

Key Words

A JOURNAL OF CULTURAL MATERIALISM

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Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism

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Editors' Preface: Seeing Ourselves in History

In the fifty years since the publication of *Culture and Society* the world has been transformed in ways which would have been unimaginable for its first readers. Writing in the aftermath of Hungary, Suez, and Khrushchev's 20th Congress denunciation of Stalin, Raymond Williams could not have predicted the cultural and political upheavals soon to be gathered under the iconic shorthand '1968', let alone the Soviet Union's catastrophic implosion two years after his death in 1988, or, since then, the accelerating pace of globalisation, the spread of the Internet, and the United States' relentless if now temporarily checked drive to make the 'New American Century' 'safe for democracy'. Even less, perhaps, could even the most red-blooded socialist have expected a recurrence of the kind of capitalist meltdown we have seen in recent months, a '1929 moment' considered no longer possible by the celebrants of a 'New World Order' that had proudly pronounced 'the end of history'.

From the standpoint of a globalised twenty-first century, Williams's groundbreaking study might at first sight seem strangely parochial, marooned in the time and space of its inception. Despite its author's later encounters with world drama and with European Marxism, or his even later recovery of his Welsh origins, the book is insistently English in its emphases. 'English', not 'British', is the normative adjective throughout. Only a handful of the social critics it discusses are not *echt* English (two Anglo-Scots, two Anglo-Irishmen, and T.S. Eliot, for thirty years a naturalised Brit). The only Welshman considered is Robert Owen. The one exception to this nativist scenario is the chapter on 'Marxism and Culture', though it, again, addresses a largely domestic tradition, mediated by Christopher Caudwell and (*pace* John Lucas's claims in the current issue) Alick West. Yet for all this, *Culture and Society* remains a work of remarkable prescience, survey and synthesis, its awareness of and responsiveness to a wider world, its resistance to the imperatives of the Cold War and a resurgent Little Englandism, testifying to an internationalism that was to find a stronger, clearer voice in the emergent New Left of the next decade, in the immense scope of a work like the *May Day Manifesto* (1967 and 1968), co-edited with E.P. Thompson and Stuart Hall, and in the two decades of Williams's writing that followed.

In the mid-1950s, the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh had drawn a significant distinction between what he termed 'parochialism' and 'provincialism':

The provincial has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis ... has to say on the subject The parochial mentality on the other hand is never in any doubt about the

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social and artistic validity of his parish. All great civilizations are based on parochialism Parochialism is universal; it deals with the fundamentals.

Williams's own work is in the best sense parochial, rooted in the particularities of what, adopting T.S. Eliot's formula, *Culture and Society* designated 'a whole way of life', but engaging, from its very situatedness, with universal issues and obligations. In a telling moment in *Modern Tragedy*, in 1966, Williams set his own situation in tangible connection with the particularity of other lives in faraway places, to register not just an empathetic but a *structural* relatedness, 'in a widely communicating world':

The bloody tale of the past is always conveniently discounted, but I am writing on a day when British military power is being used against 'dissident tribesmen' in South Arabia, and I know this pattern and its covering too well, from repeated examples through my lifetime, to be able to acquiesce in the ordinary illusion [I]t is impossible to believe that as a society we have yet dedicated ourselves to human liberation, or even to that simple recognition of the absolute humanity of all other men which is the impulse of any genuine revolution.

The capacity to tie individual experience into general structures of feeling, thought and action, and to pinpoint the determining social and economic forces that generate and underpin such structures, is the deepest impulse of all Williams's writing, and it invests the evocation of his Welsh ancestors in the late fiction as much as it informs the critical writings about Euripides or Cobbett, Ibsen or Lawrence; or, for that matter, *Z Cars* and *Steptoe and Son*, where a precise responsiveness to the narrative genres of television goes in tandem with astute technical insight into the apparatuses and systems within which such narratives are articulated. Such a way of thinking is exposed most revealingly, perhaps, in his report of an exchange with F.R. Leavis on such an ordinary matter as English Faculty business, demonstrating in miniature the crucial difference between the 'Left-Leavisism' discussed by several contributors to the present issue and Williams's own Olympian 'cultural materialist' mindset: 'Everything came out from him [Leavis] directly and *ad hominem*, while I was trying to talk about systems and structures, and of the problems of choice while we were inevitably inside them.'

'There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses', Williams wrote in *Culture and Society*, in words which still resonate in our own electronically globalised era. Such a belief may explain why one of his most pervasive influences has been outside the academy, where his own teaching career began, in that realm where, as he argued in 'Adult Education

and Social Change', learning is a transactional and transformative practice – a conviction carried forward by several generations of teachers shaped by his ideas and example. Terry Eagleton here pays personal tribute to Raymond's abiding influence, in a keynote lecture delivered to the 20th annual Raymond Williams weekend, sponsored by the WEA and our sister organisation, the Raymond Williams Memorial Fund, at the Wedgwood Memorial College in May 2008.

It is fitting that this issue of *Key Words* should take as its theme Arnold Kettle's suggestion, quoted by Patrick Parrinder, that 'we have to see both literature and ourselves in history, not as abstract entities'. Seeing ourselves in history is what Raymond Williams's work repeatedly invites us to, and this is the intent of the papers here reproduced and revised from the conference sponsored in March 2007 by the Raymond Williams Society to commemorate the life and work of Graham Martin, a founding member and for many years a Trustee of the Society. Simon Dentith's and Parrinder's examination, at this conference, of the discourses and institutions of a progressive pedagogy are accompanied throughout by a sense of that larger history within which such local and particular encounters take place, a context examined in some depth in Tony Bennett's wide-ranging exploration, at the same conference, of the historic relations between literature, criticism and liberation, and, with a more precise focus, in Nick Stevenson's consideration of the relations between cosmopolitanism and democratic citizenship in a global culture. Fifty years on from *Culture and Society*, we need to situate Williams's seminal work within that continuing history, as Andrew Milner undertakes in his interrogation of Williams's approach to his one-time collaborator, George Orwell. It is in this spirit that we publish here two contending responses by current editors of the journal, provoked by the publication of Dai Smith's 2008 biography of Williams. That Raymond Williams's life and work constitute a continuing and vital intellectual legacy is indicated by the turnout, and the age-range, at the launch event for Dai Smith's book, organised by the Raymond Williams Society at Birkbeck College, London University, in June 2008, chaired by Raymond's daughter Merryn, at which Dai Smith and Eric Hobsbawm debated Williams's life and achievement. The debate initiated there, and in this issue of *Key Words*, will continue at the AGM of the Society in November, at which Francis Mulhern will consider '*Culture and Society* Fifty Years On'.*

The current issue of *Key Words* sees two new accessions to the editorial board, and the departure of two colleagues who between them have put an enormous amount of labour and thought into rebuilding the journal, to the point at which the next three issues, each with an individual guest editor, are

* To be held at the London Office of Nottingham University, 41–42 Berners Street, W1, 2.00–5.00 pm on November 22, 2008.

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already in preparation. Professor Peter Brooker is this year also demitting office as chair of the Raymond Williams Society. In his time in office Peter has presided over the renewal and return to robust health of both Society and journal. The wider intellectual community will want to join members of the Society and his fellow editors in thanking him for what has been achieved under his leadership.

Culture Is Ordinary¹

Terry Eagleton

It was Raymond Williams, of course, who invented the phrase ‘cultural materialism’, a phrase which I take as signalling among other things that he both was and wasn’t a Marxist. On the one hand, like Marxists, he was philosophically speaking a materialist, a claim which shouldn’t be taken to mean that he liked to have a lot of material goods. On the contrary, he lived a fairly austere sort of existence, and even at times seemed strangely reluctant to switch on the light in the living room of his cottage, so that one ended up speaking to him in semi-darkness as though attending a séance. I never saw him drink more than half-a-pint of bitter at a time, and he grew a little alarmed when others around him did (I often had cause to alarm him in this respect). Perhaps there was some race-memory of Welsh chapel culture at work here. Nor should ‘materialism’ be taken to mean that he didn’t believe in so-called spiritual values – his whole life’s work was about them – just that he saw such values as working within social and historical contexts. The argument is over what we mean by spiritual values, not whether they exist. In this sense, it resembles the argument over Literature, not the argument over UFOs.

On the other hand, Raymond was always rather sceptical of conventional Marxist notions of culture, suspecting as he did that to relegate culture to the so-called superstructure meant both dematerialising it and diminishing its value. I think he was wrong about this, but it was what one might call a productive error, since it resulted in this fertile project known as cultural materialism, whose aim was to investigate not isolated artifacts but the material processes, relations and institutions of culture itself. One question this raises is how this project differs from a conventional sociology of culture. I suspect the answer is that the traditional sociology of culture looks at what one might call the outworks of the cultural artifact, its social environment, whereas Raymond was interested in seeing how that context, so to speak, got into the artefact itself, infiltrated its forms and contents, in ways which defeated this rather simpleminded inside/outside division. How can you trace the social conditions of a work of art within the work itself in its form and structure and syntax and texture? This is a hard procedure to operate, though Raymond’s work on drama might provide us with some examples. He could trace a change in ideological outlook or social relations in a shift of stage technique – from, say, naturalism to expressionism.

1 Text of the key-note lecture which opened the 20th annual Raymond Williams weekend at the Wedgwood Memorial College, 2–4th May 2008. These courses are run in association with the WEA and the RWMF.

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Or think of the way every literary work encodes some implicit sense of its potential audience and of its relations to them – whether that audience is collective (as in epic) or individual (as in lyric), whether it is to be instructed or cajoled, grasped as equal, inferior or superior, moved to action or confirmed in its quiescence, and so on. How, for example, do literary works change when they realise that their social relations have altered, that unlike what we call classical works of art they have no established or knowable audience – that their readerships are anonymous, that the writer as Shelley observes is a nightingale singing in the dark, or that the narrator is literally talking in the dark as at the beginning of Conrad's much-overrated *Heart of Darkness*? What's the difference between works which can take an identifiable audience for granted and those which must so to speak produce their own readers, fashion their own conditions of reception? How can all this be detected in the work of art itself? And how does all this relate to changed market conditions, changed conditions of production? I might add that the concept of cultural materialism of course has its own material or historical conditions too – I mean, it's hard not to see culture as in some sense material once you have the rise of the so-called culture industry – once culture is very obviously a matter of capital, technology, markets and the mass production of commodities. In this sense, perhaps, Graham Norton is a card-carrying cultural materialist. The point, however, is that while conventional critics are perfectly ready to recognise this in the case of *Britain's Got Talent* or Madonna, they're notably more reluctant to concede the point when it comes to Dante or Shostakovich. Cultural materialism is all very well for the masses, but cultural idealism is the province of the elite.

Yet I think the phrase 'cultural materialism' can also be taken in a different sense. You can be a materialist about culture; but you can also approach culture as a materialist, and I think the phrase can mean both things. (Or at least I'm going to make it mean both things.) This makes an important difference, I think, to how highly you rate culture in human affairs in general. Cultural materialism in the sense I've just described rates it very seriously: culture isn't just a set of solitary works of art, it's a whole sector of social production, quite as real and solid and material as pig farming and perhaps even in some sense more important. By contrast, cultural materialism in the sense of culture as assessed by a materialist is rather less convinced of the centrality of culture. I should say here that culture is actually one of those ideas which it's almost impossible not to either overestimate or underestimate. In this sense, its nearest equivalence is sex. Men and women don't live by culture alone. In the narrow, artistic and intellectual sense of the word, most of them don't live by it at all; and even in the broader, more generous sense of the word, meaning a whole way of life, which Williams did so much to promote, you can claim that culture isn't what's fundamental.

What do I mean by this? Well, it's significant I think that none of the most intractable problems which humankind faces on the brink of the new millennium is really in any very specific sense a cultural problem. War, famine, drugs, disease, crime, mass migration, the so-called war on terror, the devastation of the planet: of course all of these issues are cultural in the sense that every issue we call human is caught up in the business of meaning, language, value and the like. But this is such a wide definition of culture that it's essentially unusable. It lacks all cutting edge. Terms which try to cover everything end up by meaning nothing. (Think of the sheer pointlessness of saying 'everything is political', except to someone who imagined that politics was confined to the House of Lords.) These issues are by and large material rather than cultural ones, even if that's a distinction which is hard to make in the process of actually living them. I think Williams himself very often wasn't alert enough to this distinction, partly because of his emphasis (a deeply valuable one for the most part) on experience. Of course we don't experience the cultural and material as existing in separate categories. Starving to death, for example, is almost always a cultural matter – for one thing because famines are scarcely ever caused by food shortages, but by people's inability to buy food, which is clearly in a broad sense cultural; for another thing because famines very rarely take place in democracies, since democratically elected governments can't get away with them. But starving to death isn't cultural in the sense that promoting the Welsh language or clog dancing or tattooing a swastika on your neck or praying in the direction of Mecca are cultural. Shovelling food into your body is a biological necessity; whether it's bread or chapati is a cultural affair.

It's this that tends to be denied by that current of postmodern thought known as culturalism. For culturalism, culture goes all the way down. The stuff is wall to wall. This is a form of reductionism, a conceptual strategy which postmodernists aren't supposed to approve of; and it is one which risks emptying the term 'culture' of all tangible meaning, not to speak of the fact that it isn't actually true. It isn't true because whatever else human beings are, they are in the first place natural material objects; and anything more interesting we can get up to – call it history – has to recognise its dependence on this material foundation, on our frail, vulnerable, fragile, creaturely condition, if it isn't to prove overreaching and ultimately self-destructive.

There are people who have always had trouble accepting this fact, and a lot of them are known as Americans. American ideology is virulently hostile to the idea of material limit: you can crack it if you try, the sky's the limit and suchlike pernicious ideological nonsense. There's a lot of puritan voluntarism – the cult of the stark, solitary, neurotically active Will – lurking behind this. America is in love with a Faustian infinity of desire, one which regards materiality as an obstacle rather than a set of creative restraints. The criminal adventure in

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Iraq has much to do with this crazed idealist cult of Can-Do-ery. The most rapaciously materialistic society on the planet is idealist to its core, and the two things are by no means unconnected. Incidentally, so-called Islamic radicalism is one form of culturalism, because it sees spiritual values and beliefs as the dynamic of history. Osama Bin Laden isn't exactly a materialist. But the so-called war against terror isn't in the first place a cultural matter, any more than the war in Northern Ireland was about papal infallibility.

Now I think Raymond Williams always understood this, despite his immense investment in the notion of culture, because he was what you might call a born materialist as well as a philosophical one. As a man, he had an extraordinarily quick, delicate, perceptive sense of material process, whether it was a matter of hedging and ditching in the Black Mountains or observing the complex course of a river or grasping the intricacies of someone else's manual labour. But this was also a question of belief. Largely because of his rural background, he had a keen interest in Nature and ecology and environment long before these terms were in the least fashionable. Indeed, it was at his house that I first heard the word 'ecology'. He had been dipping into his son's school biology textbook and asked me if I knew what the word meant. I think I replied that it was the study of insects. Charitably passing over this absurd *faux pas*, he remarked that it was the study of the interrelation of elements in a living system – and one can see right away how such an exploration would have seized his imagination.

I think Raymond would have agreed with the proposition that culture is not our nature, as the postmodern culturalists hold, but (an important nuance of difference here) culture is *of* our nature. All human animals are born, so to speak, prematurely, incapable of looking after themselves; and if culture in the sense of caring and nursing and nourishment doesn't move in on them straight away, they are certainly going to die. We are born with a gaping hole or blank in our biological nature where culture has to be, as a kind of surplus or supplement which like the Derridean supplement is at the same time necessary.

This culture, in the wide sense of the term, then allows us to range well beyond the confines of our material bodies. In fact, culture is the way we extend those bodies into a global context. Banks and diplomatic treaties and telephone exchanges are really extensions of our bodies. Because we have language, which is to say all kinds of complex concepts at our disposal, we can become truly universal beings, doing all sorts of astonishing things which aren't possible for moles or badgers. Moles and badgers can't get outside their own bodies as linguistic animals can; what they do is pretty much constrained by their biological cycles. I don't want to be odiously patronising here – I mean I'm sure badgers and goldfish are perfectly decent little chaps in their own way – but let's face it, because they lack culture they're extraordinarily limited.

I mean, they can't even construct a nuclear weapon. How uncivilised can you get? Unless of course they're being very furtive about it.

And that, surely, is the point. The very powers which allow us to create also enable us to destroy. As far as the linguistic animal goes, it is hard to have Tennyson without Trident. Our language allows us much closer access to things and to one another than mere physical contact; sexual relationships, for example, are mostly about talking. (Or am I missing out on something?) But language or conceptual thought also wedges us apart, and risks estranging us from the world. Because language or culture unhinges us from the sensuous constraints of our bodies, we're always in danger of developing too fast, overreaching ourselves and bringing ourselves to nothing. The ancient Greeks understood this very well. It's hard to kill someone with your bare hands, since it would probably just make you sick. Sensuous inhibitions would kick into place. But it's easy enough to burn Arab children to death at long range.

This, by the way, is what the theological doctrine of the Fall is all about. We achieve creative powers or forms of knowledge which also threaten to destroy us. Like all the best Falls, the Fall from Eden was one up and not down – a Fall up into history, language, culture and consciousness. Which of course is what's precious about us as well as potentially lethal. This is why the Fall from grace is traditionally known as a happy Fall, or *felix culpa*. But it's a fall even so.

Raymond himself didn't go in for such grand generalities as I've just been indulging in. In fact he was notably nervous of them. Even when he spoke abstractly, he had a strangely attractive way of imbuing those abstractions with a certain force and concretion. His literary style does this all the time. But I think he would have been averse to culturalism, just as he would have recognised had he lived into our own time that in a certain sense culture has become more ordinary than ever. Not necessarily in the postmodern sense, though postmodern culture is certainly by and large more demotic and vernacular than Stendhal or Strindberg. But this cultural populism sometimes betrays the levelling, indiscriminate quality of the commodity, which is not the kind of popular culture Raymond had in mind. If it's inclusive, anti-hierarchical, unpretentious, consumer-friendly, anti-elitist, open to all-comers, that's to a great extent because the market is too.

I mean rather that culture has become even more ordinary in a political sense. What's striking, if you look at the three political movements which have dominated the global agenda since the late 20th century – revolutionary nationalism (far and away the most successful revolutionary current of modernity), the women's movement, and various ethnic conflicts – is that for all of these, culture in the broad sense of language, sign, value, identity, belonging, tradition, way of life and so on, is absolutely central. Culture becomes the very idiom in which political demands are framed – which is by no means so true

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of industrial or class struggles. It isn't so much people's culture or identity (a cultural matter) which is at stake in such class struggles, as their very material survival and well-being. This is why it's all the more admirable that working people have engaged so intensively over the centuries in forms of literary and artistic culture, because they don't really have the same central role to play in their struggles as say a national language, religious form of life or indigenous literature has for a third-world national liberation movement. Someone once described revolutionary nationalism as the invention of literary types. It's a very poetic kind of politics. You wouldn't put Padraic Pearse on the sanitation committee.

To put the point another way: sometime in the twentieth century, culture shifted over from being part of the solution to being part of the problem. In the nineteenth century, culture, meaning the values that we most deeply shared, could be appealed to as a ground of unity on which we might all assemble, irrespective of our material, social and political divisions. Beneath these divisions there was a shared human essence, and the expression of it was known as culture. If this was a flagrantly ideological strategy, one designed to mask real conflicts in the name of cultural harmony, it was also in its way a noble and generous-minded conception. (We mustn't forget that Karl Marx had the deepest admiration for that most revolutionary of all social classes, the liberal middle class, which is the class that produced this idea.) Culture here was a kind of spiritual solution to social ills. In the twentieth century, however, culture itself becomes a terrain of political contention. In fact, you could define culture in this sense as that which people are prepared to kill for. Or die for, if you prefer. Nobody as far as I'm aware is prepared to die for Dickens or Dostoevsky, apart perhaps from a few seriously weird people hiding out in caves too ashamed to come out and show their faces; but many people are prepared to die for their religious or national identity, or to kill for it. Culture is as crucial as that. And yet at the same time it's not fundamentally where it's at. You can't promote a language, engage in clog dancing, write novels or burn people on funeral pyres if you're starving. Culture in this sense is a sort of surplus. It presupposes human labour, which in turn presupposes much else. And this, surely, is one meaning of cultural materialism.

Now we know that that labour has always involved exploitation and unhappiness. For every cathedral, a pit of bones. For every splendid symphony, a lot of thankless, backbreaking toil. Culture and barbarism are in this sense sides of the same coin – as opposed to the conventional view that they are sequential rather than synchronous, i.e., that culture or civilisation follows barbarism, is dredged out of barbarism. That's true as far as it goes – but the truth is that the necessary violence by which humanity salvages civilisation from chaos isn't just a once-and-for-all affair. On the contrary, this precarious

edge over Nature which is known as civilisation has to be constantly sustained – which means that the primordial act of violence is ongoing. As Freud argues, civilisation or culture necessarily demands a great deal of repression. And what it represses most notably is the violence and aggression which went into its making. The same for Freud is true of individuals: what is truly scandalous about his work isn't the idea of infantile sexuality, which a lot of people had known about for a long time, not least infants, but the fact that in order to become the thinking, speaking, acting individuals that we are, an enormous amount that went into our making as human subjects must necessarily be repressed. Repression is thus good for us, though too much of it makes us ill (neurosis). The individual psyche will never cease to bear the livid scars of that original repression, just as civilisation 'sublimates' that original violence into the state, turns it outward in order to defend itself.

A properly materialist criticism, then, would be one that, so to speak, X-rays the works of civilisation in order to reveal the concealed traces of the barbarism which went into their making. Which isn't for a moment to deny that these really are works of civilisation, that civilisation is unutterably precious, that it's not just a 'mask' for violence, and other such infantile ultra-leftist fantasies. And I believe this is part of what Raymond tried to do. There is, however, another tale to tell about culture, which isn't quite so prominent in his work. When, in the period of early modernity, works of art ceased really to have much public function any longer, they could always resort to an ingenious case to justify this embarrassing lack of public function. Artists could say, well, art doesn't seem to have much of a role around the place, as it did when the bard sang about the military victories of the tribe, or when the court commissioned a masque, or when your aristocratic patron paid you to draw him posing with a lot of cows in the background to show how extravagantly wealthy he was.

But, so the argument goes, this is the whole point. The point of art is its glorious pointlessness. It's the one thing left in a society dominated by utility, exchange value and instrumental reason that doesn't have a point. This is because its point lies in itself, indeed is itself. Art is that peculiar sort of thing that carries its ends, principles, reasons, origins and foundations entirely in itself. It sees no need to justify its existence before some grim-faced tribunal of History, Utility, Production, Public Welfare, Moral Improvement and all those other tedious versions of the social superego. Its purpose lies simply in its own sensuous and spiritual self-delight, as it keeps conjuring itself up from its own unfathomable depths just for the hell of it. As such, it joins a class of extremely rare objects which equally exist simply for their own delight, which are radically autotelic, and which includes God, evil and human beings. Human beings, at least, as they could be under changed political conditions, when they might no longer be instruments but ends in themselves. In an astonishing irony then,

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art becomes a utopian image of the good life precisely by having no purpose at all. It prefigures a situation in which we would be liberated from the curse of labour (the only reason to be a socialist is of course because you object to having to work) and instead, as Oscar Wilde might have put it, just lie around all day wearing loose crimson garments and be your own communist society. Art is entirely useless, and so are we. At least, we should be. Art is a sign that the need for play, excess, surplus, extravagance, the strictly unnecessary, that which surpasses the limit, is actually built into our natures. Our nature is such as to generate culture. (The subtlest analysis of all this is known as *King Lear*.)

Raymond didn't especially explore this utopian dimension of culture. Perhaps that was the chapel culture at work again. Whatever else he was, he surely wasn't an Oscar Wilde, with whom he shared only a Celtic capacity for eloquence. But his work did something of extreme importance. It brought together two senses of the word 'culture' by showing that culture in the sense of the artistic and intellectual life of a society manifested certain qualities of life, qualities of being, qualities of relationship and creativity, which needed to be generalised throughout social life as a whole. And the hinge or bridge between these two ideas of culture, the way the first would be transformed into the second, was by politics. Nowadays, there are those in Cultural Studies departments who seem to think that the study of culture in the sense of forms of life has put paid to culture in the sense of the disciplined exploration of art; and there are those in more traditional academic departments who believe the opposite ought to be the case. It was part of Raymond's deep generosity of spirit that he recognised long ago just what a false alternative this was.

Debate: Raymond Williams Novelist?

John Lucas

Among the surprises of Dai Smith's impressive biography of Raymond Williams is the discovery that Williams not only wanted to be a novelist, but that he spent what seems an inordinate amount of time working at novels that were never to see the light of day. Of course writers-to-be have to master their art, and many a successful author will admit to prentice work that ended up in the waste paper bin. They learn by going where they have to go. Williams is no exception. Smith opens his biography with Williams's remark, made in 1966, six years after the publication of *Border Country* had given him a certain cachet as a novelist, that writing the kind of novel in which he was interested 'was a long process, full of errors, and the delay meant that I became first known as a writer in other fields'. Smith comments: 'He had not wanted it to be the way he would become known as a writer. From 1946 he had spent more time and expended more energy in writing fiction than anything else.' And many pages of *A Warrior's Tale* are taken up with providing the evidence of this: the novels begun and abandoned, those that were eventually finished but rejected by publishers, others that exist as no more than fragments. Smith, I suspect, feels that some of this work deserves to be rescued from obscurity. My own reaction is to be depressed that Williams should so misunderstand the nature of his gifts. Because despite the modest achievement of *Border Country*, I doubt he ever had it in him to succeed as a worthwhile novelist. This may seem brutal, but in making this assessment I want to draw attention to something that is lacking in Smith's biography, partly because it's lacking in Williams himself, but also because Smith is not really familiar with the discussions about fiction that so animated radical writing in the 1930s, when Williams was starting out. I don't necessarily blame him for this. And yet without knowing something of these discussions we are bound to falsify the record of what was actually happening in radical thinking about fiction at a time when Williams was beginning to think of himself as a creative writer.

'The kind of novel in which I was interested.' Williams writes as though that kind simply didn't exist in English writing. Not only this. From the evidence Smith supplies, it seems that when he went to Cambridge in 1939 he had no idea that there was a whole body of contemporary radical writing about fiction which with various degrees of sophistication explored or dogmatised about how to get beyond or counter what was then often referred to as 'bourgeois realism', that preserve of middle-class interest. Williams's remark is uttered by a man who seems to think himself pretty well isolated. Well, of course, all writers have to endure solitude. It's how books get written. But Williams

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means something else. He means, or anyway implies, that he had no choice but to go it alone. And this, I have to say, seems characteristic of him. (Although by no means confined to him: E.P. Thompson, himself no stranger to demagoguery, thought this one of the besetting sins of the English radical tradition.) It is surely revealing that when Smith comes to discuss Williams's immediate post-war years, he gives the impression that they were a time of almost solitary confinement on England's south coast. But then it's the impression that Williams himself gave. 'This England,' Smith writes on p. 226, 'compared with the fertile education territory of the industrial north, was not promising soil in which to root the banner of a life-changing process through education.' But why ever not? I'd have thought it promising just because it was, to continue Smith's metaphor, fallow soil. And I can think of a number of socialists and paid-up members of the CPGB who in post-war Britain worked enthusiastically in very similar circumstances to Williams, among them Douglas Garman, Jack Lindsay, Arnold Rattenbury, Edgell Rickword, Randall Swingler, Montagu Slater, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Alick West. That their hopes of realising 'a life-changing process' gradually withered isn't because it was killed off by sea breezes or the declivities of the South Downs. And though they were for the most part physically separated, they kept in constant touch by letter, by telephone, and by visiting each other's living quarters. It's what people of shared concerns *do*, for goodness' sake.

I have a particular reason for mentioning these writers and activists. They were all part of that great wave of radical energy which from the 1920s onwards took for granted an interest in all forms of cultural expression, including fiction. They wrote about it at length and in several instances themselves wrote novels. In 1925 Garman and Rickword set up and importantly contributed to *The Calendar of Modern Letters*. (By the way, I don't know who told Smith [p. 116] that Rickword edited some early numbers of *Scrutiny*. True, Leavis took the name for his journal from the *Calendar's* 'Scrutinies', and he wrote warmly of Rickword in early issues of his own journal, as well as re-printing several of his essays, but that's as far as it went, and by the mid-thirties the two were poles apart, politically and in literary judgement.) A decade later most of them were involved in *Left Review*, although the teenage Rattenbury followed the journal's fortunes from Bath, where he was still at school with his fellow-members of the Communist youth league, E.P. Thompson and G.M. Matthews (later to be the great editor of Shelley.) In the immediate post-war years Rattenbury and the others worked for the Communist Party's *Our Time*.

This was no isolated group. When the young Rattenbury arrived at St John's College, Cambridge in 1939, he walked into an atmosphere deeply sympathetic to Marxist thought. I will believe Smith that Williams, who arrived at the same time, seemed entirely unaware of this atmosphere, that he was 'assertive but

intellectually isolated' (p. 85), but *why* was he? And, assuming that he was already hoping to be a writer, why, if Smith is right, does he appear to have known nothing about the work of those who during the 1930s had written and published any number of essays and full-length books on prose fiction, its history, its present state, its future? Hadn't any of it caught his eye, or at least been drawn to his attention? Christopher Caudwell, Ralph Fox, Douglas Goldring, Philip Henderson, Alick West are among those whose studies of fiction from a radical perspective all appeared during the 1930s and were variously attacked or championed in newspapers and journals of the time. In other words, they were 'current', to use a term of the period, although if Smith is right then Williams wasn't part of that current when he arrived at Cambridge, nor, or so he implies, while he was there. I accept that the experience of being 'farmed out' to E.M.W. Tillyard wouldn't have helped, but nor would it have hindered. Undergraduates the world over typically listen to their teachers 'old and contrary, / Without believing a word'. In many if not most matters they prefer the word of their contemporaries. And for all that Smith presents Williams as somehow cut off from these, he also tells us that 'the Cambridge University Socialist Club framed his interests and directed his social activities' (p. 85), that among those who addressed the Club – admittedly in 1938 – was Naomi Mitchison, that 'the permeation of that student culture, from film to poetry to formal political affiliation, by the Communist Party allegiance to the Soviet Union was, publicly, unquestioned,' and that 'Increasingly ... Raymond and the incoming generation would prove to be more attracted to life – in film, theatre and party going – beyond immediate politics. He was drawn to the circle of literary lions and film enthusiasts around Michael Orram' (p. 87).

