George Orwell and Raymond Williams : A Comparison of their Thoughts on Politics, Letters and Language.

D. W. Johnson.

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between George Orwell and Raymond Williams as reflected in their respective writings on politics, letters and language.

The study aims to provide a close historical reading of exemplary texts written by Orwell and Williams. This involves: description of the historical context in which the texts were produced ; close analysis of the selected texts ; and summarising their related writings in these three areas in order to place the 'exemplary texts' in the context of their work as a whole. Finally, having thus provided a synthesis of their respective thoughts on politics, letters and language, the similarities and differences between Orwell and Williams are derived.

The conclusion drawn in this study is that notwithstanding several important differences, Orwell and Williams share a number of fundamental assumptions and beliefs in these defined areas. In their 'political' writings, they share a reliance on the evidence of 'experience ; a sense of Britain as a society governed ultimately by consensus rather than by conflict; and a commitment to similar forms of socialist-humanism. In their work on letters, they both resist the dominant definitions of 'literature' ; they both explore the relation between 'politics' and 'letters' ; and they both seek to use 'letters' in the service of (socialist) 'politics'. In their understandings of language, both Orwell and Williams assume a 'unified subject' that precedes language as the source of meaning ; they both insist on the existence of some pre-linguistic 'reality' ; and they share a sense of language as being in some way constitutive. The differences between Orwell and Williams can be summarised as follows: first, they wrote in different contexts ; second, they

represent different constituences of British socialism (Orwell middle-class and Williams working-class); and third, whereas Orwell is a popular essayist, Williams is a literary academic, who explores the many concerns they share with greater subtlety and care.

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Introduction

In recent years, several scholars have suggested that there are significant similarities between the ideas of George Orwell and those of Raymond Williams.

The most extended study on the subject is that of Paul Thomas. In his essay 'Mixed Feelings : Raymond Williams and George Orwell', he argues that although the comparisons should not be pushed too far, Orwell and Williams do have a great deal in common. For Thomas, 'the points of similarity and areas of overlap ... are largely political' (p. 424) : both Orwell and Williams reject the vulgar-Marxist contention that (economic) base determines (political and cultural) superstructure; both are concerned centrally with removing class barriers to equality; and both are indifferent to the mechanics of parliamentary politics, public administration and trade union structures, focusing instead on the cultural dimension of the struggle for socialism.

A second similarity Thomas identifies is their shared concern with 'lived experience' :

> Orwell and Williams frequently refer or appeal to their own experiences, perceptions, and recollections and inscribe these within accounts of social, cultural, or political events and processes that are much more general. (p. 425)

According to Thomas, this desire to relate personal experience to the society as a whole leads to another area of overlap, their exploration of popular culture. He quotes with approval George Woodcock's argument (p. 251) that Orwell's essays on boys' weeklies, Donald McGill and detective fiction

have formed the foundation for the cultural criticism developed by Williams and Richard Hoggart.

The final area of common interest Thomas discusses is that of language. He argues :

> Orwell and Williams share a direct and politically-charged preoccupation with the use and meaning of words, a preoccupation that links Williams's book Keywords with Orwell's essays on language, particularly 'Politics and the English Language' and 'Why I Write'. (p. 426)

Furthermore, in their respective understandings of language both Orwell and Williams are in different ways vulnerable to the Althusserian argument that 'dominant ideologies habitually exploit "imaginary" devices [including language] in various ways in order to bolster up the construct of a relatively "fixed" identity' (p. 427).

Like Thomas, Christopher Norris, in his essay 'Language, Truth and Ideology: Orwell and the Post-War Left ', sees Orwell and Williams sharing a similar reliance on 'experience' , and a related resistance to 'theory' :

> Williams cannot entirely divest his writing of the homespun individualist-empirical style which animates Orwell's prose. He can certainly acknowledge the weight of implied ideology which goes along with the resistance to theory in its cruder, neo-Orwellian forms. But the same resistance is at work in his own way of treating theoretical issues as part of an evolving social experience ,

> a combination of documentary record and personal work-in-progress. (pp. 244-5)

Norris employs the perspective of Althusserian ('Continental') Marxism in order to contextualise the 'common sense' empiricism he sees in both Orwell and Williams's work:

> From the standpoint of 'Continental' Marxism [Orwell's] case can be diagnosed as displaying all the blindspots and irrational regressions of empiricist ideology. Williams registers the force of this argument when he writes of Orwell's plain-man, common-sense style: his air of perpetually 'bumping up' against the straightforward facts of experience. Yet the commitment to empiricism - as a mode of historical experience, if not as a full-blown ideology - continues to exercise a rival claim in Williams's dealings with Continental Marxism. For him, as for [E. P.] Thompson, it acts as a constant qualifying check on the powers of theoretical abstraction. (p. 261)

In his discussion with John Lukacs and Gerald Graff entitled 'The Legacy of Orwell', Edward Said suggests yet another basis for comparing Orwell and Williams:

> I'd like to think of Orwell as simply one actor in a very complicated drama which is continuing to unfold. The drama has to do with problems of superstructure and base. Are the political and economic circumstances more determining than the ideological and cultural? What is the relationship between them? A person who

> comes after Orwell - Raymond Williams, for example - can be much more interesting on this sort of thing. Williams of course depends a great deal on Orwell, and has an Orwellian sensibility, but he takes in a lot more than Orwell ever took the time to do, trying precisely to gauge the inflection in the relationship between culture and social polity. (p. 126)

In an important overview of Williams in the New Left Review , Anthony Barnett emphasizes the significance of Orwell in the development of Williams's political understanding:

