individual phenomenon in the precise meaning of the word and cannot be explained in terms of the psychological or psychophysiological conditions of the speaker. *The utterance is a social phenomenon.*²²

It is worth noting, before moving on, that here, for the first time, Volosinov distinguishes between an individual speech act (equivalent to *parole*), and to what he calls here its 'product' - the 'utterance'. This will become significant, since it represents a transformation of the subjective, individualistic act, into something much more social in character. Utterance becomes, for Volosinov, a way of theorizing the activity of language as an interactive process in which 'dialogue' always takes place. It is here, at the recognition of the utterance as a 'dialogical' process, that Volosinov attempts to forge a very different linguistics from Saussure's, and its explication is critical, since the term, and its related 'dialogism', have been so severely reduced and misinterpreted in relation not just to Volosinov's early work, but as it is used later by Bakhtin in his literary analysis. Volosinov's response to the thesis of individualistic subjectivism and the antithesis of abstract objectivism is to offer his own third tabulation, a dialectical/dialogical transformation of the pairs of binary opposites into the dialogical third term:

1. *Language as a stable system of normatively identical forms is merely a scientific abstraction, productive only in connection with certain particular practical and theoretical goals. This abstraction is not adequate to the concrete reality of language.*
2. *Language is a continuous generative process implemented in the social-verbal interaction of speakers.*
3. *The laws of the generative process of language are not at all the laws of individual psychology, but neither can they be divorced from the activity of speakers. The laws of language generation are sociological laws.*
4. *Linguistic creativity does not coincide with artistic creativity nor with any other type of specialized ideological creativity. But, at the same time, linguistic creativity cannot be understood apart from the ideological meanings and values that fill it. The generative process of language, as is true of any historical generative process, can be perceived as blind mechanical necessity, but it can also become 'free necessity' once it has reached the position of a conscious and desired necessity.*
5. *The structure of the utterance is a purely sociological structure. The utterance, as such, obtains between speakers. The individual speech act (in the strict sense of the word 'individual') is *contradictio in adjecto*.²³*

The relationship between Volosinov's 'third term' and the first two can be given in schematic form as follows:

1. Dialectical Synthesis ('DS') 1 'demotes' Abstract Objectivism ('AO') 1, giving it value only in a strictly regional sense, and with limited validity as a methodological abstraction.
2. DS 2 takes over Individualistic Subjectivism ('IS') 1, but substitutes the 'social-verbal intention of speakers' for 'individual speech acts'.
3. DS 3 rejects IS 2 and AO 2, arguing instead that 'the laws of language generation are sociological laws'.
4. DS 4 rejects IS 3 and AO 3.
5. DS 5 accepts the 'structuring' systemic emphasis of AO 4, but in relation to the 'sociological structure' of the utterance rather than the underlying language system, which it redefines (rather like IS 4) as the determinate product of practice.

I think the table is adequate as an indication that Volosinov offers a successful non-Hegelian exit from the binary that does not either simply cancel or preserve it, in other words the process of a materialist dialectic.

3. Dialogism v Monologism

Volosinov's first amendment to Saussure's analysis of language use, is to refine the 'talking-heads' model, in which Saussure represents speech as an

unproblematical transference of a psychological concept, via a physiological process; a system which makes language itself transparent in the process (*Course*, pp. 11-12). Volosinov, rather like Roman Jakobson, sees the structure of the utterance as being determined by a complex set of competing functions, including the relative social position of the two parties, the context within which the discourse takes place, how it is transmitted, for what purpose etc. For Volosinov, 'verbal interaction' is the basic reality of language²⁴:

The actual reality of language-speech is not the abstract system of linguistic forms, not the isolated monologic utterance, and not the psychophysiological act of its implementation, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances.²⁵

That use of the epithet 'monologic' requires explanation, which will also confront some of the complexities in 'dialogism'. In an earlier discussion, Volosinov has used the term 'monologic utterance' to mean something finished, unable to change, 'divorced from its verbal and actual context and standing open not to any possible sort of active response but to passive understanding'.²⁶ This idea is linked to Volosinov's criticism of traditional philology for its treatment of language as the 'alien word', so that the philologists and linguists become the 'decipherers' of alien 'secret' scripts, priestly disseminators of the 'Logos'.²⁷ But his use, in this criticism, of the difference between 'dialogism' and 'monologism' is both problematical, and

symptomatic of a certain looseness of definition, which will become even more evident in the later work of Bakhtin. There is no such thing, for Volosinov, as a purely monologic utterance, even when it appears to be used in opposition to dialogism, as its binary opposite. 'Any monologic utterance', he writes, 'is an inseverable element of verbal communication'. Although the philologist attempts to tear each 'monument' out of its 'real domain', treating it as if it were 'a self-sufficient, isolated entity', in reality it 'makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn' (in other words, is part of a dialogical process).²⁸ What Volosinov is suggesting here, is that the term 'monologic utterance' is merely a convenience, an artificial abstraction, which pretends that the utterance is drained of its dialogic 'being' when it is removed from its linguistic domain, and can therefore become the simple object of individual philological enquiry. But if *all* utterances are actually dialogical, how useful is it as a term of analysis (more than being an interesting observation about the complexity of language)? In fact, as I have suggested, Volosinov actually uses the terminology in other ways. Specifically, he differentiates 'monological' from 'dialogical' utterances by arguing that they describe how language use is affected by power relationships. Briefly, his argument is that the dominant ideology attempts to restrict the possibility for language to be 'multi-accentual', that is, to be able to be used by competing ideological positions. The dominant presents the sign as 'naturalized', possessing a transcendent, eternal character which represses difference.²⁹ Thus the monologic is applied to the dominant, and opposed by the dialogic, represented later by Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque in

Rabelais.³⁰ Unfortunately, Bakhtin also uses the terms in his literary criticism, by invoking the rather simplistic notion of the novel as inherently 'dialogical', as opposed to the 'inferior' 'monological' earlier literary genres, such as poetry or epic, which inevitably suppresses the original idea of all utterances as inherently dialogic.³¹

If then, dialogism is an inherent feature of all language, every utterance, it is also important to note that Volosinov wants to consider, not the individual elements that make up an utterance, but the utterance in its entirety. A complete utterance may be as brief as a one-word warning, or as long as *Crime and Punishment*. What is important, for Volosinov, is the completeness of the utterance as the object of study. But even in its entirety, as word or book, it is not to be seen in isolation, but as part of a continuous stream of discourse, within which the individual utterance can have its boundaries defined.³² The utterance is filled, not with meaning, but with meanings; this basic idea will underpin the work of the Bakhtin school right through to Bakhtin's own death in 1975. Dialogism represents a dialectical relationship between the word now, and the whole history of that word's use; as well as between each word and every other part of the utterance. Each utterance is inherently 'new' and 'used' at the same time.

Despite some of the problems I have drawn attention to above, it is reasonable to suggest that Volosinov's dialogic language theory is both inventive and illuminating, and he supports his arguments with some striking examples of language activity. For instance, he gives an elegant example of the subtleties of dialogism, in recounting an anecdote given by Dostoevsky in

Diary of a Writer. Here, Volosinov is able to indicate how, even within a relatively small speech community, intonation can have radical effects of meaning. In this particular example (one, it has to be said, which looks very ‘literary’), Dostoevsky overhears a ‘conversation’ between ‘six tipsy artisans’, which consists in the repetition, six times, of a single ‘widely used obscenity’ (unspecified). This repetitive, and minimalist debate, produces the following meanings:

1. An utterly disdainful denial of some point recently in general contention.
2. Doubt about the veracity of the first denial.
3. As a form of pejorative abuse.
4. Complaint about being interrupted.
5. In the sense of discovery of something previously looked for.
6. A warning that the shouting by (5) would lead to physical damage.

Dostoevsky, summarizing the occasion, writes: ‘And so, without having uttered one other word, they repeated just this one, but obviously beloved, little word of theirs six times in a row, one after the other, and they understood each other perfectly’.³³ Volosinov uses the term ‘theme’ here, to indicate a special property of the whole utterance: ‘the theme of an utterance [...] is individual and unreproducible. [It] is the expression of the concrete, historical situation that engendered the utterance’.³⁴ Volosinov is suggesting that the sort of ‘performance’ witnessed by Dostoevsky says something important about how language appears to escape the limits of its own

‘system’ in actual use. What he needs, in order further to understand this, and to differentiate properly between the different ‘performances’ of the artisans, is a theory of speech acts (such as J L Austin’s), which would for instance allow him to differentiate between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.³⁵ In Dostoevsky’s example then, what is witnessed is a range of different speech acts or ‘performances’, which nevertheless consist of a single word. In effect, that word is ‘accented’ in a number of different ways which displays the (power) relationship existing between the six artisans. Bakhtin has also attempted to formulate a theory of ‘speech genres’, which describes localised discursive practices with their own micro-rules of usage which are distinct from the wider ‘systemic’ rules of language (grammar, syntax etc.).³⁶ Here is how some of the ideas developed above transfer into Bakhtin’s work on the novel:

[T]here are no ‘neutral’ words and forms - words and forms that can belong to ‘no-one’; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by

intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word.³⁷

Even right at the end of his life, Bakhtin maintained this position. Linguistics (as traditionally defined), can only deal with the relationship of sign to sign, not with the relationship of utterance to reality; what matters is the utterance, as a semantic whole; utterance never simply reflects an already given (passive representation of the system); words do not 'belong' to any one person, who therefore (like Humpty Dumpty), maintains strict control over them:

The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no one). The word is a drama in which three characters participate (it is not a duet but a trio). It is performed outside the author, and it cannot be introjected into the author.³⁸

Bakhtin's 'trans-linguistics', allows him to develop a theory of language which avoids the reductionism implicit in a more structural approach, and, at the same time therefore, opens up the opportunity for a version of literary analysis which goes beyond the formalist pursuit of 'literariness'. Williams, writing from the perspective of one deeply committed to a radical challenge to the hegemony of 'Literature', and (as will be developed later), deeply

sensitive to the commodification of telecommunications, the technology of language, looks to Volosinov and Bakhtin as the way to underpin his own cultural theory.

4. Keywords and Crises

In Williams's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the issue of language starts to be one of prime importance; and this places him squarely within a general critical development in Anglo-American criticism, where the dissemination of European theory, centred on versions of structuralism and poststructuralism, had begun to produce a series of critical (positive and negative) reactions. We may, in shorthand, sum up the position in the title of Williams's 1983 essay 'Crisis in English Studies'.³⁹ That 'crisis' is a crisis of definition: the definition of what counts as 'English studies', and the problem in defining language itself. And it is a crisis in the more overt sense, of a clash between a traditional attitude to literary work, and the new 'European' invasion of English, exemplified in the 'MacCabe affair' in Cambridge, in January 1981. It is here that the issue of 'language' impinges directly on Williams's activity as a Cambridge don; here too, in his support for MacCabe, we can witness not his 'resistance' to theory (a common criticism) but, on the contrary, his deep awareness of 'theory' in general, alongside his own commitment to a specific theoretical position, which swerves past the move into a structuralism founded on Saussure's theory of the sign, and points towards a more open form of cultural criticism, today perhaps the norm rather than the exception. However, as I suggested at the start of the chapter,

Williams's appropriation of Volosinov/Bakhtin rather than Saussure, will also result in his ignoring the more radical implications of Saussure's sign theory, just that aspect, indeed, so familiar at the time to colleagues like MacCabe.

Williams may have missed out on the specifics of MacCabe's Marxist linguistics, but at least he seems to have been aware of MacCabe's work, which was not true of some of his colleagues. For it was MacCabe's insistence on the study of linguistics as a grounding for (but not substitute for) literary studies, together with his desire to open up the courses, allowing limited work on film and T.V., rather than his apparent adherence to structuralism (a severe distortion of his actual allegiance), which seems to have sparked off the 'structuralist controversy' which ended with the Faculty's denial of tenure to MacCabe, and the removal of Williams (and interestingly, Frank Kermode), from the appointments committee.⁴⁰ Williams, entering the debate in *The Guardian* in January 1981, and following Fredric Jameson's advice (surely his too), to 'always historicize', starts by describing a group of 'youngish men' designing a course in Cambridge called 'Literature, Life and Thought'. But these young men are not MacCabe, Stephen Heath and Co., not 'a band of structuralists, semioticians [and] marxists', but an earlier group, who also had to face up to a language 'crisis', names familiar from earlier chapters, 'Richards, Empson, Leavis, Willey [and] Knights'. Now, once again, writes Williams:

[R]ecognition [of the language crisis] coincided with the vigorous development of new kinds of work, notably the new school of mainly

Marxist historians of English culture and society, and the wide international development of new phases of Marxist thought, rejecting the older formula of 'base and superstructure' and analysing, in diverse ways, the relations between literary forms - that neglected area, in its essential combination of aesthetic and historical practice - and social traditions and formations.⁴¹

'Crisis in English Studies' picks up on some of these issues, and continues the debate begun earlier in *Marxism and Literature* and the first edition of *Keywords*. *Keywords* is, in many ways, an exemplary version of a desire on Williams's part to concentrate on historical analysis rather than engage in a synchronic, system-based debate on language. But it is much more than that, more than that is than a sort of cultural *O.E.D.*, although in many ways it is that too. More too, than a late appendix to *Culture and Society*, although, as the subtitle suggests, it is a *vocabulary* to culture and society. More, because it concentrates not only on its manifestly abecedarian investigation into Williams's personal selection of 'difficult' words, but because it is an open text. *Keywords* relies for its power on Williams's ability to see important connections between his keywords, without organizing them into a formal 'generic' structure, which would itself restrict the opportunity to forge new connections. *Keywords*, as a vocabulary, tries to go beyond the constraints of works such as the *O.E.D.* (Williams of course recognizes its great contribution nevertheless), which, because of their volume, restrict the opportunity for frequent updating; so that, despite the *O.E.D.*'s concentration

on semantic shift, it has to offer 'today's' definition, which tends to be reified. *Keywords*, argues Williams, almost cries out for response and amendment. It ends with blank pages 'as a sign that the inquiry remains open', because 'in the use of our common language, in so important an area, this is the only spirit in which this work can be properly done'.⁴²

In the Introduction to *Keywords*, Williams addresses some of the issues that formed the 'crisis' of 1981, once again stressing how important he sees the recent work within semiotics and linguistics, but confirming also that his own work is in some sense oppositional to this dominant trend. Stressing that 'the most active problems of meaning are always primarily embedded in actual relationships', he goes on to indicate his dependence on a form of 'historical semantics', which pays attention not just to the past, or the present, but rather to a continuing social process, and further, to an activity which is deeply engaged with relationships of continuity and discontinuity.⁴³ Most importantly, Williams rejects any idea of offering this study as the resolution over class disputes, as if any politically incorrect 'faults' in the individual words can be amended to rectify society in some simple way. But that does not mean the study cannot be useful to a radical politics, which is why he is so keen to stress the very ideological nature of the entries:

What can really be contributed is not resolution but perhaps, at times, just that extra edge of consciousness. In a social history in which many crucial meanings have been shaped by a dominant class, and by

particular professions operating to a large extent within its terms, the sense of edge is accurate.⁴⁴

Williams sees the struggle for hegemony over language as an ongoing process, within which human beings make their own history. It is worth quoting in full an unusually intricate, and sinewy sentence which presses the point:

[*Keywords*] is an exploration of the vocabulary of a crucial area of social and cultural discussion, which has been inherited within precise historical and social conditions and which has to be made at once conscious and critical - subject to change as well as to continuity - if the millions of people in whom it is active are to see it as active: not a *tradition* to be learned, nor a *consensus* to be accepted, nor a set of meanings which, because it is 'our language', has a natural authority; but as a shaping and reshaping, in real circumstances and from profoundly different and important points of view: a vocabulary to use, to find our ways in, to change as we find it necessary to change it, as we go on making our own language and history.⁴⁵

Nothing in *Keywords* makes reference to any specific theoretical position underlying the argument; although, in passages such as the above, and comments such as 'verbal interaction is the basic reality of language', there is an indication that what is being relied upon is a Bakhtinian translinguistics,

rather than a Saussurean structural linguistics. And, in his response to questions in *Politics and Letters on Keywords*, he argues that the work there was produced in opposition both to the structuralist emphasis on language as the creation of arbitrary signs, and Leavis's insistence on a single heritage of meanings.⁴⁶ The influence is made explicit in 'Crisis in English Studies' and *Marxism and Literature*, in both of which he opts for the approach of the Bakhtin school.

'Crisis' develops its argument around considerations of literariness: Leavisite 'moral and cultural discrimination', 'committed' versus 'uncommitted' social realism, literariness as a question of formal devices, etc. *Marxism and Literature* (understandably in a chapter called 'Language'), offers instead a history of the conceptualization of language, from Plato to the present ('Literature' is the following chapter). In both cases, there is a very explicit concern with the relationship of language to consciousness and therefore social being. Indeed, Williams summarizes the entire history of language theory as an investigation into the relationship between language and reality. The debate, which in *Marxism and Literature* includes an extensive analysis of the problems Williams sees in Saussure's position, hinges on Williams's attempt to carve out a theoretical space where his conception of cultural materialism, which wants to redefine determination so that it embraces the positive idea of exerting pressure, as well as the negative one of setting limits (*M&L*, p.87), can embrace a concept of language which avoids its 'dematerialization' as purely superstructural (given Williams's

problematic assumption that the concept 'superstructures' implies not 'material' because functional and determined).

Like Volosinov, Williams describes Saussure's linguistics as a type of objectivist sociology, founded on work on 'specific past texts: finished *monologic* utterances' (*M&L*, p. 27, emphasis added). He sees the distinction between *langue* and *parole* as representing the bourgeois separation between society and the individual; and links this directly with the problems he senses between this structural linguistics, and the structural Marxism of Althusser and others from the middle of the twentieth century; in which history is radically excluded. '[H]istory', he writes, 'in its most specific, active, and connecting senses, has disappeared (in one tendency has been theoretically excluded) from this account of so central a social activity as language' (*M&L*, p. 28). In *Politics and Letters*, he is challenged on this position, linked as it is to the concept of the arbitrariness of the sign. His interlocutors argue that the opposition between individual and society is fundamentally different from that between *langue* and *parole*. The first pair 'coexist on the same plane - most typically, society provides the constraints in which the individual operates', whereas *langue* and *parole* are genuinely oppositional, because '*langue* is never realized - only *parole* is present', and therefore, 'it is because there is *langue* that *parole* is communication'.⁴⁷ Once again, in his response to this reading, Williams emphasizes that what is at fault for him in the *langue* / *parole* opposition, is its hierarchical ordering, wherein *parole* is always determined by the pre-existing system (determined in the last instance, he might have said). Williams, like Volosinov, recognizes that in one sense there

has to be a system in place: without it, communication would be impossible. But what this leaves out is the acknowledgment that 'systematic organization remains the social creation of real people in real relationships'. Further, he resists the charge that this merely makes the obvious point that languages have developed over time, by emphasizing that 'the systematic character of language itself is the result, the always changing result, of the activities of real people in social relationships, including individuals not simply as products of the society but in a precise dialectical relation both producing and being produced by it'.⁴⁸

5. Lacking positive terms: Saussure, *différance* and further crises

It remains to see just how Williams adapts Volosinov's work to his own formulation of cultural materialism. In 'Crisis', he argues strongly that the pioneering work in the U.S.A. and France in the 1950s and 60s was based primarily on the early formalists, rather than the more historically oriented work of the Bakhtin school. Whereas the early formalists searched for 'literariness' within the work itself, Bakhtin and his colleagues opted for a theory which emphasized the open nature of production, and hence redefined the concept of the literary away from reification:

The work of Bakhtin himself, especially in his study of Rabelais, had indicated the beginning of a certain new kind of literariness - and thus an *historical* literariness - by observing the interaction and the creative surpassing both of modes of folk literature, which had traditionally

been present, and of the polite literature which had come down within a more limited and conservative social tradition. It was precisely in the interaction of those received and different traditions that a new indication of what it was to be literary was formed.⁴⁹

In *Marxism and Literature*, this analysis is extended. Here he writes of Volosinov's 'usable sign', language as a multi-accentual dynamic fusion between 'formal element' and 'meaning'; which 'is capable of modification and development', and which synchronic analysis 'ignore[s] or reduce[s] to a secondary or accidental character' (*M&L*, p. 39). Even when not referring specifically to Volosinov, Williams adopts his terminology, describing the activity of traditional philology as the study of the 'alien written word', a concentration on 'finished monologic utterances' (*M&L*, pp. 26-27). Williams praises Volosinov for his distinction between the fixed 'signal', and the active, historical 'sign'. The mobile sign helps to deconstruct the opposition between individual and society by allowing both manifestly social interaction, and a form of internal, personal consciousness (*M&L*, p. 40). Thinking not just of Volosinov's work, but also of the explorations of Vygotsky, he argues that 'we can add to the necessary definition of the biological faculty of language as *constitutive* an equally necessary definition of language development - at once individual and social - as historically and socially *constituting* (*M&L*, p. 43, emphasis in original). Williams extends this into understanding language in dialectical terms, and suggests that it will allow him later to offer a new understanding of 'literature', in the process once again resisting the

base/superstructure model for what he sees as the 'secondary' nature of superstructural activity:

What we can then define is a dialectical process: the *changing practical consciousness of human beings*, in which both the evolutionary and the historical processes can be given full weight, but also within which they can be distinguished, in the complex variations of actual language use. It is from this theoretical foundation that we can go on to distinguish 'literature', in a specific socio-historical development of writing, from the abstract retrospective concept, so common in orthodox Marxism, which reduces it, like language itself, to a function and then a (superstructural) by-product of collective labour (*M&L*, pp. 43-44).

