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LOST FATHERS: RAYMOND WILLIAMS AND THE SIGNAL BOX AT PANDY

There is a photograph of Raymond Williams standing before the signal box at Pandy. Leaning against a wooden picket fence in the immediate right foreground, his arms bent somewhat awkwardly, Williams wears a sturdy cardigan over a casual shirt. He does not look at the camera, but beyond it, slightly to the right. In the center of the photo, behind a narrow dirt road and two lines of railroad tracks, stands the rectangular signal box, clearly labelled. To the left, a long stairway runs up the second floor, the main working area, with its unbroken bank of large windows. Behind the box, barely visible in the mist, the Welsh hills border what seems a flat, rather featureless valley.

The photograph, published in a volume of commemorative essays,¹ captures emblematically major elements of Williams's brilliant career. His father manned the signal box virtually his entire working life; the structure offers visible evidence of Williams's proletarian roots and authenticity as a spokesman for radical causes. The photograph also suggests pride in a provincial background. Few academics have drawn as much attention to their own childhood as Raymond Williams.² It became a central episode of his first and best novel, Border Country; he alluded to it repeatedly in his immensely varied critical works; it shaped his vision of a socialist community. Something more elusive might also be noted. Though often confessional in his published writings, Williams remained personally a somewhat detached figure, unfailingly cordial but also self-absorbed.³ He gazes away from the camera.

A complex thinker, Williams luxuriated in the ambiguities of his chosen subjects.

Orthodox Marxists despaired of his equivocations. If perhaps he wrote too much, he rarely allowed simplifications to contaminate his often difficult prose. Yet, at the core of his thought remained a idealized vision of his childhood in Wales that remained in creative tension with the later, more sophisticated analysis that assured his fame. The following essay will explore this tension in three related areas. First, a founding member of the New Left in Britain, Williams struck many young radicals as not unlike Harry Price, the railway signalman in Border Country and father of its major character, a scholarship boy who left Wales for England in the late 1930s. Yet, for all his similarities to Williams' own father, the fictional Harry Price embodied only a partial autobiographical truth. Second, Border Country contained an idealized notion of community fundamental to Williams' vision of socialism. Perhaps not surprisingly, this vision involved ambiguities and omissions important for understanding his evolving politics. Third, not unlike F.R. Leavis from whose influence he struggled to free himself, Williams portrayed himself as an Outsider long after his academic status qualified this persona. Raymond Williams standing before the signal box at Pandy represents a complicated inheritance of myth and reality.

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Border Country, published in 1960, makes the case that tragedy can happen in modern life to ordinary people. A young lecturer in London with a wife and young children must return to Wales when his father suffers a massive heart attack. As he arrives in Glynmawr, a small farming village near the English border, he journeys not only across a significant geographical border, but back in time to his own childhood and a network of personal relationships. Above all, Matthew Price must confront the imminent loss of a beloved parent, lying frightened and incapacitated in a small upstairs bedroom. 'His whole mind seemed a long dialogue with his

father --a dialogue of anxiety and allegiance, of deep separation and deep love.⁴ Few post-war British novels portray this intense, personally tragic episode with as much sensitivity and grace. Williams interweaves chapters on past and present to create vivid portraits of father and son. Though much can be made critically of the various 'borders' within the novel -- geographic, temporal, and emotional -- the book's power lies in its moving evocation of this central family relationship.

Williams describes Harry Price, the father, in almost wholly admirable terms. 'The dominant impression was the curious stillness of the features, and the distance and withdrawal in the very deep blue eyes.' Often silent, Harry Price conveys a sense of profound understanding. "I can feel,' Harry insisted, 'it isn't what's said.'" Deeply centered and personally secure, he cannot be intimidated, even by a strong-willed landlady when he first arrives in Glynmawr. 'She was finding, to her surprise, that she could not stare this young man down.'⁵ Above all, he remains intransigent, one of Williams's favorite words. He refuses to concede defeat easily during the General Strike, and he remains firmly rooted in his working and family routines. He has 'settled' and shall not be transformed. More jarring to contemporary sensibilities, his stubbornness also extends to relations with his wife Ellen, a shadowy figure in the novel. He makes the decision to change houses despite her protests, and he names their son Matthew against her wishes.⁶ In his appearance and masculine ethos, Harry Price bears more than a passing resemblance to the strong, silent heroes of the American Western.