> Williams's relationship to Orwell is obviously an important one for him. Orwell is the last individual to be given a chapter in the roll-call of Culture and Society. If that inheritance has been continued by Williams, then he picked up the baton from a writer whose conclusions, he states, 'have no general validity' but who was 'brave' and 'frank'. (p. 58)

He traces Williams's argument that in the middle of the 1940s Orwell helped to tie the knot binding 'Democracy' and Western capitalism. He continues :

> it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Williams, despite the fact that he was not defeated and never became an anti-Communist, in fact retained a kind of left version of the knot which Orwell helped to tie. That he, in effect, reproduced in his main political works the assumption that there is only one kind of democracy - which exists as a human inter-relationship irrespective

> of its class character. (p. 58)

According to Barnett, Williams's analysis of Western democracy is flawed in that he exaggerates the potential of revolution by 'consensus and argument', and also in that he underestimates the coercive power of Western states; his analysis of Russia, on the other hand, fails to distinguish the proletarian democracy that preceded the manifestly undemocratic Stalinist oligarchy. The result is that he tends - like Orwell - to identify 'democracy' with bourgeois government.

Finally, there have been two re-workings of Williams's 'culture-and-society' tradition which have included both Orwell and Williams as part of a common problematic or world-view. Lesley Johnson in The Cultural Critics : From Matthew Arnold to Raymond Williams pays tribute to Williams's pioneering work in the field of culture, and then sets out to describe the figures in 'a vital tradition of social criticism which has represented the artistic imagination as a moral force in society and as a fundamental mechanism for social change' (p. vii). Johnson identifies the three main figures in the tradition as Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams, but includes a substantial discussion of Orwell as a contemporary of Leavis. He concludes the section on Orwell as follows:

> Though neither culture nor education were dominant issues for him, Orwell was nevertheless taunted by the same questions [as Leavis and Williams] of the role of the literary intellectual, the future of aesthetic or creative activities in the society, and the quality of life in modern society. These issues signal the essential lines of Orwell's problematic. (p. 144)

A more recent study construing Orwell and Williams as part of the same tradition is Fred Inglis's Radical Earnestness: English Social Theory 1880 -1980 . Inglis also opens by acknowledging his debt to Williams's Culture and Society 1780 -1950 , and then describes the (similar) tradition he wishes to celebrate:

> it is composed of those who, in the teeth of a long record of British bullying, self-congratulation, hypocrisy and murderous cruelty, have also found something to honour in British intellectual life as it has resisted the awfulness of its own, dominant culture. (p. 4)

According to Inglis:

> [This tradition] has passed on ways of valuing and imagining human virtues which have helped to prevent their being lied out of existence, has shown how to criticize and fight off the blatant ideologizing of their advantages by the rich, the powerful, the greedy and the cruel. (p. 5)

Central to their mode of social protest is

> a habit of recourse to concrete examples in argument, a calm refusal of formal metaphysics, an unexamined criticism of 'over-abstraction' (which meant other people's abstractions), and a general preference for non-systematized or pluralist theories of

> political life. (p. 22)

These broad criteria enable Inglis to trace a tradition that accommodates Orwell and Williams quite comfortably within its terms; indeed, even more unlikely figures - like T. H. Green, E. P. Thompson and Isaiah Berlin - are linked in Inglis's reconstituted tradition.

Taken together, these arguments might seem persuasive. However, before trying to derive from them the grounds for comparing Orwell and Williams, two objections to such a comparison need to be examined. In the first place, Williams's own attitude to Orwell must be considered: does Williams see Orwell as his closest ancestor?[1]

Orwell stands as the final figure in Culture and Society 1780-1950 , but Williams's treatment of him is hardly that of a disciple. In the opening paragraph, Williams writes:

> With us , [my emphasis] he inherited a great and humane tradition; with us, he sought to apply it to the contemporary world. He went to books, and found in them the detail of virtue and truth. He went to experience, and found in it the practice of loyalty, tolerance and sympathy. (p. 276)

But for Orwell, this tradition is 'a kind of wry joke', everywhere contradicted by the harshness of the actual world. Williams describes the total effect of Orwell's work to be a paradox, and sees the key to the paradox as lying in his position as an exile deprived of any substantial community. Orwell committed himself to the idea of socialism, his most deliberate attempt to become part of a believing community being in Spain. Williams's main

criticisms of Orwell are directed at the proliferation of dubious generalisation in his work, his emotive abuse of fellow-Leftists, and his paralysing doubts (realised in Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four) as to the revolutionary potential of the working classes. Despite these criticisms, Williams's concluding assessment of Orwell contains a note of approval:

> as a man [Orwell] was brave, generous, frank, and good, and ... the paradox which is the total effect of his work is not to be understood in solely personal terms, but in terms of the pressures of a whole situation. I would certainly insist that his conclusions have no general validity, but the fact is, in contemporary society, that good men are driven again and again into his kind of paradox. (p. 284)

In 1971, Williams wrote his study Orwell , in which he develops his arguments in Culture and Society . Again, it is Orwell's contradictions that he foregrounds:

> Indeed the contradictions, the paradox of Orwell, must be seen as paramount . Instead of flattening out the contradictions by choosing this or that tendency as the 'real' Orwell, or fragmenting them by separating this or that period or this or that genre, we ought to say that it is the paradoxes which are finally significant. (p. 87)

He explains the paradox firstly in terms of Orwell's search for identity: 'Educated as he was to a particular consciousness, the key to his whole development is that he renounced it, or attempted to renounce it, and that he

made a whole series of attempts to find a new social identity' (pp. 87-8). Travelling light and often, Orwell encompassed in his life a range of contradictory experiences and occupied a range of contradictory positions. Williams concludes warmly:

> with great stubbornness and persistence and courage he went to the centres of the history that was determining him, so that it might be experienced and differently determined. . . . He was the writer who put himself out, who kept going and taking part, and who learned to write as a precise function of this very precise exploration. (p. 90)

The second key to explaining the paradox of Orwell lies in his historical context: according to Williams, the political contradictions (particularly the betrayal of the revolution in Russia) and the isolation and abstraction involved in them, combined with Orwell's lack of an independent social identity to produce a radical pessimism. Both Orwell's illusion as to the imminence of social democracy and his accommodation to Western capitalism should be read in the light of these contradictions.