Smith doesn't provide any names for the circle, but Sim Rattenbury, Arnold's widow, tells me that Arnold was part of it. Arnold was an enthusiastic admirer of Rex Warner's novels, as were many others. The complex fables Warner constructed provided, they felt, a cherishable and instructive alternative to the defeatist trap of fiction that dealt with things-as-they-are. So did Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* and so did Patrick Hamilton's work. Andy Croft's *Red-Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) is a full-length consideration of debates about the novel which animated radical thought of the time, with accounts of many of the novels then published, and he shows how vivid and widely discussed these were. Could Williams really have been in the Socialist Society and part of the Orram circle and have remained unaware of any of these discussions, or of the work that prompted them or to which they were a response? That he doesn't mention them – and I'm assuming he doesn't – is neither here nor there. What concerns me is that we are asked to believe that he was so cut off that he had no alternative but to

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hack a path through to some clearing where he could build his own house of fiction. It makes him sound depressingly like George Eliot's Casaubon.

But it isn't so much the seeming perversity of this that surprises me, it's the sheer improbability. Had Williams really not read Henry Green, say, or Patrick Hamilton? Or Storm Jameson or Sylvia Townsend Warner? Or Montagu Slater, or Randall Swingler? Or Walter Allen or John Hampson (key figures in the so-called 'Birmingham School')? Amazing as it must seem, perhaps he really hadn't. It may be worth noting that not long previously Roland Mathias, later to be an important Welsh poet, had managed to go through three years at Oxford without apparently coming across Auden's poetry. Perhaps this is what is called creative resistance to the dominant culture? But Mathias soon found his own voice. Williams didn't – not one of any value, anyway. Hence, the fustian Smith quotes, from the fragment of a proposed novel called *A Map of Treason*, which Williams began as an undergraduate. 'This early and ambitious fiction', Smith calls it, and quotes the following, which relates to Williams's own recruitment into the Communist Party.

Sidney Phillips, whom [Paul Ramsey – the Williams figure] had known for the past two years ... was a small, dark Londoner, sallow-faced and wearing thick-lensed spectacles. He was not a friend of Ramsey's but they had met often in the university communist party, of which they were both members. It had actually been Philips who had originally asked Ramsey to join the party. When Ramsey had come up to Cambridge, he had had behind him some years of adolescent work in his local Labour party. (p. 89)

This might, I suppose, be tolerable in biography, *but as fiction?* 'Cousin Jonathan, you will never be a poet', Dryden remarked to the young Swift when he was asked to comment on some particularly lumbering Pindarics. Reading this prose, of which Smith supplies a good deal more, I want to say, 'Mr Williams, you will never be a novelist'. The ambition, which I am prepared to believe was quite genuine, simply isn't matched by the one quality which every writer needs: an interest in words, in rhythm, cadence. It may look like the apparently plain-Jane style of Edward Upward, but it isn't. Hobbled by anxious detail, it really is plain.

This isn't to ignore the larger question which Williams brooded on, as to the kind of novels he wanted to write. But it is to say that at best his prose, serviceable enough in expository mode, is inadequate for the making of fiction. I am not carping or making a trivial aesthetic point when I say that throughout Williams's career as critic you look in vain for any suggestion that he actually enjoys writing, either his or anyone else's. Here, for instance, is an extract from 'A Fine Room to be Ill In', which did actually see the light of day. (Woodrow

Wyatt published it in *English Story*, 1948.) Here, Williams writes about a man of fastidious ways, Mr Peters, whose ‘desiccated denial of nature’, in Smith’s phrase, is betrayed in his bookcase,

With its titles arranged according to the branches of literature, for as Mr Peters so often said to his students, there is very little point in a kind of inclusive chronology of literature: it is the development of work in specific media which it is so important to emphasise. So there was drama, from the fine old calf-bound Greek texts, through the red texts of the Romans, on to the green collections of miracles and moralities, the uniform saffron editions of the Elizabethans, the patterned green covers of Racine and Corneille, the blue omnibus texts of Restoration tragedy and comedy ... It was the same with novels, with poetry, with essays, with biographies and with criticism. (Smith, p. 224)

What, all in one bookcase? Anyway, we’ve been here before:

Within a varnished case of costly wood
In level rows her polished volumes stood,
Shown as a favour to a chosen few
To prove what beauty for a book could do.

Williams may well not have read those lines from ‘Procrastination’, which forms one of Crabbe’s great 1812 collection, *Tales in Verse*, but he ought to have read the following:

Ugh! They were black, cold rooms; and seemed to be in mourning, like the inmates of the house. The books precisely matched as to size, and drawn up in line, like soldiers, looked in their cold, hard slippery uniforms, as if they had but one idea between them, and that was a freezer. The bookcase, glazed and locked, repudiated all familiarities.

Dickens had certainly read Crabbe, and a memory of how effectively Crabbe reads personality through domestic arrangement will have played some part in his writing about Mr Dombey’s library. But the point is that both Crabbe and Dickens use language with the kind of élan and *economy* which tells you much more about the people of whom they write than Williams can. It isn’t that Williams’s piece is bad. But I can’t see that it has much in way of writerly talent, a feeling for the defining phrase (‘polished volumes’, ‘glazed and locked’).

In this context, therefore, it’s worth noting that in *Reading and Criticism*, first published in 1950, Williams provides a painstaking account of the closing

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sentences of 'The Dead', in which he ticks all the main elements of Joyce's style without ever making you – well, me – feel that it means much to him.

The paragraph has distinction, although it bears minor traces of immaturity. The second paragraph is complex and highly calculated writing, yet it is lucid, surprisingly unobtrusive in its closely arranged rhythms, and for the most part lacks traces of that overdone, rather blowsy manner that has come to be known as 'style'. (p. 63)

The swipe at 'style' is made with reference to a passage from Meredith, although had Williams read *Beauchamp's Career* rather than relying on Leavis's sneer at an author Henry James had dismissed for his false style (and who by 1950 was hardly read), he might have recognised it as one of the great political novels of the nineteenth century. But Leavis is obviously the not-so-ghostly presence behind much of Williams's book. Hence, the anxious qualifiers, 'surprisingly unobtrusive' (why should unobtrusiveness be surprising?) and 'for the most part'; hence, too, the claim that the penultimate paragraph of 'The Dead' 'bears minor traces of immaturity'. Go on, then, show us where and what they are. And while you're at it, explain what you mean by 'closely arranged rhythms'.

Reading and Criticism comes across as the work of a man doggedly going through an uncongenial exercise, like a diligent undergraduate set an essay on 'Compare and Contrast', for the most part bored but hoping to please his tutor by making sure to tick all the right boxes. 'Tears, Idle Tears' is found wanting. Now there's a surprise. 'I doubted the poem's sincerity and felt that the emotional structure [what?] was too mechanical for the poem to be taken very seriously' (p. 52), whereas in 'Sailing to Byzantium' 'the realisation of these opposed qualities in an immediate and vivid way is everywhere admirable. The control of the opposition is magnificent' (p. 54). No, this isn't the Williams whose work has been of such importance to many of us.

Nor, and this is the crucial matter, is it the work of someone who seems at all interested in contemporary writing. All the writers he discusses are safely dead and safely canonised. (Or safely dismissed from the canon.) I assume that at the time Williams was at work on *Reading and Criticism* he was also writing *Adamson*, which Smith describes as a 'metaphysical thriller: its central concern is the nature of identity: lived, lost, retrieved, inescapable'. Smith quotes extensively from the novel (pp. 318–22), whose beginning, a description of a cliff walk at evening, he says is accomplished in 'spare and swift prose'. I invite any reader to compare the sentences Smith quotes with the openings of Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* (1941) or Elizabeth Taylor's *A Wreath of Roses* (1949), both of which are at least partly about 'the nature of identity', one set in the phoney war period, one in post-war England, in order to decide how

successful Williams is. And given the claims Smith makes for *Border Country*, I also invite readers to compare it and Williams's related fiction to Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Scots Quair*, which as far as I know Williams never mentions.

In his Introduction, Smith quotes Williams as saying that 'I am mainly interested in the realist tradition of the novel, and especially in the unique combination of that change in experience and in ideas which has been both my personal history and a general history of my generation.' And he adds that in future he hopes to express this in novels (p. 4). This hope was voiced in the mid-1960s, by which time Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel* and *Studies in European Realism* were both available in English translation. I am not sure whether Williams took note of either, but I am almost certain that he either knew nothing of or took no account of contemporary novelists whose work Lukács would have recognised as importantly 'realistic', and who in their writing about a change in experience and ideas surely deserved the support that someone like Williams was well placed to give them. We can all think of such novelists – at least I hope we can. I have especially in mind Philip Callow (born 1924), whose first novel, *The Hosannah Man* (1958), ought to have brought Williams to his feet, or at least to his writing desk, in celebration, and whose next books, *Common People*, *Native Ground*, and the trilogy *Another Flesh*, all published before Williams talked about 'my personal history,' explore ways in which that change in experience which so concerns Williams affected even if it didn't determine individual lives. Williams insists that his concern with fiction connects with his concern that 'the cultural tradition I encountered in Cambridge seems to me deeply inadequate and needing challenge in its own terms'. I'm not sure I know what that last phrase means, but given his conviction of the inadequacy of this tradition, I find it odd, to put it no more strongly, that as far as I know he never looks beyond it when he comes to discuss fiction. *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, although it inevitably has some interesting things to say, is unradical in its indifference to writers who had, it should be said, engaged the attention of at least some of those critics Williams seems always to have been unaware of, initially perhaps because he wanted to cultivate separateness, later because, as they existed outside the academy, perhaps they didn't count as serious commentators or critics. *The English Novel* is also focused on large, thematic issues, so that writerliness hardly gets a look in. You certainly wouldn't guess from its pages, the undoubted scrappiness of which may be partly explained by their being worked up from lecture notes, that the author laid claim to being a novelist.

Debate: 'Other Possible Findings':

Raymond Williams, Writer

Sean Matthews

It is often the case that we read writers backwards: from the published work, the mature achievements, to the early work, the beginnings. Certainly this can show a pattern of significant development, but of course the critical finding is there from the start in the procedure adopted. We read the early works for signs of how the later ones came to be written. And this can leave out, obviously, other possible findings, such as failures to develop some particular early quality. But when we are looking at the way the novel has developed, in certain gifted hands and under specific pressures, these points about development – negative as well as positive – may be of the greatest importance.¹

John Lucas, in his assessment of Dai Smith's *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale*, indicts both the author and his subject for serious faults. Smith is condemned on two counts. First, he has undertaken a biographical study for which he is unqualified, because he lacks the requisite inwardness with the radical literary culture of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, detailed knowledge of which is necessary either to offer a comprehensive account of the intellectual *milieu* in which Williams was formed, or to assess properly the project of Williams's fiction in the post-war period. Secondly, Smith is wide of the mark in his high estimate of *Border Country*, and has bestowed far more attention than it merits on the still more mediocre early, unpublished writing which is extensively reproduced in the biography. Ultimately, Lucas suggests, Smith's inadequacies as literary scholar and literary critic do much to undermine the force and credibility of his narrative. These strictures represent, however, only a subsidiary element in the case, which is primarily concerned with the creative and professional flaws of Raymond Williams himself. Lucas effectively dismisses all of Williams's fictional writing, published and unpublished, expressing bemusement and disappointment at the evidence that he should have so misunderstood his gifts and therefore so wasted his time. He contends that Williams failed to read, understand, or even demonstrate that he was 'interested in actual contemporary writing' sufficiently to recognize the formal challenge involved in writing the radical fiction which it was his ambition to produce in the 1950s. On the evidence of his prose, Lucas declares, Williams

1 Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 169.

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was in any case lacking the sense of what good writing was, ‘his or any one else’s’. For good measure, Lucas expresses something approaching disgust at the ‘perversity’ and ‘sheer improbability’ of Williams’s conduct and way of life on the grounds that, first as a student at Cambridge, and then again as an adult education tutor in Hastings, he failed to meet any of the people Lucas thinks he ought to have met. As Smith demonstrates, Williams did indeed associate himself during both these periods with some ‘people of shared concerns’ (if not the ones Lucas would have liked), and the evidence of the experience of bringing together the short-lived journals *The Critic* and *Politics and Letters*, about which Smith is again informative, also gives the lie to any lingering belief that Williams was so isolated a figure as he was sometimes later to suggest, but Lucas is nonetheless firm in his conviction of Williams’s social and political deficiencies, not least because failure to sign up for the CPGB or any of the informal socialist or writers’ groups to which he might have had access are further examples of his lack of awareness of the authentic tradition of radical literature.

It is true that Lucas praises *A Warrior’s Tale* as an ‘impressive biography’, but his objections are so strong that it is difficult to infer from ‘Raymond Williams Novelist?’ on what grounds such a tribute is offered. Lucas’s own work has drawn on and acknowledged that of Raymond Williams and I know, despite the astringent criticisms he has made on this occasion, that he is appreciative of Williams’s contributions in the field of literary and cultural criticism. I do think, however, that he misreads *A Warrior’s Tale*, and underestimates, indeed fails to recognize at all, the nature of Dai Smith’s achievement. ‘Raymond Williams Novelist?’ is a forceful polemic, drawing attention to significant issues raised by Smith’s biography and Williams’s early career, and has some justice, but Lucas’s indignation at Smith’s evident enjoyment and appreciation of Williams’s fiction, and his disapproval of Williams, have distracted him from the more complex function that writing plays in this account of Williams’s emergence, and to the balance and thrust of the biography as a whole. Not satisfied with disabusing us of any naïve illusions we, or more specifically Dai Smith and Raymond Williams, may have cherished as to Williams’s value or significance as a novelist, Lucas’s comments serve to obscure the qualities of the narrative Smith has actually offered.

Lucas maintains, as we have seen, that Smith’s grasp of the literary culture of Williams’s formation is the weakest element of his study. This contention is an important one, and it is a significant limitation, but not for the reasons adumbrated by Lucas. Certainly it would have been nice for Smith to have been able to tell us more about Williams’s reading of radical fiction of the 1930s and 1940s, but although ignorance of Philip Callow, or a lack of proper acknowledgement of the achievements of Storm Jameson, Sylvia Townsend

Warner, Montagu Slater and even Randall Swingler, may horrify Lucas, it is perhaps a fault for which one might exempt both Smith and Williams from the impertinence of personal blame: it is clear that both of them conceive of his novels in entirely different terms. Smith-Williams (the two become conflated in 'Raymond Williams Novelist?') is in effect being arraigned for lacking the requisite knowledge or sympathy for fractions of a fragmentary and relatively obscure pre-war avant-garde. The subsequent repute of these writers, and the esteem in which Lucas holds them (and he has himself been instrumental in recovering and establishing their reputations), hardly reflects, with the possible exception of Jameson, their standing at the time when the eighteen-year-old Williams made the journey to Trinity College, Cambridge, or even after the war, and if Smith is tracing the course of his subject's life accurately, then it may well be that those figures simply were not in it at this time. Smith-Williams is then, however, further criticized for a subsequent failure to follow the line of experiment and innovation that this original clique, of which he/they may indeed have been ignorant, had established. The problem is twofold. First, to offer an analogy, although it may be the case that it is, in the final verdict of history and a later incarnation of Lucas, the poetic innovations of the *Equipage* and *Parataxis* groups around Rod Mengham and Drew Milne, which will be recognized as the dominant force in late-twentieth century poetic experiment, I would hesitate to criticize, say, Lee Hall or Gabriel Gbadamosi, Cambridge contemporaries who have successfully pursued careers as writers, for failing to take proper account of their example, either during their brief time there or afterwards, much less for not having hung out with them.

Further, as we now see more clearly from the evidence of *A Warrior's Tale*, Williams certainly was involved in a number of radically experimental and innovative film and drama projects which, over and above the two journals, thoroughly dominated his thinking in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Smith elucidates the powerful influence on Williams's development of the radical subculture surrounding film and cinema which he found in Cambridge, and which he sought to cultivate and encourage in the post-war years, but Lucas disregards these original and significant details. Williams's efforts on this front were, we learn, abruptly abandoned in the mid-1950s, in favour of the work which was to culminate in *Culture and Society* and *Border Country*, a moment of crisis which Smith narrates sensitively and comprehensively. Our understanding of the range of pressures within and under which Williams was working in the period, over and above his responsibilities towards a young family, a physically as much as intellectually demanding job, and his own fearful ambition, is thus considerably enhanced by Smith's account, although this is again overlooked by Lucas, who prefers to concentrate on the apparent lacunae in Smith-Williams's reading. Williams was also, of course, most famously pioneering and inventive

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in the directions he was exploring in his critical work of this period, work which may not have been innovative at the level of its prose and language but which, in the form of *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*, surely established his claim to a central significance and value.

Set in the context of these other, decidedly radical and experimental, projects and ambitions, Williams's fictional writing of the 1950s perhaps seems, at first glance, all the more perverse and foolish in its reassertion of a literary lineage readily recognizable as that of, for want of a better description, the Great Tradition. Lucas certainly has no time for such reactionary nonsense, grumbling that Williams's attention, in *Reading and Criticism* (1950) was concentrated upon writers 'safely dead and safely canonised'. There is, however, another way of looking at the matter. Williams was especially conscious, and critical, of trends in contemporary writing in the 1950s, and is arguably more attuned to the 1950s mainstream than Lucas, who could not be more wrong when he suggests that Williams was unconscious of the currents of contemporary writing flowing around him. Even a cursory reading of his essays and reviews of the period show a steady attention not only to the work of his contemporaries but also, and just as importantly, to the theoretical difficulties of tracing the significance, value and direction of that work. It may be that Williams was not reading those works Lucas rather wishes he had but the extent of Williams's range of reading at this time is surely impressive on its own terms. As he came to grasp the 'structure of feeling' of his own time (the concept is specifically developed at this point in order to facilitate such an analysis), it became clear that his creative ambition led in quite contrary directions. It was above all the example of the classic realist tradition which was crucial to Williams's emerging fictional voice. In a largely sympathetic review of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, in 1957, in the course of a wider discussion of Hoggart's place in the 'vital contemporary mainstream', he argued, 'We are suffering, obviously, from the decay and disrepute of the realistic novel, which for our purposes (since we are, and know ourselves to be, individuals *within* a society) ought clearly to be revived'. There is an exasperation born of bitter experience in Williams's recognition of the formal problems Hoggart has faced:

[O]ne feels Hoggart hesitating between fiction on the one hand, and sociology on the other. The sociological method worked for matters apparently close to this, but once matters involving the myriad variations of individual response are in question, it breaks down. It is when this happens that one wishes Hoggart had written an autobiography or a novel: even if unsuccessful, it would have been an offering in relevant terms.

It is not to the work of a self-appointed modernist avant-garde to which he then refers us, however, but ‘more traditionally imaginative forms. Of course it cannot be George Eliot again, nor even Lawrence, though the roots are in both’.² Unfortunately, this is indeed where Smith’s narrative does lack the requisite literary bearings to be able properly to explain where Williams is going, or indeed from whence he came.

An account of Williams’s intellectual formation, particularly one which is so attentive to the conditions of his emergence as a novelist but which overlooks the singular significance of the realist tradition, and most of all that of D.H. Lawrence (who is not mentioned in *A Warrior’s Tale*), is lacking a conspicuous component. The pressure of Lawrence’s example, in particular, on Williams in the period is as important as the influence of Ibsen and Eliot (both of whom receive substantial attention). The chapter in *Culture and Society* exhibits a powerful sympathy, and even moments of obvious projection or identification between critic and writer, and despite the disavowals in the *Politics and Letters* interviews, Lawrence was for many years the dominant figure in Williams’s literary pantheon.³ It is, I should add, to Williams’s many references to Lawrence in the 1950s and 1960s that we should go for evidence that his engagement with literature was more than ‘the work of a man doggedly going through an uncongenial exercise’. The profoundly engaging reading of ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’ in *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (a work the conversational and introductory qualities of which Lucas damns, quite out of hand, for their ‘undoubted scrappiness’), is both moving and telling, and gives a closely argued justification of Williams’s praise for Lawrence’s ‘writing where he lived’, an echo of the comment in *Culture of Society* about the writer’s being ‘in a position to know the living process as a matter of common rather than of special experience’, a principle that is at the heart of Williams’s whole intellectual project.⁴ As Williams comments at the end of the Lawrence chapter in *The English Novel*, ‘it isn’t after all an end with Lawrence. It is where in our

2 Raymond Williams, ‘Fiction and the Writing Public’, *Essays in Criticism* 7, 4 (1957), p. 428. The longer essay ‘Realism and the Contemporary Novel’, first published in 1958 but expanded for inclusion in *The Long Revolution*, offers a far more substantive account of this case: Raymond Williams, ‘Realism and the Contemporary Novel’, *Universities and Left Review* 4 (1958), pp. 22–5; also *Partisan Review* 26 (1959), pp. 200–13 and *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), pp. 274–89.

3 Even the repudiation of Lawrence in the interviews reveals something of how important he had been: ‘if there was one person everybody wanted to be after the war, to the point of caricature, it was Lawrence’. Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 126.

4 Williams, *The English Novel*, p. 173; *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 203.

time we have had to begin’.⁵ *A Warrior’s Tale* is diminished by the absence of this strand, but it is appropriate to ask what we are given in its place.

Ironically, it is the complexity and depth of Smith’s narrative of that ‘living process’, the way in which we are able, through these pages, to see Williams as an aspect and representative of the community from which he came, that is the distinctive strength of *A Warrior’s Tale*, a strength which is perhaps the proper consequence of the types of scholarship and professional expertise Dai Smith does bring to the task. We may regret those elements which a literary critic might have superadded, but what we gain from Smith’s evident skill as a social and political historian is considerable. He brings so many things into focus, and offers such exemplary richness and depth, in his wholly original narration of Williams’s upbringing and war experience, that it ultimately seems almost superfluous – given the considerable amount of the criticism of his literary and cultural genealogy already in print – to demand more. In recounting the making of Raymond Williams, which is a more fitting title for this book than the one on which Smith has settled, the central challenge is to conjure the extraordinary, enduring impact of Williams’s formative experiences in Pandy and Abergavenny, and during the four years of his war service, and this is indeed at the heart of what Smith has offered. Critics who remark that there is perhaps a little *too much* of this material miss the point – it is a bit like saying there was too much of Pandy and the Border Country in Raymond Williams. Steve Woodhams, in the preceding issue of *Key Words*, has already assessed the scale of Smith’s contribution in these areas, but it is important to reiterate these qualities in the face of Lucas’s deprecations. The Williams who corrected L.C. Knights’s remark about the impossibility of understanding, in the 1940s, the meaning of the term ‘neighbour’, who maintained that ‘We begin to think where we live’, and who insisted on assessing culture as ‘a whole way of life’, was grounded in the values and relationships of his family and the community in which he came to consciousness, and Smith has done an unusual and valuable service in bringing that context to life.⁶

There is perhaps one final issue, which recurs in the critical reception of Smith’s book, which one ought to address. What one might charitably describe as Williams’s reticence and reserve is, as I have already remarked, to some degree contradicted by the detail Smith provides of his network of associates and collaborators, but it is the case – all the memoirs of the man allude to the fact – that he kept himself to his books, and just possibly his family (although Joy’s central importance is apparent in *A Warrior’s Tale*, the young children are neither seen nor heard). Williams was, on the whole, neither clubbable

⁵ Williams, *The English Novel*, p. 184.

⁶ Smith gets the Knights anecdote wrong, in that Knights was already an established figure by the time of the exchange about ‘neighbour’: see Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 67.

nor especially collegiate, although there are those who remember him with great warmth and affection, and in many ways he does not emerge from *A Warrior's Tale* as someone to whom one might warm, or who readily warmed to others – but is it the proper objective of a biographer to disguise this fact (especially if his subject was not an effusive and outgoing person), or a proper ground for criticism of the individual? In terms of Williams's early Cambridge experience, Smith shows that for his subject this was a disorienting, upsetting and occasionally 'embarrassing' time (Williams used this term when recalling that he knew no one who might propose him for membership of the Union). Williams came early to a sense of contempt and suspicion of many of those he encountered in Cambridge, 'What I found was an extremely coarse, pushing, name-ridden group ... That I showed class-feeling is not in any doubt'.⁷ Lucas's concern that Williams mistook his natural allies and supporters on the left at the time has some force, but Williams was at least as firm as Lucas in the expression of his positions, and perhaps left no ground for collaboration. He found the policies of the CPGB 'stupid and arrogant', and, in his seminal essay 'Culture is Ordinary' – a piece to which Smith rightly devotes considerable attention – baldly denounced the presumption of much communist policy: 'To try to jump the future, to pretend that in some way you *are* the future, is strictly insane.'⁸ Williams did campaign for Labour in the 1950s, just as he had back home in the 1930s, but there is nothing to indicate that in the ordinary run of such an ordinary contribution he met other than ordinary people.

The occasion of a biography inevitably involves a reassessment of its subject's standing, and with Williams it has been no different. *A Warrior's Tale* is an important work not only because of the considerable range of new material it brings to light about Williams's life and formation, but because of its sustained and largely successful effort to return that life to the moral and intellectual context from which he emerged, and upon which his writing, his whole career, was in some ways an extended labour of reflection. I conclude with two points that seem pertinent to an assessment of *A Warrior's Tale* and the life which it recounts. The first concerns Williams's own perspective on the always uneven and unexpected course of literary history. In the review of *The Uses of Literacy* mentioned earlier, he wonders at some of the more strident and vitriolic attacks on the emergent writers of the 1950s, and tries, characteristically, to look beyond the immediate instance to what it might represent in broader cultural and historical terms: 'The gaucheness and posing are not always failures of integrity; sometimes, at least, they are the

7 Raymond Williams, 'My Cambridge' in Ronald Hayman, ed., *My Cambridge* (London: Robson, 1986), p. 59.

8 Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', in John McIlroy and Sallie Westwood, eds, *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education* (Leicester: NIACE, 1993), p. 94.

‘Other Possible Findings’: Raymond Williams, Writer

by-products of the most honest attempts we have to communicate new feelings in a new situation.⁹ My opening quotation, which is drawn from the discussion of Lawrence in *The English Novel*, makes a similar point: if we are to look at a life, and consider its course, there may well be elements – ‘other possible findings’ – which, in retrospect, seem like failures, false-starts or misdirections, but which in their moment are centrally important. Even if we do not altogether share Smith’s high valuation of Williams’s fiction, and might wish he had drawn more on literary criticism and history in his account of the period, the importance of Williams’s writing in the 1940s and 1950s, and of Smith’s account of it in *A Warrior’s Tale*, is in the proper and sympathetic acknowledgement we find of the effort to understand that whole, continuous process – the ‘whole way of life’.

9 Williams, ‘Fiction and the Writing Public’, p. 426.

Mis/Reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: A Comparatist Critique of Williams on Orwell¹

Andrew Milner

George Orwell famously claimed that his later writings were written ‘*against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism’.² He was also a famously intransigent critic of British imperialism. Given that the early Franco-British New Left was formed by a double reaction against the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, we might well expect him to have been one of its key sources of inspiration. And, indeed, Raymond Williams would later recall that the ‘New Left respected Orwell directly, especially in its early years’.³ In *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, itself a talismanically New Left text, Williams went so far as to describe Orwell as ‘brave, generous, frank, and good’.⁴ And yet, he also argued that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had been ‘desperate’ because its author ‘recognized that on such a construction the exile could not win, and then there was no hope at all’.⁵ Hence, the paradox of ‘a humane man who communicated an extreme of inhuman terror; a man committed to decency who actualized a distinctive squalor’.⁶ How are we to account for Williams’s distinct uneasiness in the face of Orwell’s dystopia? Let me begin by stressing that this was no small matter. There are in fact at least three relatively distinct readings of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in Williams, developed, respectively, in the 1950s and 1960s, in the 1970s, and in 1984 itself. That Williams should have returned to the novel, again and again, suggests how troubling he found it. I will argue that this is so in part because he had misunderstood it quite fundamentally.

1 This is an expanded and slightly amended version of a paper, originally entitled ‘Cultural Materialism and Democratic Socialism’, presented to the ‘The Relevance of Raymond Williams’ seminar at the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association, held at Princeton University in 2006. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to that seminar, but especially to Keith O’Regan, who convened and organized it, and to Hywel Dix, Pamela Fox, Jan Gorak, Ben Lee, Dana Polan, Lyudmila Razumova and David Siar. The paper is dedicated to the memory of Kathryn Turnier, 1952–2007.

2 George Orwell, ‘Why I Write’, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume 1 An Age Like This*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 28.

3 Raymond Williams, *George Orwell* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 87.

4 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 284.

5 Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 283.

6 Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 277.

Three mis/readings: Williams on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Williams's first reading of Orwell's novel was essentially 'left-Leavisite' in character, in the very specific sense of being predicated on a leftist immanent critique of Leavis and Leavisism. We have noted the relevant passages from *Culture and Society*, but what needs to be added is that Williams objected to Orwell's dystopia in part because he saw it as replicating the minority culture/mass civilization topos which had propelled him away from Eliot and the Leavises. Moreover, this was by no means a casual judgement. Williams's objections to the novel had been anticipated two years previously in a little-known essay published in *The Highway*, the journal of the Workers' Educational Association. The occasion had been a critical review of recent science fiction, entitled simply 'Science Fiction', which has since been republished only once, shortly after its author's death. There, Williams dismissed as 'Putropian' – his own neologism for the putrefaction of utopia – science fiction of the kind exemplified by *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. These are each instances of a contemporary structure of feeling, he concluded, which counterposes 'the isolated intellectual' to 'the "masses" who are at best brutish, at worst brutal'.⁷ More to his own taste was James Blish's *A Case of Conscience*, 'a work of genuine imagination, and real intelligence'.⁸ Dystopias such as Orwell's excluded what most interested Williams in science fiction, the distinctively 'human voice ... far away, among the galaxies' found in what he nicely termed 'space anthropology'.⁹

This early aversion to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is both particular and general. It is particular insofar as Williams discounts the novel's relevance to the real contemporary human situation: 'his conclusions have no general validity'.¹⁰ But it is general insofar as he reads the extremism of the dystopian form as itself unrealistically anti-human. This is the shape of the argument as it reappears in *The Long Revolution*, where science fiction is again represented by *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Brave New World* and *Fahrenheit 451*, here augmented by Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors*, and used as a key element in one of Williams's exercises in literary typology. There have been two main types of realist novel in the twentieth century, he argues, the 'social novel' and the 'personal novel', each of which has 'documentary' and 'formula' sub-types.¹¹ The 'social formula novel' works by way of the abstraction of a particular pattern from the sum of social experience, accentuating it so as to create a

7 Raymond Williams, 'Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies* 15, 3 (1988), pp. 357–8 [first published in *The Highway* 48 (1956)].

8 Williams, 'Science Fiction', p. 360.

9 Williams, 'Science Fiction', p. 360.

10 Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 284.

11 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) pp. 306, 308.

fictional society. The best example is the ‘future-story’, virtually coextensive with ‘serious “science fiction”’.¹² It is ‘lively’ because ‘about lively social feelings’, but lacks both a ‘substantial society’ and ‘substantial persons’: ‘For the common life is an abstraction, and the personal lives are defined by their function in the formula.’¹³

Neither the social nor the personal novel, neither the documentary nor the formula, are at all adequate, Williams insists. The problem is one of ‘balance’, he writes, in terms clearly reminiscent of Leavis, even at one point invoking the ‘great tradition’.¹⁴ An obvious objection to this line of argument is that it illegitimately judges dystopian science fiction according to criteria more appropriate to the realistic ‘literary’ novel and thus ignores the formal conventions of the genre. In the 1965 edition of *The Long Revolution*, Williams addressed this issue very directly, arguing to the contrary that ‘the form itself, and what “by definition” it “cannot do”, must submit to be criticized from a general position in experience’.¹⁵ The implication is striking: that, if only it would try, science fiction could indeed create both a substantial society and substantial persons.