But another comparison may be more apposite. Three years before Williams published Border Country, Richard Hoggart also powerfully evoked a working-class parent. The 'Mother' within The Uses of Literacy lacks the specificity of a fictional character, but the portrait remains

no less idealized. Mother will 'cook, mend, scrub, wash, see to the children, shop and satisfy her husband's desires.' There is about her 'a steady and self-forgetful routine, one devoted to the family and beyond proud self-regard.' She shrewdly calculates the family budget, imparts wisdom and discipline to the children, and takes infrequent pleasure from being 'waited upon'.⁷ Though Hoggart describes the urban working-class, and writes autobiographical sociology rather than fiction, both he and Williams grounded their visions of working-class identity in the inter-war era, just as earlier, more upper-class writers found solace among the Edwardians. Both Hoggart and Williams warned against romanticizing the past, and indeed Williams demonstrated in The Country and the City the almost infinite regress of nostalgia across generations. Despite such caution, however, both writers channelled memories of youth into their mature cultural analysis.

Although some still equate Harry Price with the author's father,⁸ Williams himself later acknowledged a more ambiguous pedigree. In the final chapter of The Country and the City, published ten years after Border Country, he wrote that 'I had to divide and contrast what I had seen in my father as conflicting impulses and modes. I had to imagine another character, Morgan Rosser, the politician and dealer,...who could express...an internal conflict.'⁹ On the one hand, this explanation illustrates Williams characteristic honesty and ripening intelligence. A fictional work written by a young, relatively obscure author during the 1950s might easily embody a different 'structure of feeling' from an ensuing decade, when its author attained wide recognition. On the other hand, for a novel re-written seven times, what Williams calls 'the two figures of a father' involves more than an imaginative solution to a technical problem. It also reveals tensions and ambiguities within an otherwise intransigent class allegiance.

Morgan Rosser is quite a different character from Harry Price. Whereas Harry communicates his feelings quietly, with a look or a gesture, Morgan expresses himself more volubly. He expatiates upon a wide range of subjects and often delivers his opinions bluntly. Then too, whereas Harry settles comfortably, Morgan stays restless and dissatisfied. He understands the social limitations of Glynmawr and correctly forecasts how modernity will transform the valley and its inhabitants. "There'll be no village, as a place of its own. There's just be a name you pass though."¹⁰ Above all, Morgan seeks to improve his own material condition; ambitious and opportunistic, he leaves his job as a signalman to become a successful entrepreneur. This key development, which Williams handles with great skill, clearly distinguishes the two old friends. Although Morgan retains a strong commitment to Labour and the working man, he becomes seriously disillusioned by the failure of the General Strike. 'You could talk about creating the future, but in practice...people ran for shelter, manoeuvred for personal convenience, accepted the facts of existing power. To see this happening was a deep loss of faith, a slow and shocking cancellation of the future.'¹¹

Morgan restores his future through capitalism. During the Strike, he had delivered fresh produce to miners in nearby valleys. When the Strike ends, he converts this service into a small business that expands rapidly, forcing him to hire more personnel. He asks Harry Price to join him and become a trusted partner in the business. Stubbornly and without offering a persuasive explanation, Harry refuses. Morgan takes this rejection as provisional and later, in one of the novel's most tense confrontations, extends to Matthew, the son, a similar offer with his much larger operation, a jam factory. Like his father, Matthew declines for vague reasons, provoking an outburst from Morgan.

"It's the same with you both, come down to it....There's always been this idea that business isn't good enough....What's our politics mean if it's not good business raising our standard of life? You know where it comes from, this attitude you've both got? Not from people like you, working people, but from them that have always lived on the work of others; too proud to make jam but not too proud to eat it."

The narrator comments that this disagreement represented 'a border defined, a border crossed.'¹² Though Williams permits Morgan to score points, especially about the linkage between the aristocratic and proletarian disdain for business, Harry and Matthew clearly emerge as morally victorious. They are intransigent; they reject capitalism; they remain settled within their own class borders.

Yet, if the father of Raymond Williams, Henry Joseph Williams, shared traits of both Harry Price and Morgan Rosser, a different past emerges from the sharply drawn conflicts of Border Country. Though he left no formal autobiography, Williams's frequent references to his father in later works provide clues into 'the two figures of a father' presented in the novel. For example, the daily routine of a railway signalman involves a number of distinctive elements. Though Williams later emphasized how the telephone linked rank-and-file signalmen, consolidating proletarian solidarity, the job clearly involved considerable isolation and personal autonomy. The signalman worked alone. Long hours of idleness separated the passage of trains. More than most workers, especially in factories, the signalman could be his own boss.¹³

More important, neither Harry Price nor Henry Williams defined themselves by their jobs at the railroad. 'The work at the box was just done in the margin, for a wage'.¹⁴ Williams's father devoted an enormous amount of time cultivating the land and raising bees. He worked the

garden that went with his cottage, a strip of potatoes on a nearby farm, and two more quite substantial tracts leased from the railway. Like Morgan Rosser, he engaged in such labor not only for his own personal satisfaction, but for profit. He was, as Williams later wrote, '...a man in the village, with his garden and his bees, taking produce to market on a bicycle.' 'What wrong with dealing?', Harry Price asks unexpectedly at one point in Border Country.¹⁵ The tension between Morgan Rosser the opportunistic capitalist and Harry Price the committed worker, 'the two figures of a father', merged in Henry Williams.