In this study, Williams's discussion follows broadly the chronology of Orwell's career. Firstly, he dissects with admirable clarity the myth of England created by Orwell, arguing that the crucial weakness of Orwell's analysis

> lies in the original image of a family. Orwell hated what he saw of the consequences of capitalism, but he was never able to see it, fully, as an economic and political <u>system</u> . His great strength in

> personalising particular injustices was not supported by any adequate understanding of the very general forces involved. (p. 26)

Secondly, he identifies Orwell's perception of himself as a writer who 'under normal circumstances' would have practised a purely aesthetic art, but who was forced by the age he lived in to produce political pamphlets. Relating this perception of himself to the pattern of failure repeated in his novels, Williams concludes that Orwell chose 'being a writer' as a means of escaping the powerful orthodox world: unlike Dorothy Hare, Gordon Comstock and Orwell's other modest protagonists, a writer, in the aesthetic sense of the term, would not be defeated and re-absorbed into the 'normal' world. However, because he was a 'political' rather than an 'aesthetic' writer, Orwell's choice 'led him into every kind of difficulty, every tension that the choice had seemed to offer to avoid' (p. 40). Thirdly, Williams questions the applicability of the conventional separation of 'documentary' and 'fictional' writing as regards Orwell. After analysing the role of privileged observer assumed by Orwell, Williams concludes that his work before 1937 should be seen 'as sketches towards the creation of his most successful character, "Orwell" ' (p. 52). Fourthly, Orwell's political trajectory is outlined, with Williams emphasizing the significance of Orwell's conversion to revolutionary socialism in Spain, and excusing his subsequent reversion to patriotism in generous terms:

> He had exposed himself to so much hardship and then fought so hard; had got a bullet in the throat in Spain; had been severely ill with a tubercular lesion; had given so much of his energy to what seemed a desert of political illusions, lies, and bad faith. (p. 65)

Fifthly, Williams looks at Orwell's final two novels. In discussing Animal Farm, he acknowledges the 'practical humanity' and 'comradeship of the suffering' generated in the novel, but criticizes the way in which the fable profoundly denies both the consciousness of the workers and the possibility of authentic revolution (pp. 72-4). His most angry criticisms are directed at Nineteen Eighty-Four. Not only is Orwell's political analysis - particularly his identification of socialism and a centralised economy - a damaging misrepresentation, but more importantly for Williams, he has denied the resilience of the human spirit under conditions of cruelty and oppression, summarily writing off both the revolutionary potential of the 'proles' and 'the ordinary resources of personal life' (p. 81). Even in this work though, Williams finds 'there are still many elements of the novel which belong to a more liberating consciousness' (p. 74), both in Orwell's creation Newspeak, with its assumptions concerning the relation between linguistic and social forms of control, and in his convincing vision of power politics.

Finally, Williams discusses Orwell's diverse influence in post-War Britain. First, drawing especially on Nineteen Eighty-Four , Orwell's name has been used by conservatives to popularise the belief that any radical initiative inevitably leads to authoritarian structures. Second, Labour Party revisionists of the fifties and sixties drew on Orwell's arguments for putting 'the right members of the family in control' in the The Lion and the Unicorn to defend their own moderate programmes of modernisation and piecemeal reform. Most significantly from the point of view of this study, however, is the enormous shadow Orwell cast over the New Left. Since Williams was part of this grouping, his response is important:

> This New Left respected Orwell directly, especially in its early years.

> The invasion of Suez was an open exercise of the British Imperialism he had so consistently attacked. The Hungarian revolution, a popular and socialist rising against a bureaucratic and authoritarian communism, was at once a confirmation of what he had said about Stalinism and a demonstration of the authentic movement to which he had paid homage in Catalonia. The danger of the Bomb - 'either we renounce it or it destroys us' - was as he had seen it : not only the weapon which could destroy civilisation, but the shadow under which a new authoritarian war economy would grow and extend. And then, closely involved with these political positions, there was the Orwell who had written about work, about poverty, about popular culture, the Orwell who had tried to live and feel where the majority of English people were living and feeling: reporting, understanding, respecting, beyond the range of an Establishment culture. (p. 85)

In Orwell therefore, Williams commends Orwell on several points: for his persistent and courageous efforts to be at 'the centres of the history that was determining him' ; for the 'practical humanity' he expresses in Animal Farm; and for his anti-imperialism, his anti-Stalinism, and his attempts to challenge the 'Establishment culture' . Insofar as these indications of approval go, they suggest that Williams and Orwell indeed have some common values and beliefs.