By the 1970s, Williams had ceased to be any kind of Leavisite and become committed to what he would term ‘cultural materialism’, a position developed in part by way of engagement with continental European ‘Western Marxism’. The import was a strange double movement by which his declared politics acquired a more explicitly ‘leftist’ – and presumably ‘unrealistic’ – character; but they also became more analytically distinct from his scholarly work, itself increasingly defined as ‘social-scientific’ rather than ‘literary-critical’. Hence, his insistence that ‘we need not criticism but analysis ... the complex seeing of analysis’.¹⁶ The relevant texts from this period are *The Country and the City* and the first edition of *George Orwell*. In the former, Williams still clearly preferred Blish to Orwell, specifically the flying cities of *Earthman, Come Home* to the ‘shabby, ugly, exposed and lonely city’ of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.¹⁷ The comparison was much less pointed, however, than in the formulations from the 1950s. For the intent of the analysis was now not so much to take sides – or at least not immediately so – as to chart and explain the more general movement. ‘In a sense’, Williams concludes, ‘everything about the city – from the magnificent to the apocalyptic – can be believed at once. One source of

12 Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 307.

13 Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 307–8.

14 Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 314.

15 Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 387.

16 Raymond Williams, ‘A Defence of Realism’, in *What I Came To Say*, ed. Neil Belton, Francis Mulhern and Jenny Taylor (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 239.

17 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 277, 275.

this unevenness is the complexity of the pressures and problems. But another ... is the abstraction of the city, as a huge isolated problem, and the traditional images have done much to support this.¹⁸

A roughly analogous procedure informs *George Orwell*. Here, Williams developed what seems to be a more evenhanded account than in *Culture and Society*, weighing the novel's strengths against its weaknesses, rather than the author against his text. The convincing elements were twofold, Williams argued, the treatment of language and of international power politics.¹⁹ Against this, Orwell's identification of totalitarianism with socialism and his pessimism about human capacity, evident in both Winston's loveless relationship with Julia and the reduction of people to 'proles', each amount to a failure of experience. Here, as in *Culture and Society*, Williams concluded that 'the question about *Nineteen Eighty-Four*' is why Orwell should have 'created situations and people that, in comparison with his own written observations, are one-dimensional and determined'.²⁰ But here the answer is essentially sociological: 'The central significance is not in the personal contradictions but in the much deeper structures of a society and its literature. In making his projections, Orwell expressed much more than himself.'²¹ Hence, the book's final judgement that the only 'useful' thing, now, 'is to understand how it happened'.²²

This aspiration to understand is betrayed, nonetheless, by Williams's aversion to Orwell's 'anti-socialism', which surely falls well short of the 'complex seeing of analysis'. At one point, Williams chides Orwell thus: 'he had the best of reasons ... to know that political police ... were not a socialist or communist invention ... By assigning all modern forms of repression and authoritarian control to a single political tendency, he not only misrepresented it but cut short the kind of analysis that would recognize these inhuman and destructive forces wherever they appeared.'²³ Now the strange thing about this is that, in the immediately preceding paragraph, Williams had quoted from Orwell's letter of 16 June 1949 to the United Auto Workers Union, to the effect that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was intended 'NOT ... as an attack on Socialism ... but as a show-up of ... perversions ... partly realised in Communism and Fascism'.²⁴

That is, Orwell had intended neither to represent political police as a 'socialist invention' nor to assign authoritarian control to a 'single political tendency',

18 Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 278.

19 Raymond Williams, *George Orwell*, pp. 75–6.

20 Williams, *George Orwell*, p. 82.

21 Williams, *George Orwell*, p. 83.

22 Williams, *George Orwell*, p. 97.

23 Williams, *George Orwell*, pp. 77–8.

24 George Orwell, 'Letter to Francis A. Henson (extract)', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume 4: In Front of Your Nose*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 564.

but had rather assigned it quite expressly to both Communism *and* Fascism, totalitarianisms respectively of the Left and the Right. Williams quotes from the letter with scrupulous accuracy, but nonetheless appears not to hear what it says. And this is so, I suspect, because his private judgements were more hostile to Orwell and to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than those actually published in the book. As he would explain to the editors of the *New Left Review*: 'I cannot bear much of it now ... its projections of ugliness and hatred ... onto the difficulties of revolution or political change, seem to introduce a period of really decadent bourgeois writing in which the whole status of human beings is reduced ... I am bound to say, I cannot read him now.'²⁵ If the increasingly sociological cast of Williams's thought had compelled him to a greater respect for the novel, his increasing leftism seemed to compel him to a greater hostility. This would be no easy dialectic to resolve.

Williams returned to Orwell in his 1978 essay 'Utopia and Science Fiction', first published in *Science Fiction Studies* and clearly his major theoretical statement on the subject. Here he expanded on the notion, originally broached in *The Country and the City*, that science fiction represents a distinctly modern form of utopia and dystopia. There are four characteristic types of each, he argued: the paradise or hell, the positively or negatively externally-altered world, the positive or negative willed transformation and the positive or negative technological transformation. The latter two are the more characteristically utopian/dystopian modes, he concludes, especially in science fiction, because transformation is normally more important than mere otherness.²⁶ Moreover, he is now clear that utopia and dystopia are comparative rather than absolute categories, dealing respectively with 'a happier life' and 'a more wretched kind of life'.²⁷ Directly comparing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with Morris's *News from Nowhere*, he argues that Orwell's 1984 is neither more nor less plausible than Morris's 2003. The latter's fictional revolution of 1952 is more plausible than either, however, 'because its energy flows both ways, forward and back, ... its issue ... can go either way'. For Williams, this kind of openness – when the 'subjunctive is a true subjunctive, rather than a displaced indicative' – powerfully calls into question 'the now dominant mode of dystopia', which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* represented paradigmatically.²⁸

Williams's third and final approach to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in 1984 as an afterword to the second edition of *Orwell*. Here, he begins by

25 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: New Left Books, 1979), pp. 391–2.

26 Raymond Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: New Left Books, 1980) pp. 196–9. [First published in *Science Fiction Studies* 5, 3 (1978).]

27 Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', p. 196.

28 Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', p. 208.

observing that the novel has three distinct layers: an ‘infrastructure’, where the hero-victim moves through a degraded world in search of a better life; a ‘structure of argument’ concerning the nature of the fictional society; and a ‘superstructure’ of fantasy, satire and parody which renders this society ludicrous and absurd.²⁹ Williams’s main interest was in the second, which he saw as comprising three main themes: the division of the world into super-states; their internal organization along totalitarian lines; and the crucial significance to the latter of media manipulation through ‘thought control’.³⁰ He is clear, as he had not been in the first edition, that these societies have ‘developed beyond both capitalism and socialism’ and that the novel is not therefore ‘anti-socialist’. Indeed, he again quotes exactly the same passage from the Auto Workers Union letter, so as to insist that ‘what is being described ... is not only a universal danger but a universal process ... He saw the super-states, the spy states, and the majority populations controlled by induced ideas as the way *the world* was going ... This is a much harder position than any simple anti-socialism or anti-communism’.³¹ It is indeed and Williams was right to recognize this, as he had not in previous accounts.

This is not to suggest that Williams had become uncritical of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Rather, he subjected it to much the same mode of analysis applied to the pastoral in *The Country and the City*, comparing Orwell’s projections, whether developed in the novel or in political essays, with the real world that eventuated in the post-Second World War period. Unitary super-states did not emerge, Williams points out, only superpowers and their attendant military alliances; the arms race between these superpowers generated affluence and technological innovation, rather than the stagnation and poverty envisaged by Orwell; and the superpowers were often resisted, both by local tradition in the metropolitan heartlands and by national-liberation movements in the former colonial periphery.³² More fundamentally, what Orwell had most failed to anticipate was the ‘spectacular capitalist boom’, which falsified ‘virtually every element of the specific prediction’.³³ Williams rehearses his own earlier charge that Orwell had ‘specialized’ the argument about totalitarianism to the socialist tradition, but adds the important and paradoxical parenthesis ‘by his own choice, though he protested against it’.³⁴ If this still seems not quite right (where exactly was the choice?) it nonetheless suggests a more developed sense of Orwell’s political vision than hitherto.

29 Raymond Williams, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984’, in *Orwell*, third edition (London: Fontana, 1991), pp. 95–6.

30 Williams, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984’, p. 99.

31 Williams, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984’, p. 101.

32 Williams, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984’, pp. 106–10.

33 Williams, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984’, p. 117.

34 Williams, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984’, p. 119.

Moreover, Williams quotes extensively from Orwell's 1946 essay on James Burnham, which he had ignored in the first edition of *Orwell*, so as to situate the novel in a very precise politico-intellectual context.³⁵ Like Burnham, Orwell had believed capitalism finished, unlike Burnham he hoped to see it replaced by democratic socialism, but like Burnham he also acknowledged the strong possibility that quasi-socialist rhetoric would be used to legitimize 'managerial revolution' and bureaucratic dictatorship. Burnham anticipated the prospect with some relish, Orwell with much fear. Hence, the latter's insistence, both with and against Burnham, that 'the question is whether capitalism, now obviously doomed, is to give way to oligarchy or to true democracy'.³⁶ This, then, was for Williams Orwell's crucial mistake: to have imagined capitalism already beaten and, hence, the central issue as that between different 'socialisms'. As it turned out, the real 'question' would be that of a resurgent capitalism, re-legitimized by post-war affluence and radically oligarchic in its own later responses to the renewed depression and unemployment of the last quarter of the century. What most matters, Williams concludes, was 'Orwell's understanding of propaganda and thought control', even though the thought-controllers would be press lords and film magnates rather than totalitarian ideologues.³⁷

Drawing on the argument developed in *Towards 2000*, Williams pitted his own futurology against Orwell's:

The national and international monetary institutions, with their counterparts in the giant paranational corporations, ... established a ... practical and ideological dominance which so far from being shaken by the first decade of depression ... was actually reinforced by it ... Internally and externally they had all the features of a true oligarchy ... 'centralisation' is not just an old socialist nostrum but ... a practical process of ever-larger and more concentrated capitalist corporations and money markets.³⁸

This seems right, not only as an account of how late capitalism works, but also as a way into understanding why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can seem dated by comparison with Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Williams turns the essay on Burnham against the novel in what would be his own last word on dystopia as a form. He repeats his earlier argument that, in

35 Burnham, an ex-Trotskyist (of sorts), had become an enthusiastic advocate for the so-called 'managerial revolution' and, later, for the American Central Intelligence Agency. See James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: or, What is Happening in the World Now* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942).

36 George Orwell, 'James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 4*, p. 198.

37 Williams, 'Nineteen Eighty Four in 1984', p. 120.

38 Williams, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984', p. 117.

its very hopelessness, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* killed hope; that its warnings against totalitarianism were themselves so totalitarian that 'in the very absoluteness of the fiction' it became 'an imaginative submission to its inevitability'.³⁹ But he adds that Orwell had rejected this kind of submission before power when he encountered it in Burnham. 'Burnham never stops to ask *why* people want power', Orwell had written: 'He seems to assume that power hunger ... is a natural instinct that does not have to be explained.'⁴⁰ This is exactly O'Brien's answer to Winston in Room 101, Williams comments, the only answer anywhere in the novel: 'This is the terrifying irrationalism of the climax of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and it is not easy, within the pity and the terror, to persist with the real and Orwell's own question.'⁴¹ 'There *are* reasons', Williams continues, 'as outside the fiction Orwell well knew', reasons which must be sought for and distinguished, the good from the bad, the better from the worse, so as to avert the brute cynicism of Burnham's attempt 'to discredit all actual political beliefs and aspirations'.⁴²

This last reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is clearly richer than its predecessors: it combines a developed understanding of the novel's workings as a text with an expanded sense of its socio-political and intertextual contexts. Williams had finally substituted the complex seeing of analysis for moralistic criticism; he had situated the text in its material and intellectual contexts; and he had come to understand the kind of honourable personal motives and socially effective structures of feeling that might underpin dystopian forms. But his suspicion of radical dystopia remained essentially unchanged: without resistance, without 'realism', without the 'true subjunctive', dystopia must needs kill hope.

Three intertexts: Zamyatin, Huxley and Čapek

It would be difficult to dissent from this conclusion if *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had ended where Williams supposed, that is, with 'it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother'.⁴³ At a superficial level, Orwell does seem to invite us to read the novel thus: in the first edition, as in most subsequent, the next words are 'THE END'. But we know he had been deeply impressed by *Nous autres*, the French translation of Zamyatin's *My*, a novel organized into forty chapters, or 'Notes', the penultimate of which is entitled 'LA FIN'. *Nous autres* continued for a

39 Williams, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984', pp. 125–6.

40 Orwell, 'James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution', p. 211.

41 Williams, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984', p. 124.

42 Williams, 'Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984', pp. 125, 124.

43 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p. 298; George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 311.

further six pages after LA FIN, however, just as the first edition of Orwell's dystopia continues for a further fourteen after THE END.⁴⁴ *Nineteen Eighty-Four* actually ends at the conclusion to the *Appendix* on Newspeak with: 'It was chiefly in order to allow time for the preliminary work of translation that the final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050.'⁴⁵

In content, these lines add little, but their form is redolent with meaning. For, as Margaret Atwood observes of the whole *Appendix*, it 'is written in standard English, in the third person, and in the past tense, which can only mean that the regime has fallen, and that language and individuality have survived. For whoever has written the essay on Newspeak, the world of 1984 is over.'⁴⁶ This must be right: the *Appendix* is internal to the novel, neither an author's nor a scholarly editor's account of how the fiction works, but rather a part of the fiction, a fictional commentary on fictional events. And, although Atwood fails to notice this, it is anticipated within the main body of the text, by a footnote in the first chapter, which assures us, again in standard English, in the third person, in the past tense, that: 'Newspeak was the official language of Oceania.'⁴⁷ Atwood herself uses a similar device in *The Handmaid's Tale*, which concludes with an extract from the proceedings of a 'Symposium on Gileadean Studies', written in some utopian future set long after the collapse of the Republic of Gilead.⁴⁸ Moreover, she readily admits that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* provided her with a 'direct model' for this.⁴⁹ If she is to be believed, then both Orwell's *Appendix* and her own 'Historical Notes' work as framing devices, by which to blunt the force of dystopian inevitability.

There are good reasons to take Atwood seriously, not least her own dystopian novels, but it might be more productive to pursue, not so much the matter of her critical credentials as that of Orwell's intellectual contexts. Let me begin by noting how science fiction, or at least something very close to it, provided him with a generic context and related set of intertexts: as Orwell had written to Gleb Struve, referring to Zamyatin's *My*, he was interested in 'that kind of book'.⁵⁰ The relevant authors of that kind of book included, for Orwell, not only Zamyatin, but also Huxley and Karel Čapek.

44 E. Zamiatine, *Nous autres*, trans. B. Cauvet-Duhamel (Paris: Gallimard, 1929), pp. 227–32; Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, pp. 299–312.

45 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, p. 312.

46 Margaret Atwood, 'George Orwell: Some Personal Connections', in *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing 1970–2005* (London: Virago, 2005), p. 337.

47 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, p. 7n; *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 5n.

48 Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 311–24.

49 Atwood, *Curious Pursuits*, p. 337.

50 George Orwell, 'Letter to Gleb Struve', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume 3, As I Please*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 118.

Zamyatin is by common consent one of the most important figures in early twentieth-century Russian science fiction: Suvin describes him as, along with Čapek, ‘the most significant world SF writer between the World Wars’.⁵¹ He was certainly not appreciated as such, however, in Orwell’s England. The book had become available in an American – but not British – translation, as *We*, in 1924, and in French, as *Nous autres*, in 1929. Orwell had ‘not heard of’ it until 1944, when he first read Struve’s *25 Years of Soviet Russian Literature*.⁵² Unable to obtain the American translation, then unavailable in England, Orwell eventually acquired a copy of *Nous autres*, which he reviewed for *Tribune*. In 1946, he wrote approvingly of the novel in his famous essay on Burnham; in 1948, he offered to review a proposed English translation, which unfortunately failed to eventuate, for the *Times Literary Supplement*; and in 1949, he urged it on Fred Warburg, who had published *Animal Farm* in 1945 and would shortly publish *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself.

Unlike Orwell, always essentially a literary outsider, Huxley came from one of the leading intellectual families in England, descended on his father’s side from T.H. Huxley and on his mother’s from Matthew Arnold. When *Brave New World* was published in 1932, its author was already a well-established writer, with *Crome Yellow*, *Point Counter Point* and *Do What You Will* to his credit. He had been a friend of D.H. Lawrence, whose letters he was then editing for publication, and of writers like Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster. Orwell, by contrast, was out of work, impoverished and staying with his elder sister in Leeds, where he borrowed Huxley’s novel from the local public library.⁵³ Orwell is at his most enthusiastic about Huxley in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, citing *Brave New World* with approval for its caricature of Wellsian utopianism as a ‘paradise of little fat men’.⁵⁴ But in writing *Brave New World*, Huxley had acquired a series of other targets, many of which he would elsewhere explore more positively. Part of the novel’s peculiar character, at once both strength and weakness, is its capacity to represent sympathetically many different sides of many different questions. This was hardly an Orwellian virtue, however. By 1940, Orwell would dismiss Huxley’s dystopia as having no bearing on the actual future; the following year, he judged its failure reminiscent of Wells.⁵⁵ Orwell’s primary objection to *Brave New World* was to its anti-political pessimism. But in his review of *Nous autres* for *Tribune*, he was explicit that what distinguished Huxley from Zamyatin was

51 Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: on the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 280.

52 Orwell, ‘Letter to Gleb Struve’, p. 118.

53 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), p. 137.

54 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 169.

55 George Orwell, ‘Prophecies of Fascism’, p. 46 and Orwell, ‘Wells, Hitler and the World State’, p. 172, both in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume 2, My Country Right or Left*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

the latter's 'political point': 'It is [the] ... intuitive grasp of the irrational side of totalitarianism ... that makes Zamyatin's book superior to Huxley's.'⁵⁶ The political point of Orwell's own dystopia was already becoming apparent. It would need to be unremittingly horrible so as to expose the sheer ghastliness of totalitarianism. But it would therefore need something external to itself to inspire belief in the possibility of resistance. Which is why 'THE END' could not actually be the end.

Karel Čapek interested Orwell less than either Zamyatin or Huxley. He and his brother, Josef, were nonetheless amongst the best-known figures in inter-war Czech literary life. Moreover, Karel's play *R.U.R. Rossum's Universal Robots* – the title is in English in the Czech original – had proven an extraordinary international success.⁵⁷ The first Czech production was early in 1921. An American English-language version was performed in 1922 by the New York Theatre Guild, a British version by the Reandean Company at St Martin's Theatre in London in 1923. Distinct British and American translations followed in book form later that year. Orwell could not have attended the London production, since he was serving in Burma at the time, but might well have noticed the reviews. He certainly knew of the play's existence and seemed familiar with its themes. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he cites Čapek approvingly as a critic of mechanical progress for its own sake. 'Čapek hits it off well enough in the horrible ending of *R.U.R.*', he writes, 'when the Robots, having slaughtered the last human being, announce their intention to "build many houses" (just for the sake of building houses, you see).'⁵⁸

Dystopian fictions typically confront the problem of how to represent a naturalistically plausible danger sufficiently terrible to be threatening, but insufficiently so as to be demoralizing. How, then, is this resolved in Orwell's three dystopian intertexts? Here, summary must suffice, though I have argued the case elsewhere in much more detail.⁵⁹ Zamyatin's *Nous autres* resolves the problem by framing the particular catastrophes that overcome its protagonists, D-503 and I-330, in relation to a surrounding context of infinite – or at least continuing – revolution. So, in the novel's closing paragraphs, Zamyatin reminds us that the 'le Mur Vert' [the Green Wall], which surrounds the city, has been

56 George Orwell, 'Review: *We* by E.I. Zamyatin', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume 4*, p. 98.

57 The word 'robot' – *Robot* in the masculine, *Robotka* in the feminine, *Roboti* in the plural – is Čapek's coinage. Derived from the Czech *robotá*, meaning hard-labour, it first appeared in this play. 'Rossum' is intended as an English-sounding proper name, which nonetheless connotes the Czech common noun *rozum*, meaning 'reason'.

58 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, pp. 165–6.

59 Andrew Milner, 'Framing Catastrophe: The Problem of Ending in Dystopian Fiction', *Arena Journal*, New Series, 25/26 (2006), pp. 333–54.

successfully breached from the outside, that 'l'Etat Unique' [the Single State] is actually already in retreat:

à l'ouest, des régions où règnent le chaos et les bêtes sauvages et qui, malheureusement, renferment une grande quantité de numéros ayant trahi la raison. Nous avons cependant réussi à établir, dans la 40^e avenue, un mur provisoire d'ondes à haute tension.⁶⁰

[To the west, some regions are ruled by chaos and savage beasts and, unfortunately, contain many numbers who have betrayed reason. We have nevertheless succeeded in establishing, along the 40th avenue, a temporary high-voltage wall.]

As Suvin rightly comments, 'the protagonist's defeat is of the day but not necessarily of the epoch. The defeat in the novel ... is not the defeat of the novel itself, but an exasperated shocking of the reader into thought and action'.⁶¹

Huxley's *Brave New World* achieves much the same effect by framing the philosophical impasse between John Savage and Mustapha Mond comically and satirically. The impasse is performed in Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen, the philosophical core of the novel, where Mond speaks for Enlightenment *civilization* and the utilitarian felicific calculus, Savage for Romantic *Kultur*, but also for primitivist barbarism. The first of these chapters ends with Bernard Marx's and Helmholtz Watson's banishment to an island reserved for those 'too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life'.⁶² This is handled with explicit comic effect for Bernard, less so for Helmholtz, but in neither case is there much suggestion that the outcome is especially intolerable. The World State inspires satirical amusement rather than terrified dread. The second ends with the interestingly ambivalent philosophical conclusion to the entire novel:

'I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.'

'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen

60 Zamiatine, *Nous autres*, p. 234.

61 Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, p. 259.

62 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 178.

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tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.’

There was a long silence.

‘I claim them all,’ said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. ‘You’re welcome,’ he said.⁶³

Čapek’s solution in *R.U.R.*, by contrast, is to contrive an optimistic outcome, in many respects at odds with the main narrative. In *R.U.R.* humankind is led to extinction, through a combination of technological excess and unbridled capitalism, the Robots to a parallel near-extinction, through their cruelty in disposing of their onetime human masters. The play’s logic thus tends remorselessly toward the self-destruction of both, just as Orwell remembered. The Czech original was organized into a comic prologue and three acts, with the speech to which Orwell refers coming at the end of the second act. Paul Selver’s British translation, as adapted for the London stage by Nigel Playfair, had three acts and an epilogue, with this speech coming at the end of the third act.⁶⁴ But in both one human remains alive, *R.U.R.*’s head of construction, Stavitel Alquist, and in both his function is to provide the play with a less horrible ending than Orwell recalled. Where no politics will work, the alternative turns out to be unconditional romantic love. In ways both unexplained and inexplicable, the play insists that self-sacrificial heterosexual love between the Robots, Primus and Helena, will yield the promise of new life. Alquist is thus given the play’s last speech, in which to pronounce them the new Adam and Eve. Opening the Bible, he quotes directly from Genesis and then concludes by citing the song of Simeon from the Gospel according to St Luke. In the Czech original, the reference is an allusion rather than a quotation:

Nyní propustíš, Pane, služebníka svého v pokojí; neboť užřely oči mé – užřely – spasení tvé skrze lásku, a život nezahyne! ... Nezahyne! ... Nezahyne!⁶⁵

The most literally accurate translation is Novack-Jones’s from 1989, which reads: ‘Now let Thy servant depart in peace, O Lord, for my eyes have beheld

63 Huxley, pp. 186–7.

64 Compare Čapek, *R.U.R. Rossum’s Universal Robots. Kolektivní Drama o Vstupní Komedii a Třech Dějstvích* (literally, a collective drama in a comic prologue and three acts) with Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots). A Play in three acts and an epilogue*.

65 Karel Čapek, *R.U.R. Rossum’s Universal Robots. Kolektivní Drama o Vstupní Komedii a Třech Dějstvích* (Praha: Československý Spisovatel, 1966), p. 102.

– beheld Thy deliverance through love, and life shall not perish! ... It shall not perish! ... Not perish!⁶⁶ The reference is rendered slightly misleadingly in Selver's British translation, but with more dramatic effect for an English audience, as a direct quotation from the 'Nunc Dimittis', in the form given by the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, then still recited daily in the Church of England's 'Order for Evening Prayer': 'Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy will, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.'⁶⁷

The first of the three intertextual options seems to me the most persuasive, the last the least. But, however effective, they together provide three out of the four instances of a possible ideal typology, arranged around measures of internality and externality applied, respectively, to the formal question of narrative structure and to the dystopian content of the imaginary worlds represented in the fiction. So the solution in *Nous autres* is both internal to the text's main narrative and to the fictional history of the world it describes. That in *Brave New World* is also internal to the main narrative, but external to the fictional history of Huxley's A.F. 632, insofar as satire necessarily implies a position outside the reality it satirizes. That in *R.U.R.* is both external to the main narrative in form – the English translation is right to represent the fourth act as an epilogue – and also in content, insofar as the closing transcendental religiosity occupies a quite different conceptual space from that postulated in the first three acts.

The fourth possibility, that of narrative externality in form, but historical internality in fictional content, is what we find in Orwell's *Appendix*. Given that we know he was familiar with each of the other texts, we may plausibly infer that this device was in fact a deliberate invention, an experiment in relation to 'that kind of book', that is, in relation to the genre of science fiction.⁶⁸ Interestingly, there is no trace of the *Appendix* on Newspeak in what remains

66 K. Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots). A Collective Drama in a Comic Prologue and Three Acts*, trans. C. Novack-Jones in P. Kussi, ed., *Toward the Radical Center: A Karel Čapek Reader* (Highland Park, Carbird Press, 1990), p. 109.

67 Karel Čapek *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots). A Play in three acts and an epilogue*, trans. Paul Selver, in *The Brothers Čapek, R.U.R. and The Insect Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 104.

68 My own position on authorial intention is much the same as Williams's: that authorship cannot be reduced to an effect either of textuality or of the institutionalized processing of texts; and that the central question remains the dynamic interrelationship between social formation, individual development and cultural creation. 'In this at once social and historical perspective,' Williams wrote, 'the abstract figure of "the author" is ... returned to these varying and in principle variable situations, relationships, and responses.' Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 198. The argument at this point will nonetheless hold even if we choose to follow Roland Barthes in allowing intertextuality to displace authorial intention altogether.

of Orwell's own manuscript.⁶⁹ Given its dilapidated state – there is much missing – this in itself proves little. But it is suggestive of the possibility that the *Appendix* really was written last, as the real 'END' to the novel, the solution to a problem that had become apparent only once the main text was more or less complete. These inferences are strongly supportive of Atwood's reading. We may reasonably conclude, then, that accounts of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which remain premised on the assumption that the novel ends at 'THE END', are radically misconceived.

Williams was right to draw our attention to what he termed 'the tenses of the imagination'.⁷⁰ He was mistaken, nonetheless, in his understanding of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For his true subjunctive is precisely what occupies the space between 'THE END' of the novel and the *Appendix* on 'THE PRINCIPLES OF NEWSPEAK'. Moreover, the subjunctive takes a particularly interesting form within the actual text of the *Appendix*, that of the subjunctive future perfect. We noted Atwood's observation that the *Appendix* had been written in the past tense. We should add that there are other tenses at work there, notably the subjunctive future perfect. So that, in the sentences which provide its chronological frame, Orwell writes that it 'was expected that Newspeak would have finally superseded Oldspeak ... by about the year 2050'; and that 'within a couple of generations even the possibility of such a lapse would have vanished ... When Oldspeak had been once and for all superseded, the last link would have been severed'.⁷¹

Orwell's use of the subjunctive functions very much as Williams had observed it in *Morris*: to mean that these events will not necessarily have eventuated. The subjunctive future perfect is by no means always empirically present in dystopian science fiction: its use in Atwood's 'Historical Notes' is merely trivial. But, even when this is so, even where the tense fails to appear altogether, it remains nonetheless the logically informing tense of dystopia. For this is what dystopian future fictions recount, what *would have happened* if their empirical and implied readerships had not been moved to prevent it. That Orwell knew this may well be an important part of his lasting significance. That Williams never quite came to appreciate it must remain a lasting source of regret.

69 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: The Facsimile of the Extant Manuscript*, ed. P. Davison (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984).

70 Raymond Williams, 'The Tenses of Imagination', in *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984).

71 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 312, 324

Graham Martin: Literature, Liberation and Ideology

Introduced by Jeff Wallace

The following three essays arise from contributions made to a conference in celebration of the work of Graham Martin (1927–2004). The conference was held at the Institute of English Studies, University of London, on 23 March 2007, with the joint backing of the Open University and the Raymond Williams Society. Martin exerted a shaping influence on each of these organisations, the one a major innovating force in the provision of higher education in Britain, the other dedicated to sustaining and developing the cultural-materialist project of Raymond Williams after the latter's untimely death in 1988.

Graham Martin began his academic career as a scientist, but gravitated towards literary studies in the early 1950s via an Oxford scholarship. As Patrick Parrinder highlights in his essay here, Martin can be assimilated to what Terry Eagleton termed a Left-Leavisism in vogue from the late 1950s onwards. This formation inflected the dominant critical paradigm of Leavisism, with its emphasis on the evaluation of literary texts in terms of their moral and social significance, towards the concerns of the New Left as this movement emerged in the aftermath of 1956. Martin contributed review essays to *Universities and Left Review* and the subsequent *New Left Review*, the thrust of these essays being perhaps aptly summarised in 'The End of Liberal Criticism', the gently-punning title of his review of Al Alvarez's *The Shaping Spirit: Studies in Modern English and American Poetry* (*Universities and Left Review* 4, Summer 1958). In the same period Martin developed a liaison at Leeds with the pioneering Marxist literary critic Arnold Kettle, which was to lead to Martin's appointment to the Literature Department of the Open University after its establishment in 1970. He also followed Kettle in becoming head of this Department, from which role he retired in 1992.