Border Country tells the story of a dying father, and its sensitive narrative gives credence to Williams's later claim that tragedy need not be confined to great figures, as classical theory maintained. 'I have known tragedy in the life of a man driven back to silence, in an unregarded working life. In his ordinary and private death, I saw a terrifying loss of connection between men, and even between father and son.'¹⁶ Such powerful testimony cannot be disputed; Williams's refused to allow men like his father to be ignored and excluded. He demanded that tragedy be democratized. Yet, the lost father may not be the formulaic character of Border Country, but the more 'restless' and 'self-critical' figure that Williams effectively denied in this novel. This lost father became a petty capitalist; pushed his son to succeed academically; and expressed few reservations about upward social mobility. This lost father muddled the borders his son so carefully restored in the fictional past of his first published novel.¹⁷

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'A father is more than a person,' Matthew remarks in Border Country, 'he's in fact a society, the thing you grow up into.'¹⁸ This 'social father' profoundly affected Williams's personal values and intellectual development. The community at Pandy provided him with a

model of social relations which buttressed his political thinking and cultural analysis. Like other radical figures in the British past, including William Cobbett, Williams based his critique of modernity, as well as his vision of a socialist future, on an agrarian past. On these and other matters, he often expressed himself vaguely, entangling his core values in abstractions and qualifications that frequently sacrifice clarity to equivocation. But in Border Country, the discourse of fiction allowed him to provide concrete evidence of the community relationships that a humane society ought possess.

When Matthew first returns to Glynmawr, he expects no one to greet him at the station; he had departed London quickly and the sudden crisis still seemed a private, family affair. Yet, soon after he arrives, Morgan Rosser awaits him and calls him 'Will', his familiar name in Glynmawr. 'It is like that, this country; it takes you over as soon as you set foot in it.' Throughout the novel, Glynmawr and the surrounding valley form an intricate web of neighborly relationships. People greet him as he goes about his business in the village. They voice concern over his father and offer their assistance. So many wish to visit the elder Price at home that Matthew becomes alarmed. 'It'll be half the parish at this rate.' People he barely remembers or does not know inquire knowledgeably about his academic career and his family in London. He becomes annoyed when he discovers that the young doctor who treats his father has been married to a childhood friend; he somehow expected such knowledge to be made explicit, rather than assumed. Blood relationships link neighbors in complicated patterns. 'Well now,' one character remarks, 'Edie's dad is Olwen's uncle. You know how it is here. You can't go into one house without finding somebody got a relation in all the others.'¹⁹ Glynmawr remains a small village without distinct social classes; its community rituals link individuals together in complex

but knowable patterns of kinship and mutual experience.

These patterns cannot be grasped abstractly or at a distance. Throughout the novel, Williams contrasts various 'objective' descriptions of Glynmawr with its complex, subjective reality. When Matthew reads a well-known guidebook to his own locale, the flat, descriptive style of the book cannot begin to capture 'this living country'. Written discourse simplifies a complex past and funnels rich communal experience into soporific prose. More important, Matthew's own research as an academic fails to illuminate the historical questions that trouble him. His work on Welsh population movements provides useful statistics about demographic change, but completely misses the essence of its human subjects. 'They are somewhere else altogether, that I can feel but not handle, touch but not grasp.' Even those who tour the area and appreciate its landscape overlook its inner life. 'The visitor sees beauty; the inhabitant a place where he works and has his friends.' The tourist, like the travel writer and the professional statistician, cannot surmount the static illusions of abstract observation and discourse. The community evolves as its intricate patterns of personal relationships change, and the landscape itself transforms as each generation makes its subtle alterations. Whenever Matthew climbs the mountains surrounding the valley and looks below, he recalls this distance between far and near, objective and subjective, static and dynamic. 'This was not anybody's valley to make into a landscape. Work had changed and was still changing it.'²⁰

Williams carried this subjective understanding of his own Welsh community into his later writing. In Conviction, published in 1958, his famous declaration that culture was 'ordinary' rescued the word from the refined tastes of a particular class. Though anthropologists long before defined the term as broadly, Williams employed the word to invoke a 'whole way of life'

reminiscent of social relations in Pandy. 'There is a distinct working-class way of life, which I for one value --not only because I was bred in it....I think this way of life, with its emphasis of neighborhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment...is in fact the best basis for any future English society.'²¹ In Culture and Society, Williams exposed the nineteenth-century origins of the narrow definition of 'culture', thereby making historically relative any claims for its objective superiority. Moreover, Williams argued that the attempt to stigmatize the vast majority of individual citizens as 'masses' not only detached threatened elites from their civic obligations, but also obscured the authentic 'common culture' among ordinary citizens which the larger society most needed.²² Once again, the view from a distance missed the vibrant reality of lived experience.