In Williams's next piece on Orwell - Chapter V. 2 of Politics and Letters - there is no evidence of Williams liking anything about Orwell. He describes Orwell's influence in the post-War decades as a serious obstacle to socialist enquiry rather than as a source of inspiration :

> In the Britain of the fifties, along every road that you moved, the figure of Orwell seemed to be waiting. If you tried to develop a new kind of popular cultural analysis, there was Orwell; if you wanted to report on work or ordinary life, there was Orwell; if you engaged in any kind of socialist argument, there was an enormously inflated statue of Orwell warning you to go back. (p. 384)

Responding to the interviewers' unfriendly attitude to Orwell, Williams concedes that in trying to understand Orwell sympathetically, he might have let him off rather lightly (p. 386). If this is so, he compensates for his leniency here. His concluding assessment of Orwell is extremely negative:

> I must say that I cannot bear much of [Orwell's work] now. If I had to say which writings have done the most damage, it would be what you call the social patriotism - the dreadful stuff from the beginning of the war about England as a family with the wrong members in charge.... Many of the political arguments of the kind of labourism that is usually associated with the tradition of Durbin or Gaitskell can be traced to these essays, which are much more serious facts than Animal Farm. For all its weakness, that still makes a point about how power can be lost and how people can be misled.... As for Nineteen Eighty-Four its projections of ugliness and hatred, often quite arbitrarily and inconsequentially, 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. (pp. 391-2)

If Orwell contains the most substantial evidence of the similarities between Orwell and Williams, the chapter in Politics and Letters points most clearly to their differences.

Williams returns to Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984, writing an afterword on the novel in a second edition of Orwell.[2] Perhaps surprisingly after Politics and Letters, his tone in this essay is again more sympathetic. He focuses firstly on the complexities of its form - the interweaving of fantasy, naturalism and political analysis - and then traces the background to the three themes that for Williams dominate the novel: the division of the world into three superstates, the brutal processes of control within each state, and the use of means of communication to enforce totalitarian rule. Williams then scrupulously examines whether these themes anticipated with any accuracy contemporary political reality. Of the first two themes, Williams concludes that although they might contain elements of truth, it is their limitations that are more apparent: the three zones of influence theory is undermined by inter alia the growth of multi-nationals and, more importantly for Williams, by the record of successful political resistance in the Third World. The internal organisation of these states has not followed the pattern of oligarchical collectivism: in countries of 'already existing socialism', the Party has proved to be less than monolithic, and in the West, the incredible resurgence of capitalism has made Oceania-style repression unnecessary. Of the third theme, however, Williams concludes that 'what has really survived from Nineteen Eighty-Four , is Orwell's understanding of propaganda and thought control' (p. 120). The final question Williams considers is, why do people seek power? The answer in Nineteen Eighty-Four that people want it 'for its own sake' is one that Williams rejects firmly, since he argues:

> There are reasons, as outside the fiction Orwell well knew, why there are systems and phases of systems in which, as throughout recorded history, opponents and even inconvenients are imprisoned, tortured and killed. (p. 125)

To surrender methods of discriminating historical analysis and replace them with theories of irrational power worship - as Orwell does in Nineteen Eighty-Four -

> is to show little respect to those many men and women, including from the whole record Orwell himself, who have fought and are fighting the destructive and ignorant trends that are still so powerful (p. 126)

In this final statement, Williams again pays oblique tribute to Orwell's personal courage.

Reviewing the sum of Williams's writings on Orwell, an ambigious impression emerges: on the one hand, there is evidence of Williams endorsing certain of Orwell's values and achievements, particularly in sections of Orwell ; on the other hand, there is far more evidence - as in Politics and Letters - of Williams rejecting Orwell in the strongest terms. Although Williams's resistance to Orwell does not preclude the possibility of there being significant points of similarity between the two of them, it should alert us to the limits of such a comparison.

The second objection to comparing Orwell and Williams that needs to be negotiated and explained is their very different reputations in the post-War

British Left. Whereas Williams's stature as a spokesman for the Left is hardly questioned, the same cannot be said of Orwell. In his review of The Long Revolution published in 1961, E. P. Thompson writes of Williams:

> I have no need to insist upon the importance of Raymond Williams' achievement.... His work, over the past ten years, carries an authority which commands the respect of his opponents; and the positions which he has occupied must be negotiated by critics and by historians, by educational theorists, by sociologists and political theorists. This is to say that his work is very important indeed, and that - so far as we can speak of a New Left - he is our best man.[3] (p. 24)

Eighteen years later, in the Foreword to Politics and Letters, he is referred to by the editorial board of the New Left Review as 'the pre-eminent intellectual representative of socialism in contemporary Britain' (p. 9). Orwell, on the other hand, has a far more ambiguous reputation. I have already discussed the New Left Review interviewers' hostility to Orwell; it is worth quoting a short passage to reinforce the dramatic contrast to their assessment of Williams:

> Orwell had few or no original ideas, a limited creative imagination, and an unreliable capacity to recount information.... In the short run, the main charges against Orwell are political - the decline into his own versions of social chauvinism and anti-communism. But in the long run, the cultural damage done by his lack of literary scruple has probably been more lasting. (p. 387)

This is an extreme and not entirely representative judgement, but it too serves as ample warning against any attempts to identify Williams too closely with Orwell.[4]

In order to define the points of overlap between Orwell and Williams without diminishing their real differences, I have firstly grouped the possible bases for comparing them under three broad heads. In Chapter One, I explore the suggestions of Thomas, Inglis and Barnett that the similarities between Orwell and Williams are essentially of a political nature; in Chapter Two I develop the arguments of Said and Johnson that draw attention to their common interest in literature and culture; and in Chapter Three, I follow through the arguments of Norris and Thomas that stress the significance of their shared assumptions about language.

Secondly, in each chapter I have selected texts from Orwell and Williams that I take to be representative of their work in each of the three broad areas defined. In selecting the texts I have been influenced by a number of factors: the length of the text (texts not conveying sufficient detail have generally been rejected); their critical reception (texts that have elicited wide critical interest have been favoured); their reciprocal relevance (texts in which Orwell and Williams focus most closely on the same issues have been preferred - for example, in the second chapter, out of all their work on culture and literature I have selected their essays on Charles Dickens).