Inevitably though, all this is tempered somewhat by Volosinov's emphasis on the sign, the isolation of which is bound, ultimately, to be related in some way to a system, which will be 'at best an analytical procedure, at worst an evasion' (*M&L*, p. 42). Surprisingly though, Williams's slight reservation here does not allow him to question in more detail Volosinov's arguments, and, in particular, to show how Volosinov's critique of Saussure's work itself ignores the radical implications of his 'differential' system. Even when subject to his interviewers' questions in *Politics and Letters*, Williams restricts his comments on Saussure to the 'ahistorical' distinction between *langue* and *parole*.⁵⁰ He fails to confront the work of Derrida and others and

its relationship to Saussure, despite his own close involvement with MacCabe and those like him actively involved in the dissemination here of European theory in the early 1970s.

What those theorists concentrate on (Derrida, Lacan, Barthes et al) is the implication of Saussure's argument, mentioned earlier, that 'in language there are only differences *without positive terms*' (*Course*, p. 120, emphasis in original). As Derrida and others have noted,⁵¹ any 'system' without positive terms, is a very strange sort of system indeed, and its implications philosophically are enormous. In particular, it is a challenge to the 'metaphysical' notion of 'presence' (since this particular system appears to be only ever 'absent'), and, even more significantly for the arguments of Volosinov and Williams, it emphasizes how meaning is the product of the syntagmatic relations between signifiers, no one of which is ever fully present to itself. In other words, Volosinov's insistence on a 'contextual' analysis is at the expense of misunderstanding that Saussure's emphasis on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects of language indicates that he does not conceive of the signifying elements as a fixed 'self-identical' form (as in the model of 'abstract objectivism'). Further, the differential relationship of signifier to signifier stressed by Saussure allows Derrida to emphasize how Saussure's structure is a structure of 'non-presence', of what he calls *différance*, whose 'silent' *a* emphasizes the activity and passivity of 'differing' and 'deferring'. It is this sense, of meaning always being deferred, always differing from itself, this *différance* which will fuel Derrida's emphasis on difference as 'play', Barthes's *jouissance*, and Lacan's sliding of the signified

under the signifier. But as with Volosinov, this also undervalues Saussure's analysis.

For Derrida, Saussure's (unrecognized) radical semiology represents nothing less than a deconstruction of the whole of Western metaphysics, and, as such demands more attention than Williams seems prepared to give it. If Williams had attempted a formal critique of Derrida's position, he would also have been able to identify a further move in Saussure (missing from Derrida's account), from 'open' *différance* to a system of closure, generally ignored in the structuralist / poststructuralist accounts of Saussure. Saussure's just quoted comment on language as a system of differences without positive terms is given on the assumption that the signifier and signified are considered separately. In practice, as Saussure has already emphasized, the signifier and signified are always combined in the 'sign', language is like a sheet of paper, with thought on one side and sound on the other (*Course*, p. 113). 'When we consider the sign in its totality', he writes, 'we have something that is positive in its own class. [...] Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact' (*Course*, p. 120). It is this further amendment to Saussure's emphasis on difference and negativity which allows him to consider the sign itself as a positive term, and inevitably leads to the conclusion that the more 'excessive' interpretations of Saussurian linguistics, which deny *any* stability of meaning (in the context of the relational system itself), rely on at best a partial reading of Saussure. This is true also of Derrida, whose work is conducted in terms of phonemic or morphemic 'traces' rather than

Foucauldian 'discursive events', even though he does not want to privilege absence over presence, but rather postulate his *différance* as a structure inconceivable within a system which opposes one to the other.

Despite Williams's optimistic appraisal of Volosinov and the dialogic sign, its operation within cultural materialism must remain problematic. Much of Williams's later work takes up the sociological aspects of Volosinov's work, relating to language as a *social* activity, and the utterance as the real unit of human speech, without utilizing the developed *literary* discourse of the Bakhtin school: 'heteroglossia', 'dialogism', 'multi-accentuality' and the rest. Thus, the later chapters in *Marxism and Literature*, where Williams puts his language theory to work on the category 'literature', contains no mention of Bakhtin or Volosinov, even when he deals with a central Bakhtinian concern such as 'genre'. Williams wants language, as a socio-cultural activity, to be the 'social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs'. It must be a 'practical material activity, [...] literally, a means of production', but without the necessity to rely on some form of ultimate structural determination (*M&L*, p.38). The argument in *Marxism and Literature*, relying on Volosinov's theories (refined somewhat by Vygotsky), cannot finally offer a secure base for Williams's concept of language, or its application to considerations of the aesthetic or 'literariness'.

Instead, he uses the work of Jan Mukarovsky, of the Prague school, which tries to redefine the 'aesthetic' or the 'literary' in terms of social 'function' (*M&L*, pp. 152-54). Four years later, in his address to the Cambridge English faculty, Williams makes the claim, as ironic as it is

surprising, that '[c]ultural materialism is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production'.⁵² Cultural materialism, therefore, in its attitude to language, and, importantly to the paradigm 'Literature', seeks, as does 'radical semiotics', to 'include the paradigm itself as a matter for analysis, rather than as a governing definition of the object of knowledge'. Indeed, Williams imagines a future where the then current practice of radical semiotics (presumably exemplified by the work of MacCabe), has become 'fully historical', in which case it would be 'very much the same thing as cultural materialism'.⁵³ He returns (briefly) to the work of Bakhtin (this time Bakhtin's study of Rabelais), arguing that Bakhtin helped to initiate an understanding of the category 'literature' which went beyond the work of the early Russian formalists (Eichenbaum, Shklovsky etc.), by positing the notion of an 'historical literariness'.⁵⁴ This work is then extended and radicalized by Mukarovsky, who redefines the aesthetic by suggesting that the aesthetic dimension (or 'literariness') 'is not even primarily produced within the work of art'.⁵⁵ Williams takes Mukarovsky's ideas into his 'multiplicity of writing', arguing that 'the aesthetic' has to be rejected 'as a separate abstract dimension and as a separate abstract function' (*M&L*, p. 156). But this is not at all the same thing as suggesting that the 'aesthetic' does not exist (as some postmodernists would like to suggest). Rather, it means that in all sorts of ways, notions of aesthetics or literariness have social meaning, but not that sense of 'timelessness' or 'transcendentalism' traditionally associated with them. This is devastating, and not just for cultural materialism. If this new

'cultural semiotics' is founded on a denial of the validity of the traditional categories of the 'aesthetic', so that an aesthetic paradigm is no longer a suitable, canonical model against which standards of analysis can be measured, but rather an object to be tested itself (against what?), then the work of (particularly) English departments needs to be redefined: this is the real 'crisis in English studies', and will form the basis of a continuing and often acrimonious debate between 'cultural materialists' and more 'traditional' literary critics. Those differences will become more apparent in the next chapter, where I contrast some of these more 'traditional' approaches to reading with Williams's own developed practice, and will form the basis of further discussion in the Conclusion, where I consider briefly more recent developments in the practice of cultural materialism since Williams's death in 1988.

Notes and References

¹ Raymond Williams, *Loyalties* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985; London: Hogarth Press, 1989), pp. 356 and 249.

² That is, M.M. Bakhtin, V. N. Volosinov, and P.N. Medvedev. The close inter-relationship between their various texts, makes it appropriate to consider these three as a 'school', although the historical information about their working practices is somewhat murky. There have been suggestions that most of the texts published under their respective signatures were actually attributable to Bakhtin, but this ignores the real differences in some of the arguments, particularly in relation to Marxist theory.

³ Roland Barthes, 'The Structuralist Activity', in *European Literary Theory and Practice: From Existential Phenomenology to Structuralism* (New York: Delta, 1973), pp. 157-63 (pp. 157-58, emphasis in original).

⁴ Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interview with New Left Review* (London: New Left books, 1979). p. 324.

⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; repr. 1989), p. 21 (emphasis in original), [hereafter, references are given within the text as '*M&L*, page number'].

⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* [1846], ed. by C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970; repr. 1989), p. 51.

⁷ The term 'species-being' derives from Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx appropriates the term and extends it in his analysis of 'alienation'. See e.g.: 'The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' [1844], in Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975; repr. 1992), pp. 279-400 (pp. 386-91).

⁸ This 'simple opposition' does not (necessarily) represent an implied criticism of Saussure, since, as I hope to show in passing, part of the problems inherent in the structuralist enterprise arise as the direst result of a reductive reading of Saussure.

⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [1916], ed. by Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Reidlinger (London: Fontana, 1974), p. 11 [hereafter, references are given within the text as '*Course*, page number']. Some of the problems with appropriations of Saussure's theories arise from the arcane nature of the text's original production (See: *Course*,

pp. xxix-xxxii). A good defence of the argument that the book's faulty structure has led to misunderstanding is given by Jonathan Culler in *Saussure* (London: Fontana, 1976; repr. and rev. 1988).

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson gives a useful account of this aspect of Saussure in *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 5-22.

¹¹ Saussure emphasizes the priority of the verbal over the written throughout the *Course*. This 'logocentrism' is the subject of Jacques Derrida's extended critique, particularly in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

¹² It is this radical notion of structure which will become the subject of Derrida's critique, the implications of which for Williams are explored later in the chapter.

¹³ By 'arbitrary', Saussure means that the sign is *unmotivated*, that is, there is no 'natural' link between signifier and signified (sound image and concept). Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* [1966] (Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), has argued that Saussure is actually *thinking* about the *real* and not just the concept, and states further that: 'between the signifier and the signified, the connection is not arbitrary; on the contrary, it is *necessary* (p. 45, emphasis in original). Jameson, in *The Prison House of Language*, notes that the word 'natural' was an addition to Saussure by his editors, and sees Benveniste's comments as 'true and misleading': 'The relationship is of course not arbitrary for the speaker but rather for the analyst himself; and the doctrine of the arbitrary character of the

signifier seems to me to play an essential enabling and functional role in Structuralism in general (witness Derrida's doctrine of the trace!) (p. 30, f.n. 26). This mention of Derrida acts as a reminder that, as I indicate early in the essay, such 'radical' results of the application of Saussure's model are missing from the accounts of Volosinov and Williams.

¹⁴ Culler, *Saussure*, p. 34.

¹⁵ V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* [1929/30] (New York/London: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 57.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 48 and 57 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 57 (emphasis in original).

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 60-61 (emphasis in original).

¹⁹ Saussure's attempt to formulate an object that would ground linguistics as a unified science is analysed by Jameson: see *The Prison House of Language*, and, in particular, Saussure's letter to Antoine Meillet, quoted on pages 12-13

²⁰ Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 71-77.

²¹ Ibid., p. 82.

²² Ibid., p. 82 (emphasis in original).

²³ Ibid., p. 98 (emphasis in original).

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 83-98; and c.f. Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', repr. in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (Harlow: Longman, 1988), pp. 31-57. This is taken from a conference in 1958, but there is clear evidence that Jakobson was an early influence on the Bakhtin school: see e.g. I.R. Titunik's appendix to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 175-200 (esp. pp. 187-88).

²⁵ Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 94.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 23. For further discussion of these two versions of the monologism / dialogism opposition, see: Gary Saul Morson, 'Dialogue, Monologue, and the Social: A Reply to Ken Hirschkop', in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on his Work*, ed. by Gary Saul Morson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981; repr. 1986), pp. 81-88.

³⁰ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1965] (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

³¹ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981; 1990).

³² Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 96. Volosinov's definition of utterance as the linguistic unit has the extra advantage of avoiding the real problem of defining 'word' in more traditional schemes; e.g. the issue of whether 'morpheme' can be synonymic with 'word'. See: Saussure, *Course*, pp. 105, 110, and 185 (note).

³³ Volosinov, *Marxism*, pp. 103-04.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁵ J L Austin, *How to do Things with Words* [1955], 2nd edn ed. by J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962; 1978). For Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, see pp. 100-102.

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- ³⁶ M.M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986; 1990), pp. 60-102.
- ³⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 259-422 (p. 293).
- ³⁸ M.M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of the Text', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, pp. 103-31 (pp. 121-22).
- ³⁹ Williams, 'Crisis in English Studies', in *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 192-211 [originally a lecture given to the Cambridge English Faculty in 1981].
- ⁴⁰ For MacCabe's own version of events, see his 'Class of '68: Elements in an Intellectual Autobiography 1967-81', in *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 1-32 (pp. 25-31).
- ⁴¹ Williams, 'Their bark may well be lost, if it is not tempest tossed', *Guardian*, 24 January 1981, p. 11.
- ⁴² Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976; rev. edn 1989), p. 26. As the Preface to the Second Edition shows, Williams did receive, and respond to, numerous comments and amendments. Interestingly, along a long list of contributors, the name of Colin MacCabe appears.
- ⁴³ Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 22-23.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁶ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, pp. 176-77.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 329-30.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 330.

⁴⁹ 'Crisis', p. 204 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁰ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 330.

⁵¹ Much of what follows relies on the helpful explanation of Derrida's rewriting of Saussure given in his interview with Julia Kristeva in *Positions* [1972] (London: Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 15-36.

⁵² Ibid., p. 210.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 211.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 204.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 204.

‘All That Hospitalitie Doth Know’:

Literary Ideology in Penshurst

A developed cultural materialism distinguishes itself from other ways of analysing culture (including cultural texts), by its insistence on recognising not just an historical dimension, but, more centrally, by paying serious attention to productive forces usually dismissed as irrelevant, except in Marxist criticism. *The Country and the City*, which Williams published in 1973¹, can be seen to represent an interim statement of this fully-developed position. I want to demonstrate this by considering Williams’s analysis of the ‘country-house’ poetry of Ben Jonson and others (in particular Jonson’s ‘To Penshurst’), showing how Williams’s method differs from much of what has come before; but also comparing his work with some more recent approaches. In the final section of the chapter, I will try to develop the cultural materialist reading, to offer some further insights into the poetry.

A ‘traditional’ (Leavisian?) reading of the poetry would have as one of its main aims a method of differentiating between the ‘literary’ or ‘aesthetic’ qualities of competing texts, or, more likely, different authors. The Williams of *The Country and the City* still thinks in this way - indeed, even later he is prepared to argue that ‘it is not difficult to distinguish between poems by Jonson and by Carew - the former are better written in a perfectly normal sense than the latter’.² This looks very like a sort of residual Leavisianism, but it also serves to remind us that the development of cultural

materialism does not necessarily include the abandonment of all of Leavis's ways of thinking. By arguing for the 'normal sense' of his artistic judgement, Williams acknowledges that Carew is not as original or substantial a writer as Jonson, but does not also argue that his writing practice is 'sloppy', or that he is an unpractised writer of verse. Effectively, Williams concurs with Leavis in Leavis's critical 'shorthand', that it is reasonable as a working hypothesis to identify a 'line of wit' emanating from Jonson (and Donne), as we saw in chapter two. Nevertheless, that 'perfectly normal' also carries with it a suggestion that there is a consensus about 'literariness', which one would expect cultural materialism to challenge. Despite this, the plan Williams followed in *The Country and the City*, the developing project of cultural materialism, can be differentiated from the sort of work he did in *Reading and Criticism*:

My project, a very difficult one in which I am not sure I always succeeded, was quite different: it was to try to show simultaneously the literary conventions and the historical relations to which they were a response - to see together the means of the production [of the texts] and the conditions of the means of production. For the conditions of the means of production are quite crucial to any substantial understanding of the means of production themselves.³

I will investigate that project, both in its successes, and perceived weaknesses, as a method of identifying more closely just what constitutes the

practice of cultural materialism, its limits, and limitations. My main argument will be that Jonson's 'To Penshurst' marks a peculiarly fertile, abundant, not to say overdetermined text, which needs to be examined in its fullest social, political and cultural formation, before proper recognition can be given to its significance. Further, none of the critics, Williams included, seems prepared to attempt anything like this totalizing perspective, in an attempt fully to appreciate just what ideological position(s) the poem helps to support or suppress (or even elaborate for the first time). As a first step, I will briefly introduce 'To Penshurst' and the genre of country-house poetry, and then look at its critical reception before Williams went to work on it.

1. Penshurst: Criticism before Williams

As an identifiable genre, the country-house poem is predominantly a seventeenth-century phenomenon, although a recent anthology includes a few earlier examples.⁴ The poems tend largely to be centred on the buildings of noblemen most involved in Court affairs under Elizabeth until her death in 1603, and then James I; and distinguished from the generally less-ostentatious 'piles' of the much more numerous 'gentry'. Jonson's 'To Penshurst' is somewhat atypical, in that the poem underplays the 'ostentatious' aspects, stressing rather the house's modest aspect.⁵ Ben Jonson wrote 'To Penshurst' in homage to his patron Sir Robert Sidney, later Earl of Leicester.⁶ Other country-house poems included in Fowler's anthology are 'To Sir Robert Wroth', 'The Praises of a Country Life' and 'Lord Bacon's Birthday'. There are also examples from members of Jonson's 'Tribe of Ben', and a number of

imitations and reworkings of Jonson.⁷ Like ‘To Penshurst’, Jonson’s ‘To Sir Robert Wroth’ was included in the 1616 folio of the poet’s *Works* (as part of *The Forest*), and it too celebrates a member of Sidney’s family, his son-in-law, married to his daughter, Mary. Indeed, Jonson wrote a number of poems in honour of the family, as well as dedicating plays like *The Alchemist* to them.⁸ Penshurst had been the home of Robert’s late brother, poet and author of the *Arcadia*, Sir Philip Sidney. The poem is addressed to the house, rather than directly to its owner, and includes within its content Jonson himself, and, towards the end, the king and his son, Prince Henry. I mention these specifics, because they will come to be of central importance in the cultural materialist reading, but not in some simplistic ‘Batesonian’ contextual reading. Indeed, as we have already seen, such a method would be contrary to Williams’s ideas about the relationship of texts to their history since the 1950s, although this will not stop recent critics like Thomas Marshall summarising the cultural materialist approach as merely one of mapping text onto suitable-looking context.⁹

Before Williams’s work in *The Country and the City*, there was a general consensus about country-house poetry, and ‘To Penshurst’ as a representative example. L.C. Knights’s disconcerting certainty about the poem’s message is typical:

[B]ecause the great houses were an integral part of English rural life - not just holiday resorts for hunting and shooting - their owners were genuinely in touch with the activities and traditions of the countryside.

Ben Jonson was a shrewd and realistic observer of the life about him. [...] [The poem offers] an idealized but not, I think, a misleading picture, and it gives a fair impression of what 'housekeeping' meant for many great families of the time. It meant hospitality, and it meant sharing in the community life of the village in a fairly intimate fashion. It meant something altogether different from a condescending interest in 'the villagers'. [...] And since the country houses were still functional units in the rural economy of the time, I think they helped to foster that ultimate feeling for natural growth and the natural order.¹⁰

This short extract encapsulates much of the interest and difficulty of the poem, although none of it is a problem for Knights: what does it mean to say that the country-house owners were 'genuinely in touch with the activities and traditions of the countryside'? How did they 'share in the community life of the village in a fairly intimate fashion? In what sense were country houses 'still functional units', and had that function changed, indeed, what were its 'functions'? And finally (the relationship to my earlier discussion on *Scrutiny* is clear), just what is 'natural growth' and 'natural order'? Such questions would be reasonable ones to ask at any time; in the early years of the seventeenth century, only thirty years before the English Revolution, towards the end of a long 'transitional' period between a feudal and a capitalist mode of production (which needs further investigation), they become particularly significant, as we shall see.¹¹

Another critic, Geoffrey Walton, goes beyond Knights to some extent, sensing in the poem a tension brought about by the shift from 'older ideals of social justice and responsibility' towards a 'nascent capitalism' despised by Jonson.¹² Nevertheless, Walton clearly shares Knights's view of country-house living in the early 1600s, arguing that Jonson 'certainly wrote at a time when a highly cultivated society still kept in close contact with the community which supported it and still preserved traditions which encouraged it to maintain this kind of give and take, social, economic and cultural'.¹³ Margaret Walters extends the analysis, recognizing the importance of Jonson's 'persona' as a device within the poem, and also the very strong temptation to idealize a sort of Golden Age through the metaphor of the country house.¹⁴ Nevertheless, her critical rhetoric mirrors that of Knights and Walton when she recognizes 'the expression of something in the nature of this civilization, at once close to the earth, yet profoundly ideal'.¹⁵ Once again, what is seen is a 'realistic' picture of rural harmony: a harmony which extends from the 'friendliness of Nature' to 'a sense of harmony and health in the whole rural community', in which 'the country people freely and gladly bring gifts'. Relationships emphasize 'rightness and naturalness' within a 'way of life in which there is neither envy nor poverty, but where every station, King, Countryman, or Poet, takes its rightful place'. 'Penshurst', writes Walters, 'is built, not on oppression, but on love and a glad recognition of social responsibility'.¹⁶ As before there is an insistence on a sense of order and rightfulness in the relative relations of the poem's characters. Part of the problem with this interpretation, I think, stems from a confusion between the

new 'courtiers' like Robert Sidney (I consider this definition of Robert Sidney as a 'new courtier' later in the analysis) and Saxham's Sir John Crofts; and the 'country gentry' who kept themselves apart (or were forced to stay away from) court affairs, not opening their houses to royal visitations.¹⁷ Walters argues that the country-house poets 'share with Jonson the values of the conservative country gentry - opposed to the commercialities of Court and City, but firmly attached to King and Church'.¹⁸ This could certainly represent a summary of the manifest message of 'To Penshurst', but, as we shall see in more detail later, what it misses is the fact that Sidney, and for that matter Jonson, are just as much men of the Court as they are ostensibly attached to its opposite, which fact alone inevitably makes the poem a much more complex affair than it may at first appear. Some other problems, more directly related to Williams's own recurring concerns, may also now be obvious, in particular an over-confidence by these critics with the meaning of words like 'nature', 'natural', 'culture', 'community' etc. which ignores their historicity. Words which have troubled and intrigued Williams throughout his career are here brought together in the complex relationship between 'country', 'city' and 'community'. Indeed, in an appendix to *The Country and the City*, Williams teases out some of these movements, and finishes by arguing that the late sixteenth century was 'the decisive period in the formation of the structure of meanings in the words which describe [his] main theme' (*C&C*, p. 307). It is this, the relationship between representation and misrepresentation, which will form the basis of Raymond Williams's analysis of country-house poetry in *The Country and the City*.