When Williams applied his vision of community to mass communication, he found himself in a predicament which he never squarely resolved. In the Long Revolution, published in 1960, he departed from other commentators of the period by refusing to condemn outright all forms of mass communication. In particular, the popular press of the earlier nineteenth-century often reflected the views of its readers. Yet, like other members of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, Williams blamed the low quality of contemporary mass media on its capitalist owners. If only the means of communication could be owned collectively, he claimed, genuine diversity would result.²³ This conventional argument made the producers of mass culture sovereign in the marketplace and, in effect, transformed consumers into either victims of false consciousness, as the Left quietly assumed, or the benighted populace sneered at by the Right. Williams never reconciled this notion of ordinary citizens as passive and impressionable with the more autonomous, culturally-enriched working class that he usually championed. Like Richard

Hoggart, who felt nostalgia for older forms of mass culture but disgust for its modern counterpart, Williams lived with a double vision of working-class autonomy.

Williams's notion of community rarely extended to the city which, echoing a traditional distinction in German thought, he viewed more as Gesellschaft than Gemeinschaft. Matthew Price cannot acclimate himself to 'the contained indifference' of London; he moves as a stranger though the urban landscape of his adult life.²⁴ In The Country and the City, Williams never entirely sheds his suspicions of urban life. His most impassioned observations concern the countryside, and even when he acknowledges the beauty and excitement of cities, he speaks from a distance, and not close-up. 'I have felt it again and again: the great buildings of civilization; the meeting-places; the libraries and theatres, the towers and domes; and often more moving than these, the houses, the streets, the press and excitement of so many people, with so many purposes.'²⁵ Though Williams demonstrates brilliantly how capitalist exploitation long penetrated the countryside, he rarely considers how community can also thrive within the metropolis. As Hoggart showed in vivid detail, cities too contain neighborhoods where individuals lived within interwoven networks of close personal relationships. Though with customary prudence Williams warns against 'the reactionary perspective which idealizes country against the city', urban social life remains for him at best characterized by 'its transitoriness, its unexpectedness, its essential and exciting isolation....'²⁶

Williams also underplayed the less attractive, darker side of small communities. Too sophisticated a thinker to ignore problems entirely, he nevertheless underestimated how such difficulties undermined his communal ideal. For example, by the 1960s depopulation had plagued Wales for generations. Young people left the region in large numbers, and like

Williams himself, returned only to visit. Williams discussed this problem in both his fictional works and his cultural studies. 'I know...why people have had to move, why so many moved in my own family,' he wrote in The Country and the City.²⁷ In Border Country and The Fight for Monad, Matthew Price devotes his academic career to understanding and arresting this disturbing trend. 'For this is a country bled dry by prolonged depopulation,' he remarks in a crucial speech to a government commission. 'If...a different future becomes possible, a future that settles people,...then through all the dislocation...there could still be approval, significant approval.' Williams condemned the 'insolent indifference to most people's needs' found in so many literary versions of country living.²⁸

Williams attributed Welsh migration mainly to the lack of economic opportunity, an unimpeachable cause. In Border Country he also alludes briefly to women who detest the lack of modern conveniences in rural villages. One minor character, Mrs. Priddy, gloats that in a modern town she suffers 'no old stone floors, no muck in the yard, no miles to go to the shops.' Yet, Williams remains only mildly interested in such triumphal sentiments and rarely allows them to disturb his nostalgic vision of Pandy during the interwar years. Perhaps more telling, he generally neglects the social reasons why small communities prove so stifling to the young. In an angry outburst, Morgan Rosser briefly condemns the 'this narrow, self-satisfied way' of Harry Price, but he soon forgives him and lavishly praises his character.²⁹ For the most part, the conformity, complacency, mediocrity, and sheer boredom of small villages escape comment.

In Border Country Williams describes a number of incidents that clearly vivify his faith in the community of his childhood and help shape his vision of a socialist future. Interpreted less favorably, however, these same episodes might also expose Glynmawr's social limitations. To

cite but one example, after Harry Price's death, Matthew goes to Roberts, a local florist, to purchase wreaths for the funeral. Apologetically, Roberts informs Matthew that he cannot immediately satisfy his request. 'All the weddings today, I'm right out.' Frustrated, Matthew hopes to order flowers from nearby communities when he runs into Morgan Rosser, who chides him for misunderstanding the florist. 'If you'd just said who you were,' he tells Matthew. 'The thing is, he knew about Harry and about the other funerals Monday. He made an estimate for those, and he's not selling beyond that to anybody who happens to walk in.'³⁰ The episode clearly illustrates the thoughtful personal connections which existed between merchants and local villagers. In Glynmawr, the marketplace reinforced rather than severed communal relationships; transactions occurred between individuals known by name and family affiliation rather than between impersonal retailers and consumers. Yet, perhaps unintentionally, this same episode revealed one of the ironies of small communities. In its preference for insiders and distancing from outsiders, the Welsh village mirrored the despised exclusivity of English class society. Insiders with strong family connections gained special favor; outsiders fended for themselves. Glynmawr functioned with an old boy network all its own.