Having identified areas of common interest, and selected within these areas exemplary texts, I undertake a close historical reading of the texts selected. This involves the following. Firstly, I describe the historical context in which the texts were produced, drawing on the major histories and political analyses of Britain in order to reconstruct the economic, political and ideological setting at the times when Orwell and Williams were writing.

Secondly, I perform a close reading of the texts selected; by focusing carefully on specific 'exemplary texts' , the danger of lifting arguments and images from their discursive context is reduced, and the grounds of the comparison can be more precisely located. Thirdly, I summarise their other related texts in each of the three main areas in order to place the 'exemplary texts' in context of their work as a whole. The fourth and final dimension of this study is of course the drawing together of the similarities between Orwell and Williams. By this combination of close reading, and social and personal contextualisation, I hope that an accurate articulation of the relationship between them might be achieved.

Finally, this study is pursued in the spirit of Williams's 'cultural materialism'. Jonathan Dollimore in Political Shakespeare defines cultural materialism as 'a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis' (p. vii), and argues that it offers the strongest challenge to traditional critical practice. I hope that in choosing this topic and exploring it in this manner, I might make some contribution - however modest - to the expanding body of oppositional literary criticism.

Chapter One: Politics

The texts to be analysed in this chapter are: The Lion and the Unicorn by Orwell (in Sonia Orwell and Angus, II, pp. 74-134)[1], the final section of The Long Revolution and Towards 2000 by Williams. These choices need to be explained briefly.

The Lion and the Unicorn conforms to the selection criteria specified in the Introduction. It is Orwell's most detailed summary of how he conceptualises the transition to socialism in Britain. It has also been extremely influential in post-War Britain. Williams, as we have seen, argues in Politics and Letters that 'the political arguments of the kind of labourism that is usually associated with the tradition of Durbin or Gaitskell' can be traced to Orwell's' dreadful stuff from the beginning of the war' (p. 391). Tom Nairn in The Left Against Europe makes a similar point, describing The Lion and the Unicorn as

> the true locus classicus of modern British left-wing nationalism in this sense, recording as it does the 'return' of a left-wing intellectual to healthy patriotism and his demand for a socialism based on it. (p. 69)

The concluding chapter of The Long Revolution, entitled 'Britain in the 1960 s, also conforms to the selection criteria. Written at the end of the 1950 s, it represents a detailed synthesis of Williams's political thought at this stage, combining an analysis of British society with suggestions as to how 'the long revolution' - the achievement of a socialist democracy - might be accelerated. It has also been influential, particularly in the emergence of the New Left. Stuart Hall, for example, in Culture, Media, Language , looks back on it as 'a seminal event in English post-War intellectual life' (p. 19).

In Towards 2000, Williams reviews and extends The Long Revolution analysis in substantial detail: he repeats 'Britain in the 1960 s in Part II of the book; in Part III, he devotes a chapter to each of the main themes in the earlier essay; he provides an international perspective in Part IV; and draws together his hopes and fears for a socialist Britain in the final part. It is too early to judge whether Towards 2000 will have an impact of the same order as The Lion and the Unicorn and The Long Revolution, but Williams's enormous stature on the Left will ensure that it will at least be taken seriously in discussion of socialist alternatives in Britain. Further reasons for analysing Towards 2000 are that it provides a means of exploring how Williams has responded to changed historical conditons, how these changed conditions have informed his work; and how his relation to Orwell might have changed in the twenty years since The Long Revolution.

Finally, the third criterion for selecting texts is that they should be 'reciprocally relevant'. In this first chapter, the texts I have chosen conform to this criterion in a very broad sense, in that they are all concerned with understanding British society and with finding ways in which the journey to socialism in Britain might be hastened.

1.1 The Lion and the Unicorn

The Lion and the Unicorn was first published in February 1941, at a moment during the Second World War when Britain had yet to secure a single offensive victory, and had already suffered heavy defeats in North Africa, Singapore and Crete. In this 'finest hour', the British state and social polity assumed a quite distinct character.

In the first place, the War Cabinet took on wide powers to regulate the economy. Whereas previously the exchange of goods and labour had been subject to market forces, during the War the state intervened in the economy in a number of ways: it set the prices of certain goods; it controlled the amounts bought by rationing; it determined the wages for key industries; and it allocated employees to different sectors of industry by means of the manpower budget. Laurence Harris in his article 'State and Economy in the Second World War', emphasizes the ad hoc nature of these measures:

> These moves in the direction of centralized planning were not adopted as a result of administrators and politicians making an abstract choice for socialism, deciding in principle that planning was superior to the market system for a wartime economy. It was brought in, bit by bit, in response to the force of events and socialism was not the result. (p. 72)

Harris explains further why the cumulative effect of these economic dispensations still fell short of socialism as he understands it:

> The basic features of a capitalist economy remained intact. The wartime economy was one where most factories and commercial

> enterprises were owned by private capital, where profit was their yardstick, and where wages played a central role in the labour market. . . . The normal relationship between the state and civil society, in which the state maintains the conditions under which capital can generate and accumulate profits, remained. (p. 54)

The successes of the wartime innovations - full employment, increased military production, satisfaction of domestic needs - have been much emphasized by British historians. Andrew Marwick in Britain in the Century of Total War , for example, writes that

> though [these successes] were the product of a managed economy, that economy owed almost as much to the willing co-operation of a community faced with a struggle for survival as to the elaboration of any fully effective permanent system of national planning. (p. 277)

However, it is clear now that this indulgent image of brilliant organisation and British 'character' rests on two major fallacies. Correlli Barnett in The Audit of War draws attention to the fact that

> the impressive total figures of war production had only been possible because Lend-Lease and Sterling Area credit had relieved Britain of the need to earn her own way through exports. (p. 51)