The title of the conference to honour Martin's work, 'Literature and Liberation', was conceived both as a reprise and as a provocation. The reprise is of the title of a volume of Kettle's selected essays, edited by Martin and W.R. Owens in 1988, when it was possible for the introductory essayist, Dipak Nandy, to assert that 'Marxist literary criticism in Britain ... is voluminous, flourishing and seriously regarded'. The provocation was to reappraise, twenty years on, the possible relationship between the two terms in what might be regarded as an atmosphere of increased and extreme scepticism. Such scepticism would relate not only to the political disappointments of the last twenty years but also to the legacy of a sustained critique of 'literature' as concept and institution. Yet the tension between 'literature' and 'liberation' also appropriately summarises Graham Martin's intellectual project. Whilst

making a life's work out of the enthusiastic endorsement and critical analysis of literary texts, the nature of that work simultaneously contributed to a steady unmaking of the 'literary' as a discrete category. Martin was firmly committed to interdisciplinarity, and to unmasking the ideologies of literature and the literary, yet continued to convey a sense that literature, as he put it in a paraphrase of Kettle's work, 'had its own special contribution to make to that process of human liberation'.

This creative tension is eloquently conveyed in a fascinating DVD compilation of extracts from Martin's television broadcasts for the Open University, produced by co-organiser Lynda Prescott and her colleagues at the OU to accompany the conference. In a programme on 'Romantic Primitivism' (1972), Martin is to be found reading a Tarzan comic, and relating this historically to the construction of the idea of the primitive for the benefit of wealthy patrons of art. This points ahead to Martin's instrumental role in the pioneering Open University course on Popular Culture (U203), led by Tony Bennett from the early 1980s, and, from the later 1980s, to the new literature course 'Literature in the Modern World', led by Dennis Walder, which finds Martin in 1989 broadcasting on 'English, Whose English, Who's English?'. In this programme he examines 'the hidden assumptions behind the concept "English Literature"' in early twentieth-century Britain, ranging through analyses of filmic images of an invented English tradition, the Newbolt Report, and *Wind in the Willows* as a rural allegory of a class-divided society. Yet in 'Poetry' (1974) and 'Narrative' (1987), Martin adopts a more internal and trans-historical approach to these genres, with a particular emphasis on our necessary 'surrender' to the fact that 'all language is creative'. More accurately, perhaps, we could say that for this approach Martin drew primarily on a modernist aesthetic, stressing the potential of literary language to defamiliarise or, as he once put it in a letter to me, 'art's ability to displace orthodox conceptions of the world, opening up new ones'. As his sequence on Sartre's *La Nausée* in the 'Poetry' programme showed, a close reading of a modernist text is always also an encounter with the nature of language itself, in other words with the capacity of language both to give order and meaning to experience, and to dissipate these in a moment of experimentalism.

Somehow, then, Martin's work managed to hold together in tension emancipatory and reactionary conceptions of literature, requiring us either to give ourselves up to the flow and detail of a literary text or to be intensely vigilant about its mystificatory potential. 'Ideology' in this period inevitably played a crucial role in such debates. While this concept was in its critical ascendancy, due in no small part to Martin's own teaching at the Open University, he could retain a subtle sense of disengagement, especially from its close association with a structuralist concept of 'discourse'. In 1997 wrote to me about a talk

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he'd given to a university department on the topic of 'Ideology and Literature' where, he complained, 'the sole response of the younger members of staff was their trying to identify the ideology in *my* discourse' – 'which', he added wryly, 'I had supposed to be that of rational exchange'. In this light Martin's thinking seemed to mobilise together the principles of rationality and of the literary imagination in unhinging and unravelling concepts which, unnoticed perhaps, might have become monolithic and unexamined.

These three essays continue the effort of reflection on the relations between literature and liberation. Tony Bennett probes beneath the question of literature's relation to emancipation, to enquire into the 'historical and discursive conditions' that make such a proposition intelligible at all. Bennett therefore sees it as a necessary adjunct of Martin's notion of literary criticism as a progressive field that we understand the importance, for technologies of liberal governance in the modern state, of the formation of an aesthetically self-regulating subjectivity. This may, of course, leave us with 'freedom effects' rather than freedom. 'I thought I was free, but I wasn't'; thus Simon Dentith records someone's perhaps apocryphal expression of gratitude to Pierre Bourdieu, as recounted by Bruce Robbins. Dentith reflects on the legacy of Bourdieu, in considering how far the experience of the literary must necessarily be filtered through the institutions of 'Literature' or of Standard English. His scepticism is borne out in the way a kind of primal literary scene is played out in the poetry of Walcott, Heaney and Harrison, while at the same time the evidence compiled in Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001) complicates Bourdieu's notion that the liberating experience of reading literature is necessarily compromised by the acquisition of distinction or cultural capital. Patrick Parrinder concludes his assessment of Martin as a critic of the novel by underlining the importance of the 'social imagination', suggesting that for Martin it was in the power of the novelist, and perhaps therefore of literature, to 'redress the shortcomings of our provisional historical understanding'.

In a letter of 13 September 1997 to Macdonald Daly, Roger Bromley and myself, Graham Martin noted, with a typical combination of intimacy and reserve, that 'I can't easily say how grateful I am' for the realisation of the then current journal *Key Words*, cautioning – with a trenchancy that was again typical – that without this printed public presence and sense of work unfolding into the future the Raymond Williams Society might be in danger of dwindling into 'a memorialist affair, an expression of pious sentiment shared by fewer and fewer'. The enquiry into 'Literature and Liberation' was not a memorialist affair and *Key Words* is recently re-launched and revitalised, nor could those who were taught by Graham Martin, or who had the good fortune of an ongoing intellectual conversation with him, 'easily' record their gratitude.

Left-Leavisism and After: Graham Martin and Arnold Kettle as Critics of the Novel

Patrick Parrinder

I

Looking back at a piece he had published in *Scrutiny* some forty years earlier, F.R. Leavis observed in 1971 that 'It was written, of course (as everything that matters is), at a given moment in time with a given situation in view'.¹ Taken from a private letter, this is a clear statement that literary criticism is necessarily controversial and (in the broad sense) political. It suggests something of the cultural militancy and astringent energy that, in the years after the Second World War, would make Leavis such a compelling figure for left-wing intellectuals such as Raymond Williams, Arnold Kettle and the young Graham Martin. In this article I shall focus on Kettle and Martin as critics of the novel and as contributors to the multi-volume *Pelican Guide to English Literature* (1954–61) edited by Boris Ford, which may be considered one of the principal vehicles of a popular, if not exactly 'Left', version of Leavisism.

The term 'Left-Leavisism' was coined by Terry Eagleton in his Althusserian primer *Criticism and Ideology* (1976), giving rise to an acrimonious debate in the course of which Raymond Williams, described by Eagleton as having once been Left-Leavisism's 'major exemplar', strenuously objected to the label.² It is not my purpose to revive that acrimony now. Referring to his early work in *Politics and Letters* (1979), his volume of interviews with *New Left Review*, Williams attacked the reduction of 'practical criticism', of the impact of *Scrutiny*, and of Leavis's own work to an ideological formula; nevertheless, the index to his volume of interviews lists more references to Leavis than to any other single individual, including, for example, twice as many as to Karl Marx.³ Williams had shared the editorship of a short-lived review called *Politics and Letters* (1947–48) with Clifford Collins and Wolf Mankowitz, both pupils of Leavis. This was by no means the only expression of Left-Leavisism, however. I would suggest that much of the force behind Eagleton's coinage lay in its instant applicability to certain other influential literary critics who emerged in the period 1945–1960 and who were, apparently, left stranded by the theoretical innovations of the 1970s that *Criticism and Ideology* embraced

1 Letter from F.R. Leavis to the author, 31 March 1971. Leavis's article is reprinted in Patrick Parrinder, ed., *H.G. Wells: the Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge, 1972), pp. 315–18.

2 Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: NLB, 1976), p. 22; Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: NLB, 1979), p. 195.

3 Williams, *Politics and Letters*, pp. 68, 92, 190, 441.

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wholeheartedly. Arnold Kettle, for example, as a senior English professor and member of the British Communist Party's national executive, could now be sidelined as a 'Left-Leavisite', together with F.W. Bateson, Stuart Hall, Barbara Hardy, Richard Hoggart, Graham Martin and others.

Put schematically, we may say that the Left-Leavisite position has two aspects: a commitment to the social and political value of both literature and its critical evaluation, enforcing the connection between 'literature' and 'liberation' (*Literature and Liberation* is the title of a 1988 selection of Arnold Kettle's essays co-edited by Graham Martin); and involvement in literary education beyond elite institutions such as the Cambridge English Faculty and the idealised 'English School' sketched out in Leavis's *Education and the University* (1943).⁴ Typically the Left-Leavisites were active in adult education, both in the Workers' Educational Association and, eventually, the Open University where Hall, Kettle and Martin would all become professors.

Arnold Kettle's most substantial work of literary criticism was his two-volume *Introduction to the English Novel* (1951–53), a landmark of popular education written while he was a lecturer in English at Leeds who was also involved in teaching adult classes. It is surely with these readers in mind that Kettle insists on the transformative power of great novels, saying of Emily Brontë that 'no reader who has responded fully to *Wuthering Heights* is ever, whether he realises it or not, quite the same again'.⁵ He contrasts *Wuthering Heights* with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a work of propaganda fiction he dismisses as 'an act of courage rather than an act of art'. (The contrast offered is provisional, not absolute, since he adds that 'if an American negro tells me it is worth more to him than *Wuthering Heights* I cannot argue'.) We may add that the transformative power of literary fiction is a two-stage process. In Kettle's warm if imprecise formulation, where *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can enlarge our knowledge and spur us to political action, *Wuthering Heights* 'has that within it which can *change* men's consciousness and make them aware of what previously they had not even guessed'.⁶ That is, it both takes us out of ourselves, and brings us back to what William Hazlitt (in one of the first great essays on the English novel) called 'the mortifying standard of reality'.⁷ 'Mortifying' here suggests a degree of estrangement from our mundane everyday perceptions, leading to a sharper and more disconcerting sense of the real: the real as the ultimate test of our hopes, illusions and inherited ideologies; the real as what has been hidden from

4 Arnold Kettle, *Literature and Liberation: Selected Essays*, ed. Graham Martin and W.R. Owens (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988).

5 Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, 2 vols. (London: Arrow Books, 1962), I, p. 13.

6 Kettle, *Introduction*, I, p. 13.

7 William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 139.

us or, alternatively, what we have hidden from ourselves. As Kettle declared in 'The Progressive Tradition in Bourgeois Culture' (1952), 'What the realist artists of the bourgeois period were doing was, above all, telling the truth; telling the truth about – among other things – aspects of bourgeois life which from the class interests of the bourgeoisie are highly inconvenient, not to say seditious'.⁸

In his original preface to *An Introduction to the English Novel* Kettle thanked a number of friends for their help – both Leeds University colleagues and his Communist Party comrades Alick West and Edward Thompson – and then offered a warily self-conscious salute to F.R. Leavis, 'to whom anyone who has done any serious self-thinking about the English novel must owe a particular debt'.⁹ Leavis's *The Great Tradition* had been published three years earlier. It may be because, like Leavis, Kettle's method was the close analysis of a relatively small number of texts that, in introducing his second volume in 1953, he was careful to defend this approach on practical pedagogical grounds: his book offered not a canonical account of the tradition but, as he put it, 'a manageable syllabus for, say, a year or so's reading'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, literary criticism was for Kettle fundamentally a discipline of evaluation, in which the artistically second-rate must be rejected notwithstanding the courage and political radicalism involved in its conception: hence his downgrading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Kettle's mode of evaluation may be called Leavisite in its specific attention both to language – 'what is being conveyed across to us by the words on the page' – and to the author's 'moral vision' as the crucial elements of artistic achievement.¹¹ A more Marxist note enters his criticism with the proviso that 'we have to see both literature and ourselves in history, not as abstract entities'.¹² The critical whetstone is realism, not as an aesthetic prescription or generic attribute (which would be in danger of ruling out *Wuthering Heights*), but as a combination of what Kettle calls 'life' and 'pattern': the 'sense of life' proved 'upon the pulses' of the reader's experience, together with the artistic organisation that 'brings significance'.¹³ The 'significance' that concerns Kettle is (as we shall see) historical as well as aesthetic. There is, however, a certain tension between his stress on literature as life-transforming experience (which in principle should be spontaneous, unpredictable and potentially universal) and his desire to produce informed readers 'prepared', as he once put it, for the literature they

8 Kettle, *Literature and Liberation*, p. 27.

9 Kettle, *Introduction*, I. p. 9.

10 Kettle, *Introduction*, II. p. 7.

11 Kettle, *Introduction*, I. pp. 13, 17.

12 Kettle, *Introduction*, I. pp. 12–13.

13 Kettle, *Introduction*, I. pp. 13–14.

Graham Martin and Arnold Kettle as Critics of the Novel

encounter – a preparation which ideally includes a double historical awareness, that of the text and also of our own historical situation.¹⁴

For all his occasional use of terms such as ‘bourgeois realism’ and ‘critical realism’, Kettle’s aim of helping readers to develop ‘a historical as well as a literary sensibility’ is very different from the more systematic and pseudo-scientific theories of literary realism associated with European Marxism, in particular the writings of Georg Lukács.¹⁵ For Lukács, whose work remained largely unknown to Anglophone readers until the 1960s, realism is ultimately deducible from historical-materialist premises: it is an artistic achievement available to certain kinds of novelists and dramatists at certain historical periods and not others. The fact that Kettle resists such dogmatic conceptions leads to unresolved contradictions between literary and historical modes of evaluation, as we shall see below. Nevertheless, the ideas of realism and critical evaluation remained paramount both in Kettle’s work and, I would claim, in Graham Martin’s writings on literature as well.¹⁶

II

Kettle and Martin made important contributions to Boris Ford’s *Pelican Guide to English Literature*, a broadly Leavisite project with a strong commitment to popular literary education. The conflicting – as it were, both leftward and Leavisite – impulses behind the *Pelican Guide* are evident from Ford’s general introductions to each volume, in which he describes the series as offering ‘a direct encouragement to people to read widely in an informed way and with enjoyment’ while repeating (often in his opening sentence) the novelist L.H. Myers’s pronouncement that ‘a deep-seated spiritual vulgarity ... lies at the heart of our civilization’.¹⁷ Myers, as it happens, was a Communist Party member and a critic of the Bloomsbury Group, yet his words taken out of context suggest exactly the tone of embattled elitism linking *Scrutiny*

14 Kettle, *Literature and Liberation*, p. 52.

15 Arnold Kettle, ‘The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel’, in Boris Ford, ed., *From Dickens to Hardy: Volume 6 of the New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 180; Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin, 1963).

16 It is true that from 1982 onwards Graham Martin became a founding member of the Open University *Popular Culture* course in which the principles of realism and evaluation came under sustained interrogation, but that is another story. For Martin’s general pedagogical outlook see his essay ‘Teaching literature in the Open University’ in Peter Widdowson, ed., *Re-Reading English* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), especially pp. 98–9.

17 Boris Ford, ‘General Introduction’, in Ford, ed., *The Present: Volume 8 of the New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 9–10. Similar wording with small variations is present in all volumes and editions of the *Guide*. In some cases, the introductions specifically address a general adult readership rather than specialised literary students.

to certain aspects of Bloomsbury: 'mass civilisation' confronted by the aloof (but resentful) spokesmen of 'minority culture'. It was under this banner that Kettle and Martin published some of their most influential essays.

Whatever their doubts about *Scrutiny's* restrictive and discriminatory notion of culture, the rage for evaluation is evident in both Kettle's and Martin's early writings. Martin begins his 1961 *Pelican Guide* essay on Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and C.P. Snow with the following declaration: 'In any discussion of minor writers, you really want to say two things: why you think they are minor, and then, given the limitation, what their achievement amounts to.'¹⁸ Here the major/minor distinction looms over the ensuing discussion to an extent that now seems pedantic and forced, especially as all three novelists were still in mid-career when this essay was written. What lay behind the priority given to evaluation half a century ago, and why is critical evaluation so unpopular and so unassuming in academic circles today?

To risk a broad generalisation, we now live in a time of cultural abundance (or even overproduction) and have forgotten what it was like to live in conditions of perceived cultural scarcity. 1951, the year of Kettle's *Introduction to the English Novel*, was the last year of a post-war Labour government forever associated with ideas of austerity, centralisation, nationalisation and rationing. Books were still plain in appearance and cheaply produced, an after-effect of wartime economy measures including an acute paper shortage. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century there had been a missionary emphasis that only the best literature should be made available in education for the working classes, since, it was thought, they had so little leisure time or money at their command. In his 1909 book on *Literary Taste*, Arnold Bennett meticulously tots up the cheapest possible way of assembling a library of literary classics, and F.R. Leavis is in the same tradition when he insists that life is too short for the reading of second-rate fiction, or indeed anything much below the level of Jane Austen.¹⁹ Too short, at least, for all except literary academics, since (to paraphrase a critic of the 1920s) academics could legitimately read second-rate literature 'in order to declare that no one else need do so'.²⁰

This was the economy of perceived cultural scarcity. We see it in the contrast between Kettle's wide and deep knowledge of the history of the English novel, and the much smaller number of books and authors he is prepared to recommend to readers of his *Introduction*. He lets it be known that he has

18 Graham Martin, 'Novelists of Three Decades: Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, C.P. Snow', in Boris Ford, ed., *The Modern Age: Volume 7 of the Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 394.

19 Leavis wrote that 'to appreciate [Jane Austen's] distinction is to feel that life isn't long enough to permit of one's giving much time to Fielding or any to [J.B.] Priestley'. F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 11.

20 Edward Shanks, quoted in Parrinder, *H.G. Wells: the Critical Heritage*, p. 29.

read most of the Jacobin and Chartist novelists, for example – the works of Charlotte Smith, Mary Hays, and others who would remain largely forgotten in the ensuing decades – but he does not suggest that anyone else should read them. Their books should be reserved for antiquarians and university libraries, since ordinary readers will not have the money or the time. (Nowadays they are available in Broadview Classics, a series which proclaims cultural abundance in its very title.) For Kettle, the critic's job is to inspire ordinary readers to submit themselves to *Wuthering Heights*, not to rummage through the piles of minor literature reserved for the inquests of literary historians.²¹

The change from perceived scarcity to abundance was already taking place in the 1950s when the *Pelican Guide* was appearing, but academic critical attitudes changed more slowly. Nevertheless, thirty years later Graham Martin was writing at length about popular TV series such as *Dad's Army*, *Dallas* and *Z Cars* for the Open University *Popular Culture* course. By the early 1980s culture at all levels, and the time to read or view it, was assumed (it was, of course, only an assumption) to be more or less freely available to a vastly expanded audience. Education was no longer to be taken out to the populace in a missionary spirit, since students both young and not so young were flooding into the newly-built classrooms of the post-Robbins era. The challenge was not to tell would-be readers how to make the best of their limited leisure time, but to justify the prominence given to the materials of the traditional literary syllabus in mass higher education. Leisure time as the object of the cultural and educational project had given way to study time, and the justification for study time was increasingly found in the intellectual apparatus brought to bear on literary texts, rather than in the texts themselves. Evaluation had become implicit, not explicit, and openly evaluative criticism had become an embarrassment. But of course the task of every teacher was still to persuade the students that they were engaged in a significant expenditure of time.

III

If for Kettle and Martin the purpose of critical reading was evaluation, evaluation was a process in which aesthetic and historical considerations should be combined. As Kettle put it in his 1958 *Pelican Guide* essay on 'The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel', 'Evaluation of what we read is an integral part of reading it. Yet what we have to consider all the time is not just

21 'Novels which do not give us this sense of life, which we do not respond to with a certain quickening of our faculties, ... such novels may be worth an inquest but not a second edition.' Kettle, *Introduction*, I, pp. 13–14.

a book but the situation of which it is a part and to which it contributes'.²² Typically the result is a form of criticism, still very widely practised in our own time, in which historicised reading culminates in a form of judgement which is explicitly or implicitly aesthetic. The successes and failures of Kettle's and Martin's approaches remain instructive.

We might begin by noting the strong contrast between Kettle's *Introduction to the English Novel* and another Marxist-influenced study from the same period, Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Watt examines eighteenth-century fiction in relation to a narrowly 'formal' realism, not the realism with which the writers confronted their historical situation; at the same time, he marshals a formidable body of evidence about the economic conditions of reading and literary production, in order to show just why the modern novel 'arose' in England at this particular time. The academic verdict on the two books is not in doubt: *The Rise of the Novel* is a scholarly classic where Kettle's *Introduction* is not. It was aimed at a much wider readership and its virtues are very different. What is most telling is Kettle's combination of unabashed literary enthusiasm across a wide historical range (from Defoe and his predecessors to the 1940s) with respect for a standard of social realism appealing not so much to historical evidence as to the reader's common sense. Sometimes this is stated quite brutally, like a gauntlet flung down. Faced with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and with the novels of Henry Green, for example, Kettle finally resorts to what he calls the "so what?" type of criticism: when all is said these novelists' beautiful elaborations are a waste of the reader's time.²³ Once again we are in the economy of scarcity, in which both life and the well-meaning reader's attention-span are (perhaps a bit complacently) perceived to be short.

Kettle's essays often start off in a hurry with a no-nonsense declaration cutting straight to the heart of the matter. A good example is the first sentence of his *Pelican Guide* essay on the great Irish novelist: 'James Joyce was no flincher.'²⁴ In those chapters in his *Introduction* where the opening gambit identifies a novel with its supposed historical situation the results are much less convincing. 'Wuthering Heights is about England in 1847. ... *Wuthering Heights* is a vision of what life in 1847 was like': doubtless Kettle has a point worth making, but has he forgotten that the novel starts in 1802 and that its chronology mostly goes backward, not forward, from that date? His essay on Emily Brontë's 'work of supreme and astonishing genius' offers no analysis or even acknowledgement of its status as historical fiction – yet *Wuthering Heights* is crucial to his general standpoint on realism and the novel.²⁵ A different kind of historical *faux pas* is

22 Kettle, 'The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel', p. 180.

23 Kettle, *Introduction*, II, pp.108, 205.

24 Arnold Kettle, 'The Consistency of James Joyce', in Ford, *The Modern Age*, p. 301.

25 Kettle, *Introduction*, I, pp. 152, 154, 165.

his statement that ‘The subject of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is ... the destruction of the English peasantry’, a claim that would be comprehensively demolished in Raymond Williams’s writings on Hardy.²⁶ Here it is precisely the expected analysis (however summary) of class, class-consciousness and the peculiarities of English social and economic history that is lacking. Was Kettle’s closeness to Edward Thompson and the Communist Party Historians’ Group completely lost on him, one might wonder? But Kettle banishes the spectre of ‘vulgar Marxism’ in his own way, not in that chosen by the historians.

For Ian Watt, the eighteenth-century novel was the art-form of the middle classes, but for Kettle nineteenth-century fiction is a fiction of revolt, in which the major novelists after Jane Austen – more so, he suggests, than the Chartist and Jacobin writers – were rebels against their class. ‘The great novelists were rebels, and the measure of their greatness is found ... to correspond with the degree and consistency of their rebellion.’²⁷ No doubt there is a hint of revolutionary romanticism when he praises Swift, for example, for his ‘courageous realism’ and ‘unflinching sense of life’ – qualities with a somewhat military ring – and when he observes that we care about *Oliver Twist* asking for more ‘because every starved orphan in the world, and indeed everyone who is poor and oppressed and hungry is involved’; but Kettle firmly resists the easy conclusion that this makes Dickens a greater novelist than Jane Austen.²⁸ The smallness of the country-village world of *Emma* does not matter, since ‘The silliest of all criticisms of Jane Austen is the one which blames her for not writing about the battle of Waterloo and the French Revolution. She wrote about what she understood and no artist can do more.’²⁹ A potentially more damning criticism is that *Emma* remains ideologically constricted by the limitations of the narrow class society it depicts, but Kettle considers this carefully only to reject it. As readers we may be more moved by Oliver’s predicament than by Emma’s, but we are far more intimate with Emma’s world. Focusing on elements of uncertainty in the novel such as Jane Fairfax’s possible future as a governess and the scene in which Emma and Harriet visit a sick cottager, Kettle finds *Emma* unsurpassed in its portrayal of ‘the actual, concrete problems of behaviour and sensibility in an actual concrete society.’³⁰ The concreteness here is aesthetic, not historical. For all Kettle’s claims about *Emma*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Tess* he is the last person we can imagine researching into the life of the nineteenth-century English village.

26 Kettle, *Introduction*, II, p. 50; and see, e.g., Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto, 1973), pp. 197–214.

27 Kettle, *Introduction*, I, p. 97.

28 Kettle, *Introduction*, I, pp. 21, 136.

29 Kettle, *Introduction*, I, p. 107.

30 Kettle, *Introduction*, I, p. 103.

IV

Like Kettle, Graham Martin's reading of fiction explores what he once called 'the social imagination at work'.³¹ I will look here at three of his essays on the tradition of English realism: 'Novelists of Three Decades', his 1961 *Pelican Guide* account of Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and C.P. Snow, which he revised in 1983 under the title 'Novelists of Society'; his 1970 essay on *Daniel Deronda*; and his 1983 essay on 'Anthony Powell and Angus Wilson' written for volume 8 of the *New Pelican Guide*. In 'Novelists of Three Decades' he painstakingly establishes that, for all their artistic skills, neither of his chosen novelists offers a fully convincing picture of society. The argument is clearest in the case of Greene, where Martin was manifestly influenced by Kettle's earlier discussion of *The Heart of the Matter* in *An Introduction to the English Novel*. Both critics accuse Greene of using technical sleight-of-hand, or what Kettle bluntly calls 'trickery', to manipulate us into accepting the author's excessively gloomy view of the human condition.³² For all their evident topicality, Martin comments, Greene's fictions never succeed 'in challenging, much less in revising the rough social images ... which we already possess. ... There is no sense in which, collectively, "the world of Greene's novels" outlines the significant experience of an epoch'. Beyond this question of 'social insight' is the problem of Greene's Catholicism which threatens to turn the novels into theological parables, with the plot-contrivances serving as the basis of what Martin calls a 'hidden argument'.³³ The case is rather similar with Evelyn Waugh's later Catholic fiction, though here the theological argument is no longer 'hidden' but quite explicit. Martin sums it up by quoting Waugh on his protagonist Gilbert Pinfold: '[H]e looked at the world *sub specie aeternitatis* and he found it flat as a map.'³⁴

This quotation from *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* comes from the revised (1983) version of Martin's essay. The original version, apparently written before the completion of Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy, fails to take the novelist's Catholic pretensions seriously and wrestles, instead, with the nihilism of his early social satires. Waugh, we are informed, is 'essentially a pre-war novelist', a judgement rather hastily qualified (and not substantially altered) later.³⁵ In fact, both Greene and the early Waugh may now be seen as belonging to the

31 Graham Martin, 'Unit 27: Science Fiction', in *Science, Technology and Popular Culture* (2), U203 *Popular Culture* Block 6 (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1982), p. 57.

32 Kettle, *Introduction*, II, p. 184.

33 Martin, 'Novelists of Three Decades', pp. 402, 408.

34 Graham Martin, 'Novelists of Society: Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, C.P. Snow', in Boris Ford, ed., *From James to Eliot: Volume 7 of the New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 486.

35 Martin, 'Novelists of Three Decades', p. 394.

aftermath of English Modernism, as Martin acknowledges when he compares the social vision of *Brighton Rock* to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. (Martin, who also edited *Eliot in Perspective* (1970), does not comment on Waugh's allusion to *The Waste Land* in the title of *A Handful of Dust*.) The two novelists' resort to theology to underwrite their sweeping indictments of twentieth-century life has an obvious precedent in Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism. Paradoxically, however, Eliot's cultural diagnosis directly anticipates that of Leavis and of the *Pelican Guide*, as we have seen from its endorsement of Myers's dictum about modern spiritual vulgarity. The curious unease detectable in this essay of Martin's – its hesitations between a stringently objective voice and an authentic vein of generous fair-mindedness – perhaps reflects his ambivalence towards the Leavisite ambience of the *Pelican Guide*. Is the hostility he expresses towards Waugh and Greene partly explained by the fact that – theology apart – these novelists offered a fully-realised version of a cultural pessimism not at all dissimilar to that of the *Guide*?

Be that as it may, Martin's 1970 essay on *Daniel Deronda* adopts a dramatically different approach to 'Novelists of Three Decades'. Instead of a strongly Leavisian statement about minor art, it begins with a quotation from Marx about the failure of Feuerbach's project of secularising religious ideas. George Eliot, as the translator of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, had also embarked on a 'lifelong project of secularization' which remained steeped in the 'abstracting idealism' diagnosed by Marx.³⁶ Martin summarises Eliot's earlier career and then uses close analysis of the characters and situations in *Daniel Deronda* to enforce the conclusion that – like the fiction of Greene and Waugh – her novels represent the comparative failure of social imagination. In fact, Martin's verdict on *Daniel Deronda* closely resembles Arnold Kettle's view of *Felix Holt* in the same volume of essays edited by Barbara Hardy.³⁷ The difference is that, where Kettle's treatment is largely external (he rightly shows that Felix Holt, as an aspiring political leader of the working classes, would quickly have been sidelined by the Chartist movement), Martin focuses with much greater subtlety on the internal conflicts in Eliot's mind and art. Her openness to radical political passions can be seen in her letters welcoming the 1848 Revolution in France, yet in her novels political activity appears tarnished beyond redemption. Her late interest in Zionism was partly prompted by a sense of the historical relevance of Judaism to Christian England, yet, as Martin comments, this theme plays no part in *Daniel Deronda*, where the protagonist finally cuts all his ties with English society. The lack of substance that so many

36 Graham Martin, 'Daniel Deronda: George Eliot and Political Change', in Barbara Hardy, ed., *Critical Essays on George Eliot* (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 135, 138.

37 Arnold Kettle, 'Felix Holt the Radical', in Hardy, *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, pp. 99–115.

readers have found in *Deronda* reflects his author's 'gradual withdrawal from a significant English politics'.³⁸

While Martin in this essay mentions Raymond Williams only in passing, the judgment he arrives at on Eliot's career is of a kind that the emerging generation of cultural-materialist literary scholars in the 1970s would find increasingly familiar. (Other critics of nineteenth-century fiction working in this mode in the late 1960s included John Goode – who wrote on *Adam Bede* in *Critical Essays on George Eliot* – and John Lucas.) In 1983, however, Martin returned to the criticism of contemporary fiction in a post-Leavis context, writing a freshly commissioned chapter on Anthony Powell and Angus Wilson for the mid twentieth-century volume ('The Present') that was added to the renamed *New Pelican Guide*.

In this essay – contrasting two comic novelists famed for their powers of mimicry – the burden of evaluation rests somewhat more lightly than in 'Novelists of Three Decades'. Nevertheless, the questions asked of each novelist are searching and, to some extent, still unresolved today. Writing of *A Dance to the Music of Time*, Martin picks up Powell's image of Poussin's dance of the seasons as 'giving pattern to the spectacle', a claim he immediately pounces upon: 'Yet it has to be said that except in having followed the course of a number of human lives from youth to age or death, *A Dance* has no pattern to offer. ... If Powell's sequence has a consistent emphasis it is that beyond providing comic, touching and grotesque examples of the Vanity of Human Wishes, the passage of time yields nothing significant.'³⁹ It would take too long to explain why I think Martin is wrong about this, and in any case we now have the benefit of thirty years of retrospect, including dozens of critical articles and books, on Powell's achievement.⁴⁰ The core of Martin's argument is his assessment of the handling of Widmerpool, the central character of *A Dance*: 'the man remains a mystery, an articulation of surfaces, a character to whose self-understanding we have no key.'⁴¹ To the contrary, I would argue that by the end of the sequence Powell has shown (shown rather than told) all that we need to know about Widmerpool. The portrayal of this supreme opportunist who eventually becomes a Labour peer and a university chancellor has prophetic echoes which continue to resound amid the current debacle of New Labour, which Martin in 1983 could hardly have foreseen. The early

38 Martin, 'Daniel Deronda', p. 150.

39 Graham Martin, 'Anthony Powell and Angus Wilson', in Ford, *The Present*, pp. 197–8.

40 See the discussion of Powell in Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel: the English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 370–79. Recent Left critics to come to Powell's defence include Tariq Ali.