Despite his powerful advocacy of community, Williams acknowledged in interviews and revealed more covertly in his fiction that his own family removed themselves from some of the community's most vital institutions. 'Although he got on easily enough with his mates at work,' the narrator writes of Harry Price, 'he still had no close friends in the village. He never went to the pubs, and his gardens, added to the railway work, left him little free time.' Williams's father served on the parish council, but in other ways remained separate and apart. He was, for example, 'hostile to religion', a central institution in Welsh villages. In Border Country young

Matthew throws his christening book, The Holy Child, into the river. 'Like father, like son,' one character remarks critically.³¹ As Williams told the New Left Review, as a boy he occasionally attended both Church and Chapel, but refused to be confirmed, an event which 'caused no crisis in the family'. Then too, the Williams family never learned Welsh, and indeed Raymond rejected his Welshness 'until well into my thirties'.³² The picture which emerges from these scattered details remains one more of isolation than involvement.

'Nostalgia', Williams once wrote, '...is universal and persistent; only other men's nostalgias offends.'³³ Though he remained alert to its dangers, Williams never completely escaped the phenomenon he so successfully exposed in his first published novel. The communal ideal, with its emphasis on neighborhood and mutual personal concern, animated both his vision of childhood and his socialist aspirations. Both temporal projections, one past and the other future, retained their utopian elements --- their comforting habitation in the nowhere of imagination. The Pandy community which he often recalled in his autobiographical asides, like Glynmawr in Border Country, rarely suffered from the problems which impelled its young, including Williams himself, to flee elsewhere. Memories of childhood remained powerful, but selective.

During the 1960s and 1970s Williams struggled to reconcile his more optimistic vision of the working class with the harsher political realities of the Labour Party. Frustrated by its accommodations and compromises, Williams left the party in 1966 and even welcomed the Conservative victory of 1970.³⁴ His politics during the Seventies and Eighties reflected the predicaments of a radical Left animated by vigorous intellectual debate but increasingly detached from its presumed electoral base. As the New Left fractured and became demoralized in the

1980s, a more nuanced portrait of the working class began to emerge from historians and sociologists. This portrait emphasized the diversity of working class culture and acknowledged the fault lines of gender, race, region, and generation.³⁵ By decentering class as a social and political category, this portrait undermined Williams' more idealized notion of a working class community that emerged so powerfully from his Welsh background. Yet, perhaps ironically, it also assimilated the complexities of lived experience which he defended throughout his career.

The autobiographical impulse in Williams's writing became, as Patrick Parrinder later commented, 'a highly unusual and formative strategy.'³⁶ Though in the late 1950s and early 1960s other former scholarship boys drew upon their class background to provoke and then assimilate themselves within the cultural establishment, Williams employed his often confessional approach to a discourse accustomed to more detached, impersonal prose. Though not without precedent, particularly within literary criticism, his academic persona appealed to a generation of students, themselves often from modest backgrounds, restless with what they considered the moral indifference and political blindness of traditional scholarship. Like F.R. Leavis, Williams managed to portray himself as an Outsider long after he became a distinguished academic. In turn, he himself became something of a father figure to others who employed the same strategy.

Before joining the Cambridge faculty, Williams knew Leavis only fleetingly.³⁷ Yet, as Williams often acknowledged, Leavis influenced him and his generation enormously. Leavis's scathing critique of mass communication, combined with his fearless disregard for London's fashionable literary coteries appealed to the young man from Wales. One provincial radical

attracted another. Then too, Leavis's practical criticism, borrowed freely from I.A. Richards and others, provided Williams with a literary methodology 'that was intoxicating, something I cannot describe too strongly.'³⁸ Leavis forced students to examine texts with an intensity that elevated the moral worth of literature. This seriousness, combined with Leavis's faith in the redemptive powers of education, helped make legitimate Williams's preferred choice of careers. Teaching became a profession infused with missionary spirit.³⁹

Williams told his New Left interviewers that he became disaffected with Leavis for two reasons, each involving their own tensions and ambiguities. First, Williams gradually disaffiliated himself from Leavis's narrow definition of community.