2. *The Country and the City*

Writing about his method in *The Country and the City* some years later, Williams distinguishes between what he describes as the 'dominant literary paradigm' and its alternative, cultural materialism, as we saw in the previous chapter. The 'dominant literary paradigm' would include much of Williams's work before *The Country and the City*, consisting for the most part of 'work which may be approaching the analysis and judgement of literature with an exceptionally strong consciousness of the social determinants upon it', but in which 'the centre of literary attention is still there, and the procedures are judgement, explanation, verification in terms of historical explanation, and so on'.¹⁹ Williams insists that this 'traditional' method is not the one used in *The Country and the City*:

One work, however, of which this cannot be true is *The Country and the City*, [...] because it sets out to identify certain characteristic forms of writing about the country and the city, and then insists on placing them not only in their historical background - which is within the paradigm - but within an active, conflicting historical process in which the very forms are created by social relations which are sometimes evident and sometimes occluded.²⁰

Note in passing that by considering the 'occlusion' of social relations, Williams is considering those relations as structurally necessary

misrepresentation, in other words he effectively adopts a Marxist theory of ideology, despite the rejection of 'ideology' we saw in chapter four. This shift in critical understanding represents for Williams one symptom of the 'crisis' in English studies, which has resulted in a rapid reorganization of the work of English departments, as well as the development of new departments dedicated to a range of cultural formations once disparaged as 'merely popular'. The 'very form' of *The Country and the City* includes within it an admission of Williams's own subjective position, a sense of 'personal pressure and commitment' (C&C, p. 3).

Before confronting the specific examples of the country-house poems, Williams tackles the issue of the 'Golden Age', which appears to underpin the history of writing on rural issues. In a later chapter, I will have to confront criticism of Williams, accusing him of the occasional lapse into 'village nostalgia' (a nostalgia suggested in the very opening of *The Country and the City*, in terms of his upbringing in the shadow of the Black Mountains, but then mediated by reflections on his alternative 'city' life). Williams perceives within 'country' literature a continuous lament for a better past - once again we are taken into the domain of George Sturt and the organic community as read by Leavis and Thompson in *Culture and Environment*. But as Williams thinks about these ideas something takes over: it is the image of an escalator taking him and his readers back in time. Within a few paragraphs we are guided through a condensed literary history: through Hardy and George Eliot; via Cobbett and Clare; stretching back through the centuries; back beyond Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), and Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c1370-85).

At each stage of this 'nostalgic' trip into the past, the various writers sense their recent belatedness, the Golden Age has always just been left behind. From here, it is only a short excursion through the Domesday Book, the Celts etc., before we arrive (but do not necessarily end), at the Garden of Eden, the Bible offering then just one more 'golden age', the ultimate Western, Christian, literary 'version of pastoral' (*C&C*, pp. 9-12). And it is pastoral to which Williams then attends, offering a further historical analysis which seeks to challenge some received notions of the term. But not before he has recognized, in this brief, almost satiric account of the continuing yearning for a past golden age, that this too is a term which is historical:

[W]hat seemed a single escalator, a perpetual recession into history, turns out, on reflection, to be a more complicated movement: Old England, settlement, the rural virtues - all these, in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought to question (*C&C*, p. 12).

In the tradition of pastoral poetry, exemplified by, but not starting with, the writings of Virgil, the golden age is at once a memory and an expectation. For Williams, Virgil's work is characterized by a contrast between what he sees as Virgil's close attention to what is still a 'working country life', and this idea of 'a restoration, a second coming' (*C&C*, p. 17). The specific example Williams gives, from the fourth Eclogue, will find its echo in 'To Penshurst':

Goats shall walk home, their udders taut with milk, and nobody
 Herding them; the ox will have no fear of the lion ...
 ... Then shall grapes hang wild and reddening on thorn trees
 And honey sweat like dew from the hard bark of oaks ...
 ... The soil will need no harrowing, the vine no pruning-knife
 And the tough plowman may at last unyoke his oxen (*C&C*, p. 18).

This example is interesting for two reasons. The first is how such imagery finds its complement in the 'neo-pastoral' of the country-house poems. Here we are offered a Utopian vision of the 'second coming', a future 'golden age' when the flora and fauna will reproduce for us by themselves the easy abundance of the Garden of Eden. But poems like 'To Penshurst' celebrate the coming into existence of such a utopia, and they do it by employing very similar devices. Thus, in Aemilia Lanyer's 'The Description of Cooke-Ham', we have lines like: 'The trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad / Embraced each other, seeming to be glad, / Turning themselves to beauteous canopies / To shade the bright sun from your brighter eyes' (lines 23-26). Carew does something similar in 'To Saxham', utilising this time specific Biblical imagery to emphasize nature's willingness to give itself up to Saxham's use:

The Pheasant, Partridge, and the Larke,
 Flew to thy house, as to the Arke.

The willing Oxe, of himselfe came
 Home to the slaughter, with the Lambe,
 And every beast did thither bring
 Himselfe, to be an offering.

(lines 21-26)

This message is also central to 'To Penshurst', and now nature is shown as being in the same sort of relationship to the manor as the villagers are to its owner:

The painted partrich lyes in every field,
 And, for thy messe, is willing to be kill'd.
 And if the high-swolne Medway faile thy dish,
 Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,
 Fat, aged carps, that runne into thy net.
 And pikes, now weary their own kinde to eat,
 As loth, the second draught, or cast to stay,
 Officiously, at first, themselves betray.
 Bright eeles, that emulate them, and leape on land,
 Before the fisher, or into his hand.

(lines 29-38)

Williams reads these lines as evocation of 'what is now sometimes called a natural order, with metaphysical sanctions' (*C&C*, p. 29). This reminds us of

the criticism of Knights, Walton and Walters, but, as Williams stresses, it is a 'natural order' which is really the result of applying a literary convention. We have seen this same convention used in Virgil's fourth Eclogue sixteen hundred years earlier, and Williams presses the point that 'natural' can often look particularly 'unnatural': 'this natural order is simply and decisively on its way to table' (*C&C*, p. 30).

This brings us to the second reason why considering the Virgil is useful as part of the analysis of the country-house poetry, since it is a reminder that there is a tendency within traditional literary criticism not just to canonize specific authors, but also to insist on the authority of particular conventions, selected versions of history which seek to exclude oppositional tendencies. The pastoral tradition, like all traditions, is selective²¹, and tends to turn away from materialist readings of cultural formations, in favour of the invented 'golden age':

We must not look, with Crabbe and others, at what the country was really like: that is a utilitarian or materialist, perhaps even a peasant response. Let us remember, instead, that [a particular] poem is based on Horace, Epode II or Virgil, Eclogue IV; that among the high far names are Theocritus and Hesiod: the Golden Age in another sense (*C&C*, p. 18).

This additional perspective, that the golden age extends not just to a nostalgia for a perceived lost past, or expectation of perfection to come, but

crosses into the very formation of the canon itself, a literary golden age which will help to enshrine literature as a paradigm immune from question, will become important later in the analysis. For now, Williams extends his historical investigation of pastoral and its derivatives, via the poetry of the medieval period, into its transformation early in the seventeenth century into the 'neo-pastoral' country-house poetry.

Williams makes the point that we are dealing here not just with the 'internal transformation' of a mode of writing, but with such a transformation 'in the interest of a new kind of society: that of a developing agrarian capitalism' (*C&C*, p. 22). Typically, he offers this significant insight without bothering to develop it, or even support it with any evidence. I will want to argue later that most of the critics have failed to offer an adequate reading of the poetry partly because they have not paid enough (if any) attention to the relations of production within the 'courtly' manors around 1600, for which (particularly in the case of Sidney's Penshurst) we have access to a considerable volume of historical evidence, from personal letters to estate accounts. By paying attention to this, and at the same time considering the work of Marxist historians on the 'transition' from feudalism to capitalism, as well as more general studies on Elizabethan and Jacobean aristocratic families like the Sidneys, it will be possible to go 'beyond' Williams and try to extend the cultural materialist reading. But, for now, I must attend more directly with Williams's own analysis, alongside some more contemporary readings.

3. Williams and Contemporary Criticism

For Williams, poems such as 'To Penshurst', 'To Sir Robert Wroth' and 'To Saxham', 'use a particular version of country life as a way of expressing, in the form of a compliment to a house or its owner, certain social and moral values' (*C&C*, p. 27). As Williams analyses 'To Penshurst' in detail, we are immediately forced to realize how complicit Knights and the other critics mentioned earlier were with the dominant ideology expressed in the poems. However, what also has to be acknowledged is that since Williams's work there has been a new batch of critical readings, partly influenced by him, but often taking issue with his views as they too offer versions of ideological critique. The critics, old and new, tend to focus on two main aspects of the poem: the relationship of the house (metonymically standing in for Robert Sidney) to the local people; and the abundance of nature, linked to an harmonious connection between that nature and the activity of the house. The first lines to elicit comment are these:

And though thy walls be of the countrey stone,

They are rear'd with no mans ruine, no mans grone,

There's none, that dwell about them, wish them downe;

But all come in, the farmer, and the clowne;

(lines 45-48)

Knights had read these lines as an example of Jonson's 'shrewd and realistic' observation; Walton judges Penshurst as 'an active centre of a patriarchal

community', yet one in which 'all classes [...] live in close personal contact'; in Margaret Walters' curious phrasing, the lines support 'the beauty of a way of life in which there is neither envy nor poverty'.²² Against these readings, Williams's response offers a sharp contrast. Accepting that Jonson's Penshurst, like Carew's Little Saxham (in which similar description is used), may be 'lucky exceptions' from the norm (quite a concession in itself, and not necessarily supported from other evidence, as I shall show), nevertheless, even if 'such houses and such men' existed, 'they were at best the gentle exercise of a power that was elsewhere, on their own evidence, mean and brutal' (*C&C*, p. 29).

Writing in 1993, Thomas Marshall's reaction to Williams's reading is itself astonishing: 'Apparently, Williams reads this as a denial that anyone built Penshurst's walls, rather than an assertion about the nature of working relations on the estate'.²³ Marshall offers this criticism without directly quoting Williams, but must presumably be thinking of the lines given above. It is obviously a wilful misreading of Williams: it may be a reasonable interpretation of the poem's manifest content to suggest that the poem offers walls building themselves, just as it later has 'fat, aged carps' willingly running into nets (line 33). But Williams clearly reads the suggestion of a lack of labour as part of the linking of a social order to a 'natural order, with metaphysical sanctions' (*C&C*, p. 29). Marshall, offering a reading based on the idea of 'decorum' as the central controlling motif within the poem, argues for the exceptional qualities of Penshurst, compared with other country houses (and, as he notes, so does Williams). But his insistence that Jonson's

lines are evidence that ‘the well-being and affections of the tenantry matter’²⁴ seems as inadequate a reading of the poem as Knights and the other earlier critics. For, of course, the question is not what the lines say, which is certainly that everything in this particular country garden is sweetness and light, but rather how can the poem be read ‘against the grain’ or ‘ideologically’. Williams would presumably accept the desirability of gaining the affections of the tenants, and looking after their well-being, but with the proviso that these descriptions are offered from the point of view of the Lord of the manor. Marshall’s decorum then becomes the ideological mask which seeks to convince the reader (*the* reader of course being Robert Sidney), that what is offered as the content of the poem is an honest assessment both of the actual conditions existing at the time, and Jonson’s reliance on and belief in them.

In Marshall’s reading, any suggestion of aggression or potential class conflict is diluted by a sense of decorum which relies on a shared sense of responsibility. This is exemplified by the lines closely following those already given:

And no one empty-handed, to salute

Thy lord, and lady, though they have no sute.

Some bring a capon, some a rurall cake,

Some nuts, some apples, some that thinke they make

The better cheeses, bring hem; or else send

By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend

This way to husbands; and whose baskets beare

An embleme of themselves, in plum or peare.

(lines 49-56)

Knights writes that this ‘gives a fair impression of what “housekeeping” meant for many great families of the time’, turning Jonson’s poem into a piece of realist reportage. Walters, more circumspectly, detects an air of ‘unreality’ but argues that it is saved by ‘the tone of kindly comedy, and by the precision of the writing’.²⁵ Williams does not refer to these lines specifically, but this does not stop Marshall from asserting that Williams misreads them. Marshall summarises their meaning as offering ‘something inhering in order, regularity, and reciprocal responsibility’. He appears to endorse such qualities as much as Jonson, since he goes on to write that they are ‘with a little luck, within the range of human capability to obtain’.²⁶

By insisting on his idea of decorum, Marshall has to refuse anything apart from the most obvious interpretation of these lines. Yet this reading is immediately called into question by the next few lines of the poem, which he does not quote:

But what can this (more than express their love)

Adde to thy free provisions, farre above

The neede of such? whose liberall boord doth flow,

With all, that hospitalitie doth know!

(lines 57-60)

Presumably, what Jonson is describing is some sort of formalised ritual (akin perhaps to the harvest festival), where the tenants offer tribute. But it seems likely that the capons and the rest represent a significant contribution for the tenants, coming as they must from what is at best a small surplus. It will need more analysis than Marshall is willing to give the poem to consider any further what it really means to describe Penshurst's produce as 'free' or Sidney's generosity 'liberall'. Williams does just this, emphasizing (without using such language) the figure of ideological inversion in the poem. The true facts of the 'curse' of productive labour are occulted, and instead we are 'fed' images of easy consumption and lordly generosity through a 'magical recreation of what can be seen as a natural bounty and then a willing charity':

[T]his magical extraction of the curse of labour is in fact achieved by a simple extraction of the existence of labourers. The actual men and women who rear the animals and drive them to the house and kill them and prepare them for meat; who trap the pheasants and partridges and catch the fish; who plant and manure and prune and harvest the fruit trees: these are not present; their work is all done for them by a natural order. When they do at last appear, it is merely as the 'rout of rurall folke' or, more simply, as 'much poore', and what we are then shown is the charity and lack of condescension with which they are given what, now and somehow, not they but the natural order has given for food, into the lord's hands.

The poem suggests that Sidney's cellars and kitchens are overflowing, allowing large 'hospitalitie'. But, as I will show later, this too is likely to be a misrepresentation - at the time the poem was written Sidney was deep in debt, and watching his manorial finances closely. Although such debt could of course be the result of such generous 'hospitalitie', maintaining a medieval tradition, it is much more likely to be the result of over-spending at the Court.²⁷ Marshall, maintaining his insistence on seriousness and decorum within the poem, then misreads this section of the poem, as indicating 'open access to hearth and table'.²⁸ However, although the poem continues by asserting that all guests are allowed to eat at the master's table, and share his meat etc. (lines 61-64), it is clear that the tenants queuing up outside are not 'guests' (as Jonson himself would like to be).²⁹ The difference between guest and worker is represented later by the imagined waiter, who will dine below on the leftovers of the banquet. If, as I have suggested, they are rather invitees to an annual, stage-managed, ritualistic 'celebration' of abundance and hospitality, then presumably such generosity will be short-lived. This is certainly more like Williams's own reading. He offers, as comparison, a poem written by peasant-poet Stephen Duck, in the late 1720s. In this alternative understanding of 'hospitality', the enjoyment of plentiful food and ale gives way, the following morning, to a realization that it is merely a 'cheat', which will only be repeated after another year's heavy toil (*C&C*, p. 32).

I mentioned above the notion that 'hospitalitie' may refer back to a set of relationships more appropriate to the middle ages than the 1600s, and it is possible to pursue this idea briefly, by looking at Chaucer's General Prologue

to the *Canterbury Tales*. Such a shift of emphasis may be justified first, because Robert Sidney's brother Philip singled out Chaucer for particular praise, arguing, in *An Apology for Poetry* (originally 'A Defence of Poetry', 1579-80) that there had been a sad decline in English poetry since Chaucer's time, and that this was a very serious state of affairs, given his belief that it is from poetry that all other 'human learning' is derived, and that its effects are 'so good as to teach goodness and to delight the learners'.³⁰ In Chaucer's General Prologue we meet the 'frankeleyn', a substantial landowner, and previously a 'shirreve' and a 'contour' (auditor).³¹ As in 'To Penshurst', the description of the frankeleyn is given in terms of conspicuous consumption and surplus. The frankeleyn is described as 'Epicurus owne sone' (line 336), and 'Seint Julian' (line 340). As Jill Mann has pointed out, by combining these two 'strangely assorted personalities' into the character of the frankeleyn, Chaucer is able to emphasize his love of food, while avoiding the 'selfish materialism' usually equated with Epicurus, since 'Seint Julian' was the patron saint of hospitality.³² The frankeleyn thus strangely combines both the persona of Jonson in 'To Penshurst' (emphasising his own 'gluttony', while making it clear that such excess is acceptable [line 68]), and Sir Robert's hospitality (the frankeleyn's table is always ready: 'His table dormant in his halle alway / Stood redy covered al the longe day' [lines 353-54]).

When we come to the description of the frankeleyn's table, the imagery once again relies on an intimate relationship between nature and culture, nature willingly giving itself up for human consumption:

His breed, his ale, was always after oon;
 A bettre envyned man was nowher noon.
 Withoute bake mete was nevere his hous
 Of fissh and flessch, and that so plentevous,
 It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke,
 Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke.
 After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
 So chaunged he his mete and his soper.
 Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe,
 And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.
 Wo was his cook but if his sauce were
 Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his geere.
 His table dormant in his halle alway
 Stood redy al the longe day.

(lines 341-54)

Mann mentions that 'birds and fish are especially prized by the *bons viveurs* in satire on gluttony'³³, and little seems to have changed between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Just as in 'To Penshurst' the partrich and the pike ('luce') are among the particular delicacies. But whereas in the later poem a sensitivity to nature and the seasons is emphasized: 'fig, grape, and quince, each in his time doth come' ('To Penshurst', line 43); here the frankeleyn pragmatically adjusts his diet in accordance with the 'sondry sesons of the yeer' (line 347). Once again, this excess is offered without the intervention of human labour, here even bad weather contributes to the all-year-round

abundance, in a quasi-miraculous materialization of food out of the surrounding air ('it snewed in his hous of mete and drynke' [line 345]).

It is worth noting also, the description given of the frankeleyn - he is not a knight (like say Gawain), but a 'knyght of the shire' (line 356), in other words, a member of Parliament. He offers no liege-service to a lord, but instead, like Sidney, is assumed to have a straightforward 'capitalist' ownership of the land free from feudal obligations. But, within the poem, this version of 'non-military' authority is given in the language of romance and heraldry: his kitchen utensils become his 'geere' (line 351), and his table is 'dormant' (line 353)³⁴; to complete the knightly imagery, a two-edged dagger ('anlass', line 357) hangs from his belt. Obviously, Chaucer, like Jonson, relies on a community of understanding to see that this is an extended joke, but it also reminds us that there was a gradual demilitarization of the noble class, starting in the late medieval period. Perry Anderson notes that 'in 1500, every English peer bore arms; by Elizabeth's time, it has been calculated, only half the aristocracy had any fighting experience'.³⁵ He also makes the point that this shift away from the military coincided with the loosening of old ties between vassals and liege-lords, and its substitution by the adoption of new noble ranks which tended to divide out the 'peerage' from the rest of its former class.³⁶ Lawrence Stone sees this trend as leading to a 'loss of nerve' on the part of the nobility, and argues that they substituted 'a romantic and artificial revival of the chivalric ideal, expressed in literature by Malory's Arthurian legends'.³⁷ This 'loss of nerve', and weakening of the medieval ties between lord and 'dependants' is likely to be even more severe by the time

'To Penshurst' comes to be written. The significant changes we can see here reflected in the literature represent the literary interpretation of that complex, 'transitional' shift from a fully-feudalist to a modern capitalist mode of production, that significant 'long revolution' still not complete in the early 1600s, and hinted at in the poetry of Chaucer by the description of the frankeleyn's travelling companion, the 'Sergeant of the Lawe' (line 309), one of the new breed of non-noble landowners, not troubled by 'loss of nerve', and relying on an understanding of the legal ways open to the new entrepreneur to gain property and keep it in the family ('al was fee symple to hym in effect' [line 320]). By 1600, the descendants of the 'Sergeant of the Lawe' will have transformed themselves, via the newly emergent trading opportunities, into that 'gentry' class busily accumulating the land shed by Court and courtiers alike to pay for extravagance at home and abroad, and, at the same time, rapidly becoming the dominant force in the House of Commons.³⁸

Like Marshall, Don E. Wayne, in a book-length study of 'To Penshurst', insists on a steady tone of seriousness.³⁹ It would seem that only Walters, sensing the comedy within Jonson's diction, begins to understand the true complexity of the relationship between the 'persona' of Jonson and the direction of patronage, something I will want to return to as part of the attempt to unravel the interlocking set of relationships between Jonson, the poem, Sidney, the Court, and the manor. Wayne attempts to map out the 'ideological domain' of the poem, but finds no space therein for anything but seriousness, since 'what [Jonson's] poem refers to is not intentionally

fantastic'.⁴⁰ But if we are to accept, almost as a matter of faith, that 'To Penshurst' is firmly within the paradigm of 'Literature' (and, therefore, by extension, Jonson is a talented poet), what are we to make of those lines quoted earlier, full of 'painted partrich[es]', 'fat, aged carps' and 'bright eeles' all willingly giving up their lives for Sidney's table? If we do not read them as 'intentionally fantastic' what then? - are they instead unintentionally fantastic, or not fantastic at all? As I have already shown, the poetry actually adopts a particular literary convention, one which in this case relies on a shared understanding of 'intentional fantasy'.