41 Martin, 'Anthony Powell', p. 199.

Thatcher period was not, perhaps, the best time to appreciate the percipience of Powell's political comedy.

If Anthony Powell's present-day admirers at least need to find answers sufficient to dispel the critical scepticism apparent in this essay, Martin's celebration of Angus Wilson's achievement soon came to seem dated: Wilson's critical stock began to fall some time before his death in 1991. His novels went out of print, and it now seems likely they are unfairly neglected. If so, then Martin's high praise for the quality of 'social imagination' in Wilson's writing should also be due for rediscovery. Criticism of contemporary writing must have the courage of its convictions, even though – as Arnold Kettle winningly says at the start of Volume Two of *An Introduction to the English Novel* – '[Doubtless] some of my judgements will look silly even to myself should I live another forty years'.⁴² Martin observes that Wilson's *No Laughing Matter* is, like *A Dance*, a 'full-scale effort to see "society as a whole"' from the Edwardian period to the 1960s; but Wilson, a consistently experimental writer, intertwines the history of two generations of the same family with a strong element of dramatised fictionality. The result is a novel with 'strong powers of implication': 'Explicitly a work of fiction, those complicated and (after all) modestly-understood historical *realities* against which we are repeatedly invited to measure it are rendered more compellingly than in any other contemporary novel.'⁴³ This reminder that the historical realities of our own time are not yet understood, despite the clamour of 'instant history' that passes for understanding – but that a novelist's imagination can help us to understand them better – turns the tables in the competition between historical and aesthetic modes of evaluation that this essay has set out to document. Far from invoking 'history' to validate literary achievement, Martin is suggesting that it is within literature's power – and, specifically, the power of a contemporary novelist – to redress the shortcomings of our provisional historical understanding. Kettle, too, may have been struggling towards some such conclusion as this, a conclusion affirming the connection between literature and liberation that both critics were seeking.

42 Kettle, *Introduction*, II, p. 7.

43 Martin, 'Anthony Powell', p. 208.

‘I chewed up Littererchewer’: Literature and Standard English in Tony Harrison, Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott

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‘The usual mistake of intellectuals, literary and otherwise, he [Arnold Kettle] would often say, was to suppose that by thinking, and yet more thinking, they would finally arrive at “truth”, whereas the prime task was “not to understand the world, but to change it”. Literature had its own special contribution to make to that process of human liberation, and the critic’s job was to help literature have that effect.’¹ Graham Martin’s words, in the preface to *Literature and Liberation*, formally suggest some distance from Arnold Kettle’s views, but ultimately endorse his high estimation of the liberatory power of literature. Implicit in those words is a politics of reading, by which the reader will be led, via the helpful mediation of critics who understand their job appropriately, to moments of liberation, based upon an increased capacity to change the world.

A consideration of three cardinal moments in the poetry of Tony Harrison, Seamus Heaney, and Derek Walcott suggests at the very least some caveats and complexities to record in the relationship between the induction into literary culture, and the ‘process of human liberation’. These moments all align that induction with a concomitant assimilation, by the poets, of the forms of Standard English; one of the complexities attendant upon the liberatory power of literature thus becomes the relationship of literature to the institution of the national standard language. To understand this relationship I shall have some recourse to the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu; if the latter generally casts a baleful eye on the freedoms apparently bestowed by culture, Jonathan Rose’s remarkable book *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* can perhaps be invoked as in some sense an antidote. In a climate now so different from that in which Arnold Kettle and Graham Martin produced those optimistic emancipatory formulations, the alignment between literature and liberation will undoubtedly be radically transformed.

1 ‘Editors’ Preface’, in Arnold Kettle, *Literature and Liberation: Selected Essays*, ed. Graham Martin and W.R. Owens (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. vi.

Three poets take up positions

Tony Harrison's linked pair of sonnets from 'The School of Eloquence', 'Them and [uz]', offer the starkest articulation of the relationships between 'Literature', education, and Standard English. The poems dramatize a scene in a grammar school classroom, in which the schoolboy Harrison is interrupted in his reading of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' because of the strongly marked accent in which he speaks:

All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see
's been dubbed by [ʌs] into RP,
Received Pronunciation, please believe [ʌs]
your speech is in the hands of the Receivers.'

'We say [ʌs], not [uz], T.W.!'²

The sonnets in this matching pair require each other; the first is a kind of critique and repudiation of the institution of Literature, while the second resumes, in a defiant mood, the now parodied and degraded mode that the first sonnet has rejected:

So right, yer buggers, then! We'll occupy
your lousy leasehold Poetry.

I chewed up Littererchewer and spat the bones
into the lap of dozing Daniel Jones ...³

(the Daniel Jones in question here is the phonetician and compiler of an *English Pronouncing Dictionary*). The predominant category which structures the poem is of course that of social class; literature is presented to the school boy as only accessible to him if he repudiates the working-class language in which he has been raised, and assumes the accent authorised as Received Pronunciation. There is a subsidiary opposition between poetry and prose, but that is subsumed in the larger category of 'Littererchewer' in the second sonnet. On the one hand, then, the poems place prose, working-class speech, inarticulacy, 'a mouth all stuffed with glottals'; on the other, poetry, indeed Literature, Received Pronunciation, the capacity to 'enunciate'. If the initiation into 'Literature' is liberatory for the young Harrison, then the liberation that it provides is sharply ambivalent and involves the repudiation of his class origins. The poems, taken together, suggest that this might not be the whole truth about

2 Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 122.

3 Harrison, *Selected Poems*, p. 123.

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literature – Cockney Keats, and a Wordsworth restored to his original voice suggest other possibilities – but at the least we see the institution of Literature in these poems as deeply imbricated in structures of class domination.

This is Harrison, writing in the late 1970s or early 1980s about his schooling – born in 1937, he is recalling a scene from the late 1940s or early 1950s. On the basis of a principle announced by Graham Martin, that ‘a paradigm takes concrete form only in its variants’,⁴ this boldly articulated act of memory and repudiation can be compared to a moment recalled by Seamus Heaney. This too occurs in an autobiographical poem; Heaney is an almost exact contemporary of Harrison, and so the two paradigmatic instances can be presumed effectively to coincide. The poem ‘The Ministry of Fear’ is the first in a series called ‘Singing School’ which makes up the second half of the collection *North* from 1975. Once again the scene is a remembered school room:

[I] innovated a South Derry rhyme
With *bushed* and *lulled* full chimes for *pushed* and *pulled*.
Those hobnailed boots from beyond the mountain
Were walking, by God, all over the fine
Lawns of elocution.

Have our accents
Changed? ‘Catholics, in general, don’t speak
As well as students from the Protestant schools.’
Remember that stuff? Inferiority
Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on.
‘What’s your name, Heaney?’

‘Heaney, Father.’

‘Fair

Enough.’

And the poem concludes:

Ulster was British, but with no rights on
The English lyric: all around us, though
We hadn’t named it, the ministry of fear.⁵

The controlling oppositions evidently differ in this poem from those that are operating in Harrison’s ‘Them and [uz]’. Class is still an important matter: Heaney’s hobnailed boots are a mark of his ‘peasant’ origin. But religion,

4 Graham Martin, ‘D.H. Lawrence and Class’, in Douglas Jefferson and Graham Martin, eds, *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle* (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1982), pp. 83–97, p. 85.

5 Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Poems 1966–1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 135–6.

clearly enough, is equally important in this passage; Heaney has a neat way of indicating how the 'inferiority complex' induced by being belittled on the grounds of religion is itself productive: 'stuff that dreams were made on.' This too is a poem that recounts a moment of exclusion and recoils from that moment to make a claim. In doing so the poet, at the end of the poem, moves beyond the sectarian difference to a national difference; playing on the differences between 'British' and 'English' – poetry is English, not British – Heaney's exclusion from English literature is directly related to structures of domination in the form of B Specials and a sectarian state. Yet, at the same time, the poem is produced out of this imbrication of class, accent, political power, education and 'Literature'. This is a paradox best expressed by Harrison, who remarks, in another poem from the same period as 'Them and [uz]', 'A Good Read', that 'I've come round to your position on 'the Arts' / but put it down in poems, that's the bind'.⁶ Here the poem is addressed to his father; the latter's 'position on "the Arts"' is indicated by him giving his son one of his 'you-stuck-up-bugger looks'. These poems emerge from the very exclusion from poetry that they record.

A third instantiation of this paradigm occurs in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, and is rather different from Harrison's and Heaney's poems in that the lines do not refer to an incident in a school room, but refer to an imaginary meeting with the poet's dead father (at least, I presume the meeting is imaginary). His father recounts his own experience as an amateur poet:

I was raised in this obscure Caribbean port,
where my bastard father christened me for his shire:
Warwick. The Bard's county. But never felt part
of the foreign machinery known as Literature.

I preferred verse to fame, but I wrote with the heart
Of an amateur. It's that Will you inherit.

I died on his birthday, one April. Your mother
sewed her own costume as Portia, then that disease
like Hamlet's old man's spread from an infected ear,

I believe the parallel has brought you some peace.
Death imitating Art, eh?⁷

6 Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems*, p. 141.

7 Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 68–9.

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Naturally the phrase that indicates the paradigm most directly is 'the foreign machinery known as Literature'. But it occurs in an especially complicated poetic context: these are words attributed by one professional poet to his now dead father when he encounters his ghost while on a visit to their old house. The professional poet's relationship to 'Literature' is mediated by his father's relationship to it, which in turn looks back to an illegitimate succession taking him back, via the name, to Warwick and William Shakespeare. The assumption of the mantle of Literature necessarily involves, for the Caribbean poet, a difficult negotiation with the foreignness of the institution, caught up as it is in the relations of colonial power. One way that Walcott figures it here is as the archetypal claim made by the bastard child to the parental inheritance. If Heaney and Harrison had made the movement from repudiation to assertion in one generation – in the history of their own selves, as it were – Walcott traces the same movement across two generations, as his father's 'amateur' verse is transferred, via a fraught generational transition, to his own professional vocation.

Here then are three moments of position-taking by three very different poets, who, though born within a few years of each other (Walcott is the oldest, born in 1930), emerged into poetry via difficult negotiations: for none of them was the entry into Literature a matter of assuming an uncomplicated inheritance, but involved overcoming exclusions based on class, nationality and colonialism. The notion of 'position-taking' is chosen advisedly; it is taken from Bourdieu's account of the insertion of the new artist into the field of cultural production, an insertion, as we shall see, marked with paradoxes of its own. But before moving onto Bourdieu, two points about these three poetic moments should be noted. First, all three involve questions of *naming*. Heaney insists on his own name, and later in the poem has to own up to 'Seamus' when stopped by inquisitive B Specials armed with machine guns. Harrison's assumption of 'Littererchewer' means, explicitly in these poems, re-assuming his name as Tony and repudiating his grammar school moniker T.W., while Derek Walcott's father's name links him inextricably back to his own father's claimed inheritance of Warwickshire and its bard. Secondly, and more importantly for the argument, all three moments (though less visibly in the case of *Omeros*) involve a negotiation not just with the institution of Literature but also with the forms of Standard English. To speak the canon involves a repudiation of one's own linguistic legacy, or at the very least a difficult negotiation with it. This is most evident in Harrison's poem, which reproduces what is perhaps the primal scene of Standard Language debates in the third quarter of the twentieth century: the classroom in which the nonstandard language user is humiliated for his use of stigmatised non-standard forms. But it is also evident in Heaney's poem, both in his reports on the linguistic

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innovations that he attempted in his youthful poetry, and in the hostile account of Catholic students' speech attributed in the poem – perhaps to some visiting School Inspector? Language is not visibly an issue in the section quoted from *Omeros*, but it is of course centrally important in Walcott's output as a whole. Pierre Bourdieu provides some challenging accounts of both language and literature, and his analyses suggest explications of these moments, recalled in the poetry, that emphasise the more sceptical elements implicit in them.

Literature and Standard English

It is clearly no accident that Literature, in Harrison's phrase, should have been 'dubbed into RP', since Received Pronunciation can be described as the oral version of Standard English, though this is controversial amongst linguists.⁸ The two fields, language and literature, are structured by cognate sets of social relationships. Bourdieu's general position is that the field of artistic production (including literary production) works by different, indeed opposite, laws to the field of the economy and indeed of social domination – that it operates by the laws of 'loser takes all', for success in the literary field is in effect achieved by a repudiation of the laws of the economic field. But this is in actuality a different strategy for obtaining success, and in the long term the symbolic power accrued in the cultural field is expected to be rewarded economically. So Bourdieu produces a series of analyses of various cultural fields (theatre, art, literature especially) explicating the complex exchanges and negations between the field of culture and the encompassing systems of domination. *Negation* is the key term; in the cultural field agents have persistently to deny that they are acting out of self-interest (they are 'disinterested', they are 'devoted to their art', etc.) but in fact they are playing for symbolic power. The terms of these complex negotiations are laid down in schooling; the persistence of the domination of the dominating class is ensured because the most emphatic way of ensuring access to this symbolic capital is via prolonged exposure to education, and such prolonged exposure is differentially available according to class. In this sense the poems by Harrison and Heaney expose the secret of Literature which in general remains hidden: 'To enable culture to fulfil its primary ideological function of class co-optation and legitimation of this mode of selection, it is necessary and sufficient that the link between culture

8 See, for example, Peter Trudgill, in 'Standard English: What it Isn't', in *Standard English: The Widening Debate*, ed. Tony Bex and Richard J. Watts (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 117–28. In this article Trudgill argues that 'while all RP speakers also speak Standard English, the reverse is not the case' (p. 118). Alternatively it can be argued that Standard English is essentially a matter of the written form of the language and that nobody in effect speaks it.

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and education, which is simultaneously obvious and hidden, be forgotten, disguised and denied.⁹

Bourdieu's arguments about cultural production are closely cognate with his arguments about differential induction into Standard and non-Standard forms of language in class-dominated societies. In this case also the key factor is the length of time that social actors are exposed to the educational system. 'Correct' linguistic usage is a form of social distinction; its systematic reproduction is an essential carrier of symbolic capital. Like the acquisition of cultural capital in the induction into Literature, the school system provides the illusion of absolute equality in the acquisition of this symbolic capital while simultaneously actually distributing children broadly speaking according to their position in the class hierarchy:

The social uses of language owe their specifically social value to the fact that they tend to be organized in systems of differences (between prosodic and articulatory or lexical and syntactic variants) which reproduce, in the symbolic order of differential deviations, the system of social differences. To speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups. These styles, systems of differences which are both classified and classifying, ranked and ranking, mark those who appropriate them. And a spontaneous stylistics, armed with a practical sense of the equivalence between the two orders of differences, apprehends social classes through classes of stylistic indices.¹⁰

Bourdieu's position here is in fact more sophisticated than the dominant position within British sociolinguistics, which has tended to take a rather one-sided view of these matters: education which insists on Standard English not only creates linguistic anxiety among non-Standard English speakers, it also fails to recognise the actual linguistic equivalence, on objective scientific grounds, of variant forms of English. In Bourdieu's case, there is an explicit avoidance of the romanticisation of non-standard forms, and an insistence that speakers are inevitably caught up in systems of domination and distinction: there is no avoiding the appropriation of 'one or other of the expressive styles already constituted'. Whatever linguistic strategy you choose – not that it is usually

9 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception', in *The Field of Cultural Production*, edited and introduced by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 215–37, p. 235.

10 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language', in *Language and Symbolic Power*, edited and introduced by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 43–65, p. 54.

a matter of choice – you are furthering and contributing to the system of linguistic distinction.

Harrison's poem, in particular, demonstrates what I have called the primal scene of the British sociolinguistic tradition as it relates to education and the place of Standard English within it: this is the scene in which the non-standard speaker is humiliated for his use of non-standard forms – in this case, the dropped initial aitch (a shibboleth with a long history behind it), and the use of [uz] rather than [ʌs]. Heaney's poem also, though less visibly, alludes to an explicit valorisation of one kind of speech (from Protestant schools), and the denigration of the speech of Catholic schoolchildren. In both cases the sociolinguists' point is made emphatically and effectively. What the invocation of Bourdieu makes clearer is that this exclusion is also *productive*: for both Harrison and Heaney their literary productiveness grows out of, though not happily, their simultaneous repudiation and reappropriation of the stigmatised speech of their home milieu.

It is nevertheless important to recognise that both Harrison and Heaney are referring to educational experiences that they endured in their childhood: they are both old enough to be the grandparents of teenage children undergoing education now. There have been at least a couple of turns of the screw in these matters of the educational presence of Standard English even since these poems were published (late 1970s to 1980s), let alone since the experiences which they record actually occurred (a generation before then). Partly in response to scenes such as the one recorded by Harrison, and because of the sociolinguistic arguments stemming from Labov in America and Trudgill in Britain, there was a period of retreat from the denigration of non-Standard forms, though never from the actual teaching of Standard English. But the educational debates of the 1980s and 1990s, and the arguments of people like John Honey, have meant that Standard English is now entrenched in the National Curriculum; we are living in an especially prescriptivist educational climate.¹¹ However, the mode of its entrenchment is clearly radically different from the extraordinary assumption of class, national and cultural authority recorded in the poems by Harrison, Heaney and Walcott.

The point of this foray into debates about Standard English is that we can see a comparable structure at work in both domains: the induction into Literature, as much as into Standard English, involves both an acquisition and a repudiation. So much so that, for Bourdieu, there is more than an analogy at

11 See John Honey, *Language is Power; the Story of Standard English and its Enemies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997). See also Ben Rampton, *Language in Late Modernity: Interaction in an Urban School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), which provides some transcripts of classes in the contemporary school strikingly at odds with the primal scene of British sociolinguistics or Tony Harrison's poetry.

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work; Literature helps to define what constitutes legitimate language, and itself therefore buttresses the system of linguistic distinction:

The work performed in the literary field produces the appearances of an original language by resorting to a set of derivations whose common principle is that of a deviation from the most frequent, i.e. 'common', 'ordinary', 'vulgar', usages. Value always arises from deviation, *deliberate or not*, with respect to the most widespread usage, 'commonplaces', 'ordinary sentiments', 'trivial' phrases, 'vulgar' expressions, 'facile' style.¹²

In addition, then, to the mechanisms of distinction at work in the literary field proper, Literature legitimises comparable mechanisms in the linguistic system.

It may be that reactions to the politics or simply the ethics of these two cognate domains are different: certainly to speak confidently of 'Literature and Liberation' is to see a more or less unproblematic relationship between the two, while the unequivocally liberatory aspects of the induction into Standard English, and the voicing over into RP of local, dialect and working-class speech, are much more dubious. For Bourdieu, however, both are unequivocally comparable, and are evident mechanisms by which class society reproduces itself. Indeed this is the predominant function of culture: the 'primary ideological function' of culture is 'class co-optation and legitimation of this mode of selection'.¹³

This leads, then, into some rather depressing territory, in which Literature is to be understood as a mode of distinction, a means by which people play a long game of building up symbolic capital, to be cashed in at a later date. Bourdieu's arguments come close to debunking ones, or to that favourite shout of populist twentieth-century art-criticism: 'the emperor's got no clothes!' This is still more explicitly the case when he compares museums to 'cultural temples' in which 'the chosen few come to nurture a faith of virtuosi while conformists and bogus devotees come and perform a class ritual'.¹⁴ In this context, we have to ask what value might attach even to poems like Harrison's, Heaney's and Walcott's, which momentarily expose the very mechanisms of distinction upon which they depend. They are perhaps comparable (though we must admit, on a vastly different scale), to Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, to which Bourdieu devotes a series of lectures. Bourdieu relies on Flaubert's novel as evidence for, or indeed analysis of, the very structures of competitive

12 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 60.

13 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 235.

14 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception', in *The Field of Cultural Production*, edited and introduced by Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 215–37, p. 236.

cultural game-playing which he wishes to expose; the novel provides him with ammunition because Flaubert is in effect a sociologist *manqué*, who like the sociologist himself, can take comfort from no more than the 'slightly perverse pleasure of disenchantment'.¹⁵ The logic of the argument at this moment is that the only liberation provided by poems such as these is that they point to a liberation from the delusions of the liberatory power of Literature.

Distinction and the autodidact tradition

Turning from Bourdieu to Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001) seems initially like entering an opposite world to that analysed by Bourdieu. Rose has assembled a quite remarkable collection of material relative above all to the autodidact tradition within British working-class history. The anecdotes and recollections that he has brought together are extraordinarily diverse, but Rose is especially drawn to memories of the following kind, by the nineteenth-century Unitarian minister Robert Collyer, who recalled his first book-purchase, a copy of *The History of Whittington and His Cat*:

Does some reader say, Why should you touch this incident? And I answer, I have a library now of about three thousand volumes ...; but in that first purchase lay the spark of a fire which has not yet gone down to white ashes, the passion which grew with my growth to read all the books in the early years I could lay my hands on, and in this wise prepare me in some fashion for the work I must do in the ministry. ... I see myself in the far-away time and cottage reading, as I may truly say in my case, for dear life.¹⁶

'Reading for dear life': the phrase emerges from a wholly different mental world than that of the debunking scepticism of Bourdieu. Testimony after testimony (the protestant vocabulary is perhaps appropriate) attests to the power of reading Literature to transform lives, and indeed to liberate readers. The book is impressive not only because of the striking accounts of knowledge acquired under difficulties, but because it seeks to cut across any debilitating scepticism that teachers of literature may have about the value of the work which has fallen to their hand. This is not an accident; one of the insistent polemical themes of Jonathan Rose in his book is that the obsession of contemporary criticism with the often conservative politics of canonical works rapidly evaporates after an

15 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Principles for a Sociology of Cultural Works', in *Language and Symbolic Power*, pp. 176–91, p. 190.

16 Robert Collyer, quoted in Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 3.

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acquaintance with the reading history of these books by working-class people, who again and again ignored or transformed this recognised conservatism and converted the books into a resource for a radical politics.

So is it simply possible to invoke *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* to counteract Bourdieu? To quote the hundreds of testimonies by working-class people to the liberatory power of literature, and allow that to overcome the scepticism which a Bourdieuan perspective induces? There are a number of reasons for thinking that matters are not that simple, though ultimately the force and value of such testimonies remains. In the first place, Rose is concerned with the autodidact tradition, and though Bourdieu does devote a few pages to this in *Distinction*, he asserts that autodidacticism cannot escape the same structures of domination that characterise the educational system; indeed, he asserts:

[I]t presents no paradox to see the autodidact's relation to culture, and the autodidact himself, as *products of the educational system*, the sole agency empowered to transmit the hierarchical body of aptitudes and knowledge which constitutes legitimate culture, and to consecrate arrival at a given level of initiation, by means of examinations and certificates.¹⁷

In this account, older-style autodidacts (fixated on the consecrated products of legitimate culture, that is), are inevitably going to reproduce, as though by a photographic negative, the structures of exclusion that have created them. This is connected to the time-scale that characterises Rose's book: he is mostly concerned with a two-century period that ends with the Second World War and the Butler Education Act, after which he asks the question, 'What Went Wrong?' The answer is mostly that the autodidact tradition ended because it got swallowed by official education: instead of Robert Collyer 'reading for dear life', Tony Harrison was now reading for his homework. He thus got caught up in those paradoxical structures of exclusion and reappropriation with which we began. But the most telling reason for suggesting that Bourdieu and Rose are not the diametrical opposites which they first appear is that it is possible to read Rose's book somewhat against the grain and see in it evidence that supports rather than contradicts Bourdieu's arguments.

The most striking suggestion of this possibility comes from the title of Rose's Chapter One: 'A Desire for Singularity'. The coincidence with Bourdieu's *magnum opus*, *Distinction*, is indicative: what propels many of the autodidacts that Rose records is indeed a desire for singularity, for distinction, for the accumulation of cultural capital to mark them off from their fellows. One way of describing

17 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 328.

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this is to say that Bourdieu and Rose view the same phenomenon but ascribe opposite valuations to it. This is partly to do with Rose's individualism; his interpretation of 'liberation' is simply more individualistic than either Arnold Kettle's or Graham Martin's. But it is also true that Rose records a number of instances where autodidacts respond to their less intellectually-inclined fellow workers with impatience and even contempt. The dominating structures, whereby the acquisition of cultural capital translates, however contradictorily, into social capital, are not thrown off so easily.

It is also possible to find in Rose's book evidence of a comparable problematic at work which linked the acquisition of 'Literature' with the acquisition of a class-based 'Standard' dialect. Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist, marked his educational transition by changing his dialect:

Now, to hear a youth in mean clothing, sitting at the shoemaker's stall, pursuing one of the lowliest callings, speak in what seemed to some of them almost a foreign dialect, raised positive anger and scorn in some, and amazement in others. Who was I, that I should sit on the cobbler's stall, and 'talk fine'! They could not understand it.¹⁸

But Cooper continues, in a passage that Rose does not quote:

With Whillock and my intellectual friends I had conversed in the best and most refined English I could command; but I had used our plain old Lincolnshire dialect in talking to the neighbours. This was all to be laid aside now, and it took some courage to do it. Yet I persevered until the Doric was conquered; and at one time of my life spoke better Attic than, belike, I speak now.¹⁹

Where Rose quotes from Cooper as an example almost of the amusing quaintness that characterised Cooper's neighbours and their attitudes towards unfamiliar language, we can surely also see in it a peculiar, self-inflicted internalisation on Cooper's part of the logic of distinction that had marked the 'Attic' with prestige and stigmatized the 'Doric'.

These are all caveats, albeit significant ones, to temper the initial enthusiasm with which one might turn to Rose's book as an antidote to Bourdieu. They suggest that the access into 'Literature' was never such an unequivocal experience as Rose himself would like to suggest, and that it was always imbricated in matters of class and social domination, even if the way that this imbrication

18 Quoted in Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, p. 224.

19 Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, with an introduction by John Saville (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971 [1872]).

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manifested itself was different in the case of the autodidact tradition. But they remain no more than caveats. Rose has gathered together testimonies that at the very least suggest limits to Bourdieu's thesis, both individually and politically. *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* contains a remarkable range of testimonies to the power of literature (perhaps one should say to reading more generally, though Rose especially emphasises literary reading) to transform individual lives, to restore a sense of self-worth and dignity to those at the bottom of the social heap. Furthermore, Rose extensively demonstrates the capacity of working-class readers to convert even the unlikeliest literary material into political weaponry. It certainly seems inadequate to read all this as no more than the operation of a system of distinction. But it is possible to move on from this historically extensive counter-evidence to a more theoretical objection; literature would not have the power that it does were it *only* a system of distinction, as if it only derived its value, that is to say, from the systematic differences which distinguished it from popular culture or the 'common', the 'ordinary', the 'vulgar' and so on. We can use Bourdieu's analogy against him: if the fields of literary production, and of language, are 'markets' just like the economy (albeit ones which operate according to differing laws), then we can argue that they too depend upon a use-value which must pre-exist their conversion into exchange-value, and indeed is a condition for their commodification. Literature too has a 'use-value' and, however much that may be compromised by the systems of distinction which prey upon it, the working-class readers celebrated by Rose were in some degree responding to that.

Conclusion

Bruce Robbins, writing in the *London Review of Books*, records an incident of a woman greeting Bourdieu in the streets with the assertion that his books had changed her life: 'I thought I was free, but I wasn't', she told him.²⁰ This is surely not the kind of liberation that Graham Martin or Arnold Kettle had in mind. But it does seem to be the only version available to Bourdieu: freedom from illusion, producing the 'perverse pleasure of disenchantment.' One reading of those cardinal moments from the writings of Harrison, Heaney and Walcott, would perhaps support such a disenchanted attitude; this poetry can do no more than reveal the conditions of its own production in the problematics of class, nation and empire. It is not altogether sufficient to point out, either, that these poets also wrote about other things: it is surprising how much of their writing revolves around this originary moment, in which their separation

20 Bruce Robbins, 'Martial Art', *London Review of Books* 28, 8 (20 April 2006), p. 18.

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from their home environment is both mourned, and guiltily, even obsessively, recorded. Nevertheless, as the invocation and discussion of Rose's book indicates, that is not a position in which we need to rest.

The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes deals mostly with the two hundred years or so from about 1750 to about 1950. Harrison, Heaney and Walcott all allude to educational experiences that occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. Bourdieu's work has considerable historical range, and claims for itself a certain timeless truth in that it is addressed to the mechanisms of domination in class society. But the very logic of his argument is that the processes of distinction must be constantly updated, as this year's fashionable headgear becomes next year's old hat. Changes in the educational system, in the power, prestige and pervasiveness of popular culture, and in the technologies of culture, have all radically altered since Harrison experienced that primal scene of class humiliation and hence paradoxical insertion into culture. So it is expedient to conclude with some gestures towards the contemporary moment and the liberatory power of literature within it.

Although it is very unlikely that that scene from that early 1950s classroom would be reproduced in the contemporary school, despite the resurgence of an insistence on Standard English and its institutionalisation in the classroom, it is also obvious that the logic of distinction has not disappeared from education, either in the teaching of Literature or in the instilling of language. However skillfully managed, language is still a site in which schoolchildren act out possible roles for themselves and by which their places in the social hierarchy are in part indicated. On the other hand, the prestige of high culture, including Literature, seems to me to be much more questionable than was assumed by that classroom of school boys and their teacher more than half a century ago, as the current fraught debates about the place of the 'classics' in the classroom indicate. All those debates about the relationship between high and popular culture clearly take on a different colour in a situation where, as Terry Eagleton remarked a few years ago, popular culture *is* the dominant culture. Perhaps this even represents a liberation *for* literature, if its acquisition were no longer to be marked so strongly by meanings derived from its role in the acquisition of symbolic capital.

It is also clear that the autodidact tradition, and its institutional arrangements in organisations like the WEA, cannot simply be invoked now. On the other hand, phenomena with very diverse class colorations – 'reading groups' and groups gathered together in the National Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers – attest to the real persistence of ways of consuming and producing literature that are not simply to be assimilated into the processes of distinction, though it remains to be seen whether these diverse phenomena are ultimately 'residual', to use Raymond Williams's terminology.