And secondly, Britain's industrial performance was in fact less impressive than had been claimed. Barnett elaborates:

> The bald fact of Germany's defeat and Britain's victory has served to obscure from British minds the truth that German industry performed better overall during the War than British industry. (p. 60)

If the economy ultimately did not constitute socialism, the political organisation of wartime Britain did not resemble a democracy. Marwick emphasizes that the extraordinary powers enjoyed by Churchill's Cabinet ensured that the House of Commons was' relegated to a deeper impotence than ever' (p. 277). Besides the economic controls, the central government imposed substantial limits on freedom of speech and associaiton. In War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century , Marwick concludes that 'direction and control of life and labour were probably more total (and more efficient) than in any other country, save for Russia' (p. 151). Harris quotes a Guardian reader who remembers the bureaucratic rule of the war years as bearing 'a strong resemblance to George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four'! (p. 51).

Finally, in describing the historical context of The Lion and the Unicorn , an attempt must be made to convey a sense of the cultural and ideological atmosphere of the period.[1] Of particular relevance for this study was the emergence during the early part of War of a strong interest in how Britain should be restructured after the War. Barnett quotes Sir William Beveridge's explanation of this interest:

> Today there is no such prospect of contentment in going back, because the times before the Second World War were not good. The British people have learned by experience that after this war they

must go forward to something new, not back to the old. (p. 33)

Beveridge's own Report was the most famous of these investigations. It came out in 1942 and was to form the foundation of the welfare state. Other similar enquiries included Harold Laski's Where Do We Go From Here? (1940), which sold over 80000 copies, and John Strachey's tract A Faith to Fight For, which tries to find a socialist path forward after the shock of the Hitler-Stalin pact. These works share not only the same historical moment as The Lion and the Unicorn; they also share a desire to see Nazism vanquished, a rekindled patriotism, and an urgent concern to see a non-Stalinist version of socialism established in Britain.

That The Lion and the Unicorn is a product of its own exceptional historical moment is further demonstrated in reviewing (and comparing) Orwell's earlier, and also his subsequent thoughts on Britain and socialist politics.

Orwell's first extended consideration of British politics is The Road to Wigan Pier. Commissioned by Victor Gollancz in January 1936 to write about the condition of the unemployed in the industrial north of England,[2] Orwell produced a work containing in Part I a record of his impressions of working-class life, and in Part II a rambling polemic on the nature of socialism and socialists. Part II also represents a synthesis of Orwell's early life-experiences: his schooling at Eton; his imperial service in Burma; his 'slumming it' in Paris and London; and, of course, this journey to Wigan.

The image of Britain he presents is of a country divided by massive economic inequalities; he lays great stress on the deep roots of the conflict between rich and poor, arguing that

> the meeting of proletarian and bourgeois, when they do succeed in meeting, is not always the embrace of long-lost brothers; too often it is the clash of alien cultures which can only meet in war. (p. 258)

His understanding of socialism is expressed in terms of certain emotional allegiances rather than as a political programme: 'We have got to fight for justice and liberty, and Socialism does mean justice and liberty when the nonsense is stripped off it' (p. 292). And: 'What is the mark of a real Socialist? I suggest that the real Socialist is one who wishes . . . to see tyranny overthrown' (p. 292-3). However, perhaps the most famous part of Wigan Pier is Orwell's 'analysis' of socialists. He distinguishes between, firstly, the working-class socialist, who' is weak on doctrine and can hardly open his mouth without uttering a heresy, but he has the heart of the matter in him' (p. 293), and secondly, the middle-class socialist, whose insincerity and crankishness make him or her a great burden to the cause of socialism. Orwell's abuse of the latter category is extreme: 'If only the sandals and the pistachio-coloured shirts could be put in a pile and burnt, and every vegetarian, teetotaller, and creeping Jesus sent home to Welwyn Garden City to do his yoga exercises quietly!' (p. 293).[3] And yet he still ultimately argues that' it is desperately necessary for left-wingers of all complexions to drop their differences and hang together' (p. 292).

In Orwell's next piece on 'politics', Homage to Catalonia , he describes his experiences during the Spanish Civil War. Although of only indirect relevance to his understanding of Britain, Homage to Catalonia reflects a substantial development in his commitment to Socialism. In the first place, his socialism, which in Wigan Pier had been defined negatively (anti-oppression and only therefore socialist), became a positive ideal. He

records:

> For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society . . . . And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. The effect was to make my desire to see Socialism established much more actual than it had been before. (p. 376)

Secondly, his opposition to Communism, which had before been based on his emotional distance from fellow middle-class socialists, hardened into a political position. Fighting with Trotskyist/Anarchist and P.O.U.M. militias, Orwell became exposed to the ruthless repression and concerted propaganda directed against rival left-wing groups by the Stalinist-backed P.S.U.C and its British Communist Party supporters. In a favourable review of Franz Borkenau's The Spanish Cockpit (I, pp. 309-11), he concludes:

> The most important fact that has emerged from the whole business is that the Communist Party is now (presumably for the sake of Russian foreign policy) an anti-revolutionary force. So far from pushing the Spanish Government further towards the Left, the Communist influence has pulled it violently towards the Right. (p. 310)

Thirdly, the Spanish War reinforced Orwell's internationalist perspective on the struggle for socialism. In 'Looking Back on the Spanish War.' (II, pp. 286-311), he argues:

> The hatred which the Spanish Republic excited in millionaires, dukes, cardinals, play-boys, Blimps and what-not would in itself be enough to show one how the land lay. In essence it was a class war. If it had been won, the cause of the common people everywhere would have been strengthened. It was lost, and the dividend drawers all over the world rubbed their hands. That was the real issue; all else was froth on its surface. (p. 300)