I recollect one incident...which anticipated what was eventually to be my key disagreement with (Leavis). Mankowitz and I went to hear L. C. Knights give a talk on the meaning of 'neighbor' in Shakespeare. Leavis was leaning against the wall at the back of the room. When Knight said that nobody now can understand Shakespeare's meaning of neighbor, for in a corrupt mechanical civilization there are no neighbors, I got up and said I thought that this was only differentially true; there were obviously successive kinds of community, and I knew perfectly well, from Wales, what neighbor meant.

Mankowitz...attacked me bitterly for sentimental nonsense. Leavis was nodding approvingly while he was doing so.⁴⁰

The anecdote illustrates nicely the complicated nature of Leavis's influence over Williams. In a setting where Leavis's disciples predominated, even a nod of disapproval from the master remains lodged in a dissenter's later memory. A story about intellectual emergence also testifies to residual dependency. More important, Williams's objections reconstructed rather than

abandoned Leavis's assumptions and methodology. He appealed to 'experience' to buttress his argument; he too assumed a provincial and organic model of community; he invoked one attenuated form of populism against another. Williams distanced himself from Leavis (his 'cultural father'?) by modernizing the old estate.

Williams also diverged from Leavis for ideological reasons. Leavis seldom weighed the social implications of the literature he endorsed; aesthetics transcended political struggle. Williams, however, became troubled by socialist disciples of Leavis who admired T.S. Eliot's artistry and insight, but discounted his royalism as amateurish and irrelevant. 'There was a class struggle occurring around those poems and that criticism,' Williams recalled.⁴¹ This unwillingness to detach politics from letters reasserted a tradition in English literature that extended at least as far back as the Elizabethans. Indeed, Williams wrote Culture and Society in part to demonstrate how historically recent Leavis's approach remained. Although in the 1930s English Marxists reasserted politics in literary criticism, the crudities of some orthodox criticism limited their influence. Far more subtle and nuanced, Williams helped demonstrate the inescapability of political categories even when critics proclaimed neutrality. This ideological preoccupation, less overt than others among the New Left but consequently all the more persuasive, combined with Williams's challenges to the entrenched hierarchies of elite and popular culture, prefigured the often divisive concerns of later literary studies. The road from Leavis to postmodernism proved straighter than might be expected.⁴²

To make literary criticism a form of class struggle, however, embodied difficulties all its own. Like other academic Leftists in later decades, Williams never felt entirely comfortable with his choice of professions. Literary efforts to subvert the existing political order and assure

greater social equality often stood in tension, and perhaps even helped assure, the comfortable privileges which accompanied academic success. These tensions become apparent in what Bruce Robbins calls 'the inchoate self-hatred of the autobiographical novels.'¹⁴³ Border Country contrasts implicitly the political heroism of an older generation with the less authentic preoccupations of an academic career. Second Generation carries this self-doubt even further. As others have noted, both academic leftists within the novel do not fare well. Robert Lane openly but apologetically sacrifices political commitment to academic careerism; and Arthur Dean, a sexual libertarian, psychologically manipulates a working-class mother and political radical into a destructive extra-marital affair. As the New Left Review editors put it, 'each represents, with a contrasted tonality, a combination of political conformism and moral corruption.'¹⁴⁴ Lane later appears in The Fight for Monad, where he has become an influential figure in established government circles. Once again within the trilogy, the intransigence of an older generation stands in marked contrast to the sophisticated capitulations of the young. To be sure, Williams remains too complex a thinker to lapse into anti-intellectualism, or to accept uncritically the predictable accusations of hypocrisy. He knows the value of literature's 'knowable community' and the centrality of the university for an improved society. He retains Leavis's faith in education. But the tension persists. As Robbins comments, Williams 'can neither accept nor repudiate himself as he has been constituted by the vocational aspirations that lead from Wales and from the working class....Family romance is thus transmuted into vocational tragedy.'¹⁴⁵

A less noticed, though related aspect of this tension between Williams's radical politics and his elevated social status concerns his understanding of British elites. Williams claimed in

1979 that 'I still mainly know the actual ruling class only by reading about it.'⁴⁶ Few modern aristocrats appear in any of his writings, and within his fiction he remains best at exploring the consciousness of articulate working-class figures. Yet, his obliviousness to the 'actual ruling class' remains at times disingenuous. He himself almost perfectly embodied the upward social mobility of the post-war era. From modest circumstances, he rose to become Professor of Drama at Cambridge University; he earned many thousands from the flourishing sales of his publications; he owned two houses, including one in Wales.⁴⁷ Though he disavowed elitism and always retained a feeling of social exclusion, by most standards of modern judgement he himself became part of the 'ruling class' in contemporary Britain.