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Finally, we can turn to arguments such as that made by Peter Widdowson in his book *Literature* (1998), which sought to distinguish between the ideological work performed by the category 'Literature' with a capital L, and the liberatory potential of the 'literary' in reshaping and re-imagining the stories that we tell about ourselves.²¹ Widdowson's distinction between 'Literature' and 'the literary' seeks to safeguard the positive possibilities of the latter term from the bad ideological work performed by the former – though he does not engage with Bourdieu, his analysis of 'Literature' is largely cognate with his analysis. But perhaps things are harder than his generous distinction between 'Literature' and 'the literary' suggests, for the capacity to re-shape and re-imagine the world in these literary ways is only gained via a passage through 'Literature'. The poet whose work most exemplifies this, and is indeed controversial in his allegiance to European Literature in re-imagining the life of the Caribbean as a result – is of course Derek Walcott, and above all in *Omeros*. I recall that phrase of his: 'the foreign machinery known as Literature'. In a sense we have no choice in these matters – the woman who greeted Bourdieu was right. But we do not have to abandon literature as a result; however marked by its passage through the systems of distinction that Bourdieu describes, in the final analysis it's all we've got.

21 Peter Widdowson, *Literature* (London: Routledge, 1998).

Aesthetics, Government, Freedom

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How are we to see now the relations between literature and freedom? This question is unavoidably posed by the theme of the conference – *Literature and Liberation* – that was organised to celebrate Graham Martin’s life and work. It is posed too by Martin’s own assessment of the close, almost intrinsic connection between the two in his endorsement of Arnold Kettle’s view that ‘Literature had its own special contribution to make to that process of liberation, and the critic’s job was to help literature have that effect’.¹ My purpose here, however, is not to augment literature’s ‘freedom effects’ but to probe the historical and discursive conditions which make intelligible the relations between criticism, freedom and literature that Martin advocated. I shall, in doing so, broaden my focus beyond the sphere of the specifically literary to include the relations between aesthetics and freedom more generally. The perspective from which I broach these questions is that provided by post-Foucauldian debates on liberal government and the role these accord freedom not as the *vis-à-vis* of government but as a mechanism that is central to its operations. This will involve a consideration of the respects in which the relations between literature, aesthetics, and freedom have operated as parts of a distinctive field of government rather than as an outside of government capable of furnishing the grounds for its transcendental critique in the name of liberation.

A part of my concern here – although more as background than as its centre - is to offer a historical framing of the Left Leavisism that nurtured Martin’s understanding of the role of criticism, by tracing its affiliation to the post-Kantian construction of culture as a realm of freedom.² As Kant put it: ‘The production in a rational being of an aptitude for any ends whatever of its own choosing, consequently of the aptitude of a being in its freedom, is *culture* [*Kultur*]’.³ The influence of Kant’s account of the relations between aesthetics, culture and freedom in Britain was, of course, distinct in its form. Rather than generating a tradition of formalised aesthetic theories, as it did in Germany, its influence was mediated via Coleridge and the Romantics⁴ and thence, via its connections to the question of character that preoccupied liberal

1 Taken from the organisers’ blurb for the *Literature and Liberation* conference.

2 These aspects of my concerns bear some similarity to, but also differ from those of, Francis Mulhern’s account of metaculture – see Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). For a fuller elaborations of these questions see Tony Bennett, ‘Making Culture, Changing Society: the Perspective of “Culture Studies”’, *Cultural Studies* 21, 4–5, pp. 610–29.

3 Quoted in Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 389.

4 Ian Hunter, ‘The History of Theory’, *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006), pp. 78–111.

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political thought, from Mill through to Arnold, with debates about the role of education.⁵ But we can hear its echoes well into the twentieth century.

We can hear them, for example, in Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, in the account he offers of the role that a literary or art education had for generations of working-class students – whether in the WEA or at Ruskin College – who expressed their appreciation of its benefits precisely in terms of the dual relations of disinterestedness and freedom, and their influence on both self and social reform, that is the Kantian bequest. Take, for example, the following comments on the value of education from the 1936 *Learn and Live* survey of WEA students:

The giving of prominence to things of the mind and spirit and the encouraging of an attitude of mind which places man first and his economic function second; freedom from commercialism; disinterestedness. All of which, I believe, go to stimulate the student to social service.

[...]

By then I had realised that some people fully appreciated and enjoyed life, because, I thought, they had solved life's problems for themselves, and the rest of the world were mere drudges, slaves, and drunkards, and I did not wish to be classified with this latter class.⁶

And we can hear them in the suggestion by the literary critic, John Carey, that reading literature might serve as an effective antidote to binge-drinking.⁷ In his polemic *What Good are the Arts?* Carey discusses a report in *The Times* in which two fifteen-year old schoolgirls construe their binge-drinking as an attempt to escape the boredom of life in a small Gloucestershire village. Connecting this to the decline of the public library, Carey prescribes reading good literature as a mind-enhancing and life-changing escape from boredom in contrast to the merely temporary escape offered by drugs, drink, and antidepressants. As such, he presents exposure to good literature as an alternative to the attempt to tackle binge drinking by punitive or corrective measures. In doing so, he proposes a contemporary version of nineteenth-century dreams of luring the working man away from the pub and into the library or art gallery as a means

5 N. Roberts, 'Character in the Mind: Citizenship, Education and Psychology in Britain, 1880–1914', *History of Education* 33, 2 (2004), pp. 177–97.

6 Quoted in Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven and London: Yale Nota Bene, 2002), p. 284.

7 John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

of combating drunkenness and the all the social ills (wife beating, promiscuity, and unchecked population growth) that accompanied it.⁸

On the face of it these might seem to be two quite different ‘takes’ on the relations between freedom and culture that Kant proposes: the first, connecting it to the self-emancipation of the working class – culture, as the escape from necessity, representing the free pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself; and the second inscribing culture as a mechanism of government that works through the means of self-regulation it makes possible. But they are closely linked: the history of the relations between adult education in Britain and the development of literary education show how closely the former was modelled on the latter as a space of free expression in which, via their responses to the literary text, students were encouraged to express their selves in a specially controlled settings (the tutorial) in ways that made their thoughts and feelings subject to correction and revision in the light of the guidance offered by an experienced reader (the tutor) and their fellow students.⁹ ‘Its essential characteristic,’ Albert Mansbridge said of the WEA Tutorial Class, ‘is freedom. Each student is a teacher, each teacher is a student’.¹⁰ It was, indeed, as Ian Hunter has shown in compelling detail, precisely this extension of the use of literature for élite forms of self-cultivation to the population more generally via the public schooling system and adult education that placed the literary class at the heart of a new machinery of self-government.¹¹

The argument I want to propose here is that, if we are to understand both of these cases, we need to consider how the attribute of uselessness that constituted the original defining attribute of the aesthetic was redefined so that it could serve as an instrument of government. I shall look first at the ways in which Kant transformed the connections between the uselessness or disinterestedness that had been ascribed to aesthetic judgement in the culture of civic humanism and the role this played in his critique of the relations between Christian Wolffe’s aesthetics and the *polizeiwissenschaften* of the Prussian state.¹² I shall then look back beyond Kant to review the relations between Shaftesbury’s

8 See Tony Bennett, ‘Acting on the Social: Art, Culture, and Government’, *American Behavioural Science* 43, 9 (2000), pp. 1412–28.

9 Richard E. Lee, *Life and Times of Cultural Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

10 Quoted in Rose, p. 276.

11 Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

12 I am aware of the difficulties of using Kant as a ‘hinge’ in this way since it grants him the transcendence of previous positions that he produced for his own through his method of dialectical critique: see Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). This is, however, a convenient presentational device for this stage in my inquiries.

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aesthetics and Adam Smith's 'man within' in the development of eighteenth-century forms of liberal government, before returning to relate these historical excursions to the issues that are at stake in the present concerning the relations between aesthetics, government and freedom.

From government to self-government

Wolffe's *The Real Happiness of a People under a Philosophical King* offers an economical summary of his conception of the relationship that ought to obtain between philosophy and government. The ideal is 'that if Kings or Rulers are Philosophers, or Philosophers Kings, then it is that the End of Society is obtained', where that end is envisaged as an ordered set of social and political relations governed by the principles of police.¹³ The 'common Good' is secured when the philosopher-king is able to bring about 'the highest Good, which every individual can attain to in this World, according to the different State he is in'.¹⁴ The role of philosophy in this regard consists in the logic of subsumptive judgement: that is, in its ability to bring every particular case under the heading of a determinate concept in order that the requirements of the common good can be accurately and consistently determined from one case to the next.

The difficulty that judgements of beauty posed for Wolffe concerned their implications for the relations between the lower sensate faculty of intuition and the higher faculty of reason which, in the context of the police state of Frederick the Great's Prussia, functioned as a coded reference to the relations between rulers and ruled: that is, between the enlightened absolutism of the monarch and the state bureaucracy on the one hand, and their unenlightened subjects on the other. If beauty, as a form of perfection, can be sensibly intuited and is therefore potentially available to everyone, what is the relationship between this and the rational knowledge of perfection achieved by the higher faculty of reason? Or, when translated into questions of governance: what is the relationship between the confused perception of the people if, in matters pertaining to beauty, they are allowed the power of judgement and the subsumptive rationality of kings and philosophers that is to guide the ordering of the state? Wolffe's solution, in allowing the existence of the intuitive or sensible perception of beauty, is to do so only on the condition that it is subject to correction and revision by being brought under the influence of a rational appreciation of beauty governed by definite rules of judgement. The higher faculty is thus to raise the lower faculty from its confused and dim appreciation

13 Christian Wolffe, *The Real Happiness of a People under a Philosophical King* (London: M. Cooper, 1750), p. 5.

14 Wolffe, p. 4.

of perfection just as enlightened rulers are to lift the unenlightened out of confusion and darkness through a didactic programme, legislated from above, that does not involve any self-activity on the part of the governed.

In this revival of the Hobbesian view in which the unification of the manifold results from the political act of sovereignty, the social order is governed from above – just as the lower faculty is ordered by the higher one – by the king and philosopher-bureaucrats who administer the affairs of state in the light of their rational understanding of the common welfare. Government thus by-passes the individual members of civil society who are, so to speak, to be coerced into freedom and autonomy rather than either possessing these as natural attributes or achieving them through their own activity. The role of the citizen is to be led into willing obedience by learning, through public discussion, to understand the reason that is embodied in the law. The common man, however, is to be led into blind obedience through a perpetuation of the politics of spectacle associated with earlier, unenlightened forms of sovereignty:

The common man, who depends on his senses and can barely use his reason, is unable to grasp what royal majesty is; but through the things which he takes in through his eyes and which affect his other senses, he knows majesty, power and force with an indistinct but clear concept.¹⁵

It was as a consequence of Wolffe's denial of any generally distributed capacity for independent judgement that questions of aesthetics became so politically loaded in mid- and late eighteenth-century Germany. Caygill singles out two figures who played key roles in dismantling the Wolffian philosophical apparatus by probing the aporias associated with his account of judgements of beauty: Baumgarten and Herder. Baumgarten's early work is conventionally regarded as remaining within the order of Wolffe's system in seeking to establish a scientific basis for recognising the aesthetic as a distinct and separate faculty, thereby effecting a procedural subordination of the sensible to reason. While concurring with this view, Caygill argues that, in his later *Aesthetica*, Baumgarten makes the relations between sensate judgements of beauty and reason both continuous and discontinuous in ways that opened up the possibility for new relations between governors and governed. Since, in this work, aesthetic judgement and rational knowledge differ only in degree and not in kind, and since, for Baumgarten, the aesthetic operates as a field of independent judgement that is not automatically subservient to the higher court of reason ('My recognition of the perfection and imperfection of things is judgement. Therefore I have the power of judgement'), the aesthetic is opened up as an area of self-activity within the context of what remains a tutelary relation of

15 Wolffe, quoted by Caygill, p. 139.

judgement (the people/citizenry) to reason (the state).¹⁶ Herder's *Sculpture* is more radical in locating judgement within a dynamic economy of the senses in which the privileging of sight associated with painting is discrowned by being subordinated to touch. This functions as the organising centre for an economy of the senses in which society, rather than being 'ordered as if on a visual surface by a superior eye', is produced as citizens form themselves into an object for their own contemplation through their relations to sculpture in what Jason Greiger, in his introduction to Herder's text, describes as a combination of 'spatial seeing and an anamnesis of touch'.¹⁷ Judgement here, then, is a formative activity – 'a reflective process of self-sculpting' – breaking with the visual paradigm and its 'corollary of a passive, policed subject'.¹⁸

These, then, are some of the relevant coordinates against which Kant's *Critique of Judgement* needs to be set.¹⁹ Published in 1790, it played a key role in the debates leading to the 1806 reforms which marked the transition from the police to the legal state in view of the place it produced for the aesthetic by inscribing it in a conception of Culture as process of free self-making that is enacted in civil society. Coming after his critiques of pure and practical reason, Kant's account of the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgement articulates the logic that orchestrates the relations between these three faculties as complementary parts of a practice of freedom. As such it completes Kant's alternative to Wolffe's state-centred account of reason as necessarily depending on subsumptive principles for its exercise. Whereas these require that all objects are subsumed under universals, Kant's system is a relational one in which judgement determines the real relations of attraction and negation between objects within the systems, or horizons, of relations that are established by the dispositions of the subject arising from the faculties of knowledge, desire, and feeling. In order to reconcile his account of the faculties with the practice of freedom, Gilles Deleuze argues, Kant sought, in the case of each faculty, to identify a higher form of that faculty so that it might find, in that higher form, the law of its own exercise within itself and thus not be obliged to defer to any external authority. It is, moreover, through this higher form that the subject is placed in charge of the world and the interest of reason is secured. For when, in the case of knowledge, 'the faculty of knowledge finds its own law in itself', it then 'legislates in this way over the objects of knowledge'.²⁰

16 Baumgarten, quoted by Caygill, p. 164.

17 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 185, 16.

18 Herder, pp. 181–2.

19 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. W.S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1987).

20 Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 5.

In the case of the faculty of feeling, however, the higher form of this faculty – aesthetic judgement, the sense of the beautiful – neither legislates over objects nor secures an interest in reason. It cannot do the latter since it is, by definition, disinterested and so is independent of both the speculative interest and the practical interest which motivate, respectively, the faculties of knowledge and desire. It is not legislative since it is, again by definition, always particular ('this rose is beautiful' not 'roses in general are beautiful', since such generalisations imply logical comparisons that are the province of the faculty of knowledge) and so cannot subject a field of objects to its exercise. Powerless to legislate over objects, 'judgement can only be *beautonomous*, that is, it legislates over itself'.²¹ But in doing so it provides a basis for harmonising the exercise of all the faculties. The supposition that aesthetic judgement is universal, and so communicable to all without the intervention of concepts, provides the basis for a common sense based on the free interplay of the faculties in which imagination and the understanding are brought into a free, undetermined accord with one another. Aesthetic judgement, as the higher form of the faculty of feeling, thus provides for the free subjective harmony between the faculties that is necessary if the other faculties are to perform the legislative roles that Kant assigns them.

As is well known, for Kant, the higher faculty of feeling is split into two forms: the sense of beauty that is experienced in relation to works of art, and the sense of the sublime that is experienced in relation to nature. Deleuze, glossing this division and Kant's higher estimation of the sublime, notes Kant's dictum that 'he who leaves a museum to turn towards the beauties of nature deserves respect'.²² However, at this point, with the liberal subject of aesthetic judgement now almost fully assembled and, when translated to the English context, ready to set off to either the Lake District or to the nearest art gallery, I want to backtrack to consider the earlier history of the relations between the notions of disinterestedness, aesthetic judgement and freedom that were associated with the practices of civic humanism and eighteenth-century discourses of taste. For this will help to clarify how Kant deployed aspects of these traditions to undermine Wolff's system and how, in the process, he transformed them.

Uselessness, aesthetics and social ordering

The general context for the eighteenth-century concern with the relations between taste and social ordering is provided by the need, post-1688, to

21 Deleuze, p. 48.

22 Deleuze, p. 56.

reconfigure the relations between state and civil society. There are a number of considerations to be factored in here: the (relatively) unfettered growth of market society and, as a part of this, the undermining of feudal status and power hierarchies and the declining influence of sumptuary codes as a way of prescribing and publicly marking social distinctions; the continuing potential, in the aftermath of the Civil War, for sectarian religious divisions to produce turbulent social division; and the reduced power of sovereignty given the reduced authority of the monarchy and the continued potency of territorial divisions within the nation in spite (or because) of the enforcement of political unity on England, Scotland and Wales. If these are the factors that Paul Guyer singles out for attention, Mary Poovey adds the collapse, by 1688, of William Petty's project of political arithmetic that had aimed to substitute a programme of 'government through information' for sovereignty by proposing a rational classification of population by means of economic function as a grid for social ordering that would displace the social disordering of religious factionalism.²³ For the failure of this meant that, unlike their continental counterparts, social theorists in Britain were unable to look to the bureaucratic procedures of *polizeiwissenschaften* to provide a mechanism of social ordering and looked, instead, to taste, as a mechanism that might emerge out of the free activities of individuals in their capacity as consumers.

The variety of positions that were staked out in the context of the eighteenth-century debates over taste is too wide to be fully reviewed here. Instead, I shall focus on two figures – the Earl of Shaftesbury and Adam Smith – to trace the formation of two aspects of the eighteenth-century discourse of aesthetics that bear significantly on its later assemblage into technologies of liberal governance. The first concerns the influence of Shaftesbury's conception of the role of aesthetic judgement in opening up a new space within the self – a space of self-inspection and self-reform – whose uneven distribution becomes one of the main means of marking the frontiers of liberal government. The second concerns how the notion of disinterestedness is reworked from its

23 Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 57; Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998). See also Mary Poovey, 'The Social Constitution of "Class": Toward a History of Classificatory Thinking', in Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, eds, *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 15–56. By defining every individual in terms of his relation to production, Petty's political arithmetic, developed initially in connection with the tasks of colonial government in Ireland, meant that every individual could be measured according to the same universal equivalent by which the productivity of land was measured. This produced a ground on which the Irish and English could become like one another, as instances of *homo economicus*, with religious preference, culture, language, and political affiliation, becoming no more than 'Perversions of Humour'.

association, within the culture of civic humanism, with the independence of the landed gentry into the ‘purposiveness without purpose’ of the Kantian conception of aesthetic appreciation as an end in itself, and the role this plays in Kant’s conception of self governance as a practice of freedom.

I begin with Shaftesbury in view of his location at the junction of two traditions. First, Caygill tells us, he is heir to the critique of Hobbes by the seventeenth-century natural rights theorist Cumberland who, in contrast to the tradition that leads from Hobbes via Pufendorf to the police state, disputes the ordering power of sovereignty by seeing civil society as being like a work of art: regular and proportional in its functioning and constitution, but without having been legislated or produced by any political authority, testifying, instead, to the ‘invisible hand’ of a divine providence. Second, Josef Chytry traces his relationship to the Florentine tradition of civic humanism and thence to the neo-Roman conception of freedom.²⁴ According to this view, it is the duty of government to secure the conditions for freedom by providing the political institutions in which citizens can take part in civic affairs free from those relations of dependency on or servitude to others that will topple them from virtue by making them susceptible to corruption or intimidation by others.²⁵

This Florentine legacy was reworked in the context of Shaftesbury’s concern, in the post 1688 ‘Whig settlement’, to define and shape the norms of gentlemanly culture as codes of politeness conceived, according to Lawrence Klein, as an interactive conversational practice that served both to mark out distinctions within the body politic and to distribute authority in new ways in a society that that was post-courtly, post-godly, pre-professional and pre-meritocratic.²⁶ By constructing an intersubjective domain through the exchange of feelings and opinions via discourse on the arts and letters, the culture of politeness assumed differences of opinion while also operating as a mechanism for coordinating and reconciling those differences, allowing the self to be formed in dialogic relations with others. In its more demotic versions, this culture was connected to the declining influence of the court and church and to the rise of the new forms of urbanism associated with the development of the West End and of spa cities with their network of institutions (coffee houses, clubs, gardens, promenades, and theatres) which organised new forms of sociability between elements of the aristocracy, the landed gentry, and mercantile and business interests. In such contexts the ‘paradigm of politeness offered an alternative to

24 Josef Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1989).

25 Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume 2: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

26 Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

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the reliance on traditional authoritative institutions for ordering the discursive world, because it sought processes within the babble, diversity, and liberty of the new discursive world of the Town that would produce order and direction'.²⁷ The model for Shaftesbury's conception of conversational practice was a more limited one related closely to the position of the Whig gentry. Its ideal form, Klein argues, was that of gentlemen conversing in a coach in a country house park. Here politeness had little to do with the multiple-stranded dialogism of town life but operated, instead, as a counter to the impolite and authoritarian practices of clerics and virtuosi.

However, it also operated as a counter to the Hobbesian account of sovereignty and its role in the production of social and political order. For Shaftesbury, polite discourse on the beautiful was to provide a basis for political authority and social order that depended neither on divine right nor on Hobbesian might but one which aimed, rather, for the governed to be 'all sharers (though at so far a distance from each other) in the government of themselves'.²⁸ Polite discourse about questions of taste and judgement was to be translated into an inner mechanism of self-governance through the surgical splitting of the self that Shaftesbury effected by translating the dialogical aspects of sociable conversation into a means through which the self conducts a dialogue with, and regulates, itself by bringing its many parts into harmony. Shaftesbury proposes, as a model for this splitting of the self, the dramatic soliloquy through which the character 'carries on the business of self-dissection' via an inner conversation with absent others, thereby becoming 'two distinct persons ... pupil and preceptor' so that he is thereby able to both teach and learn at the same time: a model of self-governance achieved through the mechanism of conversation.²⁹

This turns out, however, to be the adjustment of the individual to an already-ordered order. Although a strong opponent of the church, Shaftesbury believed in a divinely ordered cosmos governed by principles of mathematical proportion which the individual could come to apprehend directly and freely (rather than through the mediation of a priesthood) through the practice of aesthetic judgement conceived as a disinterested contemplation of the mathematical proportion that governed the orders of beauty. 'For Shaftesbury, then,' as Poovey summarises the position, 'human subjectivity – the ground of the liberal governmentality – was formed in the image of mathematical order, and thus was

27 Klein, pp. 11–12.

28 Shaftesbury, quoted by Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarisation of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), p. 5.

29 Quoted by Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, p. 178.

naturally attracted to it. Society could be orderly ... because individuals ... wanted nothing more than to actualise the order they perceived in themselves.³⁰

There are a number of aspects to the role that disinterestedness plays in Shaftesbury's aesthetic. The aspect Poovey refers to here concerns Shaftesbury's importation into aesthetic debate of the principles of disinterested observation associated with the role of 'reliable witnesses' in establishing the truth claims of the empirical sciences.³¹ A second aspect refers to his severance of aesthetic pleasure from possession or ownership (although, as Guyer shows, not from all forms of utility) as a necessary condition for aesthetic judgement to be formed through conversational practice.³² The most significant aspect, however, is, in common with the culture of civic humanism more generally, his limitation of the capacity for disinterestedness to those (i) whose possession of landed property freed them from dependence on others, (ii) who are entitled to bear arms, and (iii) whose liberal occupations gave them the time and intellectual capacity to have a care for the public weal free of self-interest.³³ This excluded 'rustics', 'plain artisans and people of lower rank', and those in mechanical occupations whose all-consuming and routine nature afforded neither the time nor the capacity for disinterested contemplation of either art or the affairs of state.³⁴ Paulson summarises the social and political logic of the position as follows:

In this way, in these terms, he invented and defined modern aesthetics. But if he replaced the deity with Beauty, he also shifted attention from God the governor (if not creator) to the men who can perceive and judge for themselves. In the same way, Shaftesbury the Whig (grandson of the great first earl) replaced a king and his priests with an oligarchy of nobles. ... In terms of aesthetics, the civic humanist discourse that he expounded turned attention from the maker, the painter or the architect, to the men of taste, the connoisseurs, and the collectors. Shaftesbury's politics and aesthetics join in his concept of disinterestedness: as a property owner, the civic humanist is above considerations of ambition, possession, consumption, and desire, and therefore is capable of a 'rational and refined' contemplation of both morality and beauty – capable of both governing men and judging art.³⁵

30 Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, p. 179.

31 Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

32 Guyer, pp. 110–11.

33 John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

34 Quoted by Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 7.

35 Paulson, pp. 4–5.

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Unsurprisingly this conception of disinterestedness was roundly criticised as both a creature and cover for the interests of the landed faction: Hogarth satirises it when he notes that ‘it has ever been observ’d at all auctions of pictures, that the very worst painters sit as the most profound judges, and are trusted, I suppose, on account of their *disinterestedness*’.³⁶ This and similar criticisms provide a template for what has been and remains, in the work of Bourdieu and the literature it has inspired, a criticism of the disinterestedness of the aesthetic as a mask for special interests, legitimating and perpetuating divisions of wealth and distinction.³⁷ However, I want here to take a different tack by drawing on Jacques Rancière’s approach to the aesthetic as a system for the distribution of the sensible which operates, he argues, less to legitimate inequalities than to produce and mark a political division: an unequal distribution of political and civic entitlements according to which only those whose position allows them to become judges of art are able to take part in government as both governors and governed.³⁸ For it is this aspect of the history of the social inscription of aesthetic discourse that is centrally relevant to the relations between aesthetics and liberal government in view of its role in producing a position in political space which confers on those who can exercise command over and control of the self the capacity to direct the conduct of others.

Shaftesbury’s account, in the *Characteristics*, of the organisation of a space for dialogue within the self that he models on the soliloquy has proved particularly important here as a mechanism which proved to be detachable from its particular anchorage in the landed gentry in Shaftesbury’s work to form a part of more expansive conceptions of liberal government while simultaneously marking the frontiers – of class, gender, and race – beyond which it could not be extended. As Vivienne Brown and others have noted, however, Shaftesbury frequently mixed his metaphors, often switching from the auditory associations of the soliloquy to the auditory/spectatorial imagery of ‘a vocal looking glass’ to describe how the self is split into two so that it might monitor and act on itself.³⁹ And there are places where the soliloquy is

36 William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press/Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, 1997), p. 19.

37 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). There is not space here to assess the strengths and limitations of this tradition; however, for an assessment of the one-sided nature of Bourdieu’s account of the social inscription of aesthetic discourses, see Tony Bennett, ‘Habitus Clivé: Aesthetics and Politics in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu’, *New Literary History* 38, 1 (2007), pp. 201–28.

38 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

39 Vivienne Brown, *Adam Smith’s Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce and Conscience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) and ‘Dialogism, the Gaze, and the Emergence of Economic Discourse’, *New Literary History* 28 (1997), pp. 697–710.

described exclusively in spectatorial terms, as men become regular spectators of themselves in order to be governors of themselves:

And, what was of singular note in these *magical Glasses*; it wou'd happen that, by constant and long Inspection, the Partys accustom'd to the Practice, wou'd acquire a peculiar *speculative Habit*; so as virtually to carry about with 'em a sort of Pocket-Mirrou, always ready, and in use.⁴⁰

It is this mechanism, primarily in its spectatorial form, but still with traces of the auditory associations of the soliloquy, that Adam Smith develops in his account of 'the man within' in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Working through norms of reciprocity – of the mutual mirroring of the views of others – that Smith derives from Hume's account of natural sympathy, this inner mechanism of self-inspection accounts for how men become governors of themselves:

We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. If, upon placing ourselves in his situation, we thoroughly enter into all the passions and motives which influenced it, we approve of it, by sympathy with the approbation of this supposed equitable judge. If otherwise, we enter into his disapprobation, and condemn it.⁴¹

The invocation of natural sympathy here transforms the functioning of this specular mechanism. In Shaftesbury's account of the aesthetic, judgement, while shaped by the subject's conversational interlocutors, is ultimately validated by the belief, as Howard Caygill summarises it, (i) that there is a providence which disposes of all things into (ii) a beautiful order which (iii) gives to human beings the capacity to recognise and act in accordance with that order, which (iv) thus ensures a harmonious ordering of individual judgements and the general good without the need for state intervention.⁴² By contrast, Vivienne Brown argues, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* 'truly moral outcomes are open; they are not rule-bound or obligatory but are the result of an open process of debate between the moral agent and the impartial spectator, in which the final outcome is neither predetermined nor legislated upon by a theological determinism'.⁴³ Here, before the 'invisible hand' of *The Wealth of Nations*, the catoptric production of the unity of the manifold through a Hobbesian act of sovereignty is replaced by the emergence of order through the reciprocal

40 Shaftesbury quoted by Klein, p. 117.

41 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 128–9.

42 Caygill, p. 46.

43 Brown, *Adam Smith's Discourse*, p. 64.

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adjustments of conduct arising from the ‘sideways glances’ that are produced by the system of mirrors through which the members of civil society view their own conduct through the eyes of others.⁴⁴

However, as with Shaftesbury, this ‘specular morality’ is reserved for those whose station in life equips them with the capacity to acquire it. Smith does not consider women as possible candidates for this role, and he discounts both savages and the mob, albeit on different grounds. The savage, he contends, is driven by the harsh exigencies of necessity to exercise a Spartan discipline which affords neither the time nor the space to give or expect sympathy from those around him.⁴⁵ His, then, is an iron-like self-command driven entirely by need. The mob, who, like Shaftesbury, Smith represents as still being dazzled by spectacle, are to be governed by leading them to obey sound moral codes routinely via the mechanism of habit rather than that of self-conscious assent acquired through the mechanism of ‘specular morality’. However, Smith is also clear that, even among the higher social classes, the capacity for an inner-directed specular morality is only available to ‘a select, though, I am afraid but small party’ whose capacity for ‘studious and careful’ observation allows them to discern that the path of the wise and virtuous is ‘more exquisitely beautiful in its outline’ and more worthy of emulation than is the ‘gaudy and glittering’ model of wealth and power that impresses itself ‘upon the notice of every wandering eye’.⁴⁶ This appeal to aesthetic criteria as a means of sifting those who are most fully capable of exercising self-government, and thus the most qualified to be responsible for the government of others, echoes Smith’s earlier appeal to the perfection embodied in works of art as a means of calibrating the degree to which individuals meet or fall short of the standards of self-command that good governance requires.⁴⁷

Cultural assemblages of freedom and government

However, enough said: I have, since leaving Kant, tried to sketch in some of the elements of aesthetic discourse that were developed in eighteenth-century British debates about aesthetics which, as I showed earlier, Kant later re-configured into a new set of articulations of the relations between freedom, aesthetic judgement and government. A proper account of these

44 Catoptric vision refers to a device invented by the Mersenne circle which obviated the need for the spectator to change position in order to decipher anamorphic works of art. It served Hobbes as a means of visualising the production of political order from the single and unchanging position of sovereignty (Caygill, pp. 19–25).