Unlike Wayne, and more akin to Walters, Williams reads these lines as wit ('the most ardent traditionalist will hardly claim it for observation' [*C&C*, p. 29]), a wit which works, he goes on to argue, by relying on 'a shared and conscious point of view towards nature' (*C&C*, p. 30). This emphasis is revealing and significant: the shared viewpoint is between the poet and the intended reader (Sidney), without such congruence the wit would fail and Wayne would be correct in denying a level of intentional fantasy. As Williams explains, Jonson's offering works by relying on a very conventional set of literary devices which transform what he wants to call the 'natural order' into a neo-pastoral within which nature and culture (i.e. tenants as much as eels), pay homage ('tribute') to the estate not through coercion but because they are happy to conform to their appointed place in God's world. What then remains 'natural' is not a real relationship, but rather the naturalization of a set of cultural conventions: as Williams comments, this is actually an extremely *unnatural* order: 'this natural order is simply and decisively on its

way to table' (*C&C*, p. 30). This naturalization works in part by rewriting a version of pastoral fit for the Jacobean age, and reinforces its historical validity by appealing, within the poem, to a golden age in which Pan and Bacchus can feast beneath the trees of Penshurst (just as Jonson hopes to).

4. The Penshurst Papers

I have indicated at various points earlier, how interpretations of the poem (including Williams's own), are incomplete or deficient in some way because little or no attention has been paid to the actual social conditions pertaining at its date of composition, sometime around the year 1610 (the exact date is still unknown).⁴¹ What is needed then, is an approach which pays attention to the *general* conditions existing at the time (in other words clarification about the mode of production), as well as more specific historical evidence relating to the organization of the Penshurst estate, and, most importantly, the relations of production operating in that manor. This is obviously crucial, since we are dealing with a poem which as I have shown has been interpreted as giving a fair representation of those relations (albeit by adopting a set of self-conscious literary stylizations). For the second of these, there is the advantage of the existence of a substantial archive of material relating to Penshurst, stretching back to the middle ages, and belonging to the present Viscount De L'Isle.⁴² This valuable resource seems to have attracted only limited attention from economic historians, although the material included in *MSS*, 77 has been the subject of a useful essay by J.C.A. Rathmell.⁴³

Considering first then the general conditions existing in England at the period, probably the least controversial comment to make would be that it is almost impossible to say with any real confidence either that there still existed a feudal mode of production, or that it had finally been replaced by capitalism. It is convenient, though far from conclusive, to mark the English Revolution of the 1640s as the decisive moment of full transference from one to the other, but, obviously, this leaves open the real possibility that for a significant time before (perhaps a couple of centuries), features of both modes appeared to exist together.⁴⁴ It has been conventional, for instance, to identify feudalism or capitalism by looking at whether rent is paid in money, rather than in kind or through labour. But, as Maurice Dobb has pointed out, following Marx, this is a mistake; there is no simple correlation between a decline in labour rent (by commutation to a money rent), and a decline in feudalism.⁴⁵ Indeed, as Rodney Hilton points out, feudal rent tended to be extracted in various means - 'mostly in labour, partly in kind, to an insignificant extent in money'.⁴⁶ What is relevant, rather, is not how the surplus is paid over, but how it is extracted, in other words, what sort of coercion is used, what are the relations of production between producer and overlord? In a fully-feudalist economy the main basis of calculation of rent is not economic but political, a measure of the success of non-economic forms of compulsion.⁴⁷ However, it is also clear that following the increase of peasant unrest in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries⁴⁸ the 'petty producers' tended to emancipate themselves from 'feudal exploitation', and this emancipation included the transition from labour rent to money rent, increasing the

possibility for them to retain more of the surplus product for themselves.⁴⁹ It is hard not to sympathise with the ‘conclusion’ of Eric Hobsbawm: ‘nobody has seriously maintained that capitalism prevailed before the sixteenth century or that feudalism prevailed after the late eighteenth. However, nobody can doubt that for all or most of the last 1000 years before 1800 economic evolution consistently took place in the same direction’.⁵⁰

If this brief investigation into the ‘transitional’ mode is less than fully satisfactory, it will be more helpful to consider the history of the aristocracy in the decades just before and after 1600, since this will then impact more directly on Penshurst and its owner, Robert Sidney. Lawrence Stone argues that the four most significant preconditions for the English Revolution were: the failure of the Crown to acquire ‘a standing army and a paid, reliable local bureaucracy’; the ‘decline of the aristocracy, and the corresponding rise of the gentry’ (a rise both of wealth and political power); a ‘diffuse Puritanism, whose most important political consequence was to create a burning sense of the need for change in the Church and eventually in the State’; and a general ‘crisis of confidence in the integrity and moral worth of the holders of high administrative office, whether courtiers or nobles or bishops or judges or even kings’,⁵¹ All of these may be relevant here, though obviously the second, the ‘decline of the aristocracy’, and the last, a lessening of the feudal ties of responsibility and respect, would seem most pertinent to this study. But these ‘cultural’ changes have to be considered in terms of more directly ‘economic’ adjustments. In another work, Stone analyses in detail how a combination of economic measures, including enclosure of lands, a shift towards economic

'rack' rents in the early seventeenth century, the disposal of land to finance debt by the nobility in favour of the gentry, and the general move towards 'absenteeism' in the last years of Elizabeth's reign and the first years of James's, as more of the 'country-house' nobles devoted considerable periods to attendance at Court, conspired to weaken them both socially and economically, undermining the loyalty of tenants as it drained away inherited wealth.⁵²

Most of the readers of 'To Penshurst' have relied on a specific set of beliefs about the estate, about Jonson, and about Sidney and his family, all based firmly in the information available in the poem: Penshurst is small compared with equivalent Elizabethan 'piles', and its relative modesty is a measure of the sort of man Sidney was ('thou art not, PENSHURST, built to envious show' [line 1])⁵³; Jonson was a close confidant of the whole family (evidenced by the number of poems and other writings he dedicated to them); and Sidney and his wife Barbara Gamage were an unusually loving and affectionate couple, who maintained at Penshurst a sort of paternalistic benevolence quite exceptional for the time, which included very close attention to the running of the estate and the needs of its tenants and wage-labourers. The records of the De L'Isle manuscripts, together with the detailed work of historians like Lawrence Stone, may make it possible at least partly to revise this generous portrayal, and, at the same time think further about Jonson's own relationship to Penshurst, King and Court.

Along with most of the other nobles attendant upon the Court in the last years of Elizabeth's reign, Robert Sidney was desperate for elevation to

the peerage, but, although Elizabeth recognised Sidney's value, like many others, he was passed over.⁵⁴ The succession of James I in 1603 produced a rapid change, and, along with a large number of others, Sidney soon had titles conferred on him, ultimately being made Earl of Leicester.⁵⁵ This potential increase in power and influence was not necessarily matched by an improved financial position. Many of the courtiers were riddled with debt, spending huge amounts on costly property improvements, Court attendance, and entertaining the king and his retinue at their houses, while at the same time shifts in the relations of production were tending to make it more difficult to collect and retain commercial rents, and the amount of land subject to rent was itself declining. The records of Robert Sidney and his estate remind us that British capital has always sacrificed long-term improvement for short-term gain, and that capitalism demands accelerating competitive reinvestment.

Against this general trend, there was always the possibility that funds could pass out from the Court into the hands of the nobles, and Sidney was the recipient of monies from the grant of old debts, and was also compensated when the 'Cautionary Towns' were returned to the Dutch in 1616, although such compensation may not have covered his previous earnings as Governor of Flushing.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the last few years of the sixteenth century, and the first decade of the seventeenth, saw Sidney and other family members constantly in financial difficulties. Besides a high level of expenditure on the noble cause of pursuing claims to land and title through the courts⁵⁷, Sidney felt he had to maintain a reasonably ornate standard of dress because of his position at Court: 'The bill for the outfit of Lord Sydney for the Christmas

Masque in 1603 came to £220, and a few years later a single suit for a court occasion - admittedly smothered in pearls - cost him £250'.⁵⁸ To put this in some sort of perspective, his Estate surplus at Lady Day, 1612 was just over £150, and he was paying landless day-labourers eleven pence a day based on a six-day week, equivalent to around £14 per annum.⁵⁹

Far from being exceptional, this life-style is shown by Stone to be typical - Sidney was obviously living beyond his means, and the considerable periods spent away from Penshurst (approximately twenty-eight months in total between July 1609 and September 1612 based on the De L'Isle catalogue index) meant he could not devote proper, personal attention to his estate accounts. Like many nobles at this period, he had not taken the opportunity to upgrade his accounting system to adopt the new 'double-entry' system, or to consolidate his estate accounts, information being kept in discreet 'parcels', and maintained under the archaic 'charge and discharge' system which made it all but impossible to decide whether the estate was running a surplus or deficit. So serious were these shortcomings, that Sidney, like many others, spent the first few decades of the seventeenth century desperately increasing the amount of estate paperwork, hoping to produce enough information both to allow him to understand how he was managing, and to dissuade his servants from poor work, or even from robbing him. Despite the attempt of the poem to offer a picture of mutual respect and trust ('there's none, that dwell about them, wish them downe' [line 47]), the estate papers show cooks behaving 'mallipertly' towards Lady Lisle, pages and footmen who are 'very chargeable', and 'unusefull servaunts'.⁶⁰

The inevitable result of all this financial ineptitude was serious debt - by 1626 the Earl of Leicester had debts running into thousands of pounds⁶¹, and, again like many of his fellow courtiers, he had recourse to moneylenders drawn from the newly-wealthy gentry class of City traders - along with a couple of lords and an earl, Sidney borrowed from the draper, John Langley⁶²; and he even on occasion had to rely on the generosity of one of his stewards.⁶³ Other members of the family were similarly plagued with money problems: following the death of her husband, Sir Robert Wroth, in 1614, Sidney's eldest daughter Lady Mary was 'beset with financial difficulties' and her influence at court 'declined'.⁶⁴

All of these worries, combined with Sidney's long absences from Penshurst, must have had their effect on his marriage to Barbara Gamage. Despite being an arranged marriage, and a very quickly 'arranged' one at that, following the sudden death of her father in 1584, their relationship is generally considered to have been very good⁶⁵, and most critics quote approvingly the lines: 'what praise was heap'd / On thy good lady, then! who, therein, reap'd / The just reward of her high huswifery' (lines 83-85). J.C.A. Rathmell is astute enough to realise that she had little choice but to be a good 'huswife': 'in the absence of her husband at court, the main responsibility for looking after Penshurst rested with her'.⁶⁶ It is fair to say that many of Sidney's letters to his wife show a high degree of affection, particularly before 1600, and he frequently mentions gifts he is sending to her: one letter mentions wine, blankets and various pictures which have 'cost [...] a good deale of money'. Like the poet, Sidney also appeals to her skills in management: 'I hope you

play the good houswyfe in my garden and see my Siccamor trees set as I gave order. Farewel sweethart and make much of yourself and kiss all our children from me'.⁶⁷

But, increasingly, the letters become generally shorter, and concentrate more on financial matters, until, in an extraordinary sequence between October 1608 and May 1610 they consist almost entirely of very abrupt requests for money to be sent, or accounts to be settled.⁶⁸ Indeed, there is the suggestion that Lady Lisle had to control the manor's budget even when Sidney was at home. One note from her to the steward Golding in 1607 acknowledges receipt of £150 and asks him to bring the money for servants' wages; this at a time when it is clear from other correspondence that Robert Sidney is at home.⁶⁹

If, as I want to suggest, all of this points to a man sadly out of touch with some of the realities of Penshurst, and an aristocratic family as much in 'crisis' as any other in the early years of James I's reign, in contradistinction to the prevailing critical opinion, it might be supported by the distorted picture Jonson offers of the family and its activities. Jonson, as his biographer David Riggs points out, 'consistently portrays the Sidneys [...] as members of a self-contained aristocratic community that is answerable only to its own ancestral traditions'.⁷⁰ This is stressed at the very beginning of 'To Penshurst', where the poet comments that the house is not 'built to envious show' (line 1), like equivalent courtiers' buildings (Sackville's Knole for instance, or Burghley's Theobalds), but then adds that it 'stand'st an ancient pile' (line 5), substituting tradition and heritage for conspicuous expenditure.

The *real* antiquity of the building (erected around the time of Chaucer's birth), is thus metonymically linked to the *presumed* ancient lineage of the Sidney family, but this is in fact a sham, as Riggs indicates:

By emphasizing the antiquity of Penshurst [...] and the purity of its gothic style, Jonson associates Lisle's manor house with the chivalric past. Yet the Sidneys did not, in fact, belong to the 'old' nobility. Lisle's father had bribed the heralds to fake a genealogy for them in 1568; they had acquired Penshurst from King Edward VI just sixty years before and they did not maintain an authentic tradition.⁷¹

Like the 'anlass' hanging from the frankeleyn's belt, Penshurst's crenellations are the signs of tradition and unbroken descent, rather than the real thing.⁷² The real tradition Robert Sidney has inherited, rather than the invented one of his family's ancient lineage, is the tradition of bribery and corruption. Sir John Fleming, writing to him in 1614, remarks on the likely high costs of the imminent marriage of one of Sidney's daughters, and offers not to press for early return of a £200 loan falling due. He continues: 'What place I am to hold in the martial courts of Flushing you may decide as you please, and your will shall be a commandment', a few weeks later, he has been appointed Sergeant Major.⁷³

Rather than assume, as the poem suggests, that it is Sidney's inherent modesty and private nature which persuades him not to make Penshurst as ostentatious as some of its neighbours, it may be much more to do with his

own financial limitations, and the good sense of those around him. Rathmell mentions the intriguing letter from Thomas Golding to Sidney of 1611, in which the steward is very un-deferential in warning Sidney about his debts, and tries to persuade him not to extend his deer-park.⁷⁴ In fact, if Lawrence Stone is right, Sidney is rather acting against the grain in even considering such a project, given the cost of development and inevitable loss of rents. Stone argues that the first decade of the seventeenth century saw 'park after park, even that around the great house', cleared to make way for valuable pasture or arable land as the desperate 'quest for profit' grew.⁷⁵ Here we have the tension between two competing sets of social relations made manifest: Sidney needs to improve his estate to gain royal favour, but must do so without the benefit of feudal patronage, instead relying on 'agri-business' and the primitive phase of the accumulation of capital. It is clear from other documents that this was not the only time Sidney tried to make Penshurst 'built to envious show', but was constrained by a lack of capital. In 1612 another steward, Robert Kyrwin, advises him to forestall new building work, so that the money can be used to finish a wall 'for the workmen desire to be payd every fortnight for thinges are very deeare'.⁷⁶ Indeed, the control of workmen, and tenants, is more of a problem than is suggested by the poem. Although rents are still being paid under the feudal mix of kind and labour⁷⁷, this does not mean that the extraction of the surplus is a straightforward matter of coercion. At one time, the sort of building work contemplated by Sidney could have been accomplished cheaply, relying on the tenants to supply free labour. But by 1611 this is not so likely to be the case, as Golding

advises Sidney.⁷⁸ Instead, the steward has to pursue the outside builders to provide full estimates of the cost of supplying labourers and masons.⁷⁹ Once again the old feudal formation has to make way for an emergent capitalism, here indicated by the development of a labour market and the settlement of wage levels by competition. Further, there is a new degree of mobility, men who had previously worked on the Penshurst demesne 'have taken bargains of the Earl of Clanrickard', who is building a house and paying out 'forty markes a week'.⁸⁰ Similarly, the collection of rents has become much less straightforward. Many letters bear witness to the problems of collection, and the amount of arrears. Sidney's lands at Otford appear to be a particular problem: in 1607 Golding writes that, although once 'so well esteemed [it] is brought almost into contempt [...] by extorting and bribing from tenants'.⁸¹ Four years later, Golding has to admit that it has become almost impossible to collect all the rents due, and that traditional methods of 'persuasion' are not working: '[I]f some tenants are backward, Hayward neither distrains nor reports their names. The last time he was with me I willed him to distrain. He told me that was what they desired. For then they would give up their lands'.⁸²

5. Jonson, The Sidneys, and the Court

One of the reasons that so much of 'To Penshurst' is confidently assumed to offer a fair representation of the Sidneys and the estate, is because Jonson is seen as having a particularly close relationship with the family. It is quite true, as Rathmell argues, that Jonson had 'many connections' with the

family⁸³, for instance through the staging of court masques⁸⁴, but it is less clear that his relationship with them was particularly intimate. Rathmell argues in favour of close ties, particularly in relation to another poem included in *The Forest*, 'Ode: To Sir William Sidney on His Birthday'. Rathmell reads this as indicating that Jonson was present at the birthday celebrations, and argues that Jonson appears to have had 'a particularly close relationship' with Sidney's son.⁸⁵ He quotes a letter written in July 1611 from Sidney to his wife, in which Sidney writes: 'If [Will Sydney] list he may do himself much good with Mr. Johnson and he cannot in any way please me better'.⁸⁶ Rathmell is cautious about assuming absolutely that this is Ben Jonson, but nevertheless writes of a 'quasi-tutorial relationship' suggested in the poem, for which the letter provides support.⁸⁷ Robert Evans, discussing the poem and citing Rathmell, suggests that 'the work may have grown out of Jonson's service to the Sidneys in a more official capacity than poet'.⁸⁸ This sense of Jonson as academic / moral adviser is then used to validate the poet's separateness from the festivities as the poem opens, only offering himself to William when 'all the noyse / Of these forc'd joyes / Are fled and gone' (lines 17-19).⁸⁹ A simpler explanation may be that he was never there in the first place, so that he brings in to the poem a *genuine* sense of displacement, and can only offer the bare essentials of any such festive occasion. Jonson's 'intimacy' with the family may have been overestimated: there are only two references to Ben Jonson in the *HMC* catalogue - one a letter to the second Earl of Leicester in 1637 which mentions the poet's death⁹⁰, the other a brief footnote to correspondence in 1614, concerning Jonson's travels in France

with the young Walter Raleigh.⁹¹ As for 'Mr. Johnson' the tutor, mentioned by Rathmell, the *HMC* index lists this as 'Robert Johnson, of Magdalen College [Oxford], afterwards one of the King's chaplains, tutor to William Sidney'.⁹² As Rathmell himself points out⁹³, Will Sidney was at Oxford, although his mother was reluctant to let him return on time at the start of each term, and his academic progress appears to have been unspectacular, so that the appointment of a personal tutor 'on site' and one obviously with some ties with the court, must have looked a good idea. The archivist of Magdalen College has confirmed that Robert Johnson graduated in 1598, and received the MA in 1601, eventually becoming chaplain to James I, although there is no information about his relationship to Will Sidney.⁹⁴

The doubt over Jonson's real relationship with the Sidney family is increased by the information that he was a tutor to Wat Raleigh. David Riggs dates the start of this relationship in the spring of 1612, just a few months after the presumed date of Will Sidney's twenty-first birthday in November 1611, for which the poem was written.⁹⁵ This relationship entailed a significant amount of time accompanying Wat on the 'Grand Tour', so any 'quasi-tutorial relationship' between Jonson and Will Sidney must have quickly changed into a form of 'distance learning' at best. But Jonson's 'adoption' of Raleigh's son may give a final clue to a revised interpretation of 'To Penshurst' and Jonson's other work ostensibly connected to the Sidney family. David Riggs points out that Jonson was making some attempt to develop a relationship with James I's son, Prince Henry - dedicating the 1609 quarto of *The Masque of Queens* to him, and, by 1612, preparing annotated

quartos of *The Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers* and *Oberon*.⁹⁶ His attachment to Wat Raleigh therefore, 'the son of Henry's chief mentor'⁹⁷ cannot have harmed his image. However, the potential cost of this pursuit of Royal patronage was the possible adverse effect on Jonson's relationship with the king, in almost every respect the opposite of his son's warlike, Francophile, abstemious inclinations. Jonson therefore needed to maintain at all cost evidence of a strong attachment to the father, while hoping to gain favour also with the son, and therefore improve his overall chances of patronage. At the same time, it would obviously be advantageous to develop other patrons, particularly where these also inter-related with the Court, and it is here that the Sidneys are so useful to Jonson. Unlike say Thomas Carew, who clearly built up a strong personal relationship to Sir John Crofts and his family, even accompanying one of his sons on *his* trip to France in 1619, I would suggest that the Sidneys may be only part of the structure of relationships adopted by Jonson to improve his own chances at Court. Thus, by pursuing a family like the Sidneys, Jonson would gain access also to the king, and in a sense replicate the nobles' own relationship to the court. Riggs makes this important point, adding that it was courtiers (like the Sidneys) who appeared in the masques written by Jonson (Lady Mary Wroth, for instance, appeared in Queen Anne's first masque, *The Masque of Blackness*, on Twelfth Night, 1605)⁹⁸, but it was James who 'paid. in whole or in part, for most of the court masques, and he was the one who ultimately had to be pleased'.⁹⁹

Jonathan Goldberg has noted that Jonson very frequently brought in references to the king when addressing others, a king 'that rules by example more than sway'.¹⁰⁰ This observation gives some force to an interpretation of 'To Penshurst' which gives more importance, perhaps, to the inclusion of the king, than the absent Robert Sidney. Jonson, in a few lines near to the climax of the poem, neatly equates himself with Sidney and the king, reinforcing the close relationship through the rhyme scheme:

As if thou, then wert mine, or I reign'd here;
 There's nothing I can wish, for which I stay.
 That found King JAMES, when hunting late, this way,
 With his brave sonne, the Prince, they saw thy fires
(lines 74-77).

Indeed, the patterning of the poem suggests that the art of poetry itself is as important a message as anything else - Jonson only enters the poem towards its close, as does the king, but the oblique reference to Robert's poet-brother Philip in lines 13 and 14 ('That taller tree, which of a nut was set, / At his great birth, where all the Muses met'), produces a poem in which the poet himself has a significant part to play - in this case the memory of Philip Sidney and *The Arcadia* is a convenient device which at once praises Sidney's family, the art and importance of poetry, and panders to the king's aesthetic leanings, and does it by reproducing suitable pastoral figures (Pan, Bacchus etc.), mixing them up into this new 'invented tradition' of the neo-pastoral country-

house poem, which is as much about show and the pretence of heritage and tradition, as the fake battlements of Penshurst itself.