Despite the betrayals and suffering he witnessed during the Civil War, Orwell returned from Spain a revolutionary socialist. In a kind of manifesto, 'Why I Joined the Independent Labour Party' (I, pp. 373-5), he declared:

> It is not possible for any thinking person to live in such a society as our own without wanting to change it .... At a moment like the present writing books is not enough .... One has got to be actively a Socialist, not merely sympathetic to Socialism. (p. 374)

This conviction was to fade soon afterwards. The war with Germany confronted him with a choice between pacificism (on the gounds that this was to be yet another imperialist war in which the workers of all countries would ultimately lose), and joining the patriotic clamour 'to wipe the curse of Hitler from the brow of mankind'. Although he acknowledged the cogency of internationalist arguments, Orwell was obliged to concede the residual force of his own thorough schooling in the myths of ruling class culture. In 'My Country Left or Right'(I, pp. 587-92), he writes:

> a time comes when the sand is sodden red and what have I done for thee, England, my England. I was brought up in this tradition myself . . . and also sympathise with it, for even at its stupidest and most sentimental it is a comelier thing than the shallow self-righteousness of the left-wing intelligentsia. (p. 587)

The Lion and the Unicorn and 'The English People' (III, pp. 15-56) are products of this phase, as is his essay in Victor Gollancz's Betrayal of the Left.[4]

In the final years of his life, although Orwell wrote several essays dealing with socialism in Britain, his political ideas at this stage were expressed most powerfully in his novels. In Animal Farm, his opposition to Stalinism is realised in the fable depicting the revolution of the farm animals against the rule of Jones. He explains his intention in the Preface to the Ukrainian Edition of Animal Farm (III, pp. 455-9):

> for the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement. On my return from Spain, I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and could be easily translated into other languages. (p. 458)

In Nineteen Eighty-Four, Orwell's misgivings about the Soviet state are reinforced by his perception that totalitarian tendencies were on the increase in all modern societies. Influenced by a group of writers he refers to as 'The Pessimists'[5], he blends in Nineteen Eighty-Four dystopian fantasy,

naturalism and political history (Goldstein's testimony) in order to serve a grim warning as to the dangers of totalitarianism. In a letter to Francis A. Henson of the United Automibile Workers (IV, p. 564), he clarifies his aims in Nineteen Eighty-Four:

> My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable and which have already been partly realized in Communism and Fascism .... The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if not fought against , could triumph anywhere. (p. 564)

The main elements in Orwell's final conception of socialist politics in Britain can be drawn out of these two novels. They include: first, his continuing commitment to the ideals of democratic socialism (as he understood it); second, his loss of faith in the capacity of 'ordinary people' to act as the agents of socialism: the proles in Nineteen Eighty-Four and the animals in Animal Farm are virtuous, but lack the political intelligence to seize power; third, his perception of nationalism as an emotion generated quite cynically by ruling elites: Winston Smith and the writer of The Lion and the Unicorn would differ profoundly as to the 'comely' aspect of patriotism; fourth, his view of the state as a powerful instrument of ruling-class domination, rather than as an institution reflecting the will of the majority: in Nineteen Eighty-Four, 'public opinion' is simply a creation of the Ministry of

Truth.[6]

Having described the context in which The Lion and the Unicorn was written, and summarised Orwell's other main 'political' writings, we are now able to turn to the arguments in The Lion and the Unicorn in more detail.

The first point of interest is the position-as-observer that Orwell assumes in the text. In the opening two paragraphs, Orwell describes his experience of the War in personal terms:

> As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me. They do not feel any enmity against me as an individual, nor I against them. They are 'only doing their duty' as the saying goes. (p. 74)

On the basis of this experience, he moves to the general conclusion that patriotism is a formidable force, that 'Christianity and international Socialism are as weak as straw in comparison with it' (p. 75). From this, it is a short step for Orwell to argue the analytical value of establishing national or racial stereotypes:

> Till recently it was thought proper to pretend that all human beings are very much alike, but in fact anyone able to use his eyes knows that the average of human behaviour differs enormously from country to country. (p. 75)

In bluff and confident fashion, Orwell thus justifies his search for 'the real England'.

The identity of the narrator is substantially established in this first page : 'I' connotes a stout-hearted Englishman speaking out on behalf of his fellow-countrymen. Confident as to the authenticity of his own experience, the narrator feels quite comfortable leaping rapidly from the specific (his personal experience of the bombing) to the general (his theories about the overriding force of patriotism). Further, 'anyone [else] able to use his eyes' must inevitably agree with his perceptions and generalisations about national identity, since they are derived from the (privileged) experience of the narrator himself. In Politics and Letters , Raymond Williams describes this narrative persona employed by Orwell in his essays as' the successful impersonation of the plain man who bumps into experience in an unmediated way and is simply telling the truth about it' (p. 385). In The Lion and the Unicorn, the plain man bumps into the experience of war, and he 'uses his eyes' in order to tell the truth about Britain's present plight and future prospects.

Although Williams is correct to stress Orwell's lack of self-consciousness vis-a-vis his position as observer, it should be added that Orwell is not unique in this respect. The failure on the part of British (and metropolitan writers generally) to foreground their own formation as members of a ruling class is deeply embedded. The economic and political hegemony enjoyed by Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was accompanied by the philosophies of liberal humanism and common sense empiricism, which took for granted the privileged point-of-view of the British observer/ narrator. E. H. Carr's discussion of British empiricism in What is History ?[7] brings this point into focus :

> The empirical theory of knowledge presupposes a complete separation between subject and object. Facts, like sense-impressions, impinge on the observer from outside and are independent of his consciousness. The process of reception is passive. (p. 9)

There is no doubt in the mind of the subject (in this case, the English historian of the nineteenth century) that the object ('the real world out there') might determine or in any way influence his perceptions; there is no possibility entertained that his way of seeing might be limited, the product of a particular and partial world view. In similar fashion, Orwell (the plain man) is a privileged subject, who also suppresses his own history as he 'uses his eyes' to observe the 'objective reality' (Britain in World War II).