45 Smith, pp. 239–43.

46 Smith, p. 73.

47 Smith, p. 32.

developments would, however, clearly need a more meticulous treatment of the ways in which such conceptions of aesthetic culture were shaped by, and as a part of, the development of new material assemblages of cultural governance in which it was precisely by being set apart from the social that aesthetic culture was rendered useful as a means of acting on it governmentally.⁴⁸ Such an account, the principles of which I have sketched elsewhere, would focus on the material, technical and institutional processes through which aesthetic culture was made tangible, visible and performable in new settings (museums, art museums, concert halls, libraries, literary and scientific associations) which assembled texts, artefacts, techniques, and persons in new relations to each other.⁴⁹ In the process, it was also made actionable in new ways as, in being disconnected from the networks in which aesthetic practices had earlier been inscribed (principally, in Britain, those that had bound the landed gentry together in the culture of civic humanism), they were made available for new forms of action on the social through the institutions in which they were newly assembled together. An example is the development of the public art gallery as a means for extending the reach of *Bildung* beyond the ethical training of state bureaucrats and the private cultivation of the bourgeois, to translate it into a programme of public education through which the governed were to be drawn into orbit of the practices of self-government it promulgated.⁵⁰ And another example, to return to my point of departure, consists in the relations between literature and liberation that Graham Martin urged criticism to augment, relations which, as I have argued, do not have a purely abstract immaterial form but are rather inscribed within specific governmental assemblages – those of, in Martin's case, the distinctive intellectual formation of 'English' in which aesthetic culture was cast in a distinctively communitarian form.⁵¹

48 This is, in spirit, an enterprise similar to that of Martha Woodmansee who notes that 'those who make an occupation of aesthetics tend to deny the history of their own subject' by recounting the history of aesthetics in the form of a 'tradition of great minds speaking with one another' over and above the specific historical circumstances that connect specific conceptions of the aesthetic to particular circumstances of cultural production and consumption. She thus notes, of Terry Eagleton's would-be historicisation of the aesthetic, that he 'takes the same "high priori" road' as that of philosopher-historians, 'selecting for comment the ideas of a few giants arranged chronologically' matter': Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 7.

49 See Tony Bennett, 'Civic Laboratories: Museums, Cultural Objecthood, and the Governance of the Social', *Cultural Studies* 19, 5 (2005), pp. 521–47, and 'The Work of Culture', *Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1, 1 (2007), pp. 31–48.

50 I draw here on the discussion of these three aspects of *Bildung* in R. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

51 James English, 'Literary Studies', in Tony Bennett and John Frow, eds, *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2008), pp. 126–44.

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To place aesthetics, government and freedom alongside each other in these ways is, though, likely to strike a discordant note among those who think of freedom as something pure and unalloyed, arising from sources located outside the sphere of governmental practices. Indeed, aesthetics itself is frequently identified as such a locus for freedom – as an outside to governmentality, a realm of pure freedom, and a source for critique. Foucault's account of the relationship between the Enlightenment and aesthetic culture and his conception of the 'aesthetics of existence' might, indeed, seem to point in this direction.⁵² I believe, however, that this would be mistaken. This is not, though, to discount the 'freedom effects' of the relations between aesthetics, government and freedom that I have described. If we go back to the WEA students Jonathan Rose discusses, their testimony provides clear evidence of the ways in which 'ordinary people' have latched on to the forms of art and culture that are disseminated via public provision and used them as resources to help craft a life for themselves. And this, I think, is what Foucault had in mind in his concept of 'the aesthetics of existence' – a concept in which the qualities Kant attributes only to those works of art which are the product of genius are extended to something that everyone can do in their daily lives: 'the creation of a style of life,' as Thomas Osborn puts it, 'without recourse to the fixity of moral codes on the one hand, or of epistemological guarantees on the other'.⁵³ If this identifies an extended role that a criticism for our time might play by placing itself within the relations between 'literature' and 'liberation', it is a role that emerges from a particular, historically-forged set of connections between modern assemblages of culture and the practices of liberal government; and it is a role that can only be played by recognising that the creation of a style of life poised between the fixity of moral codes and epistemological guarantees is a particular set of competencies and aptitudes that need to be cultivated and trained and not an autochthonous attribute of the human subject. To paraphrase Foucault, it is a style of life which enunciates the demand not that we should not be governed but that we should not be governed like that – whatever 'that' might happen to be. It is in this way that the historical nexus of the relations between aesthetics, government and freedom inscribes a certain endemic tension within the mechanisms of liberal government.

52 Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

53 Thomas Osborn, *Aspects of Enlightenment: Social Theory and the Ethics of Truth* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

Which Cosmopolitanism? Neoliberalism, the Society of the Spectacle and Democratic Citizenship

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If the history of twentieth-century Europe could be written as a struggle between capitalism and socialism, then with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 few were in any doubt as to who had won. The socialist dream of an egalitarian and work-based society had, it seemed, foundered upon the rocks of authoritarian, state-managed societies. However the triumphalist liberalism that greeted the end of Eastern European socialism with ideas of ‘the end of history’ has since had to be revised. If the idea of a peaceful, planetary liberal democracy always seemed an impossible dream, given the ecological damage, inequality and general human misery that it requires, then some have recently been proposing more cosmopolitan versions of this vision. There is a recognised need for global solutions to global problems. Issues of environmental degradation, global poverty, refugee crises and other features can only be faced in the context of post-national versions of citizenship. Proponents of a new cosmopolitan age argue that citizens need to break with the hegemony of the nation state so that democracy can find new levels of expression. Yet if this view has its roots in the last decade of the twentieth century, after 9/11 and the war in Iraq such ideas already seem to be wearing thin. The idea of building new democratic global institutions is currently unlikely in the context of American exceptionalism. If the United States is the global player insisting upon human rights, international law and democracy it is also responsible for Abu Graib, Guantánamo Bay, extraordinary rendition, ‘regime change’ and the disastrous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In this context cosmopolitanism offers the possibility of critique in the context of complex global societies. The idea of the cosmopolitan joins together a notion of global citizenship with the need to live with the ‘Other’. Further cosmopolitanism should be as alive to neoliberalism as to the promotion of pure or separatist identities. However there exist many different tendencies within cosmopolitan thinking. This discussion aims to outline what cosmopolitanism might mean in the European setting. In this respect, I shall explore the ways in which this rich vein of thinking might be reinvented and applied to some of the practical problems of the present. As we shall see, the cosmopolitan projects of the past have been most effective when they have sought to offer alternative possible worlds, rather than unrealistic utopias. There is a need for cosmopolitan arguments and imaginings to come down to earth and connect with democratic possibilities. Here my argument is that, whatever the rightness of cosmopolitan political

sensibilities, they are unlikely to get very far without a substantial revival in the fortunes of democratic citizenship.

European cosmopolitan worlds

Historically, the idea of cosmopolitanism can be traced back to the Stoics (third century BC). According to the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, cosmopolitanism in its various guises involves the idea that we have obligations to others beyond those we would normally meet in face-to-face relations, and that to value human lives means to take an interest in the practices that make them meaningful.¹ There may of course be times when attempts to be citizens of the world while valuing difference come into conflict; but we become cosmopolitan through the attempt to deal with this challenge.

For Kant the idea of a cosmopolitan order assumes the need to build a confederation of states that have renounced violence and are governed by the rule of law.² In Kant's vision a cosmopolitan order is required to restrain the tendency of states to go to war. Kant formulated a notion of cosmopolitan rule that aimed to quell inter-state violence. Hannah Arendt's cosmopolitan vision was inspired by that of Kant. Arendt writes:

Antisemitism (not merely the hatred of the Jews), imperialism (not merely conquest), totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship) – one after the other, one more brutally than the other, have demonstrated that human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth.³

Arendt's cosmopolitanism was formulated in the context of international law and the Nuremberg charter.⁴ This introduced the idea of 'crimes against humanity', which Arendt supported. Such a notion is built upon the idea that individuals can be held accountable for their actions irrespective of the laws of their own state. Arendt explored these features in her famous book on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi functionary who claimed in his defence

1 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. xv.

2 Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch' (1795), in H.S. Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (1st edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 104.

3 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1986), p. xi.

4 Robert Fine, 'Taking the Ism Out of Cosmopolitanism', *European Journal of Social Theory* 6, 4 (2003), pp. 451–4.

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that he was simply following orders.⁵ The cosmopolitan principle at work here is that each of us is responsible for the other, and that this responsibility cannot be contained within the borders of the nation-state. The prospect of being a global citizen or cosmopolitan then depend upon the development of international law, respect for human diversity and the capacity of individuals to be responsible. For the cosmopolitan, the crimes of ‘the final solution’ were not only a crime against the Jews but an attack upon humanity. More specifically, Arendt was particularly concerned to stress that cosmopolitan responsibilities should not rely upon human goodness, but be placed in the hands of institutions that guarantee equal rights. Part of Arendt’s reasoning comes from her recognition that Eichmann was an ordinary man who did not lack a sense of morality or duty. The only sure way to guard against crimes against humanity was to integrate the masses into republics based upon rights and the rule of law, in which people were motivated by a public morality.⁶

The ideals of a universal cosmopolitanism were quickly displaced by the beginning of the Cold War. Such ideas were unlikely to take root in a world that was divided between the logics of two destructive superpowers. However it is mistaken to think that the cosmopolitan ideal only re-emerged after the end of the Cold War. Elsewhere I have argued that European peace movements CND and END struggled to dismantle the bloc system through the promotion of intellectual and cultural exchange. Here the fear was that the Cold War promoted an atmosphere of paranoia and hostility with democracy as the main casualty.⁷ Mary Kaldor similarly recognises the importance of European peace initiatives in the development of militarism and dismantle the oppositions East and West, in favour of an emphasis on human interconnectedness.⁸

If many of these arguments have a direct bearing upon the idea of cosmopolitan thought today, they also need to be extended. With the end of the Cold War, many have argued that the time is now right to reinvent cosmopolitanism for our own times. Due to the intensification of economic, political and cultural globalisation the world after the Cold War is more easily understood as a web of global interdependences. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the interconnection of global societies has rapidly expanded our moral responsibilities.⁹ This has meant that in our time the distinction between direct responsibility for killing and killing through neglect becomes increasingly

5 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 90–97.

6 Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 183–5.

7 Nick Stevenson, ‘Cosmopolitanism and the Future of Democracy: Politics, Culture and the Self’, *New Political Economy* 7, 2 (2002), pp. 253–5.

8 Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: an Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 76.

9 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 101.

questionable. If Arendt focused upon the responsibilities we all share in respect of our actions, then current indifference to the fragile ecological balance and human misery of poverty, would equally seem to be matters for concern. The United Nations reports that there has been an increase of 25 million chronically undernourished people since 1996, leaving a total of 850 million people globally without enough to eat. The ecological footprint of wealthy societies is likely to have a hazardous impact upon their own as well as poorer nations. Cosmopolitanism in our own time would need continually to remind us of the ways in which we are historically, culturally and morally interconnected, while also offering a form of politics that seeks to accommodate questions of difference.

Ulrich Beck has recently sought to rethink the very basis of the social sciences along these lines.¹⁰ Here Beck outlines what a genuinely critical theory might come to mean in the twenty-first century. Cosmopolitanism aims to return the social sciences to 'real world' concerns after the evasions of postmodernism. In this the cosmopolitan viewpoint holds that the social sciences need to dispense with the limitations of methodological nationalism by adopting more complex and genuinely global perspectives. Rejecting the idea that globalisation can be understood in purely economic terms, cosmopolitanism aims to help us appreciate the multidimensional nature of current social transformations. Global interconnection is not something that happens outside the nation-state: on the contrary, it manifests itself locally, within and across national boundaries. From the intensification of cultural intermixing to the development of global social movements, and from the emergence of the global ecological crisis to the movement of refugees, we have gone beyond a world of national frontiers.

According to Beck and Sznaider, cosmopolitanism 'should be chiefly conceived of as globalization from within, as internalized cosmopolitanism'.¹¹ What is genuinely 'new' in this situation is not necessarily cultural intermixing and global interdependence, but an 'awareness' of these features through the formation of something like a global public sphere. If methodological nationalism remains preoccupied with what is distinctive about each nation, cosmopolitanism helps us appreciate ways in which the globe is experiencing new levels of interconnection and intercultural dialogue.¹² If there is indeed a growing awareness that we exist in a network of responsibilities, then equally it would seem we need to move our horizons from the national to a greater appreciation of more global uncertainties. As Beck defines it, resistance to

10 Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), pp. 17–47.

11 Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider, 'Unpacking Cosmopolitanism for the Social Sciences: a Research Agenda', *The British Journal of Sociology* 57, 1 (2006), p. 9.

12 Beck, p. 21.

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these initiatives may come from an unwillingness to abandon 'the nation' as the domain of our thinking for the admittedly less certain project of trying to understand an increasingly uncertain global world.

For Beck and Sznaider the dimensions of fact and value are bridged through the development of what they call 'cosmopolitan common sense', as much of humanity is ready to uphold a minimum set of universal norms, such as freedom from torture, enslavement and religious intolerance.¹³ Politically the need to foster global institutions around shared norms can be developed in a number of ways. The cosmopolitan project will inevitably come up against concerns about Eurocentrism and an inability to think from positions that are not exclusively Western. Here the cosmopolitan ideal loses its ability to take questions of difference seriously and becomes a form of global liberalism. We need to unpack some of these features.

Global cosmopolitanism as Eurocentrism?

The question that needs to be considered here is that, if cosmopolitan ideals emerged in Europe, how fit are they for global application? Could the cosmopolitanism be accused of inventing a new and more benign form of colonialism which seeks to subjugate other values and experiences under the sign of Western universalism? This is potentially not merely an intellectual problem but also connects to the ways in which alternatives are articulated in the current global order. Within cosmopolitan thought David Held has sought to develop a more overtly political attempt to imagine the explicit dimensions of a global political alternative.¹⁴ Crucially this would involve the building of multilateral institutions at the global level, condemnation of human rights violations wherever they occur, and progressive reversal of the polarisation of income and power between rich and poor. For Held such an agenda would need to convince powerful nations like the United States of the desirability of acting in concert with others, finding an alternative to global terrorism in the building of legitimate public institutions. In the context of the crisis in Iraq, the development of such global institutions would require new agreed-upon rules for 'humanitarian intervention', a reformed and democratised United Nations, and a shift from the 'right to intervene' into a 'duty to protect'. These new global rules need to operate independently of the interests of particular nation-states and be connected to a 'global covenant' that sought to link human rights and social and environmental justice. What Held has in mind here are rules and

13 Beck and Sznaider, p. 19.

14 David Held, *Global Covenant: the Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 151.

procedures that would regulate such matters as environmental degradation, child labour and trade union rights, thereby providing a consensual backdrop to the operation of global trade and finance.

In Held's reckoning, such a globally-orientated politics would provide an alternative to the naïve localism of the anti-globalisation movement, while articulating a distinctive political agenda. David Held's arguments amount to nothing less than a passionate plea for a global social democracy. For Held the idea of Europe has an important role to play in the formation of such a project, given that it is the historical home of social democracy and has successfully constructed peaceful relations between and beyond nation-states. For Held Europe's role should be to seek to develop a world of genuinely global multilateral institutions and not seek to develop an anti-United States coalition.

Ulrich Beck also argues that a reformed United Nations is required to stand up to the dominance of the United States.¹⁵ Indeed, should we fail in such a venture, Beck reasons that the United States is likely further to betray its own values. Like Held, Beck argues that Europeans are uniquely placed to develop cosmopolitan institutions because of their own unique historical position. As we noted earlier, the idea of 'crimes against humanity' was born in the context of European history. A genuinely cosmopolitan Europe sought to develop legal norms and democratic procedures to tame the barbarism of the past. There is widespread agreement within cosmopolitan perspectives that the primary aim is to break with the hegemony of perspectives centred on the nation state, and to develop a set of institutions to democratise the global order. It is noticeable, however, that such views are built upon particular readings of European history that seeks to universalise the European experience. Hardt and Negri for example point out the irony that proposals for a global parliament would make the world's power structure increasingly like that of the United States, but that the United States' current policies of exceptionalism and unilateralism are also most likely to undermine moves in this direction.¹⁶

There are then two different kinds of objections to the kind of cosmopolitan initiatives offered by David Held and Ulrich Beck. First, such ideas are impractical in the current age of imperial dominance, and that they are deeply Eurocentric. Second, the development of a global polity is an ideal that took root after the fall of the Berlin wall and has effectively been silenced by the events of 9/11. The Bush government's 'war on terrorism' and the development of Islamic fundamentalism now make cosmopolitan initiatives seem naïve and practically unworkable. The development of unilateral responses on the part of the Bush government and refusal to cooperate on global climate change treaties or the

15 Beck, p. 134.

16 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 316–20.

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development of international criminal courts suggest that the cosmopolitan ideal could disappear just as quickly as it did after the end of the Second World War. Further, as Chantal Mouffe argues, the consequence of attempting to integrate the world into a unified model of liberal democracy would not only increase the power of the West, but would potentially foster rather than detract from antagonism.¹⁷ While Mouffe does not elaborate this point, it is indeed notable that Held does not really address questions such as Eurocentrism or issues of cultural domination more generally. A reconstructed cosmopolitan approach to modernity would need to accept that there are plural modernities that do not discount universal human rights, but that they cannot simply be seen as a universal good. Mouffe indicates that the meaning of 'human rights' cannot be decided outside the contours of hegemonic struggle and political forms of antagonism. Instead of a reformed United Nations seeking to impose a universal order upon global antagonisms, Mouffe offers the idea of an increasingly multipolar world.

This view would argue that there are indeed multiple globalisations that cannot be contained within ideas of the West and the rest. Such a world is likely to be made up of large regional units (Latin America, Africa, Europe, China, the United States, etc.) which articulate different political rationalities and citizenships. This cancels the idea of the European project as the basis for a future global cosmopolitan polity, but does not necessarily cancel the need to develop a specifically European cosmopolitan citizenship. Such considerations do not necessarily contradict the attempt to build cosmopolitan or global forms of governance, but is sceptical about moves towards world government or global federalism.¹⁸

The establishment of a multipolar world requires a different form of politics that would challenge the dominance of the United States. Indeed the cosmopolitan model presented thus far seriously underestimates the dominance of neoliberal forms of globalisation. If the cosmopolitan view tends to read the end of the Cold War as offering political possibilities for fostering universal cosmopolitan norms, it fails to appreciate the decline of the divide within Europe which ultimately led to the victory of capitalism over state socialism. Following Chantal Mouffe, cosmopolitans should give up the idea that the aim is to impose a single liberal model upon the rest of the world.¹⁹ Indeed the development of a more multipolar world would actually require Europeans to go further than they have thus far in seeking to develop

17 Chantal Mouffe, *The Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 97–106.

18 The Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) is equally sceptical of such arguments.

19 Chantal Mouffe, 'Schmitt's Vision of a Multipolar World Order', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, 4 (2005), p. 246.

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specific alternatives to neoliberalism. Demands for a cosmopolitan peace are probably better served through a global balance of powers rather than United Nations reform. As Tzvetan Todorov comments, it is unlikely that the United Nations could ever ensure justice, given that the necessary force belongs to individual states.²⁰ We still live in a world where the dominant military powers are nation-states or alliances between nation-states. Hence my argument is less for a construction of a global cosmopolitan order, but more for Europeans to defend their social and political values in a multipolar world. This will require the concerted defence of the so-called ‘European model’ that is currently under threat from neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitan critique has thus far failed adequately to account for the development of neoliberal forms of globalisation. Since the 1980s the growing of neoliberal policies has meant enhanced processes of deregulation, privatisation and an ideology of the lean state. The impact of neoliberalism is currently underestimated in much cosmopolitan thinking. In particular, given the emphasis that cosmopolitanism places upon the pluralisation of the cultural domain, I want to argue that it displaces the extent to which the economic can be said to have colonised cultural and political life, replaying earlier debates in globalisation literature between homogenisation and cultural difference. Commodification strategies can lead either to the spread of cultural difference or homogenization; but the key point here is the way in which public forms of culture become increasingly subject to the discipline of the market.

In David Harvey’s terms, neoliberalism can be seen as an attempt to restore the power of the capitalist ruling-classes after the breakdown of social democracy.²¹ Neoliberalism has resulted in increased social inequality, the development of an entrepreneurial culture, and blaming the working-class for lacking the necessary competitive strength in cut-throat markets. Neoliberalism’s ‘success’ is measured by its defenders for its ability to undermine the solidarity of oppositional organisations like trade unions, for the privatisation of public resources, the reduction of taxes and the fostering of a climate favourable for business. Andre Gorz argues that ‘new style’ European social democracy has had increasingly to adapt itself to the ‘reality’ of global markets.²² This has led

20 Tzvetan Todorov, *The New World Disorder: Reflections of a European* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 50.

21 David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 25–9.

22 Andre Gorz, *Reclaiming Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 22.

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to social democracy adopting the rhetoric of international competition. These developments have resulted in the distribution of wealth upwards into the board rooms and away from the shop floor. Despite recent talk of a European 'third way' between social democracy and capitalism, the commodification of the public sphere is unlikely to be held in check without a reinvestment in the idea of the social state.²³

The development of monetarism, privatisation along with reduced government spending is transported globally through institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. If the period of European dominance has now passed, the United States has over the course of the twentieth century fostered a new kind of imperial dominance. America became the hegemonic power in a world determined by national struggles for independence and the Cold War. American imperialism is a 'mix of privileged trade relations, patronage, clientelism, and covert coercion'.²⁴ In David Harvey's view, if racism was the ruling ideology of European imperialism, the United States has historically sought to conceal its global ambitions in an abstract universalism. The United States presents itself as the global defender of freedom by defending free markets and private property. The internal image promoted by the United States, and the face it presents to the rest of the world, relies upon it being identified as a promoter of civilised values. There were of course evident contradictions during its period of hegemony, such as the suppression of democratic and populist attempts to promote social democracy in Latin America. However the global strategy of the United States during the Cold War was over-determined by the need to combat the real or imagined influence of the Soviet Union. The American empire was able to do this by supporting the revival of its potential economic competitors through the development of favourable trade relations, financial assistance and multilateral institutions. As Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin comment, 'this was the first empire fully oriented to the making of global capitalism'.²⁵

Since the 1970s a new kind of system has emerged under American control. Under American neoliberal hegemony New York has become the financial centre of the global economy and has become increasingly driven by processes of progressive economic privatisation (or 'accumulation by dispossession').²⁶ While the intellectual roots of neoliberalism can be traced back to the 1930s and 1940s, Harvey argues that these ideas were used to reform capitalist practice

23 Zygmunt Bauman, *Europe: an Unfinished Adventure* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: the Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

24 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 48.

25 Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, 'Superintending Global Capital', *New Left Review* 35 (September/October 2005), p. 112.

26 Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 67.

after the oil crisis in 1973. Accumulation by dispossession works through the forcing open and privatisation of markets, usually through the IMF and WTO. If the over-accumulation of capital leads to a surplus that cannot be profitably invested then privatisation (of land, water, media, telecommunications, homes) enables capital to be put to use. Notably in this analysis the end of the Cold War and the opening up of China has drawn the globe into a genuinely world market. However the sociologist Michael Mann has argued that American power remains more limited than many currently like to believe.²⁷ Mann points both to the unwillingness of the United States (despite Iraq) to occupy foreign nations in the ways exemplified by the Europeans and to the fact that despite their economic dominance they cannot directly force neoliberalism on sovereign states, opening the possibility of national forms of resistance. As Immanuel Wallerstein has argued, the position of the United States as a world power has been substantially weakened by the Iraq war.²⁸ The neo-conservative attempt to reaffirm American honour and hegemony is in ruins. We are on the cusp of increasing multilateral divisions in world power with no one centre maintaining overwhelming superiority.

The arrival of a multi-polar world led Hardt and Negri to argue that our current era cannot be described as imperialist with any intellectual precision.²⁹ If imperialism in the past meant the expansion of the state due to crisis tendencies within capitalism then the current era is better characterised as being governed by the importance of capital and the declining power of nation-states. Instead of a politics of imperialism, Hardt and Negri propose the dominance of a postmodern Empire.³⁰ The global economy has been postmodernised through processes of heterogeneity, deterritorialisation and differentiation in such a way so as to deconstruct any clear contrast between First and Third World. This means that imperial politics is mostly finished, with no nation-state ever likely to be as powerful as European nations at the end of the nineteenth century. Empire is constituted through a power shift to a boundless order existing within a universal space. The decline of the power of the state and the deregulation of nation-states helps constitute a new global order over the civilised zones of the earth. In Hardt and Negri's analysis Empire institutes a new regime of sovereignty whereby the dominant subjects of the world order are continually called upon to impose peace and resolve humanitarian problems.

27 Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 12.

28 Immanuel Wallerstein, 'The Curve of American Power', *New Left Review* 40 (July/August 2006), pp. 77–94.

29 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 133.

30 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 10.

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Hardt and Negri are clear that the rule of Empire not only reconstructs global relations but also institutes what they call a 'society of control'.³¹ Here they extend Foucault's argument in respect of bio-power where subjectivity is constructed through networks of knowledge, communication and language. The identities required by Empire are flexible and mobile, encouraging modern subjects to embrace hybridity and fluidity. There is then a neat correspondence between the ideology of corporate capital and postmodernism. In the society of control, postmodernism is the ideology of the new middle class whereas the losers are increasingly attracted to a vengeful fundamentalism. The postmodern Empire's key organisational mode is the network which becomes increasingly disconnected from specific territories, which weakens the position of labour as capital becomes increasingly global. Further, the development of the modern informational economy introduces 'a new mode of being human'.³² This is not only a consumer-orientated world but one where masses of people become familiar with computer technology. The knowledge economy has no organisational centre (nor can it, given the relative weakness of the state) and produces an uncertain world of insecure employment and technological intervention.

Notably the debates on the idea of a postmodern Empire and the new imperialism share a number of features in common.³³ In certain respects Hardt and Negri provide an important corrective to some of the recent work on imperialism. The problem with David Harvey's otherwise masterful analysis of strategies of privatisation is that he fails to account for the ways in which neoliberalism has sought to reconstruct questions of culture and subjectivity. Yet Hardt and Negri themselves fail to give a convincing account of the ways in which neoliberalism dominates everyday life and discounts the role of the state in capitalist accumulation strategies.³⁴ In this respect, Samir Amin argues that in their rejection of the term imperialism, Hardt and Negri fail to account for the role of state-administered authority in processes of capitalist expansion and accumulation.³⁵ However, despite the attempt to capture the precise nature of neoliberal domination, none of the accounts seemingly deals with specifically cultural questions. Hardt and Negri are correct to the extent to which the cultural system in the postmodern Empire is required to produce flexible, entrepreneurial and communicative labour, but they radically underestimate the importance of the state in organising and giving expression

31 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 23.

32 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 289.

33 Michael Coward offers a contrast between ideas of Empire and imperialism in 'The Globalisation of Enclosure: Interrogating the Geopolitics of Empire', *Third World Quarterly* 26, 6 (2005), pp. 855–71.

34 Samir Amin, *The Liberal Virus* (London: Pluto Press, 2004) pp. 23–7.

35 Amin, p. 23.

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to political identities.³⁶ Network capitalism is able to organize itself on a real-time basis, with the vast majority of its citizens remaining local and dependent on their host state for their rights. It is the task of cosmopolitan politics to empower the state while seeking to emphasise the practice of democracy. However before moving onto these questions we need to map the ways in which neoliberal capitalism has commodified public forms of culture.

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argue that capitalism and culture remain connected through the need to provide people with a moral sense of motivation. It does this principally by incorporating oppositional cultures.³⁷ Capitalism must be made not only profitable but also exciting, innovative and compelling. More specifically, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that modern neoliberal capitalism has sought to incorporate the bohemian artistic critique of capitalism. Reinvented by the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s, as a protest against inauthenticity of the market, this critique argued capitalism required a corporate ethos that was conformist, hierarchical and lacking in spontaneity. This is no longer the case. Capitalism now offers its own form of 'liberation' through increasingly anomic short-term relationships and endless forms of self-transformation. Just as workers are required to be flexible while constantly updating their skills, the consumer is required to be experimental in their new tastes and lifestyles.³⁸ The individualised consumerist self is more concerned with the cultivation of the 'surface' of the self than with taking responsibility for the community or the common good.³⁹ The corporate domination of everyday life does not necessarily impose homogenised lifestyles or work but instead talks the language of liberation. As Thomas Frank argues, modern capitalism increasingly works through the languages of hip consumption that continually offer the possibility of breaking free of the norm.⁴⁰ The development of the knowledge economy and consumer society is therefore responsible for the increasing marginalisation of democratic and civic initiatives.

36 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 23.

37 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005).

38 Pierre Bourdieu, *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 23.

39 Anthony Elliott and Charles Lemert, *The New Individualism: the Emotional Costs of Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2006); Nick Stevenson, 'Audiences and Celebrity', in Jessica Evans and David Hesmondhalgh, eds, *Understanding Media: Inside Celebrity* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005).

40 Thomas Frank, 'Liberation Marketing and the Culture Trust', in E. Barnouw et al., eds, *Conglomerates and the Media* (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 175.

Neoliberalism and the society of the spectacle

Recently there has been a re-emergence of interest in the idea of the society of the spectacle, as a way of understanding the transformation of the public realm. Douglas Kellner argues that media spectacles have become a key organising principle of the dominant capitalist society.⁴¹ Following the earlier work of Debord,⁴² Kellner argues that the society of the spectacle reproduces itself through the promotion of reified images of sensation and scandal. Mary Kaldor has argued that there has emerged a new kind of warfare that should be called spectacle war.⁴³ Spectacle wars use advanced weapon and missile technology in order to maximise impact and minimise the casualties of the host. Spectacle wars have a tendency to be extremely destructive in terms of the loss of life, have a huge media impact, and downplay humanitarian considerations. The spectacle provides the link between new forms of warfare and the arrival of the consumer society.

In Debord's original formulation just as workers are separated from the products of their labour through capitalist social relations, so images take on an autonomous appearance that has little connection with everyday life. The masses consume dramatic images of human misery and suffering that increasingly take on the appearance of unreality. In this respect, the spectacle is not the effect of technology but is the product of a centralised capitalist society that institutes an 'essentially one-way flow of information'.⁴⁴ Such a system of capitalist domination is built upon alienation, as people learn to recognise their needs and desires through the images and commodities offered by the dominant system. Needs and desires then are not arrived at autonomously but through a society of affluence where people are driven to consume images and commodities built upon 'the ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs'.⁴⁵ The society of the spectacle represents the further penetration of capitalism into the psyche of modern citizens. Some forms of critical theory and Marxism have been complicit with the dominance of the spectacle through the imposition of similarly authoritarian modes of struggle and rule. For Debord if the alienation effect of the spectacle is to be defeated then the subjugated would need to revolt against their imposed passivity and their 'purely contemplative role'.⁴⁶ Countering alienation demands a 'theory of praxis entering into two-way communication with practical struggles'.⁴⁷

41 Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 14.

42 See, for example, Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

43 Kaldor, p. 123.

44 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 19.

45 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 33.

46 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 87.

47 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 89.