The only problem with arguing in this way for the poetry being in a sense at least as much a 'tribute' to the king (and his son) as to Robert Sidney and his family, is that Jonson frequently tends to play down both Sidney's and his own relationship to the court, arguing in favour of country 'hospitalitie' and in opposition to the excesses and abuses of the seat of power. This displacement is even more obvious in 'To Sir Robert Wroth', where the directness of the address (to the man, rather than the house) is matched by a very full argument in favour of country-life and opposed to city and court. This complicated, and potentially precarious, balancing act that Jonson plays between court and country finds its equivalent in the representation of Philip Sidney in the poem. Like Jonson at Will Sidney's party, Philip Sidney is left rather 'outside' the proceedings at Penshurst, but Alan Sinfield has suggested that this is explained perhaps because 'as a writer who was also a nobleman he threatens to disrupt the poem's ethos of mutual deference between professional authorship and social power'.¹⁰¹ Jonson is not a 'nobleman' but would like to be, and he recognizes that such a position includes an acknowledgement that court and country are not in simple opposition - at least, if 'country' is defined as consisting of those already favoured by the court with titles. For it is of course these houses, and not the houses of the 'gentry', that Elizabeth and James visited, and on their lands that James liked to hunt. A few decades before the English Revolution, Jonson is still very much an absolutist.¹⁰² And he is politically astute enough to realize that he

does not have to produce simple kingly praise to stay in favour: after all, he was able to stage a 'seditious' play like *Sejanus*, and have it performed by the 'King's Men', without it causing serious injury to his reputation.¹⁰³ The country-house poetry therefore is used as an opportunity to show how country and court can be brought together through the king's own allegiance to a particular version of 'country' (a particularly 'exclusive' one), and Jonathan Goldberg points to a small, neat example of this opposition being deconstructed, as Jonson, in 'To Sir Robert Wroth', uses the phrase 'courteous shade'¹⁰⁴ (although the fact that it is a serpent which seeks out the 'courteous shade' would appear further to complicate the representation).¹⁰⁵

Jonson himself was always in a particularly complex relationship to the means of literary production, frequently trying to negotiate a set of competing positions, between 'independent' (capitalist) maker and producer of stage plays, and writer of poems and masques seeking patronage, and this often led him into difficulties.¹⁰⁶ His self-representation in 'To Penshurst' is particularly interesting, because he explicitly emphasizes his role of greedy guest ('A waiter, doth my gluttony envy', line 68), but is only *implicitly* figured as poet or maker of judgements. As we have seen already in his 'Ode: to Sir William Sidney on His Birthday', his more typical strategy is to emphasize his own activity of poet, as well as his close personal relationship to the subject matter of the poem, which inevitably brings along with it problems about his own actual position amidst the various competing court factions.¹⁰⁷ Poetry which can be seen to undermine the opposition between court/city and country should appeal to Williams's 'border-crossing' desires.

As he had told the Cambridge English faculty: 'the very forms [of writing] are created which are sometimes evident and sometimes occluded'.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps this should act as a warning even to Williams himself against too-willingly giving Penshurst the benefit of the doubt: not wanting to 'refuse Jonson [...] the courtesy of [his] lucky exception' (*C&C*, p. 29). The evidence, both about the poetry and the poet, and the house and its owner, tends to suggest that such refusal may be the most sensible decision.

Notes and References

¹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973; London: Hogarth Press, 1985) [hereafter, references are given within the text as '*C&C*, page number'].

² Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 306.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 304. He goes on to argue that 'recent left criticism' has tended to exclude these 'conditions'; and that 'the emphasis of [*The Country and the City*] is certainly not on literary texts as records, but as representations of history' (p. 304).

⁴ Alastair Fowler, *The Country House Poem: A Cabinet of Seventeenth-Century Estate Poems and Related Items* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

⁵ The first line of the poem is: 'Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show'. 'To Penshurst' is written some time before November 1612 - James's son, mentioned in line 77, died in November 1612. Further background is

given in G.R. Hibbard, 'The Country-House Poem of the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 19 (1956), 159-74. For a strong argument that the social and political differences between 'courtiers' and 'gentry' are reflected in their choice of property, see: Eric Mercer, 'The Houses of the Gentry', *Past and Present*, 5 (1954), 11-32. All references to Jonson's poetry are from: *The Poems of Ben Jonson*, ed. by Bernard H. Newdigate (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936).

⁶ James I made Sidney (1563-1626) a lord in 1603, Viscount Lisle in 1605, and Earl of Leicester in 1618.

⁷ 'To Sir Robert Wroth' (c. 1616); 'The Praises of Country Life' (before 1618); 'Lord Bacon's Birthday' (1620/21). Probably most important from the 'Tribe of Ben' are Thomas Carew's 'To Saxham' (by 1631-2), and 'To my Friend G.N. from Wrest' (1639). Imitations/reworkings include two poems by Edmund Waller, 'At Penshurst' I and II (1635-45). [All dates and references are from Fowler, *The Country House Poem*].

⁸ For full details, see: Lisle Cecil John, 'Ben Jonson's "To Sir William Sidney On His Birthday"', *Modern Language Review*, 52 (1957), 168-72.

⁹ Thomas D. Marshall, 'Addressing the House: Jonson's Ideology at Penshurst', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 35 (1993), 57-78 (p. 57).

¹⁰ L.C. Knights, *Further Explorations* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), pp. 113-15 (emphasis in original).

¹¹ For the build-up to the English Revolution, see: Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution: 1529-1642* (London: Routledge, 1972). The debate about the transition from feudalism to capitalism was conducted through the pages of *Science and Society* in the early 1950s, and is summarised and extended in: *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, ed. by Rodney Hilton (London: New Left Books, 1976). Hilton includes a note which helps to explain the Marxist use of the term 'feudal mode of production' on page 30. One of the main contributors to the debate, Paul Sweezy, was the subject of a further essay: Robert Brenner, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: a Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *New Left Review*, 104 (1977), 25-92. See also a comment by Sweezy on this article, and a further response by Brenner, in *New Left Review*, 108 (1978), 94-96. Also: *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. by T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹² Geoffrey Walton, *Metaphysical to Augustan: Studies in Tone and Sensibility in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1955), p. 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁴ Margaret Walters, 'The Poetic Voice of Ben Jonson', *Melbourne Critical Review*, 2 (1959), 38-46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

¹⁷ For this distinction, see Eric Mercer, 'House of the Gentry', full ref. above, note 4.

¹⁸ Walters, pp. 42-43.

¹⁹ This is from the text of a lecture given to the Cambridge English Faculty in 1981; orig. published as 'Marxism, Structuralism and Literary Analysis', *New Left Review*, 129 (1981), 51-66; repr. as 'Crisis in English Studies', in Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 192-211 (p. 209).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²¹ See e.g. Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14.

²² Knights, p. 113; Walton, p. 33; Walters, p. 44.

²³ Marshall, 'Addressing the House: Jonson's Ideology at Penshurst', p. 70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁵ Knights, p. 114; Walters, p. 114.

²⁶ Marshall, p. 71.

²⁷ This suggestion is made in relation to the generally high level of debt by courtiers by Lawrence Stone, see: *The Crisis of the Aristocracy: 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 329-330.

²⁸ Marshall, p. 70.

²⁹ Indeed, as Fowler has pointed out, the survival of hall seating plans (including those for Penshurst) makes it perfectly clear that there was a

strictly enforced hierarchical arrangement, so that the estate workers would never be allowed onto the 'top' table (Fowler, *The Country House Poem*, pp. 10-11).

³⁰ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* [1595], in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. by G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), pp. 169-70.

³¹ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; repr. 1989), lines 331 and 359. All further references to the general Prologue are given in the text by line number.

³² Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 156-57.

³³ Mann, p. 153.

³⁴ A 'table dormant' was a particular kind of table, which could be folded away when not in use to save space, but obviously Chaucer chooses it here because of its mock-heraldic connections.

³⁵ Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974; 1993), p. 125.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁷ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, p. 266.

³⁸ Perry Anderson, pp. 124-27.

³⁹ Don E. Wayne, *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History* (London: Methuen, 1984). Marshall's and Wayne's insistence on this

'seriousness' may be the result more of the form of the poem than its content. Antony Easthope has argued that 'pentameter aims to preclude shouting and improper excitement; it enhances the poise of a moderate yet uplifted tone of voice, a single voice self-possessed, self-controlled, impersonally self-reflexive, a tone which has retained its dominance in British culture since the Renaissance', 'Problematizing the Pentameter', *New Literary History*, 12 (1981), 475-92 (p. 485). This does seem to be a fair summary of the effect of 'To Penshurst', although its universal application seems doubtful - 'poise' and 'moderation', for instance, may not be such accurate summaries of the language of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, also in iambic pentameter.

⁴⁰ Wayne, p. 42

⁴¹ Refer back to note 5 above for further comment.

⁴² The 'De L'Isle Manuscripts' is a private collection held at the Centre for Kentish Studies (CKS), County Hall, Maidstone. They are catalogued in three volumes, marked 'U1475, Parts I - III', although part III is actually referenced 'U1500'. Most of the personal correspondence to and from various family members included in U1475 has been collated in the Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports: *Historical MSS Commission, 77; Report on the MSS of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place, Kent*, 6 vols (London: HMSO, 1925-66).. Where possible, references are given to these reports. None of U1500, and little of U1475 except for the letters is included in *HMC*, 77.

⁴³ J.C.A. Rathmell, 'Jonson, Lord Lisle and Penshurst', *English Literary Renaissance*, 1 (1971), 250-60.

⁴⁴ See e.g.: Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution: 1529-1642* (London: Routledge, 1972).

⁴⁵ Maurice Dobb, in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, p. 166.

⁴⁶ Hilton, *Transition*, p. 113.

⁴⁷ For further analysis, see Rodney Hilton's entry on 'feudal society' in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottomore, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; 1995), pp. 191-96.

⁴⁸ Dobb, quoting Rodney Hilton, *Transition*, p. 166.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁵¹ Stone, *Causes of the English Revolution*, p. 116.

⁵² Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, pp. 258-74.

⁵³ Alastair Fowler's comment is typical: 'Penshurst really was quite a modest building in actual fact, with a fourteenth-century hall small by Elizabethan standards': Fowler, 'The "Better Marks" of Jonson's *To Penshurst*', *Review of English Studies*, N.S. 24 (1973), 266-82.

⁵⁴ 'But what shall I doe with all these that pretend to titles? I cold be willing to call him [Sydney] and one or two more, but to call many I will not', Elizabeth in 1598, quoted by Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, p. 100.

⁵⁵ Lord Sidney, 1603; Viscount Lisle, 1605; Earl of Leicester, 1618

⁵⁶ It was not always easy to get full satisfaction from these old debts, but some 'did moderately well, like the Earl of Leicester, who in six years recovered £4,451 of his £8,000', Stone, *Crisis*, p. 417. Sidney, along with Sir Horace Vere and Sir Edward Conway, were deprived of office in 1616, and in recompense, received £2,300 p.a. between them; Stone, *Crisis*, p. 419.

⁵⁷ Sidney was involved in a long-running legal battle over his title, brought by his illegitimate son Dudley. His legal expenses for one year, 5th November 1608 to 5th November 1609, totalled £257 16s 10d, *U1475*, A40A.

⁵⁸ Stone, *Crisis*, p. 564.

⁵⁹ *HMC*, 77, V, 45-47. It is difficult to believe that an 'Estate Surplus' of £150 represents some sort of annual 'profit', although Alastair Fowler claims that the Sidneys' 'total rentals' [i.e. gross income] 'were well under £2000 in 1603' (*The Country House Poem*, p. 57).

⁶⁰ Thus, by 1624/25, there are detailed, daily expense records for Baynards Castle, which disclose stock movements for a huge range of food and consumables, and a detailed summary of total expenditure for the various parts of the demesne - kitchen, 'Brewhouse', 'Laundrey' etc.; *U1475*, A27/7. For an example of the 'charge and discharge' system used at Penshurst, see the account prepared by Sidney's steward Thomas Hopkins for his Glamorgan estates: *HMC*, 77, IV, 264-65. The comments on 'mallipert behavior' and the failure of servants to perform their duties properly are given in *HMC*, III, 189 [1605]; and *U1500*, A13/15 [1621].

⁶¹ *U1475*, F23/1.

⁶² Stone, *Crisis*, p. 533.

⁶³ Thomas Goldynge wrote to his master in 1611: 'I do not take allowance of the 50l. I lent your Lordship seeing your wants, although my own be very great for the putting out of my children'; *HMC*, 77, IV, 265. This hand-to-mouth existence seems to have affected those around Sidney as well - his agent, T. James, wrote to him in 1611 that if a debt for £400 be brought to execution he will be 'utterly undone, being already deeply in debt otherwise'; *HMC*, IV, 303.

⁶⁴ Lady Mary Wroth, *Love's Victory*, ed. by Michael G. Brennan (London: Roxburghe Club, 1988), p.1.

⁶⁵ Lawrence Stone, writing on how common arranged marriages were at this time, says that 'Barbara Gamage had almost certainly never set eyes on her husband before the wedding day, and yet in the end the marriage was a striking personal success'; *Crisis*, p. 660.

⁶⁶ Rathmell, 'Jonson, Lord Lisle and Penshurst', p. 252.

⁶⁷ *U1500*, C1/19 [1591].

⁶⁸ *U1475*, C81/166-96. C81/187 is typical: 'Sweethart, I pray you deliver the odd twenty pound you have to Thos. Morgan [steward] for my ordinary charges'.

⁶⁹ *U1500*, C1/13.

⁷⁰ David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 180.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁷² Riggs, quoting Don E. Wayne, writes: ‘Like the battlements, towers, and drawbridges of the “sham castles” of the period [...] the crenelations at Penshurst are decorative and deliberately anachronistic. They were not built of the thickness required for real fortifications. And since they served no useful purpose, they could only have been meant to constitute a *sign*’ (Riggs, p. 185, emphasis in original).

⁷³ *HMC*, 77, V, 194; and *HMC*, 77, V, 213.

⁷⁴ *HMC*, 77, IV, 265-67. Rathmell quotes the letter on page 258, arguing that the poem may be a covert attempt by Jonson to make a similar warning to Golding’s.

⁷⁵ Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 302-03.

⁷⁶ *HMC*, 77, V, 25.

⁷⁷ See e.g. *HMC*, 77, IV, 264, which gives the rent for ‘Coity Anglia’ as ‘164 capons, 19 hens and 54 day works’, totalling £262 7s 6 1/2d

⁷⁸ *HMC*, 77, IV, 266.

⁷⁹ *HMC*, 77, V, 45-47.

⁸⁰ *HMC*, 77, IV, 267.

⁸¹ *HMC*, 77, III, 374-75.

⁸² *HMC*, 77, IV, 265.

⁸³ Rathmell, ‘Jonson, Lord Lisle, and Penshurst’, p. 251.

⁸⁴ See: Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* [1967] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

⁸⁵ Rathmell, p. 251.

⁸⁶ *HMC*, 77, IV, 279; quoted Rathmell, p. 251.

⁸⁷ Rathmell, p. 251.

⁸⁸ Robert C. Evans, *Ben Jonson and the Poetics of Patronage* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1989), p. 124.

⁸⁹ Robert Evans, p. 125.

⁹⁰ *HMC*, 77, VI, 121-22.

⁹¹ *HMC*, 77, V, 209, f.n.1.

⁹² *HMC*, 77, IV, 358.

⁹³ Rathmell, 'Jonson, Lord Lisle and Penshurst', pp. 253 to 254.

⁹⁴ Personal correspondence with Dr J.B. Cottis, Magdalen College, Oxford, 30th July 1996.

⁹⁵ David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, p. 187. The argument for the date of Will's birthday for which the poem was written is given in Rathmell, 'Jonson, Lord Lisle, and Penshurst', p. 251, f.n.3.

⁹⁶ Riggs, pp. 164-87.

⁹⁷ Riggs, p. 187.

⁹⁸ Lady Mary Wroth, *Love's Victory*, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Riggs, p. 118.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and their Contemporaries* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 224.

¹⁰¹ Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 211.

¹⁰² This point is argued for by Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*, p. 594.

¹⁰³ Although the performance was not without its problems: David Riggs points out (p. 105) that as a result of staging the play Jonson 'was called befor the Councell for his Sejanus & accused both of popperie and treason'.

¹⁰⁴ Goldberg, p. 228.

¹⁰⁵ 'To Sir Robert Wroth', like 'To Penshurst' is full of complex latent criticisms/comments on the Wroth family, made more complex by the manifest rejection of 'Court' in favour of 'country' as the poem opens. These 'complications' are increased because (as Jonson was well aware), there was an affair in progress between Wroth's wife Mary, the daughter of Robert Sidney, and William Herbert ('Pembroke'), her first cousin. Herbert was a powerful court figure, and Mary Wroth attended James's wife, Queen Anne in the early years of James's reign. For more on this intriguing and complex story, see: Gary Waller, *The Sidney Family Romance: Mary Wroth, William Herbert, and the Early Modern Construction of Gender* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993). The poem is discussed and compared with 'To Penshurst' on pp. 116-19.

¹⁰⁶ For instance, in the failure of his 1629 play *The New Inn*. To the version published in 1631, Jonson attached an 'Ode to Himselfe, in which he justifies his anger at the public reaction to the play's first performance, arguing that the 'chair of wit' had been usurped. Among responses to this outburst, see: Thomas Carew, 'To Ben Jonson: Upon the Occasion of his Ode of Defiance

Annex to his Play of the New Inne', in *The Poems of Thomas Carew, with his Masque Coelum Britannicum*, ed. by Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949; repr. 1970), pp. 64-65, in which Carew gently rebukes Jonson for losing his temper.

¹⁰⁷ The theme of 'gluttony' is a common one in Jonson's poetry, but, as I have suggested, usually accompanied by Jonson's explicit representation as poet. For examples see: 'Inviting a Friend to Supper', 'An Ode To Himselfe', and 'On Lucy Countesse of Bedford'.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, 'Crisis in English Studies', p. 209.

Against the New Conformists: Williams, Jameson and the Challenge of Postmodernity

In this final chapter, before I look forward in the conclusion to the 'future' of cultural materialism, I want to investigate in some detail the relationship of Williams's theories to what has become known as the 'postmodern condition'.¹ For some critics of Williams, such a decision will be seen as arcane, even absurd. The consensus attitude towards Williams has been ~~not~~ that he has remained ^{not} immune from the postmodern, but unaware of it as a phenomenon. Not only that, but further, that he rejects the claims of modernism as well, remaining more content within a Lukácsian realm of classic realism. Only Tony Pinkney, concentrating on the novels, has felt it sensible to link Williams to the postmodern, and his own suave reading of those sadly neglected texts tends to be somewhat over-reaching: Williams not only exhibits the signs of postmodern writing, but becomes a 'postmodern novelist'.² It is as if Pinkney's obvious interest in the postmodern forces him to read into the novels a level of compliance with the 'postmodern condition' which over-rides the fact that, as a group, they look decidedly 'realist'. But this difficulty of definition is useful as a reminder that one of the problems in discussing postmodern culture is that the terms used frequently seem more applicable to accounts of modernism, and thus lose their critical force. In other words, just as this thesis as a whole has had to keep trying to define cultural materialism in terms of a set of specifying characteristics which are

themselves subject to historical change, so any discussion of the postmodern has to acknowledge the very real problems of definition which have to be confronted almost before discussion can properly begin.

This problem of definition starts with 'postmodern' itself, since the terms 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernism' are frequently used as if they were synonymous, and the same has been true for 'modernity' and 'modernism'.³ I want, as far as is possible, to keep these terms apart, particularly because it will be my argument that although it is reasonable to consider some culture as 'postmodernist' (in other words in some ways significantly different from 'modernist' or 'realist'), this does not mean that I accept that we have moved out of 'modernity' and into 'postmodernity'. What follows, specifically Jameson's argument that we have moved into a third 'stage' of capital, and that this is marked by a new type of culture, also accepts that all of these stages exist within the continuing project of modernity. Further, and this is crucial to the trajectory of the thesis as a whole, the sorts of changes in 'cultural production' discussed by Jameson and others have not (pace Williams) *fundamentally* changed the relationship of such superstructural activities to the economic base. That is, 'post-Fordism' has seen an enormous acceleration in the integration of cultural production into commodity production, but this is not at all the same as suggesting that we have therefore left Modernity behind, and with it all those 'grand narratives' (Marxism included) with which we attempted to make sense of the world.

This chapter attempts to define the limits of Raymond Williams's cultural materialism, as reflected in his late writings, and to argue that Fredric Jameson effectively extends Williams's theories into his own assessment of the condition of the postmodern, despite the obvious significant cultural and historical differences between Williams and Jameson. It will be necessary therefore, having indicated where their theoretical positions overlap, and having further tried to define what the postmodern means for Jameson, to indicate various ways in which they confront and engage with the problems of the postmodern, and begin to offer solutions to it. Finally, the essay looks beyond the present, to indicate what (for Jameson) seems to be the way to proceed 'out' of the postmodern in the future.