In Culture and Society and in later books, Williams described a problem which may help explain this phenomenon. A rebellious member of one social class, such as George Gissing or George Orwell, identifies strongly with the lower classes, only to discover that poverty rarely ennoble and that individual virtues and faults cannot be easily generalized. Williams called this problem 'negative identification' and argues that it accounts 'for a great deal of adolescent socialism and radicalism.'⁴⁸ Williams attitude towards the 'ruling class' represents an inversion of this phenomenon. Rather than romanticize another social class in which he found himself, he demonized it; the established capitalist order, including eventually the Labour Party itself, embodied few virtues; most elites compromised the interests of the people. Williams rarely described specific individuals within these ruling orders; in both his fiction and cultural analysis they remain shadowy figures who manipulate others for their own benefit. Generalized and undifferentiated, they represent a failure of imagination no less severe than what Williams noted in Gissing and Orwell.

Williams identified positively with the social class which he left as an adolescent. 'It was not my Cambridge', he began an essay published in 1977. 'I have now spent eighteen years in the university, in three distinct periods. In each of them I have..., in time, made some kind of settlement. But this has always, even in the longest period, felt temporary.'⁴⁹ Such detachment came with a long history; generations of scholarship boys found it difficult to adjust to Oxford and Cambridge; some became absorbed happily; others, like Williams, retained their distance. Yet, however genuine his discomfort, this attitude also served a purpose. Pandy provided Williams with a unique point of view. It helped position him within a highly competitive academic culture that after 1960 became increasingly central to British life. To invoke Bourdieu's shrewd phrase, Williams's anchorage in a provincial childhood provided him with the 'cultural capital' to distinguish himself from those around him.⁵⁰ And since the New Left often set the intellectual agenda during the Sixties and Seventies, it also allowed emerging insiders to mask their true status. Who of intellectual prominence during the 1960s championed the aristocracy? What artists of any significance denigrated the working classes?

And so we return to the signal box at Pandy. In Border Country, Matthew Price ponders its place in the life of his family. 'It was almost a part of home, this box in which for thirty-six years Harry had spent a third of his life. Yet it seemed, looking up, quite separate and commonplace. Once in early childhood, it had been a place of magic.'⁵¹ The photograph of Raymond Williams standing before the signal box at Pandy also combines myth and reality, the magical and the more commonplace. Here, in the photograph, we see a son of the working-class, returned to his provincial roots, now himself a lost father of the New Left. Yet, within a commemorative volume of respectful and often moving essays, the photograph also becomes an

emblem that conceals as well as reveals. The man who spent a third of his life in the signal box was not simply the stoical Harry Price, railwayman, but also Morgan Rosser, restless entrepreneur. Pandy cannot be seen in the picture, but also cannot be seen in its idealized recreations in Williams's fiction and recurring autobiographical references. The casually dressed figure in the foreground was not only a countryman of unquestioned integrity, but also a prominent intellectual at one of the world's great universities. Still, the magic remains appealing. An important man stands before a valuable inheritance, as in the oil portraits of old.

ENDNOTES

1. 'Raymond Williams: A Photographic Sketch', Robin Gale, compiler, in Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives, Terry Eagleton, ed. (Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), between pages 107 and 108.
2. Jan Gorak, The Alien Mind of Raymond Williams (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 7. See also Stuart Hall, 'Only Connect: the Life of Raymond Williams', New Statesman, 5 February 1988, 20-1; Raphael Samuel, "'Philosophy Teaching by Example": Past and Present in Raymond Williams', History Workshop, 27 (1989): 141-53; Stephen Heath and Colin MacCabe, 'Raymond Williams, 1921-1988', Critical Quarterly, 30, 1 (1988): 3-5. For the work of Williams generally, I have found especially illuminating Terry Eagleton, 'Criticism and Politics: the Work of Raymond Williams', New Left Review, 95 (1976): 3-23. See also J. P. Ward, Raymond Williams (University of Wales Press for Welsh Arts Council, 1981); Alan O'Connor, Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); and Andrew Milner, 'Williams and the New Left', Southern Review, 22, 2 (1989): 119-28.
3. E.P. Thompson, 'Last Dispatches from the Border Country', The Nation, 5 March 1988, 310.
14. Raymond Williams, Border Country (London: Hogarth, 1988 [1960]) 22. This novel has provoked relatively little sustained criticism, though see Laura Di Michele, 'Autobiography and the "Structure of Feeling" in Border Country', in Dennis L Dworkin and Leslie G. Roman, eds., Views Beyond the Border Country: Raymond Williams and Cultural Politics (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 21-37. For the impact of the novel on another scholarship boy, see

Dennis Potter, 'Unknown Territory', New Left Review, 7 (1961): 63-5.

5. Williams, Border Country, 27, 80, 48.

6. *Ibid.*, 56-7.

7. Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970 [1957]), 38, 45.

8. See, for example, Fred Inglis, Radical Earnestness: English Social Theory, 1880-1980 (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982), 170.

9. Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 299.