The other way in which the spectacle dominates the lives of modern citizens is through the elimination of historical knowledge. If the rise of capitalism eclipsed the dominance of the cyclical time systems of the medieval world, then it did so by instituting an irreversible linear time. Ideas of progress that came along with capitalist modernity and calculable time necessary for the production of commodities and the disciplining of labour accompanies the development of spectacular time. Spectacular time prevents the development of historical knowledge by organising information as dramatic media events that are quickly displaced and forgotten. Similarly Frederick Jameson has argued that commodity capitalism has instituted a society that has lost its sense of pastness.⁴⁸ Such features for Debord can only be resisted once 'dialogue has taken up arms to impose its own conditions upon the world'.⁴⁹

Debord's writing can at times be frustrating, given his tendency for gross exaggeration (at one point this includes weather forecasters being involved in a capitalist conspiracy).⁵⁰ However, Debord was perhaps amongst the first to grasp the emerging connections between capitalism, technology and media that became increasingly concentrated upon the spectacular. The reconfiguration of capitalism in the age of information has massively expanded the reach of transnational corporations into the fabric of everyday life. The development of superinformation highways through the digital convergence of the computer, telephone and the television set provide new, profitable markets for the future.⁵¹

For Kellner, updating Debord's original reflections, in the society of the spectacle, fashion, models, celebrities and icons become increasingly important. Culture is increasingly dominated by the power of certain images and brands. The central feature of modern society is not greater cosmopolitan awareness but the dominance of a new form of technocapitalism whereby capital accumulation, the knowledge revolution and new technology have combined to produce a new kind of society. The culture of the spectacle instigates new forms of domination of mass distraction and the continuing expansion of social and cultural domains that fall under its sway from politics to sport and from music to the news media. Today however Kellner argues that we need to distinguish between different kinds of media spectacle. These would include the megaspectacle (large-scale media events attracting mass audiences like the war on terror or the funeral of Princess Diana), interactive spectacles (different

48 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 19.

49 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p. 154.

50 Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 17.

51 Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (New York: New Press, 2000) and Dan Schiller, *Digital Capitalism* (London: The MIT Press, 2000).

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levels of audience participation, like eviction night on ‘Big Brother’) and more overtly political spectacles. Yet the society of the spectacle in Debord’s original formulation continues to pose the question of what a more authentic and less manipulated life might be like. Debord remains important given the need to search for alternatives to the mediocrity, absence of democratic control and boredom that dominates everyday life. Material abundance in this sense cannot compensate for a life that lacks either passion or autonomy.⁵²

The extent to which the politics of the spectacle is built upon the explicit denial of democracy has been explored by The Retort collective’s book that grew out of the protests against the war on terror in America.⁵³ The society of the spectacle as we have already seen marks a new stage in the accumulation of capital, as it becomes increasingly dependent upon advertising and the simulation of image and desire. In the context of the struggle against the war in Iraq the society of the spectacle could be said to institute a form of ‘weak citizenship’.⁵⁴ Retort argue that 9/11 is significant in that it represented an image defeat for the United States. In other words, 9/11 communicated to the world the vulnerability of the American empire. This perhaps partially explains the anxious news coverage after 9/11 in which news reporters were seen in shopping centers and the high street reporting on consumer confidence. There was a widespread sense that the capitalist consumer spectacle was under attack. Indeed for Retort the spectacle seeks progressively to colonise everyday life. It does this by ‘deliberately alienating the moment’ it offers ordinary people with an escape route from inner emptiness thereby bypassing questions of meaningfulness.⁵⁵ Consumer culture offers an escape into virtual consumer worlds. This escape is without substance and reproduces unsustainable levels of consumption and creates fundamentalist organisations who cultivate hardness, discipline and self-sacrifice.

The war on Iraq is explained less through postmodern images or even slogans such as ‘no blood for oil’, but by capitalism’s need to expand and reconstruct the conditions for profitability. The Retort collective draw upon Marx’s analysis of primitive accumulation to argue that at this stage of capitalism’s global development neoliberalism has adopted militaristic solutions to economic problems. Here Retort offer a similar economic analysis to that of David Harvey. The problem remains however that while the war in Iraq can at least be partially understood through economic acts of enclosure and

52 Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992).

53 Retort (Ian Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, Michael Watts), *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso, 2005).

54 Retort, p. 21; and Julian Stallabrass, ‘Spectacle and Terror’, *New Left Review* 37 (January/February 2006), pp. 87–106.

55 Retort, p. 182.

dispossession, the ‘war on terror’ is more politically driven than the analysis thus far would have us believe. As Pieterse argues, the problem with seeing the ‘war on terror’ in these terms is that the cost of the conquest of Iraq is likely to outstrip any economic gains.⁵⁶ It has been estimated that the cost of the war in Iraq was likely to exceed \$2 trillion, which works out as \$2,000 a head for the world’s poorest, surviving on less than \$1 a day. Despite the undoubted link between corporate accumulation strategies and the Bush administration, it is hard not to see the current administration as a political reinvention of the Reagan administration, combining ‘less government, more market, and evangelical patriotism’.⁵⁷ Such a view would argue that the neoliberal empire is actually a politically forged coalition between economics, religion and coercion. This is different from saying that the current aggressive stance on the international stage is disconnected from capitalism, but it does mean that it could find other forms of political expression. Especially significant in this context has been the decline of liberal America, especially since 9/11. The need to combat what has been widely seen as ‘Islamofascism’ has reasserted a form of aggressive militaristic thinking that is comparable to that of the Cold War era.⁵⁸ The politics of the spectacle then was able to take root in a context where there was a decline in meaningful political opposition and where the power of the image and the hollowing out of democracy had combined to produce catastrophic results. Yet while the critique of commodification is welcome there is little exploration by the Retort collective of alternatives. The Left needs to build upon the growing ambivalence in respect of consumerism to offer a sustainable definition of the good society.⁵⁹ Indeed we might add that while the idea of the society of the spectacle remains powerful, it is reminiscent of Raymond Williams’s warning not to view democratic citizens as herd-like masses.⁶⁰ While the market continues to view ‘customers’ or ‘consumers’ as items to be bought and sold criticism needs to point towards other more democratic alternatives.

Cosmopolitan democratic citizenship

Democratic ideals and practices are increasingly forced out by the dominance of the market and consumerism. If democracy and dialogue is to retain a footing in the public then it needs to find expression in everyday practices.

56 Jan N. Pieterse, *Globalization or Empire?* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 27.

57 Pieterse, p. 22.

58 Tony Judt, ‘Bush’s Useful Idiots’, *London Review of Books* 28, 18 (21 September 2006).

59 Kate Soper, ‘Reflections on Affliction’, *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 17, 2 (2006), pp. 74–80.

60 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (London: Pelican, 1958), p. 288.

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Arguably a more cosmopolitan public is being ushered in by the development of technological media, but it is hard to avoid the view that the erosion of democratic publics continues to be the more powerful trend. In Jurgen Habermas's estimation, the key to the success of the idea of a democratic Europe will be its ability to provide a response to global economic pressures.⁶¹ Under the conditions of global finance, national governments are under increasing pressure to lower taxes and provide economic environments in the interests of corporations rather than people. Such downward pressures compel national governments to accept increasing inequalities while downgrading systems of social welfare. In this scenario money replaces politics. The European Union would need to develop a market-correcting ethos with new forms of regulation and redistribution. This version of European identity has at its heart the ability of citizens 'to learn to mutually recognise one another as members of a common political existence beyond national borders'.⁶² This does not mean homogenising different national and ethnic identities into a pan-European nation-state. A cosmopolitan European identity actually requires a form of civic solidarity where fellow Europeans take responsibility for one another. These processes are dependent not only on the formulation of a common European civil society, constitution and social policy, but also on a common sense of solidarity being created through political institutions. The development of a European cosmopolitan identity is dependent upon civic forms of solidarity being developed beyond the nation. These are important considerations necessary for the survival of public forms of citizenship in the European context in the age of globalisation. Habermas underestimates the depth of disconnection evident at the heart of democratic politics. Unless democratic practice is rooted more closely to home its post-national expression is likely to become an alienated spectacle. The European context has recently witnessed the rise of a number of right-wing authoritarian parties and governments that offer a mixture of neoliberalism, consumerism, nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Colin Crouch has argued that general elections and mainstream politics in the context of the decline of social democracy are increasingly coming to resemble a controlled political spectacle.⁶³ This is where political agendas are increasingly dominated by business elites, professional politicians, a few think-tanks, and the media. A post-democracy begins to develop in the context where powerful elites have a greater bearing on democratic politics than the majority of citizens.

61 Jurgen Habermas, *The Political Constellation: Political Essays* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 74–80.

62 Habermas, p. 99.

63 Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 19.

Despite the erosion of civic virtues and democratic practices we should not underestimate the extent to which democratic features remain alive. My own political coming of age was the defeat of the National Union of Mineworkers by the Conservative government in 1984. The strike, which famously failed to gain democratic legitimacy, played into the hands of a government determined to introduce an authoritarian state and a free market. Raymond Williams recognised that since the 1970s capitalism had entered into a new phase that sought to crush organised labour while insisting upon 'the restoration of the absolute prerogatives of capital'.⁶⁴ The miners' strike, like the mass demonstrations against the wars in Iraq, depended upon the mass mobilisation of civil society. These genuinely popular movements forged connections with diverse sections of the population against the politics of the spectacle. However a new kind of politics failed to emerge in the wake of these large scale mobilisations. The pragmatic New Labour project that since 1997 has sought to connect a neoliberal agenda with a subordinate social democratic strand is seemingly coming to a close. The anti-globalisation or anti-capitalist movement, the anti-war coalition and various ecological initiatives continue to offer the possibility of radical politics, but for now they seem to be isolated from mainstream agendas. The pressure group Compass has explicitly sought to draw upon the memory of the New Left but has developed a statist agenda dependent upon a (not yet apparent) re-energised Labour government.⁶⁵ Without significant grassroots involvement in argument, debate and mobilization, it would seem that civic engagement and action is likely to remain distant from everyday life. Outside of a few activist circles, the politics of the spectacle would seem to be triumphant, while the political Left has yet to mount an effective politics against neoliberalism and the power of the spectacle. However as Raymond Williams continually reminded us, 'we must speak for hope'.⁶⁶ The ability of neoliberalism to increase working hours, encourage consumerism, lessen the polar opposites of Left and Right, foster inequality and threaten ordinary people with redundancy and ecological catastrophe will not go unresisted. In this context, we need to recognise how quickly many Left campaigns and movements of the past failed to maintain themselves as popular democratic movements. This is not the place for an analysis of the historical failings of Left and socialist-inspired movements. How we build a wider culture of democracy remains the Left's most pressing problem. These questions are mostly either ignored by a pragmatist and

64 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 249–50.

65 Michael Kenny, 'Progressive Politics after Blair', *Soundings*, www.lwbooks.co.uk/journal/articles/kenny07.html (accessed 1 May 2008).

66 Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton, 'The Politics of Hope: An Interview', in Terry Eagleton, ed., *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 322.

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market-orientated Labour Party or dismissed by the authoritarian routines of the far Left. However, as I have argued, the ascendant politics of the spectacle is anti-democratic to the core. The political Left needs to remind itself that despite the defeats and disappointments that ‘the democratic revolution is still at a very early stage’.⁶⁷

It is perhaps fitting to end by remembering the ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign of 2005. This campaign brought together a number of agencies such as Oxfam and Greenpeace, along with the New Labour government and high profile celebrities like Bob Geldof and Bono. The campaign actively encouraged citizens to buy white wristbands, email or text the government, while the BBC carried a number of especially commissioned programmes ahead of the G8 meeting to decide action on global poverty.⁶⁸ In terms of a social coalition genuinely fired by cosmopolitan passion this campaign can only be viewed ambivalently. It is hard to dismiss the extent to which the ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign changed the terms of the debate on global poverty and built on previous movements like ‘Jubilee 2000’. That over 2 billion people watched a music concert produced to publicise global poverty or that 250,000 people demonstrated in Edinburgh should not be dismissed as insignificant. Yet this cosmopolitan movement has not yet built a permanent grassroots concerned with change. The movement against global poverty however failed to develop critical perspectives beyond the spectacle of a celebrity-endorsed campaign. Political change requires a more authentic and less media-driven politics which would seek to question rather than simply avoid the imperatives of neoliberalism. Whether a more genuinely cosmopolitan and democratically orientated politics can develop in the future will depend upon the endurance and reinvention of democratic ideals in a changing public realm.

67 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 10.

68 See on this Nick Stevenson, ‘Cosmopolitan Europe, Post-colonialism and the Politics of Imperialism’, in Chris Rumford, ed., *Cosmopolitanism and Europe* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 51–71.

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Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture and Food among the Early Moderns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. xxi + 376 pp. 21 halftones. \$32.50; £17.00 hb. ISBN 0-226-02126-2

At the time of Raymond Williams's death in 1988, Stuart Hall, writing in the *New Statesman*, emphasised his significance: 'the whole formation of that variety of intellectual projects now known as "cultural studies" would have been impossible without his path-breaking work.'¹ Yet one topic that Williams did not focus on extensively was the cultural study of food. Indeed Catherine Gallagher, in her 1992 article 'Raymond Williams and Cultural Studies', suggests that Williams's attitude to the 'signifying practices' of food, revealed in particular in his late work *Culture* (1981), was 'complicated' and 'odd'.² Food, for Williams, was a signifying system where cultural meaning was not the 'primary function', rather it 'dissolves' signification in 'other' (not manifestly cultural) processes. 'Food ... has "signifying" moments; one can make semiotic analyses of food, demonstrating the various social meanings of how and what people prepare and consume. But the signifying function of food, Williams claims, is submerged in its primary function of sustaining life.'³

Aguecheek's Beef challenges this lacuna in Williams's work, as Appelbaum explores in detail the ideational meanings of food from a particular historical period, approximately the years 1500–1700, in relation to England, France, Italy and the Americas. As he summarises in the book's conclusion 'Crusoe's Friday, Rousseau's *Émile*' (which tracks forward into the eighteenth century), 'food has meaning': indeed, it possesses 'not only more than one meaning but more than one kind of meaning' as, for example, discourses of cookery and health were 'categorically different' (p. 300). I will return to the ways *Aguecheek's Beef* discusses and divides the cultural meaning of food into structured categories in a moment. First it is important to signal that for Appelbaum, *contra* Williams, the idea of food as a vehicle of signification was 'a primary meaning' (p. 301). As Appelbaum states:

[I]t was why a new movement toward vegetarianism got under way in the seventeenth century, and why a new epicureanism took hold of the planters

1 See <http://www.newstatesman.com/society/2008/02/work-life-williams-english>.

2 Catherine Gallagher, 'Raymond Williams and Cultural Studies', *Social Text* 30 (1992), pp. 79–89, p. 84.

3 Gallagher, p. 84.

of Barbados along with the courtiers of Versailles. Food came first. It was the master of arts, the giver of wits. Indeed, the primacy of food was why a figure like Cornaro [a Venetian nobleman, who ate sparingly and lived well beyond the usual life expectancy of the period] and his many followers weighed out their food every day of their lives, limiting themselves to a 'sober' life measured out in ounces; and it was why a Counter-Reformation figure like Saint Teresa of Ávila [a strict Spanish ascetic and purger] made herself vomit every night by sticking feathers down her throat. (p. 301)

Not only is this quotation representative of the book's intention to show 'how early modern food was never only food', but it also indicates the breadth of the book's frame of reference – it moves easily from seventeenth-century vegetarians, through New World and French epicureans, to Venetian and Spanish ascetics – and characterises Appelbaum's writing style. *Aguecheek's Beef* engages the reader in a conversation about food: using well-known Shakespearean allusions to food (which, of course, generate the book's title) as cultural touchstones, the author moves into less familiar territory such as early modern cookbooks, theories of nutrition and regimens of health, and debates about the status of New World peoples vis-à-vis their eating habits.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each exploring a 'kind of meaning' about food. The introductory chapter, 'Aguecheek's Beef, Hamlet's Baked Meat', situates Shakespeare's allusions to food against the ideological and material systems underpinning them in order to reveal the complexity of these brief references. There then follow three sets of paired chapters. The first set, 'The Sensory Science' and 'The Cookbook as Literature', focuses on two different kinds of printed publications, the medical regimen and the cookbook respectively, and discusses how they mediated and conditioned the ways early modern men and women experienced food. The second set, 'The Food of Wishes, from Cockaigne to Utopia' and 'Food of Regret', focuses on some of the most powerful mythic and literary treatments of food in early modern culture. Appelbaum explores first how the myth of Cockaigne and literary representations of the ideal society in Utopia, where hunger does not exist, embed political and religious meanings concerning social justice and increasing secularisation. In 'Food of Regret' he examines the connections between food and consumption in the myths of the lost Golden Age and the Garden of Eden, finishing the chapter with a discussion of contradictory conceptions of angelic and hellish digestion, and the double nature of the forbidden fruit as both apple and peach. The final two chapters of Appelbaum's study concern appetite and its management: 'Belch's Hiccup' focuses on appetite in relation to the comic, simultaneously grotesque and civilizing, contradictory utterances of consumption and self-regulation of the early modern body; 'Cannibals and

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Missionaries' looks at the ways European representations of the New World describe the cannibal appetites of the American tribes encountered, and how colonialist discourse attempts to 'civilise' them through diet.

This is a complex, sophisticated book, erudite and wide-ranging. At 375 pages long, it is also a weighty book and might have benefited from a further edit to tighten the author's rich, but sometimes overfed, prose. The 21 halftone illustrations which accompany the text are welcome additions to the narrative and work best when they are closely tied in with the analysis. Even the book's half-page illustrations have been reproduced well and, given the modest cover price, the University of Chicago Press should be congratulated on their quality. Production values are generally high and a useful Index and Select Bibliography are also included.

Despite Williams's attitude to the cultural study of food, it is a topic which is increasingly coming into the purview of Renaissance scholars and receiving sustained attention. Since Appelbaum's book in 2006, Joan Fitzpatrick's *Food in Shakespeare: Early Modern Dietaries and the Plays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) has been published and Fitzpatrick, together with Wendy Wall and Diane Purkiss, made up a well-received panel 'In the Kitchen' at the Renaissance Society of America conference, held in Chicago in March 2008.⁴ Wall's work on the cultural significance of distillation, and the transformation and preservation of flesh, is particularly exciting as she examines whether the new wave of popular cookery books published in England between 1570 and 1650 offer women the powerful possibility of staying the march of time through creative transformations of nature's raw material. Likewise Diane Purkiss's research on changing attitudes to the staple of bread is also noteworthy, as she locates this alteration against a great and sudden shift of taste at the end of the sixteenth century, from darker, richer flavours like venison (linked to a land-owning, male, gentry culture) to a dairy-based palate (linked to a feminine, urban, civilizing culture). Scholarly momentum certainly does seem to be building up around early modern dietaries and recipe books, and their cultural significations. *Aguecheek's Beef* is an insightful and thought-provoking book and the arguments Appelbaum makes, and in the journal articles published as harbingers of the book-length study in the last few years, are already shaping scholarship on this important branch of cultural studies about the ideational meanings of food, and the relationship between literature and food.

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4 See <http://www.rsa.org/pdfs/2008/2008ProgramBook.pdf>.

Mauro Pala, *The Social Text: Letteratura e prassi culturale in Raymond Williams*. Cagliari, Sardinia: CUEC [Cooperativa Universitaria Editrice Cagliaritanà], 2005. 373 pp. €18.00. ISBN 88-8467-233-3.

Mauro Pala's study situates Raymond Williams's critical praxis in the contexts of an evolving sociology of literature and of critical and comparative theory, configuring him alongside the parallel discourses of such cultural and political theorists as Gramsci, Althusser and Foucault. The book retraces Williams's pioneering interdisciplinary work and his expansion of the interpretative process to encompass the whole field of cultural practice, in a trajectory which led from the journal *Politics and Letters*, in which he sought 'to conjugate a genuinely radical politics within a critical position which descended from Leavis' (p. 34; my translations *passim*), to the inquiry into the nature of institutions in the posthumous collection *The Politics of Modernism*.

The Social Text emphasises just how much, thanks to Williams, the inception of cultural studies owed to the literary methodology, in particular the practice of close reading, associated with such adherents of the Cambridge school as Leavis and Empson. It acknowledges, too, Williams's radical break with that tradition in his, at the time, innovative refocusing on the relation between text and context. The subtitle's stress on 'literature and cultural praxis' emphasises Williams's abiding interest in the idea of the text, resisting any tendency to reduce his approach to that of a mere sociology of literature.

Pala focuses specifically on *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (1958), *The Country and the City* (1973), and *Marxism and Literature* (1977), which he sees as pivotal works. With *Culture and Society*, the reference point for cultural studies, the literary text opened itself to include the world and history, through the close reading of a range of texts from poetry to novels to pamphlets (the normative practice of the journal *Scrutiny*). From *Culture and Society* onwards, the concept of *culture* became a keyword in Williams's work, 'a process open to constant verification', viewed virtually anthropologically, in contrast to the 'immutable corpus' it remained for Leavis (p. 81). The concept of *experience*, likewise, provided a 'vital connection between the individual evaluation and a background of collective notions' (p. 46). In tandem with this, the idea of *community* opened the way to another important theme, what Gramsci designated 'civil society', a recurring motif up to *The Country and the City*.

With *The Long Revolution* Williams's writings began to focus more on the relations between the individual and the collective. Pala points out the importance, from a theoretical point of view, of the connection that he established here between culture, communications and community. It's here too that the concept of the *structure of feeling* was born: a 'junction between

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the sensibility of an age and its institutions, between a social structure and individual expression' (p. 22).

Pala detects some conceptual limitations in Williams's neo-Marxist reformulation of critical practice – in particular, the absence from the oeuvre of any effective categories of sociological analysis, and its limited acquaintance with political economy. Nevertheless, in fleshing out Althusser's concept of ideology, with its paralysing consequences for the possibility of meaningful praxis, with the aid of Gramsci's idea of hegemony, Williams was able to illuminate the mechanisms underlying the interaction between social relations and the cultural domain. As Pala demonstrates, hegemony is not for Williams something restricted to the realm of material production, but saturates all aspects of social life, transcending the crude dualism of base and superstructure.

In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams explored the implications of the concept of hegemony, particularly with regard to the interconnections between social context and the state. The idea of an 'alternative' culture, independent of the state, is absent in Gramsci. For Gramsci, the state, in its cultural aspect, subsumes all forms of social experience. Williams's concept of the *structure of feeling*, despite its imprecision, has the merit of emphasising not only the prominence and relative autonomy of the cultural dimension, but also its permeability to power. *The Social Text* demonstrates persuasively the structural resemblances between Williams's and Gramsci's thought, from their heterodox relation to traditional marxism to the sensitivity (in both cases for biographical reasons) to the 'relationship between a centre – in the English case an imperial centre – and a periphery which exists on a global scale' (p. 188). The analysis addresses other shared features, ranging from the interpretation of the forms of cultural creation as modes of production, through the idea of communication as a formative process of culture (and not a separate sphere), to the political and philosophical dimensions of language.

In a similar vein, Pala's study explores the methodological correspondences between Williams's approach and Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. In contrast to critics such as Tony Bennett, who criticise Williams for not recognising the impact of institutions on culture, Pala emphasises the centrality of the idea of the institution in Williams's work. In an extended comparison with Foucault, Pala sees Williams's emphasis on the cultural work of the institution as a reflection of the interconnection between power and the forms of communication (a position which also has similarities to Walter Benjamin). The powerful utopian core of Williams's thought kept him safe from the shoals of post-structuralist nihilism, while his opening to history ensured that his cultural materialism avoided the rigid determinisms of orthodox Marxism. Though confronting postmodern themes – the alienation of the

subject, Fukuyama's 'end of history', the culture of the simulacrum (which for Williams, in the 'search for a chink in the hegemonic culture, becomes *facsimile*') – Williams insisted on a subject 'stoically and historically capable of political initiative' (p. 345).

'Towards 2000, after 2000', the concluding chapter of Pala's book, is an inventory of Williams's utopian perspectives and of his impact on the evolution of critical theory. Although Pala notes some important gaps in Williams's work – notably the whole issue of gender and the missed opportunity to extend the topos 'country' to include that of 'colony' – he demonstrates how Williams located the causes of social and cultural change in a 'peripheral and "other" space', and, through the concepts of *emergent* and *residual* forms, was able to incorporate local and diachronic transformations into his theory of what would otherwise have remained a fragmented and disjunctive history (p. 351). An important exposition of his thought for the Italian reader, *The Social Text* clarifies how postcolonial and cultural studies find their origins in the work of Raymond Williams, whose insights were forged against the grain of an academic environment which remained to the last unsympathetic to that work.

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R.S. White, *Pacifism and English Literature: Minstrels of Peace*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. viii + 299 pp. £50. ISBN 978-0-230-55317-0

Before he returned to his native Australia in the late 1980s, Bob White taught my generation of English undergraduates at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and his gentle, open-minded style of teaching gave great credibility to the clear-eyed sense of moral purpose he brought to literary criticism. These traits (gentleness, open-mindedness, moral purpose) are well displayed in the book under review, a survey of pacifist ideas in literary texts. White's libertarian poetics, influenced by both reception theory and humanistic ideas of 'natural law', are built on the idea that literature can teach and directly touch readers' lives, and lead to the discovery of many socially progressive ideas even in reputedly 'establishment' authors. Discussing the (then) critically neglected victims of Shakespearian political violence, in his pioneering *Innocent Victims* (1982, p. 4), White argued that 'If we cannot raise questions about literature which are deeply troubling and relevant in life, then in what sense can the dramatist or theorist say that we are being taught?' Thus he finds in the stage deaths of innocents both a 'moral compass' for the spectator, and an implicit

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critique of those who employ political violence. What we are taught in the present study is that pacifist ideas, whether they are loosely or tightly defined, are clearly discernible in texts from throughout literary history, having been established and formulated in the canonical works of all the major religions as well as in the secular canon, and in both classical and ancient oriental literary and philosophical traditions. Despite the rhetorical power of those who continue to employ war for strategic ends, pacifist ideas are widely available, both in canonical authors like Milton and Shakespeare, and in many forgotten or neglected figures, from the medieval poets Hoccleve and Lydgate through to the poets of the nuclear age.

It is an impressive study and – as continuing events in the Middle East and elsewhere serve to underline – an important and necessary work of synthesis and recovery. In rejecting the exclusivity implicit in ideas of narrow ideological purity, White is able to show that important pacifist ideas and inspiration may be drawn from all sorts of sources: the seemingly even-handed Shakespeare, the occasionally non-pacifist man of peace Gandhi, the anti-pacifist Orwell, to take three well-known examples discussed briefly or in depth in the book. Like the ‘reason’-based pacifism White both espouses and delineates, it is a very grown-up approach to political and social ideas and yields important results, casting new light on canonical writers from Shakespeare to the present, broadening the discussion into modern film, and highlighting many under-read and neglected writers. It is a lot to take on in a standard-length monograph and White achieves effective economy by using a limited number of individual figures to focus eras. These are not always the usual suspects: the neglected Leigh Hunt, for example, is used as a key focus here in the Romantic period, and Denise Levertov is explicitly given a similar role in the Vietnam period (p. 248). It is primarily a work of what has come to be known as ‘recovery research’ and, as with White’s earlier work, what is recovered is threefold: neglected ideologies in canonical writing, ‘hidden’ history and neglected writers (and their writings).

Particular emphasis is given to poetry, and this, with the three consecutive chapters on the Renaissance, Shakespeare and Romanticism (chapters 6–8), reflect the strength of White’s earlier work on poetry, *Shakespeare and Romanticism*, and follow on from the two studies which prepared the ground for this one: *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature* (1996) and *Natural Rights and the Birth of Romanticism in the 1790s* (2005). But White’s main areas of expertise are boldly extended, first in the useful summarising chapters on religious and secular pacifisms, then on the early and Medieval period, and finally in some very substantial discussions of modern prose, film, and poetry, bringing things up to date and underlining the continued significance – indeed, given the present world situation, the screaming urgency – of these issues.

Inevitably, not everything important gets in. White purposely swerves away from the most famous anti-war poems: the First World War poets, whose writing is brilliantly but (mainly) focused on the limited experience of static trench warfare, as seen from the soldier's (or the commanding-officer-with-a-conscience's) perspective. This economy has an obvious cause: these poems are widely discussed and taught in schools, and need no further recovery here. I was sorrier not to see any discussion of Tony Harrison's anti-war poetry. Harrison's was a lone poetic voice speaking out against the first Gulf War (poems widely circulated in the broadsheet press). But of course one cannot include everything, and White's emphases in the modern period are perfectly coherent. Instead of trench poetry we have the poetry of 'War from the Air' (chapter 10), with its greater emphasis on the terrifying civilian experience which characterises much of modern warfare. (I write this with graphic evidence to hand: today's *Guardian*, 11 August 2008, estimates thousands of civilian dead and 20,000 refugees, with relatively few military deaths, in the first days of the current Russian-Georgian conflict.) Civilian rather than military, then: and women rather than men, often. There is an understandable, and welcome, feminist emphasis in much of White's discussion of modern pacifist and anti-war writing.

White tailors the level of discussion to the differing needs of many kinds of material. Sometimes it is a matter of simply 'recovering' ideas and texts, describing and explaining them: the revival of Leigh Hunt's pacifism, for example, is of this type. In the discussion of Shakespeare, by contrast, the book engages with fairly extensive existing debates in order to be able to show that armed conflict is 'rarely, if ever, allowed to stand unchallenged' in Shakespeare 'as the norm of human behaviour' (p. 140); while Milton, hitherto little discussed in pacifist terms, for White achieves a pacifist perspective not by any Shakespearian 'balance' but by ascribing militarism to Satan and undercutting Satan's rhetorical credibility.

This is a timely and an absorbing study. It will serve usefully as both a reference source for the history of pacifism in literary texts and an inspiring reminder of the wide range of pacifist sources, ideas and voices in literary history.

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The Raymond Williams Foundation (RWF)

Following a considerable enhancement of funds from a substantial bequest, the Raymond Williams Memorial Fund (RWMF) has changed its name to RWF – a foundation which has a firm financial base of nearly £200,000 on which to build.

The sixteen Trustees of RWF (spread across the land from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Bolton to Biggleswade) are seeking to ensure that the charitable aims of RWMF, now embodied in a new RWF constitution, registered as a charity, will take effect as soon as possible. The aims are ‘to commemorate the works of Raymond Williams, in particular in the sphere of adult education for the benefit of the public, by advancing education through the provision of bursary funds for the benefit of the education of disadvantaged students, including by assisting in courses held at Wedgwood Memorial College (WMC).

We are discussing a development programme which may include, for example: WEA and other residential and day schools at Wedgwood Memorial College, Stoke-on-Trent, notably more support for the annual Raymond Williams weekend along with residential courses on Thomas Paine, William Morris and the Spanish Civil war; residential and day schools elsewhere in the UK, especially Wales; support for web-based networking (using www.open-democracy.net) to extend pub/church hall/coffee-house discussion groups on social, political and cultural issues, feeding through to the more formal day and residential schools.

Our partnerships with the WEA and WMC remain central but, financially strengthened and with new membership arrangements and promotions, we will be able to strengthen our symbiotic relationship with the Raymond Williams Society and several other sister organisations.

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Douglas Dunn, ed., *The Faber Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry*. Faber, 1992. xlvi+424 pp. £17.50 hb. ISBN 0 571 15431 X.

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