1. The Expansion of Culture, and 'Late' Capitalism

Both Williams and Jameson share at once a fundamental desire to hold on to the specificities of Marxism, and an understanding of the very real changes evident in the way 'culture' operates today, compared with the historical period of Marx. Effectively, they each reject the argument that the mode of production has a simple deterministic relationship to 'superstructural' activity (as we saw for Williams in chapter four), yet at the same time refuse to succumb to the reductionism of a purely culturalist model, which denies any notion of economic determinacy. In his reassessment of Theodor Adorno, Jameson makes his own position explicit, arguing that base and superstructure should be viewed not as a 'full-fledged theory in its own right, but rather as the name for a problem, whose solution is always a

unique, ad hoc invention'.⁴ For Adorno, this effectively means treating culture as a lie or an illusion; but, paradoxically, a useful one (in that we have to denounce it at the same time as we perpetuate it). For Jameson, the same is true of superstructures in general, since 'the stigmatizing term of superstructure needs to be retained in order to remind us of a gap that has to be overcome in some more adequate way than forgetting about it'.⁵

Their shared model is based not just on a recognition of the long history of debate over the validity of the original formulation of the base/superstructure paradigm but, more importantly for this study, on their sensitivity to some significant alteration within culture itself. This adjustment, for Jameson, is the transition, at the level of culture, from modernism to postmodernism, and is intimately linked, in ways in which we must now explore, to a more fundamental change in capitalism itself, into what he will term, following Ernest Mandel, 'late capitalism' (Williams, at one point, acknowledges the change, but parodies it as 'very late capitalism').⁶ Jameson's use of Mandel's model extends back before he confronts directly the subject of postmodernism, at least as far back as his essay from 1975/76, 'The Ideology of the Text'.⁷ Mandel describes the development of capitalism in terms of a progression, which he calls the 'long-waves'.⁸ Fundamentally, he recognizes a series of structural changes, as capitalism moves from its 'classical' definition in Marx ('market capital'), through Lenin's 'imperialism' ('monopoly capital'), into its most recent form, multinational 'late' capitalism, in which there has been an unprecedented penetration of capitalism into

previously uncommodified areas. This is how Jameson summarises Mandel's argument:

These three moments can be enumerated as the classical or national market capitalism known to Marx, the moment of monopoly capital or the stage of imperialism (theorized by Lenin), and the permutation, finally, after World War II, into a global form of 'multinational' capitalism which has as yet [1975/6] received no adequate designation in its own right.⁹

It is this model which Jameson uses in 'The Ideology of the Text', and extends in 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'.¹⁰ Following Mandel, Jameson maps on to this tripartite model, three 'revolutions' in technology, and this will become of central importance when we make comparisons with Williams's approach. Mandel refers specifically to the production of machines *by* machines, emphasising therefore (following Marx), the dependency of technology itself on the mode of production:

The fundamental revolutions in power technology - the technology of the production of motive machines by machines - thus appears as the determinant moment in revolutions of technology as a whole. Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90's of the 19th century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses

since the 40's of the 20th century - these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the 'original' industrial revolution of the later 18th century.¹¹

Thus Mandel relates significant technological advances to his three fundamental shifts in capital. In his essay, Jameson makes a further refinement, arguing that this schema can also have mapped on to it a 'cultural periodization' (realism, modernism, postmodernism), such that changes in culture, like technology, are dependent on alterations to the mode of production itself.¹² Before proceeding, it is worth emphasising how Jameson uses this 'periodizing hypothesis', since, at first sight, it looks rather like a Lukácsian formulation, with all its attendant problems of historical rigidity. It is to avoid such criticism, that Jameson prefers to describe his three moments not as 'styles', but rather as 'cultural dominants' ('Postmodernism', p.56). In the earlier essay, he had described these 'cultural dominants' as informing 'a whole range of social and existential phenomena'.¹³ This allows him to acknowledge the presence, within the 'postmodern', of alternative cultural formations ('residual' in Williams's terms, as I discuss later in the chapter) which resemble rather the eras of realism or modernism (and similarly, some very 'postmodern' looking productions in previous periods). Jameson stresses though, that, whatever the appearance of any particular cultural product today, overall we are in an entirely different formation:

[E]ven if all the constitutive features of postmodernism were identical and continuous with those of an older modernism - a position I feel to be demonstrably erroneous but which only an even lengthier analysis of modernism proper could dispel - the two phenomena would still remain utterly distinct in their meaning and social function, owing to the very different positioning of postmodernism in the economic system of late capital, and beyond that, to the transformation of the very sphere of culture in contemporary society.

(‘Postmodernism’, p.57)

Having reached this stage, we need now to understand just what, for Jameson, the ‘constitutive features of postmodernism’ are, and here, for the purposes particularly of the comparison with Williams, it will be appropriate to use Jameson’s own summary of those distinguishing marks:

[A] new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary ‘theory’ and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose ‘schizophrenic’ structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone - what I will call ‘intensities’ - which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all

this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system ('Postmodernism', p.58).

I want to take up and consider some of these features via Jameson's redefinition of the sublime; in particular, the notion of a certain 'depthlessness' within the postmodern, linked to ideas about image culture and the 'simulacrum'; and the significant change both in technology, and, more importantly, in our relationship to it. But it will be helpful first, to consider also how Jameson sees that lack of 'depth' finding its corollary in a certain failure of postmodernist art to act as radical critique of society, in the ways that such critique might be recognised in the historical moments of realism and modernism. This is linked to what Jameson calls a 'winner loses' logic, in which the efforts of the theorist to explain 'an increasingly closed and terrifying machine' are confounded by that very same construction 'since the critical capacity of his work is thereby paralysed, and the impulses of negation and revolt, not to speak of those of social transformation, are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial in the face of the model itself' ('Postmodernism', pp.56-57). I suppose we have to credit Jameson with a level of intentional irony in arguing for the impossibility of just what he is doing. In a similar way, as Jameson himself notes in his Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard continuously emphasizes the need for 'narrative analysis' within a discourse where narrative itself (including those grand narratives like Marxism and Freudianism) is deemed an impossibility.¹⁴ Lyotard's 'solution' is curious: re-using the ideology of modernism as aesthetic and applying it to

science. The model as formulated obviously calls for something very different at the levels of both 'theory' and artistic 'practice' from what is available to date. Or, perhaps there is something, as yet untheorized, within the postmodern itself, which will begin to confront such fears. I want now to examine some of these ideas, but it will be a useful first step to expand Mandel's 'definition' of late capitalism by paying attention to the work of the 'postmodern geographer' David Harvey on 'time-space compression'.¹⁵

2. Time, space, and social power

Harvey, starting from the position of 'Fordism' as the typical capitalist formation of the early twentieth-century, based on a relatively rigid set of doctrines in respect of labour processes, markets, products etc., argues that recent history has been marked by an abandonment of this model in favour of 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey, p. 147). The earlier 'Fordist' formation is marked by the 'typical' drive of capitalism towards technological advance, itself the direct result of 'the coercive laws of competition and the conditions of class struggle endemic to capitalism' (Harvey, p. 105). What this inevitably leads to is a sense of time 'accelerating' or being 'compressed' as the drive towards technological improvement leads to a regular reduction in productive time. Similarly, the desperate search for new markets, again in order effectively to maintain a position at least better than 'average', tends towards an invasion and distortion of space, in which historical boundaries are transcended or ignored, and the globe itself appears to shrink down.

For Harvey, (like Mandel), this set of characteristics typical of capitalism may have entered a new phase of acceleration in 'late capitalism', and, in a similar way to Jameson, he maps these developments of time-space compression onto cultural shifts (realism-modernism-postmodernism). Effectively, he sees time and space as 'sources of social power', so that one crucial job for the Marxist analyst is to analyse 'the relations between money, space, and time as interlocking sources of social power' (Harvey, p. 227). Later, I will want to examine further these ideas, and particularly to differentiate more carefully the relationship between 'space', and its localized equivalent 'place' (so significant a term for Williams). Harvey offers a 'simple rule' concerning the relationship between the two, arguing that 'those who command space can always control the politics of place even though, and this is a vital corollary, it takes control of some place to command space in the first instance' (Harvey, p. 234).¹⁶

Relating these ideas specifically to culture, Harvey goes on to argue that these transitions in the experience of space and time had the effect of making the realist text inappropriate as a vehicle for exploring the modern world, since its narrative structures relied on a degree of linearity at odds with an increasing 'spatial simultaneity' (Harvey, p. 265). He goes on to suggest that such a shift was directly related to the move from realism to modernism, and that this leaves open at least the possibility for a similar shift into the postmodern:

The changing experience of space and time had much to do with the birth of modernism and its confused wanderings from this to that side of the spatial-temporal relation. If this is indeed the case, then the proposition that postmodernism is some kind of response to a new set of experiences of space and time, a new round of 'time-space compression', is well worth exploring (Harvey, p. 283, emphasis in original).

Having reached this stage, Harvey goes on to investigate this 'proposition', by relating the latest round of time-space compression directly to the postmodern condition (Harvey, chapter 17). He argues that among all the developments noticeable in the 'arena of consumption' recently, two stand out as being most significant for the debate: first, the 'mobilization of fashion in mass (as opposed to elite) markets', which 'provided a means to accelerate the pace of consumption not only in clothing, ornament, and decoration but also across a wide swathe of life styles and recreational activities'; second 'a shift away from the consumption of goods and into the consumption of services', which tend to be shorter-lived than the goods they have come to replace, therefore increasing acceleration (Harvey, p. 285).

Drawing on his own expertise, Harvey then notes a new 'spatial irony': as the world appears to shrink down, so localized control of ('new') space becomes more important (he cites a number of examples such as 'Silicon Valley'): 'the story in each case is different, making it appear as if the uniqueness of this or that geographical circumstance matters more than ever

before. Yet it does so, ironically, only because of the collapse of spatial barriers' (Harvey, p. 294). Later in this chapter, I will want to show how Jameson starts to confront some of these 'ironies' in his work on 'Critical Regionalism'. Harvey, like Jameson, emphasises an inherent paradox: 'the less important the spatial barriers, the greater the sensitivity of capital to the variations of place within space, and the greater the incentive for places to be differentiated in ways attractive to capital' (Harvey, pp. 295-96). Thus, time-space compression exposes a new contradiction at the heart of 'late' capitalism: 'the production of fragmentation, insecurity, and ephemeral uneven development within a highly unified global space economy of capital flows' (Harvey, p. 296). All of this results in a new type of society, one dominated by spectacle, and by images and representations which are actually 'simulacra', bringing together 'different worlds (of commodities) in the same space and time'. And these simulacra are able to 'conceal almost perfectly any trace of origin, of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations implicated in their production' (Harvey, p. 300). For further consideration of the role and meaning of the 'simulacrum', I turn now to Jameson and Williams.

3. Jameson's simulacrum, Williams's facsimile

One of the ways Jameson will want to designate the characteristics of postmodernism is in terms of a radical shift away from the temporal and towards the spatial. This is likely to cause difficulties for Marxist theory, concerned so centrally with the temporality of history itself. The work of

‘postmodern geographers’ like David Harvey and Doreen Massey has started to challenge what they see as a downgrading of ‘space’ compared with ‘time’, summarised by Massey thus: ‘[I]t is Time which is conceived of as in the position of “A”, and space which is “not-A”. Over and over again, time is defined by such things as change, movement, history, dynamism: while space, rather lamely by comparison, is simply the absence of these things’.¹⁷ As space, particularly the global space of late capitalism, becomes such a constitutive feature, only a re-evaluated understanding of the relationship of space to time will suffice. This new ‘image culture’, in which history always *appears* to be subject to imminent effacement (most famously in Fukuyama’s ‘End of History’), is given definition by the concept of the ‘simulacrum’, summarised by Jameson, following Plato, as ‘the identical copy for which no original has ever existed’ (‘Postmodernism’, p.66). The simulacrum therefore lacks ‘depth’, ‘history’, ‘time’. Elsewhere, Jameson argues that it ‘characterizes the commodity production of consumer capitalism and marks our object world with an unreality and a free-floating absence of “the referent”’.¹⁸ We will need later to extend Jameson’s theory of the simulacrum into the debate over technology. For now though, I want to indicate how this apparently debilitating flight from history can be rethought, in terms of what I will want to call, following Williams, a ‘politics of hope’, because, as I will argue, both Williams and Jameson hold on determinably to a Utopian impulse, despite what Jameson has summarised as the dehistoricization of the postmodern.

To understand Williams's notion of the 'facsimile', and its relationship to Jameson's 'simulacrum' we have first to consider briefly Williams's analysis of different cultural and social formations: which he designates as the 'dominant', the 'residual' and the 'emergent'. Briefly, while acknowledging the 'conventional' Marxist view, that we are generally subject to a specific 'hegemonic' cultural formation, Williams argues, in *Marxism and Literature*, that alongside this dominant mode, there are traces of previous (in this case pre-capitalist) formations - the 'residual', and new formations - the 'emergent' (the most significant example being presumably the formation of a new class). The dominant then is in a permanent state of 'evaluation' towards these alternative, and therefore potentially oppositional forms. Its first impulse will be to incorporate them, therefore draining them of critical distance, although, in certain cases, particularly with respect to very old residual formations, elements may be left unincorporated (rural formations being one example). It would then appear, within late capitalism, that the emergence of radical new forms, as well as the continuation of older 'residual' formations, is likely to be more difficult, and their incorporation much more likely. This rapid incorporation of the emergent is already evident in the earlier 'modernist' phase (think of all those 'isms' of the avant-garde). In the case of the residual, we can look for instance at regions which have not yet passed from 'feudal' into 'capitalist' states, and expect these to offer the potential for a form of opposition. But the global penetration of late capitalism has rapidly transformed many of these regions, and the political price to pay by those seeking the assistance of the 'advanced' countries is the rapid initiation into

the structure (if not necessarily the benefits) of that already developed capitalist model.

In cultural terms, as Williams argues, it is the invention of 'tradition' which works as 'the most powerful practical means of incorporation', whereby a particularly 'selective' tradition effectively writes out history, or rather, writes in only a very selective version.¹⁹ In this sense, again as Williams himself stresses, what is being offered is actually the past as best fits the contemporary dominance of a specific class; and we can therefore see how such a strategy is likely to be transformed in 'postmodernity', where history itself is put under erasure, so that only the 'present' is available, and tradition itself becomes just another cultural artefact. This radical attempt at historical effacement then effectively threatens to destroy both the residual and the emergent, so that, in artistic terms, the only 'shock' of the 'new', is that there is no shock, because there is no 'new'. This new era of what Jameson would want to call 'depthlessness', is then exemplified by his notion of the simulacrum, which we will need soon to refine in the light of his own reworking of Baudrillard's theories. For now, though, we can compare it with what Williams calls the 'facsimile'. Like Jameson, Williams's politics of hope includes a recognition that, despite the *appearance* of the postmodern, there are still in fact activities which are not within the dominant. This is so, because what dominance actually means (as indicated by the selective tradition) is the inclusion and emphasising of what matches the 'ruling definition of the social', at the expense of excluding what for Williams often represents our most human, or metaphysical regions of existence.²⁰ Using an

extended stress rare in Williams, and, at the same time, confirming his continued allegiance to a Marxist model, he argues that '*no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention*'.²¹

If this is correct, then it has to be assumed that there is, on the part of the dominant, a failure perhaps always to recognize, and deal with oppositions effectively. We can then pick up on the notion of the 'facsimile' to offer the potential for dis-simulation, rather than the simulation of the simulacrum. Acknowledging that today, '[t]he area of effective penetration of the dominant order into the whole social and cultural process is thus now significantly greater', Williams nevertheless holds to the position that, whatever the difficulties, emergence can still happen:

Elements of emergence may indeed be incorporated, but just as often the incorporated forms are merely *facsimiles* of the genuinely emergent cultural practice. Any significant emergence, beyond or against a dominant mode, is very difficult under these conditions; in itself and in its repeated confusion with the facsimiles and novelties of the incorporated phase. Yet, in our own period as in others, the fact of emergent cultural practice is still undeniable, and together with the fact of actively residual practice is a necessary complication of the would-be dominant culture.²²

Thus Williams offers the utopian notion of the emergent form deceiving the dominant into accepting a facsimile of itself, which satisfies the dominant, allowing the emergent to escape incorporation.

Having offered at least a tentative alternative to the negativity of the postmodern simulacrum, we must now re-examine Jameson's own formulation.

4. The Electric Ant, The Hysterical Sublime

So far, we have relied on that limited, if paradoxical, definition of the simulacrum given by Jameson in his essay - Plato's identical copy for which no original has ever existed. This finds its architectural correlative in David Harvey's analysis of Quinlan Terry's 'Richmond Riverside Panorama', a simulacrum of a never-existing eighteenth-century classical building, almost indistinguishable from a well-restored original (Harvey, p. 84). In terms of the work of Jean Baudrillard, it would conform to what he calls a 'second-order' simulation, in that there is still a gap, albeit a very small one, between original and copy, a difference which can still be recognized.²³ For Baudrillard, this is the era of the robot. Where previously, we constructed automata, which played the game of resemblance and difference by offering something as like as possible to the human but still somehow different; so, with the industrial robot, there is no attempt at copying, the robot 'is no longer turned towards a resemblance with man, to whom furthermore it no longer bears comparison'.²⁴ Like the commodity it has become, the robot resembles only itself, proliferating like signs which are always only self-referential. But this

collapse of difference still maintains that more significant difference, between machine and man, which itself is threatened by Baudrillard's 'third order', the postmodern order of signs and models.

Since these images of automata and robotics are so potent, it helps that they form the subject matter of two of Jameson's favourite cultural examples, Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* and Philip K. Dick's short story *An Electric Ant*. In *Blade Runner*, the hero's job consists of tracking down 'replicants', robots who are almost impossible to differentiate from humans (and are therefore, in Baudrillard's terms 'automata'). They give themselves away, ironically, by relying for their personal 'history' on an implanted set of instructions, backed up by sets of photographs which actually belong to the 'real' family history of their inventor. But the subject of Dick's *Electric Ant* is rather different, and effectively, I want to argue, jumps from the first order simulacrum of the automaton, to the third order simulacrum of a world made up *only* of models. As Jameson summarises the story, 'the corporation man finds out that he's one of the robots the corporation makes'.²⁵ This then raises the possibility that there are in fact *only* robots, simulations without an original. But in offering this example, I want also to emphasise how Jameson uses it to discuss our relationship to technology, since this then allows us to make that connection between postmodernism, technology and the 'sublime', which in turn opens out on to a whole other debate about consciousness, and our ability to orient ourselves within the mystifications of late capitalism.

Jameson mentions *An Electric Ant* in answer to a question raised about his use of the sublime in postmodern theory. Returning briefly to

Romantic ideology, we can identify the sublime, as defined by Edmund Burke, as that moment when the human being, confronting the enormity of Nature, experiences a strange mix of terror, power, vastness, infinity and magnificence, in the emotion called by Burke 'Astonishment'; an emotion so overwhelming that it excludes the possibility of any other, including even reasoning about the experience itself.²⁶ If Jameson is right, and that 'other' reality is now, not nature, but multinational capitalism, then we have to ask ourselves whether any equivalent to the 'classical' notion of the sublime still has meaning. For Jameson, invoking instead the concept of an 'hysterical sublime', that other, an 'enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labour stored up in our machinery', is indeed late capitalism itself, but disguised, hidden by the simulacrum that is technology ('Postmodernism', p.77).

This returns us to *An Electric Ant*, because Jameson asks the question: '[W]ould it be sublime to find out you're a robot?'.²⁷ In the case of the 'hero' of the story, 'he' undergoes a version of the hysterical sublime, a moment of overwhelming 'astonishment', but astonishment not at confrontation with the real of Nature, but the postmodern equivalent, the hysterical sublime of technology and its ability to mask the reality of the mode of production (although, as Jameson points out, since we are actually dealing with something which lacks human self-consciousness, any 'reaction' is itself merely a simulacrum). What we have then, is something altogether new, a relationship between the human and the machine which seems significantly different from anything that has come before, and it is for this reason that

Mandel's 'periodizing hypothesis', mapping technological change onto alterations within capitalism itself, is so important for Jameson. He mentions, for instance, the very powerful positive images of the technological which were a feature of modernism, whether in the revolutionary impulses of a Diego Rivera, or the very different futurism of a Marinetti. There certainly seems to be something different between the machinery of the 'electric' age, and our own 'electronic' culture (Baudrillard's 'digital' culture of codes and binary oppositions). There is a new sense of disorientation, that hysterical or technological sublime, which comes from our inability to deal with the unrepresentability of a machine age based on electronic data transmission and the 'inert' appearance of the computer, a machine almost completely devoid of visibly moving parts. For Jameson, it is a question of representation: he contrasts, for instance, the railroad train, which 'represents' speed even when turned into a stationary work of art, with the computer, 'whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power', and with the television, 'which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself' ('Postmodernism', p.79).

For Jameson, this new sublime relationship with technology is one of faulty representations: we are mesmerised and fascinated by the 'astonishing' power of the newer machines, centred on activities of communication and information processing, where code itself becomes commodity. This relationship 'seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp - namely the whole new global network of the third

stage of capital itself' ('Postmodernism', pp.79-80). Jameson's attempts at 'solutions' to this new development of capital will include the effort to discover utopian evidence of collectivity within the brutalised image culture of postmodernism, and what he will want to call, following the work of Kevin Lynch and others, 'cognitive mapping'.²⁸ I will investigate some of these ideas further, after seeing how Raymond Williams tackles some of the same problems.

5. The New Conformists

The title of this chapter is taken from the sub-title to Raymond Williams's *The Politics of Modernism*, a collection put together from his own schema, after his death in 1988.²⁹ 'Against the New Conformists' was to have been the last chapter, but was never completed. I have taken it to refer to what Williams calls in 'Culture and Technology' (a chapter included in the volume, and previously in *Towards 2000*) the 'technological determinists' and 'cultural pessimists'. These designations then align themselves precisely with the cultural relationship to new technologies outlined by Fredric Jameson above, privileging technology at the expense of ignoring more fundamental structures. We can therefore start to sketch out Williams's own analysis of Jameson's 'hysterical sublime', and some of his responses to the thrust of late capitalism, at the same time recognizing, from Jameson's perspective, potential problems with Williams's model.

Sublimely observing the inexorable rise in technological innovation through what Williams calls 'paranational hypercapitalism', and believing that

this technology somehow 'emerges' into society, and then changes it, the cultural pessimists hang on desperately to past cultures, ultimately opting for corporate sponsorship through advertising - what Franco Moretti has called the ultimate modern myth.³⁰ The cultural pessimists therefore grasp at the opportunity for 'free' money, but Williams reminds us what once Marx taught, that there is no such thing:

There is no free money. It is all spent for calculated and usually acknowledged purposes: in immediate trading, but also to substitute a healthy for an unhealthy association (as in tobacco sponsorships of sports), or to reassure what are called 'opinion-formers', or to enhance, as it is slyly put, a 'public image' (*POM*, p.128).