10. Williams, Border Country, 242.

11. *Ibid.*, 153-4.

12. *Ibid.*, 252, 254.

13. This point is made by C.L. Mowat, 'The Education of Raymond Williams', The Critical Quarterly, 3, 2 (1961): 180.

14. Williams, Border Country, 154.

15. Williams, Country and City, 4, 102; Williams, Border Country, 157.

16. Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987 [1966]),
13. See also Raymond Williams, Drama From Ibsen to Brecht (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), esp. 271; and the earlier Raymond Williams, Drama From Ibsen to Eliot (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), esp. 23-27.
17. Raymond Williams, Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review (London: Verso, 1979), 282. This point about Harry Williams need not be laden with partisan implications, especially since it relies primarily on Raymond Williams' own testimony. Still, the ongoing process of historicizing the New Left often involves internecine struggle, most clearly revealed in the often bitter reception of Fred Inglis's Raymond Williams (London: Routledge, 1995). This flawed biography, upon which I have relied very little in my own interpretation, drew a scathing review from Raphael Samuel in the London Review of Books (4 July 1996). However, as a number of subsequent letter writers observed (1 August 1996), Samuel's essay embodied the same techniques (snobbery and innuendo) which the reviewer found so offensive in the biographer. More important, as these same writers also observed, Samuel never substantively refuted Inglis's interpretation of Williams' character.
18. Williams, Border Country, 282.
19. *Ibid.*, 15, 81, 67.
20. *Ibid.*, 69, 10, 75, 76.
21. Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary' in Norman Mackenzie, ed., Conviction (London:

MacGibbon and Kee, 1958), 80.

22. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (New York: Harper, 1958), esp. 295-338.

23. Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution, rev.ed. (New York: Harper, 1965), 335-47. See also, among others, Raymond Williams, Communications, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 138-179.

24. Williams, Border Country, 9.

25. Williams, Country and City, 5.

26. Ibid., 184, 234.

27. Ibid., 84.

28. Raymond Williams, The Fight for Manod (London: Hogarth, 1988 [1979]), 193; Williams, Country and City, 84.

29. Williams, Border Country, 160, 254.

30. Ibid., 331, 333.

31. Ibid., 58, 122.

32. Williams, Politics and Letters, 24-5.

33. Williams, Country and City, 12.
34. Dennis Dworkin, Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 149-50.
35. For example, see Gareth Stedman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in Working Class History, 1832-1982 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Ross McKibbin, The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding, eds. Workers' Worlds: Culture and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Andrew Davies, Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939 (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992); Ellen Ross, Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
36. Patrick Parrinder, 'The Accents of Raymond Williams', Critical Quarterly, 26, 1 & 2 (1984): 50.
37. Raymond Williams, 'A Man Confronting a Very Particular Kind of Mystery', Times Higher Educational Supplement, 5 May 1978, 10; Raymond Williams, 'Our Debt to Dr. Leavis', The Critical Quarterly, 1, 3 (1959): 245. See also Raymond Williams, 'Seeing a Man Running', in Denys Thompson, ed., The Leavises: Recollections and Impressions (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1984), 113-22; and Inglis, Williams, 162-95.

38. Williams, Politics and Letters, 66.

39. The bibliography on Leavis is enormous, and like the man himself, divisive. Two excellent works which place his criticism in historical context are: Chris Baldick, The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); and Francis Mulhearn, The Moment of Scrutiny (London: New Left Books, 1979). See also the recent biography, Ian MacKillop, F.R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism (London: Allan Lane, 1995).

40. Williams, Politics and Letters, 67.

41. Ibid.

42. Postmodernism loves to peel back its own onion. For Britain, see among others, Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Antony Easthope, British Post-Structuralism Since 1968 (London; Routledge, 1988); Graeme Turner, British Cultural Studies: An Introduction (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); and Patrick Brantlinger, Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America (New York: Routledge, 1990).

43. Bruce Robbins, Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture (London: Verso, 1993), 142.

44. Williams, Politics and Letters, 287.
45. Robbins, Secular Vocations, 132-33.
46. Williams, Politics and Letters, 289.
47. By 1979, Williams's books sold over 750,000 copies, an extraordinary figure for an academic writer. See Terry Eagleton, The Function of Criticism from 'The Spectator' to Post-Structuralism (London: Verso, 1984), 112.
48. Williams, Culture and Society, 176-77. See also Raymond Williams, Orwell (London: Fontana/Collins, 1971).
49. Raymond Williams in Ronald Hayman, ed., My Cambridge (London; Robson Books, 1977), 55.
50. Williams co-authored an article on Bourdieu. See Nicholas Garnham and Raymond Williams, 'Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Culture: An Introduction', Media, Culture and Society, 2 (1980): 209-23.
51. Williams, Border Country, 139.