Money suppresses difference through exchange value. Indeed, as Jameson puts it: 'the minute commodities begin to speak [...] they have already become exchange values'.³¹ Advertising sponsorship, for Williams, is 'paranational manna' emanating from the 'true paranational godfathers' (*POM*, p.128). It succeeds in disguising its true purposes behind a mask of disinterested respectability. But it is always 'interested' in shoring up the dominant ideology, and will, if pressed, change the sponsorship relationship to reassert the correct power relationship:

Many [...] kinds of artistic enterprise, confident in the seriousness and validity of their projects, have joined the queues outside the offices of

the corporations, for sponsorship money. None of this can go on for long - indeed in some ways none of it can even start - unless deeper adaptations have already been made. What is treated as mere 'support money' never stays like that. Production itself becomes steadily more homogeneous with the sponsoring and directing institutions (*POM*, p. 129).³²

Effectively, this leads to a form of nostalgia which Williams sees as starting to saturate the minority arts. Those very images and representations used to legitimate the most tawdry and undesirable aspects of the modern - our 'glorious past' (the 'selective tradition'), the heritage industry, indeed, that whole simulacrum of what there once was (or rather never was) - are reinvented by a contemporary, postmodern culture finally at ease with corporate sponsorship. And that corporatism becomes the postmodern unnameable, 'the enemy which could not be named because its money was being taken' (*POM*, p.132).

One way past this postmodern aporia, for Williams, would be imaginative, a utopian looking forward, towards more communitarian models of collectivity. Rather like Jameson, who agonises over the dissolution of 'Brecht' into 'Brecht-Industrie', Williams recognizes the incorporation of modernist forms, which 'lent themselves to cultural competition and the commercial interplay of obsolescence, with its shifts of schools, styles and fashion so essential to the market' (*POM*, p. 35). This is from the Introduction to *The Politics of Modernism*. What were once seen as

exemplary versions of the avant-garde, become in the postmodern 'the merely technical modes of advertising and the commercial cinema'. Like Jameson, he identifies the onslaught of a 'new international capitalism' with the seeming impossibility for critical distance. But, also like Jameson, he refuses to put up his hands in despair:

These heartless formulae sharply remind us that the innovations of what is called Modernism have become the new but fixed forms of our present moment. If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of *post*-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past but, for all our sakes, to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again (*POM*, p. 35, emphasis in original).

Williams's attempts at solutions to these overwhelming problems can range from the truly global to the intensely personal. At times, he is almost Bakhtinian in his continuing belief in the possibilities for localized, carnivalesque disruptions to the dominant order. Almost village nostalgia this, with its emphasis on 'jokes and gossip, [...] everyday singing and dancing, [...] occasional dressing up and extravagant outbursts of colour' (*POM*, p. 134). Almost, but not quite: these activities do still go on, from the trades union march to the pit brass band; from the continuously changing popular

music, always one step ahead of the market, to the exuberance of the Notting Hill Carnival. And, despite continuing attempts at incorporation (or suppression), they remain a tangible, oppositional force:

They are irrepressible because in the generality of their impulses, and in their intransigent attachments to human diversity and recreation, they survive, under any pressures and through whatever forms, while life itself survives, and while so many people - real if not always connected majorities - keep living and looking to live beyond the routines which attempt to control and reduce them (*POM*, p. 134).

The emphasis on community, while conforming to Jameson's stress on the need for collectivity to re-assert itself, risks the accusation that Williams is yearning for the nostalgia of small, self-sufficient, basically non-urban organizations (the ultimate simulacrum perhaps). Indeed, while acknowledging Williams's importance to his own thinking, Jameson himself alludes to a lingering 'village nostalgia' in Williams's emphasis on place rather than space.³³ But, as Williams emphasizes in *Politics and Letters*, 'village nostalgia' is one means socialists have of representing the unrepresentable (and thus thinking through the postmodern sublime). As Williams and others have stressed, the utopian future will be more, rather than less complex than now, as subjectivity is given new opportunities outside the constraints of a dominant capitalism.³⁴ Thus we have to have recourse to past models as the only way of figuring this future, without losing sight of their inevitable

limitations. In the field of electronic communication, for instance, he envisages an appropriation, such that 'the kinds of democracy previously imagined only for very small communities [...] become quite normally available for larger communities'.³⁵ Further, the increasing acceleration of time-space compression has not in fact led to 'place' becoming less important, as might be assumed. As Harvey noted above, one of the effects of the collapse of spatial barriers has been a greater 'sensitivity of capital to the variations of place within space, and the greater the incentive for places to be differentiated in ways attractive to capital' (Harvey, p. 296).

Williams's utopian impulse, though often emphasising local opposition, is neither nostalgic nor unrealistic. Rather, it transfers images of village nostalgia into a tool for confronting the global village. Refusing to succumb to either technological determinism or cultural pessimism, he seeks instead for what David Harvey calls the 'cracks in the mirror' within the superficially unbroken image culture of the postmodern (Harvey, chapter 27). Grasping the means of production, the crucial moment of class consciousness, is translated by Williams into the immediate need to expropriate the potential for change locked into the new technologies. For instance, he insists on rethinking the activity of broadcasting, to encourage independent producers; operating a form of exchange network across national divides; development of an extensive electronic catalogue backed up by a reference and archive network, releasing information at present tied up in various forms of public trust (*POM*, p.135). Williams effectively extends the parameters of his cultural materialism, seizing aspects of the postmodern to release moments of

choice previously occluded or even actively suppressed by the same system. 'Nothing', he writes, 'is determined by the new technology, but it is an important feature of the new systems that they offer opportunities for new cultural relationships, which the older systems could not' (*POM*, p.135).

There are no easy solutions to the difficulties caused in the postmodern by the extensive advance of new communication systems, and the commodification of knowledge itself. The power of new global systems is supported by an ever more dominant economic and political order, which recognizes in these forms the opportunity for ever greater global penetration and homogenization, relying not on the totalitarian regimes which figure so prominently within modernism, but far subtler binary systems of hegemonic 'negotiation' and 'reconciliation'. Already (in 1983), as Williams notes, the development of cable television is 'systematically exclud[ing] rural populations and the poorer towns and city areas' (*POM*, p.136). We could extend this analysis today to include the development of the Internet, a form of interaction which appears to have escaped from its initiating control within weapons technology, and yet increasingly seems subject to the will of a small handful of multinational companies for its organization and 'improvement'.³⁶

What is needed then, is increased access, but access accompanied by new production, not reproduction from within the dominant order. Looking outside to research in other fields, Williams offers as an example the opinion poll, arguing that the canvassers tend 'to deploy [their] agenda of questions on the assumption of an existing competence to answer them in the selected terms' (*POM*, p.137). This conforms to another of Jameson's anxieties, that

everything may be rigged in advance, including our own actions. Yet, as Williams stresses, some work has already indicated that alternative procedures are possible, in which initial replies lead to the amendment of questions, resulting perhaps in a genuine exchange of developing viewpoints.

Like Williams, Jameson too often has recourse to a form of 'micropolitics', as he searches within the constraints of late capitalism for those 'moments of truth' which point forward to a utopian solution. Frequently, such 'moments' will appear aberrant and undesirable. Jameson argues, in *Signatures of the Visible*, that 'the works of mass culture cannot be ideological without at one and the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well'.³⁷ Two examples from American popular culture help to explain what Jameson means by this strange assertion. In the first, the television cop show (exemplified say by *Hill Street Blues*), he argues that the ideological 'message' of the drama occludes a sort of Williams' like knowable community of collective activity:

You very clearly have two kinds of operation going on here. You have a whole horrible law-and-order ideology at work there, in order to train the United States in internal urban matters and in external foreign affairs matters. And then I think that underneath one also has the image of a team and of a certain kind of collective work which is relatively utopian; and it's in that sense that I think these kinds of texts carry that attempt to recover some utopian dimension.³⁸

The other example Jameson uses is Coppola's *The Godfather*, and in a typically exuberant reading of the first two parts, he opens up these narratives of violence and corruption to a utopian emphasis on family and collectivity. He introduces the topic by 'historicizing' the genre of gangster film, positing the Mafia portrayal of *The Godfather* as having a very particular narrative content not seen earlier: 'a kind of saga or family material analogous to that of the medieval "chansons de geste", with its recurrent episodes and legendary figures returning again and again in different perspectives and contexts'.³⁹ Setting aside the question of unconscious desire, in Jameson's urge to weld the older history of medieval Europe on to North America's more recent one, it is his stress on the family (here without the inevitable Mafia pun) which distinguishes *The Godfather* from earlier gangster movies, which concentrated rather on the individuality of action. Rather than what he considers to be its ideological function: displacing the 'crime' of corporate capital onto an ethical debate about organized crime at the more local level, it is here that Jameson recognizes the potential for utopian fantasy:

At a time when the disintegration of the dominant communities is persistently 'explained' in the (profoundly ideological) terms of a deterioration of the family, the growth of permissiveness, and the loss of authority of the father, the ethnic group can seem to project an image of social reintegration by way of the patriarchal and authoritarian family of the past.⁴⁰

This straightforward representation of 'family' is deconstructed from both the ideological and Utopian perspectives in *Godfather II*. Here, the work of the Mafia, in the first a substitute for business, turns into its actuality, as the family strains for corporate credibility, revealing its ideological constraints. At the same time, the origins of 'family' are revealed in the 'pre-capitalist social formation of a backward and feudal Sicily' (which presumably explains the rather anti-utopian formulation of the patriarchal family). In a final twist, the film reaches its historical conclusion in the failure of the new corporate Mafia to overcome the dynamism of the nascent Cuban revolution.⁴¹ Jameson summarises his analysis thus:

[T]hese two narrative impulses as it were reverse each other: the ideological myth of the Mafia ends up generating the authentically Utopian vision of revolutionary liberation; while the degraded Utopian content of the family paradigm ultimately unmask itself as the survival of more archaic forms of repression and sexism and violence.⁴²

Jameson's belief that, however degraded our culture might be, it can be opened up to a form, however 'fantastic', of utopian critique, still leaves open the problem of that initial sense of disorientation with respect to the postmodern, exacerbated by what Jameson perceives as an inevitable closing down of the possibilities for critique. Indeed, the development of his work indicates an ever-increasing sense of such closure, as he provides more and

more totalizing models, which continue to emphasize what we have seen earlier as the 'winner-loses' logic of postmodern culture. I would argue that this is a continuing feature of Jameson's work, right through to *The Seeds of Time*, where he at once anguishes over the skill of late capital in offering 'simulacra' of apparently localized new building projects, while at the same time he writes with some enthusiasm about one specific example of such development, known as 'critical regionalism'.⁴³

Arguing, in a similar manner to the above, that 'the most powerful arguments against Utopia are in reality Utopian ones' (*SOT*, p. 54), Jameson uses the example of 'critical regionalism' (taking the term from the architect Kenneth Frampton) as a paradoxical form which appears both to share postmodernism's rejection of modernism's grand narratives, while at the same time seeking to 'negate a whole series of postmodern negations of modernism as well' (*SOT*, p. 190). Far from representing a sort of 'avant-gardist' modernist desire for the new, which is now the staple diet of a consumerist postmodern appropriation ('Brecht becomes Brecht-Industrie') it instead promotes itself as formed out of a 'certain deeper historical logic' which is at odds with the 'end of history' and the 'repudiation of historical teleology' (*SOT*, pp. 190-91).⁴⁴

In attempting to explain how Frampton's notion of critical regionalism is put into architectural practice, Jameson replays some of the ideas we have already investigated. In particular, Frampton attempts to oppose the current doxa of the 'primacy of representation in contemporary architecture', and does so by privileging instead those parts of the building which are not

normally visible (in particular the internal joints, *SOT*, p. 197). This new aesthetic (Frampton divides it into a tripartite schema - the 'tactile', the 'tectonic' and the 'telluric') attempts to 'frame the notion of space in such a way that it turns back slowly into a conception of place once again' (*SOT*, p. 197). But if this critical regionalism then has the effect of disengaging from the 'space' of global capital in favour of a more localized sensitivity to place, it appears to do so both by failing to pay attention to the technological aspect of modern architecture, and by reverting to yet another version of 'village nostalgia'.

In a sense, both of these issues relate to Williams's notion of the 'residual' (as Jameson acknowledges, *SOT*, p. 199). From necessity, as the opportunities for genuine 'emergence' recede, critical regionalism is 'built' on residual elements, so that its problem is to do so while at the same time offering a form of progressive intervention. In fact, as Jameson shows through a number of specific examples, critical regionalism does embrace modern technological advances in building design and construction. It holds out the possibility 'of inventing some new relationship to the technological beyond nostalgic repudiation or mindless corporate celebration' (*SOT*, p. 201). Similarly, the re-emphasis on place is attempted while refusing to succumb to an earlier attitude, which invested existing forms with inherent political, even revolutionary potential. Critical regionalism aims to identify spatial difference and attend to it by producing structures which are place-specific.

The trouble is, and it is with this that Jameson ends his essay, the providers of such 'difference' will tend to be just those multinational companies who embrace postmodernism and represent late capitalism. Thus, while apparently 'respecting' the values of a local community, this advanced form of post-Fordism 'inserts the corporations into the very heart of local and regional culture' so that assumptions about authenticity (remember Harvey's simulacrum, the Quinlan Terry building) become intensely problematic (*SOT*, p. 204). What we must end with then, is a consideration of Jameson's more ambitious 'solution' to such problems, together with a brief look forwards to the future for cultural materialism and utopian thinking.

Cognitive mapping, and a new 'Negative Dialectics'

Both Williams and Jameson have challenged the positions of the cultural pessimists and technological determinists, denying the privileging of the technological over the economic; arguing against notions of the 'end of history' or the 'post-industrial' age. The trouble is, as Jameson notes towards the end of 'Postmodernism', there is a very real political issue at stake here, since it seems that large numbers of intelligent people really do believe such things ('Postmodernism', p.91). For Jameson, these faulty representations need to be challenged by a new version of reorientation, which acknowledges the postmodern, and tries to see beyond it, what he calls 'cognitive mapping'. It has to be said straight away that this remains an idea rather than a thought out system. Jameson bases his notion on a reworking of the geographic analysis of city mapping, which indicates how people are increasingly unable

to 'place' themselves in the modern city. They therefore are required to produce their own 'internal' maps, which allow improved relationships with the very contours of the city, and thus benefit their being. This is then extrapolated by Jameson 'to the realm of social structure, that is to say, in our historical moment, to the totality of class relations on a global [...] scale'.⁴⁵ Jameson argues that it is the new global space itself which is the moment of truth of postmodernism, so that aspects of that space need to be grasped by the subject in order for there to be a re-orientation. 'Cognitive mapping' is then posited as 'a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'. If successful, such a strategy would achieve:

'a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing [multinational capital], in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion' ('Postmodernism', p. 92).

Effectively, Jameson 'takes on' the totality of late capitalism with a similarly totalizing form of critique which tries to go 'beyond' the purely ideological in search of the Utopian, as in the earlier analysis of *The Godfather*. This is the gist of his argument in *The Political Unconscious*, where he investigates once more 'the Frankfurt school's conception of strong

memory as the trace of gratification, of the revolutionary power of that *promesse de bonheur* most immediately inscribed in the aesthetic text'.⁴⁶

But it is precisely this which will form the basis of Terry Eagleton's anxiety, expressed through his reading of the above in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Quoting Jürgen Habermas, that '[t]he truth of statements [...] is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and the true life', Eagleton comments: '[t]o claim to detect a *promesse de bonheur* in an exchange of obscene insults would seem either ridiculously gullible or faintly perverse - akin, perhaps, to Fredric Jameson's startling claim to discern a proleptic image of utopia in any human collectivity whatsoever, which would presumably encompass racist rallies'.⁴⁷ Astute as this comment is, it fails to confront something even more 'startling' just a few pages later in *The Political Unconscious*, where Jameson reminds us that in Adorno's and Horkheimer's classic *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they also discern elements of Utopia in something as obscene as a racist rally, that is 'one of the ugliest of all human passions, antisemitism'.⁴⁸ Further, for Jameson, these notions of repressed utopian impulse are allegorical:

The achieved collectivity or organic group of whatever kind - oppressors fully as much as oppressed - is Utopian not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectives are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society.⁴⁹

It is for this reason that Jameson, while approving of Walter Benjamin's famous maxim, that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism', wants to reverse the terms, so that within even the most barbaric, one can discern at least the figure of a new civilizing force.⁵⁰ And it is for this reason, no less 'startling' in its way, that Jameson makes the turn to Adorno's negative dialectics, rather than Ernst Bloch's ideal of utopian hope or Bakhtin's carnivalesque disruption of the hegemonic.

If we are to confront postmodernism, dependent ultimately on the much more complex totalizing system of capitalism itself, a global 'totality' which survives because it depends not on the barbarities of totalitarianism, but on the increasingly digital networks and 'negotiations' of late capitalism's success at hegemonic dominance, then what is needed perhaps is indeed a return to a negative dialectic. As Jameson explains in his interview in *News from Nowhere*, his 'hope' is that Adorno could provide the 'vehicle for demystifying what offers itself as rich and abundant and consumable about the postmodern, a way of unmasking it as a negative system of closure'⁵¹, but (unlike the Adorno of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*), this time with the result of leading not to that 'withdrawal and quietism' so familiar to his readers, but rather towards a sense of the limits of the system, and the beginning of a way of thinking past them.⁵² Rather like Benjamin's excavation of past ruins, Jameson recommends digging within 'the insubstantial bottomless realm of cultural and collective fantasy' to recover the invaluable, almost lost category of class consciousness.⁵³ Perhaps, as Williams suggests,

and Jameson implies, we are all 'after, stuck in the post' (*POM*, p.35; emphasis in original). In that case, we need a developed cultural materialism, perhaps in the form of a 'cognitive mapping' which can at least point the way out of this 'sticky' end, so that at last, the apparent complexities of the postmodern appear empty and uninteresting against the far greater diversification of a new society.

Notes and references

¹ The phrase comes from Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

² Tony Pinkney, *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1991).

³ A good summary of the arguments is given by Peter Osborne in: 'Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological, Category', *New Left Review*, 192 (1992), 65-84. Lyotard defines the *postmodern* as 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (*The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv), but his use of 'postmodern' conflates postmodernity (which would find metanarratives 'incredulous'), and postmodernism (which would express no opinion). Jameson also occasionally slips from one term to the other, and also substitutes 'postmodern' for 'postmodernist'. This difficulty is emphasized by Terry Eagleton in *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). In his Preface, Eagleton summarises what he sees as the differences between the two terms, and recognizes *postmodernism* as 'a style of culture'. But he goes on to say that he has decided to use the 'more familiar term' *postmodernism* (pp. vii-viii), even though the content of his book says more

about 'ideas' than 'artistic culture', in which case it would seem more appropriate to have chosen *postmodernity*.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 46.

⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

⁶ Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* [1972] (London: Verso, 1978).

⁷ Fredric Jameson, 'The Ideology of the Text', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986, Volume 1: Situations of Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 17-71.

⁸ Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, chapter 4.

⁹ Jameson, 'The Ideology of the Text', p. 67.

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 (1984), 53-92 [hereafter, references are given within the text as "'Postmodernism", page number'].

¹¹ Mandel, p. 118, quoted Jameson, 'Postmodernism', pp. 77-78.

¹² Ibid., p. 78. But note, however, the potential problems with this rather 'Lukácsian' model. See e.g. C. Barry Chabot, 'The Problem of the Postmodern', *New Literary History*, 20 (1988/89), 1-20.

¹³ Jameson, 'The Ideology of the Text', p. 67.

¹⁴ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xx.

¹⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) [hereafter, references are given within the text as "'Harvey", page number'].

¹⁶ This neat 'rule' could usefully be compared with the plot of Williams's *The Fight for Manxol* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979; London: Hogarth Press, 1988), in which just this relationship is exploited, and who 'controls' what is of central importance.

¹⁷ Doreen Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time', *New Left Review*, 196 (1992), 65-84 (p. 72). For a view that this notion of time and history may itself be historical, see: Peter Osborne, 'Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological, Category'. Following Reinhart Koselleck, Osborne argues that 'in the decades around 1800, "revolution", "progress", "development", "crisis", "*Zeitgeist*", "epoch", and "history" itself, all acquire temporal determinations never present before' (p. 70).

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990), p. 17 (emphasis in original).

¹⁹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 115. See also: Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14.

²⁰ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 125.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125 (emphasis in original).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 126 (emphasis added).

²³ Jean Baudrillard, 'The Orders of Simulacra', in *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), pp. 83-159. Despite Baudrillard's obvious relevance to the notion of 'simulacra', his work needs to be distinguished from that of

Jameson and Williams, in particular with regards to this specific text, where he insists on replacing 'mode of production' with 'code of production'.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁵ 'Postmodernism and Utopia: Interview with Fredric Jameson', *News from Nowhere*, 9 (1991), 6-17 (p. 14).

²⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757], ed. by James T. Boulton (London: Routledge, 1958; rev. edn Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 57-79. Jameson specifically refers to Burke and Kant in 'Postmodernism', p. 77. For Kant's amendment of Burke into a debate on representation and the way in which an initial 'inadequacy' of the imagination to deal with the totality of sublime experience is taken over by a 'supersensible' faculty (i.e. Reason) which *can* deal with this totality, see: Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* [1790], ed. by J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928; 1986), pp. 91-117.

²⁷ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Utopia', p. 14.

²⁸ See, for example, Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960).

²⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. by Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989) [hereafter, references are given within the text as '*POM*, page number'].

³⁰ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 1983; rev. 1988): '[A]dvertising is the myth

of the commodity - commodity transformed into myth, into a fetish that parades, instead of hiding, its "arcane" features' (p. 195, emphasis in original).

³¹ Fredric Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter', *New Left Review*, 209 (1995), 75-109 (p. 92).

³² It will be interesting to investigate, over the next few years, what effect if any the availability of 'Lottery' money has on this relationship.

³³ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Utopia', pp. 13-15. David Harvey has argued that: 'Working-class movements are, in fact, generally better at organizing in and dominating place than they are at commanding space', *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 236.

³⁴ For an extension of this view see: Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 317-38 (p. 336).

³⁵ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 435.

³⁶ The growth in publications dealing with the 'Information Superhighway', 'Internet', 'Cyberspace' etc. has been spectacular, and divides into two relatively distinct camps, akin to those taking sides on the postmodern (i.e. rapturous celebration or deep pessimism). For a reasonably balanced summary of current debate, see: Julian Stallabrass, 'Empowering Technology: The Exploration of Cyberspace', *New Left Review*, 211 (1995), 3-32.

³⁷ Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 29.

³⁸ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Utopia', p. 9.

³⁹ Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁴² Ibid., p. 34.

⁴³ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) [hereafter, references are given within the text as '*SOT*, page number'].

⁴⁴ This paragraph makes explicit Jameson's occasional unwillingness to differentiate between *postmodernity* (within which it is relevant to discuss the rejection of 'grand narratives' and the 'end of history') and *postmodernism* as a cultural 'dominant'. Despite this, the general thrust of Jameson's argument is that 'late capitalism' represents a mutation of capitalism but not an exit from the project of modernity.

⁴⁵ Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 347-57 (p. 353).

⁴⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* [1981] (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 285.

⁴⁷ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 404.

⁴⁸ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 288.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 291 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of History', VII, in *Illuminations*, ed., by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 258.

Jameson uses this as the epigraph to his final chapter in *The Political Unconscious*; and compare with: 'the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror' (Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 57).

⁵¹ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Utopia', p. 15.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁵³ Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 22.

Conclusion: The Future of Cultural Materialism

The last chapter suggested a possible future for cultural materialism after the death of Raymond Williams. To conclude, I want to consider in more detail what cultural materialism has meant since 1988, particularly in relation to Shakespeare studies, and where it might go from here. First though, it is worth emphasizing that cultural materialism as understood and practised by Williams has come in for some criticism from those on the Left, and not just for the theoretical reasons raised earlier by Terry Eagleton. A number of critics, while praising Williams for his insights, particularly in the area of class politics, have noticed that considerations of gender or race are by contrast almost completely absent. In practice, of course, there is no possibility of simply separating out these issues, as if they inhabited different regions, but it is reasonable to accept that differing emphasis can be made, and that, for Williams, class has dominated. What started out though as straightforward criticism, has moved more recently into valuable attempts to move cultural materialism more directly into these other areas, so as to explore, in Williams's terms, a new vocabulary of culture and society, a set of keywords for one sort of future.¹

In the body of the thesis we have seen Williams's cultural materialist approach used on culture ranging from an early-seventeenth century poem to a late-twentieth century feature film. Nevertheless, it is true that the area which has become the major focus of attention for those describing

themselves as cultural materialists is Renaissance studies, and specifically the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. One effect of this concentration on Shakespeare has been a predictable challenge from more 'traditional' Shakespeare scholars, resulting in a long, and often acrimonious set of exchanges, for example the so-called 'Bardbiz' controversy which raged in the *London Review of Books* throughout most of 1990 and 1991.²

Central to this debate was the publication in 1985 of *Political Shakespeare*, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield.³ As Sinfield has pointed out, *Political Shakespeare* 'caused a furore' by suggesting that Shakespeare's plays 'are, and always have been, involved in politics'.⁴ The reaction to all this was to attempt to re-instate a Coleridgean notion of Shakespeare transcending a narrow 'politics' to speak to all men at all times in all places. This 'academic' debate within University English departments spreads out, embracing not only crucial decisions about what schoolchildren should learn, so that the National Curriculum mirrors the approach of the Cambridge 'Tripos' and Oxford 'Schools' by making Shakespeare a special case (in the National Curriculum, the only compulsory author for English, in Oxford and Cambridge the only author taking up a complete paper), but also reflecting the very real cultural and political significance of 'Shakespeare' generally.⁵ Thus Warwickshire, as the signpost on the M 40 informs us, is 'Shakespeare's county'.⁶ But if Shakespeare can 'appropriate' a county, everyone, it appears, wants to 'appropriate' Shakespeare, from the Prince of Wales to a Government Minister.⁷ As Sinfield has pointed out, the opponents of cultural materialism are of two distinct kinds. On the one hand, many

traditional critics refuse to acknowledge that anything as gross as a political idea could infect Shakespeare or his works. This would appear to be the stance taken up by the very properly 'apolitical' heir to the throne, who reads Shakespeare in a particularly 'transcendent' way, as Sinfield shows by considering a speech given in Stratford upon Avon in 1991:

[Prince Charles] was complaining about 'a general flight from our great literary heritage' - an odd idea, when you look around Stratford. But whose literary heritage? Shakespeare's 'roots are ours, his language is ours, his culture ours', H. R. H. declared. Of course, this is true for only some British people. 'His roots are ours': who are 'we'? Well, Shakespeare's plays have lots of kings in them - perhaps he meant the royal 'we'.⁸

But not all traditionalists are so resistant to politics and history: Nigel Lawson suggested in 1983 that Shakespeare was 'a Tory, without any doubt'.⁹ I am not sure whether Lawson counts as a 'Shakespearean scholar', but Brian Vickers certainly does. His position is that there is a high degree of coherence in all Shakespeare's works, which reflects a strong allegiance to one specific ('State') ideological position. Such is the theme of his *Appropriating Shakespeare*¹⁰, in which Vickers takes on the cultural materialists and new historicists for what he sees as their superficial historical understanding, and desperate desire to turn everything towards the cause of contemporary

politics. His rejection of this political approach is nicely summarised in a review essay from 1994:

Newer fashions of “historicism” [...] really write about contemporary politics under the guise of historical commentary, indicting Western government and authority by aligning it with the victories or betrayals in Shakespeare. Gaultree Forest foreshadows My Lai, Agincourt is juxtaposed with the Falklands or Gulf War triumphs. Militarism, colonialism, Machiavellianism: for this school of critics, Shakespeare shares the guilt of LBJ or George Bush.¹¹

Vickers is a formidable opponent, all the more so because he does not appear to reject the claims of cultural materialists completely. Indeed, in an earlier work, *Returning to Shakespeare*¹² he specifically praises Williams for his insights into the failure of Cambridge to teach Shakespeare properly. And the text of Williams which comes in for this praise is none other than Williams’s ‘Afterword’ to *Political Shakespeare*.¹³ Vickers neatly ‘appropriates’ Williams for his own ends, using the ‘Afterword’ to argue once again for a version of ‘close reading’ which includes historical contextualization.¹⁴ In other words, he takes us right back to those debates about the meaning of ‘text’ and ‘context’ which formed much of the subject matter of chapter two, and the dispute between Bateson and Leavis, and it is undertaken in a way which ignores all those more recent theories which seek to challenge the simple opposition between ‘text’ and ‘context’.¹⁵ But Vickers’ strong support

of a 'contextual' approach is as far removed from the cultural materialist perspective as possible - he argues that such work does not make us rethink the significance of Shakespeare, on the contrary: 'such exercises in historical criticism, paradoxically enough, bring Shakespeare's reliance on, yet independence of, his social and intellectual context into much sharper focus. The increased clarity of vision makes the plays that much more individual, and immediate'.¹⁶ In other words, the effort of doing historical research rewards us by making it clearer that Shakespeare was even greater than we first imagined. This is hardly the message of *Political Shakespeare* or Raymond Williams. Returning to Williams's 'Afterword', what becomes clear is that, despite his plea for a more 'historical' form of criticism, his own commitment to a cultural materialist reading has as one of its main targets just the kind of privileging of Shakespeare suggested by Vickers:

I have always believed that the works of what has been defined, and often contained, as the mainstream simply have to go on being addressed: not only because of their own substantial importance, but also because their very formation into what has been called a canon, with implications for all the works and related forms which that significant term excludes and is at times designed to exclude, enforces, in any new analysis, direct and sustained attention to what can be known of these works both before and after this incorporating and often flattening process.¹⁷

Williams continues by pointing to the content of the essays in *Political Shakespeare*, which combine 'within the same covers, studies of particular plays and of the institutions, in education and theatre, which have been built around versions of them'.¹⁸ This is a very different understanding of 'contextualization' and one unlikely to gain Vickers' approval. Vickers' attempt to appropriate Williams is at best misguided, and he must realise that Williams's fundamental beliefs about culture are close to those who now call themselves cultural materialists: Sinfield points to a similar 'faultline' in *Appropriating Shakespeare*, where Vickers argues that it was a direct result of his 'traditional' approach to thinking about Shakespeare which allowed him to leave his childhood home, a miner's cottage in South Wales, and that therefore 'Shakespeare transcends class-divisions'.¹⁹ The very mention of Wales, and a suggestion of 'border crossing' inevitably invokes in Sinfield the name of Williams:

Raymond Williams's work could have helped Vickers to see that the co-option of bright individuals into middle-class Englishness does nothing for the Welsh working class, and may leave the escapees culturally rootless and bitter.²⁰

Given Alan Sinfield's regular acknowledgements of Williams's influence, and Williams's own willingness to have his name connected with *Political Shakespeare*, it may be more reasonable for Sinfield to appropriate Williams than Vickers, but it leaves open the question of the relationship

between the formulation of cultural materialism revealed in the main body of the thesis, and the continuing activity of Sinfield and his colleagues. In particular, the problem raised in chapter four, about Williams's attempt to 'materialize' cultural production, and the doubts expressed by Terry Eagleton about Williams's claim that his radical reformulation of the base/superstructure metaphor can still be considered 'part of' historical materialism can be seen to be of continuing significance. We saw in the chapter on 'Penshurst' that despite Williams's rejection of ideology in favour of hegemony, his own analysis of the 'Country-House' poems is still very much 'ideological critique', in which forms of consciousness and representation are shown to be inverted and exclusionary with respect to the governing relations of production. This insistence on a Marxist theory of determination is problematized in the 'Postmodern' chapter. There, certain theories of postmodernity insist on the end of 'grand narratives', including Marxism, and suggest that it is meaningless even to think about the relationship between economic activity and 'superstructural' formations and any 'determining' relationship between them. Yet, as I have shown using the work of Fredric Jameson, it is possible to account for the sorts of cultural shifts designated by the term 'postmodernism' by holding on to such a deterministic model, arguing instead that we have not entered some strange, new epoch of 'postmodernity', but merely the latest stage in the development of capitalism.

Whether or not we can consider Williams a 'Marxist'²¹, his *intention* to carve out a specific theory, 'cultural materialism' within historical

materialism is clear. This does not have to be true for those who have come after, particularly in the wake of 1989 and the continuing suggestion that we are now 'post-Marxist' (just as we are 'post' everything else). Thus, in Jonathan Dollimore's Introduction to the second edition of *Radical Tragedy* he argues that a central issue in recent Renaissance studies has been 'a growing feeling that theory itself had reached a level of sophistication which required historical engagement as its next stage, meaning by this not *just* a rereading of past literature through theoretical lenses, but a historical exploration of theory - hence using history to 'read' theory as well as vice versa'.²² It may look as though one particular 'theoretical' way of understanding the world, 'historical materialism', fits Dollimore's idea rather well. But further reading in *Radical Tragedy* suggests rather that what he is thinking about is much closer to that earlier debate, between a 'materialist' and an 'idealist' philosophy, than the developed work of 'late' Marx which starts out after this particular debate is at an end. When Dollimore invokes Marx, it is in terms of 'the Marxist proposition that human consciousness is determined by social being' rather than the Marx of 'base and superstructure'.²³ As Eagleton reminded us earlier, one does not have to be an historical materialist to accept the 'ontological' thesis that social being determines consciousness. Further, while acknowledging that Marx 'displaced man from the centre of history', Dollimore uses this as a way to deny teleology, relying instead on a Foucauldian/Nietzschean notion of 'genealogies'.²⁴ But Marxism is committed absolutely to a 'teleological' understanding of history (albeit one at present caught up in the circularity of

'pre-history'). What I mean by this statement is not that Marxists understand history as something to do with evident design, or purpose, or 'final causes' or whatever, because they accept with Marx that 'history' to date has been a self-repeating, circular affair of tragedy and farce. What I do mean is that it is premature to talk about the 'end of history' and resign ourselves to the 'delights' of late capitalism, because, as Terry Eagleton puts it : 'The point for Marx is not to move us towards the *telos* of History, but to get out from under all this so that we may make a beginning - so that histories proper, in all their wealth of difference, might get off the ground.'²⁵

A rather more sophisticated analysis of cultural materialism, and the continuing relevance to it of Marxism, is undertaken by Alan Sinfield in *Faultlines*.²⁶ Setting his own project in direct antagonism to the sort of 'coherence' theory of literary criticism argued for by Brian Vickers, Sinfield argues that:

[c]ultural materialism calls for modes of knowledge that literary criticism scarcely possesses, or even knows how to discover - modes, indeed, that hitherto have been cultivated distinctively within that alien other of essentialist humanism, Marxism.²⁷

Responding directly to the debates over base and superstructure, Sinfield points out that new historicism's tendency to replace a model of determination with a structure of homologies drains away any notion of class agency, and hence any real possibility for historical change.²⁸ For Sinfield,

new historicists tend to over-rely on the work of Foucault, while at the same time actually misreading it, assuming that his fundamental model is one of 'entrapment' rather than 'resistance' (or Sinfield's preferred term, 'dissidence').²⁹ Sinfield's insistence on the existence of 'faultlines' within the Shakespearean text relies on a Marxist theory of ideology which denies the possibility of 'a privileged vantage point outside the dominant', but also acknowledges that 'the social order *cannot but produce* faultlines [i.e. 'contradictions'] through which its own criteria of plausibility fall into contest and disarray.³⁰ To explain this theoretically, Sinfield quotes Stuart Hall:

[T]he dominant culture of a complex society is never a homogeneous structure. It is layered, reflecting different interests within the dominant class (e.g. an aristocratic versus a bourgeois outlook), containing different traces from the past (e.g. religious ideas within a largely secular culture), as well as emergent elements in the present.³¹

It is not difficult to see how close Hall's formulation is to Williams's notion of 'dominant, residual and emergent', and indeed Sinfield specifically recognizes the influence of these ideas.³² This returns us once again to Williams's 'Base and Superstructure' essay, the place where he first formally develops his ideas about dominant, residual and emergent cultural practices. Despite Sinfield's strong emphasis on the need for cultural materialism to keep close to a Marxist cultural theory and practice, his own work makes it clear that it is Williams's use of Gramsci and his writing on 'hegemony' and 'organic

intellectuals' which he finds most useful, particularly in his later work on 'subcultures'.³³ Effectively, this latest version of cultural materialism is one much closer to Dollimore's 'cultural analysis', which I considered in the Introduction. It has allowed Sinfield, Dollimore, Hawkes and many others to open up 'canonical' works and 'EngLit' to a set of 'dissident' readings which have transformed reading practices in many valuable ways. But this has been achieved by sacrificing in particular a Marxist understanding of determination, despite Williams's desire to retain it. His own commitment to discussing society in terms of inter-relating levels of activity³⁴, in other words, means in effect that he is unable to retain the notion of determination, however much he intends to, and this is true also for those who have followed him. In their original 'Foreword' to *Political Shakespeare*, Dollimore and Sinfield insist that 'culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production', and they argue that cultural materialism 'registers its commitment to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on grounds of race, gender and class'.³⁵ If cultural materialism is to have any viable future, this is what it needs to remember.

Notes and References

¹ On this specific point, see the new list of 'keywords' proposed by Morag Shiach in: 'A Gendered History of Cultural Categories', in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams*, ed. by Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 51-70 (p. 68). From the same volume, see also: Gauri Viswanathan, 'Raymond Williams and

British Colonialism' (pp. 188-210). *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Terry Eagleton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), includes: Lisa Jardine and Julia Swindells, 'Homage to Orwell: The Dream of a Common Culture, and Other Minefields' (pp. 108-29); and Edward Said, 'Jane Austen and Empire' (pp. 150-64). For a more vigorous challenge, which takes on the whole of 'LitCrit', see: Lisa Jardine, "'Girl Talk'" (for boys on the Left), or Marginalising Feminist Critical Praxis', *Oxford Literary Review*, 8 (1986), pp. 208-17. It has to be said that these essays vary in their allegiance to a cultural materialist reading. A number of full-length works have appeared recently dealing with 'queer theory' from a cultural materialist perspective, including two by Alan Sinfield: *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 1994); and *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (London: Cassell, 1994). In *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979) Williams's interviewers ask him why he argues in *The Long Revolution* that there are four 'essential systems' in society, but excludes one of these, the 'familial', in actually analysing the 'long revolution'. In responding, Williams stresses the values of 'women's liberation', but argues that feminist theory has lacked an adequate analysis of 'the contradictory features' of such a development (pp. 147-49).

² The name comes from the review article by Terence Hawkes which started the controversy. A version of 'Bardbiz' appears in Hawkes's *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 141-53. On page 154, Hawkes

helpfully lists the letters which formed the 'controversy'. The most frequent combatants were Alan Sinfield and the Guardian journalist James Wood.

³ *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 2nd edn, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994)

⁴ Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics* (Professorial Lecture given at the University of Sussex, 9 March 1993, in-house photocopy), p. 2. Some of these arguments are also included in Sinfield's new essay in the second edition of *Political Shakespeare*, 'Heritage and the Market, Regulation and Desublimation', pp. 255-79.

⁵ The debate 'spreads out' also into the public domain, by becoming the subject of media debate - see e.g. the review article on the controversy by Peter Watson, 'Presume Not That I Am The Thing I Was', *Observer*, 22 August 1993, pp. 37-38.

⁶ Similarly, Shakespeare's birthday is celebrated on 23rd April, linking his name with that of St George. The excuse given for this is that 'Shakespeare was baptised on April 26, 1664' and 'children were usually christened when they were two or three days old', sub-text to a photograph of 'Shakespeare's birthday procession', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 April 1994, p. 3.

⁷ Such appropriation is genuinely extensive: on Radio 4's scientific programme 'Big Bang', 11 September 1995, which included a discussion about the genetic possibilities for the preservation of proteins played out in

Jurassic Park, the interviewer mentioned the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet*, and said 'Shakespeare got it right'.

⁸ Sinfield, *Cultural Politics*, p. 17.

⁹ Quoted by Alan Sinfield, 'Untune That String: Shakespeare and the Scope for Dissidence', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 April 1994, pp. 4-5 (p. 4).

¹⁰ Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (London: Yale University Press, 1993). See also: Graham Bradshaw, *Mis-representations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). The sort of writing seen in *Political Shakespeare* is continued in: *Materialist Shakespeare: A History*, ed. by Ivo Kamps (London: Verso, 1995).

¹¹ Brian Vickers, 'Rehearsal Time: Politics, the Plague and the Planning of Shakespeare's Plays', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 April 1994, pp. 3-4 (p. 3, emphasis in original).

¹² Brian Vickers, *Returning to Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1989).

¹³ Raymond Williams, 'Afterword', in *Political Shakespeare*, pp. 281-89.

¹⁴ Brian Vickers, *Returning to Shakespeare*, p. 10.

¹⁵ For a development of this argument, see: Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'Culture and Textuality: Debating Cultural Materialism', *Textual Practice* 4 (1990), 91-100 (pp. 98-99).

¹⁶ Vickers, *Returning to Shakespeare*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Raymond Williams, 'Afterword', pp. 286-87. Regarding the notion of the 'canon', it seems clear that within 'EngLit' the canon is discussed as though

'Shakespeare' is *always* there and *always* at number 1. The only debate then is over whether certain works be attributed to Shakespeare and included under his name, most recently 'A Funeral Elegy' and 'Shall I Die?'

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 287.

¹⁹ Quoted in Sinfield, 'Heritage and the Market', p. 256.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 256. Obviously Williams's 'work' in this case may include his own personal history, as reflected fictionally in the first three novels, and particularly the character 'Matthew Price': *Border Country* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960; London: Hogarth Press, 1988); *Second Generation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964; London: Hogarth Press, 1988); *The Fight for Manod* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979; London: Hogarth Press, 1988).

²¹ The suggestion itself is indicative of a 'unitary' definition not matched by the diversity of approaches among those who do consider themselves Marxists, hence Williams's 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' [1975] in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 65-76.

²² Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 2nd edn 1989), p. xlvii (emphasis in original). A footnote to this quotation reads: 'It should be added that there were those, like Raymond Williams, who never subscribed to anything else', p. lxvii, n. 73.

²³ Ibid., p. 153.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 269.

²⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 65 (emphasis in original).

²⁶ Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45 (emphasis in original).

³¹ Hall, quoted Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 45.

³² 'Much of the importance of Raymond Williams derives from the fact that at a time when Althusser and Foucault were being read in some quarters as establishing ideology and / or power in a necessarily unbreakable continuum, Williams argued the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance' (Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 9).

³³ For example, in his later *The Wilde Century*, Sinfield uses the Gramsci of *The Prison Notebooks* to show how political awareness arises from involvement in a particular 'milieu' or 'subculture': 'In acquiring one's conception of the world one belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting' (p. 183).

³⁴ Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 36.

³⁵ Dollimore and Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, p. viii.

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Where the original date of publication does not form part of the reference, it is given in square brackets immediately following the title.

All works by Raymond Williams are given in chronological order of original publication within each sub-section. All other references appear in alphabetical order by author.

Primary Texts by Raymond Williams

- 1 Books (including novels).
- 2 Chapters in Books
- 3 Articles

Secondary Texts on Raymond Williams or Cultural Materialism

Other Secondary Texts

Primary Texts by Raymond Williams

1 Books (including novels)

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