In The Lion and the Unicorn, the confidence of the plain man in setting out to describe 'the real England' is reinforced by the unusually warm relationship he is able to conceive with his audience as a result of the war. In the opening passages, Orwell constitutes as the reader a decent sensible Briton able to see the common sense of his arguments. He uses the 'I-you' forms of personal dialogue to 'create' this figure: 'When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air' (emphasis added) (p. 75). Not surprisingly, the Germans - although '[m]ost of them, I have no doubt, are kind-hearted law-abiding men' (emphasis added) (p. 74) - are excluded from this dialogue. Writing for this sympathetic and homogeneous English audience, Orwell expects they will share his way of seeing. However, this relation with the undifferentiated decent English soul breaks down in the course of the essay.

Later, the ruling-class are excluded from the dialogue Orwell conducts - 'There they [the ruling class] sat, at the centre of a vast empire and a world-wide financial network' (emphasis added) (p. 89). The working-class too are excluded:

> At some point or another you have got to deal with the [working-class] man who says 'I should be no worse off under Hitler'. But what answer can you give him - that is, what answer can you expect him to listen to - while common soldiers risk their lives for two and sixpence a day, and fat women ride about in Rolls Royce cars, nursing pekineses? (emphasis added) (p. 109)

And: 'They can stand all that the Spanish workers stood, and more. But they will want some kind of proof that a better life is ahead for themselves and their children' (emphasis added) (p. 109). The plain man therefore sets out to establish a common bond with all his fellow Britons, but in the course of the essay his position as middle-class observer is revealed by these (unconscious) exclusions. The audience he ultimately addresses is one of the same class background and formation as himself - the 'educated' middle class. Orwell's main project in the first and longest section of The Lion and the Unicorn, entitled 'England Your England', is' to try and determine what England is , before guessing what part England can play in the huge events that are happening' (p. 76). His search for 'what England is' starts with a list of provocative but quite unrelated generalisations, which include: the English are not musical; they are not intellectual in the sense that they have a horror of abstract thought; they love flowers; they cherish their privacy; they

believe in the liberty of the individual; the 'common people' of England live against the dominant order, participating in a popular culture that goes on beneath the surface; the most marked characteristic of the English, however, he concludes, is their gentleness.

After this dubious list of national traits, Orwell questions the value of generalising in this fashion about a nation of forty-five million individuals. He asks, ' is not England notoriously two nations, the rich and the poor?' (p. 83). The answer he had given in Wigan Pier was firmly in the affirmative: the world of the coal-miners is entirely distinct from the comfortable world of Southern England. In The Lion and the Unicorn, however, he argues that there is a stronger force transcending class differences, namely patriotism: 'the vast majority of the people feel themselves to be a single nation and are conscious of resembling one another more than they resemble foreigners' (p. 84). He describes this patriotism as an 'invisible chain' binding the nation together. At moments of crisis, the people of England act as one; sometimes their herd instinct might be sound - as was the case in Dunkirk, but sometimes it might be awry - 'in the 1931 General Election, for instance, we all did the wrong thing in perfect unison' (emphasis added) (p. 86). From this, Orwell concludes that there is indeed a degree of democracy in Britain. He explains:

> between 1931 and 1940 the National Government represented the will of the mass of the people. It tolerated slums, unemployment and a cowardly foreign policy. Yes, but so did public opinion. (p. 86)

Orwell's concluding image of England combines these qualities of latent unity, incomplete democracy and apathetic consensus:

> England is not the jewelled isle of Shakespeare's much-quoted message, nor is it the inferno depicted by Goebbels. More than either it resembles a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. (p. 88)

The England Orwell presents here is the natural correlative of the unified audience he constitutes in the opening pages: the identity of the 'you' he addresses is established as referring to his 'family', bedridden aunts and impoverished cousins alike. This identification of nation and family reflects a fundamental shift away from his conception of Britain in Wigan Pier, where Orwell presents - with minor qualifications - a conflict model of society. In the Lion and the Unicorn, Orwell re-discovers 'the invisible chain' of patriotism, which causes him to relinquish the conflict model, and turn to a liberal-pluralist or consensual model of society in which the different classes ultimately agree on how affairs of state should be conducted. The government genuinely represents 'the will of the mass of the people', and there is 'real consensus' as to the form and structure of society.

Williams has argued that Orwell's principle failing was his inability to see British society as an economic and political system; that Orwell was able to go no further than personalising particular injustices.[8] The family analogy bears this out, but the criticism needs to be taken further: Orwell failed to see the society characterised by irreconcilable class conflict. A theoretical or systematic elaboration of the analysis in 'England Your England' would not 'correct' Orwell's shortcomings as long as it continued to build upon his assumptions of consensus; such analysis would still be paralysed by the absence of any sense of endemic conflict and struggle.

The next step Orwell takes in trying to determine what England is, is to examine the history of its ruling class:

> After 1832 the old land-owning aristocracy steadily lost power, but instead of disappearing or becoming a fossil they simply intermarried with the merchants, manufacturers and financiers who had replaced them, and soon turned them into accurate copies of themselves . . . . England was ruled by an aristocracy constantly recruited from parvenus. And considering what energy the self-made men possessed, and considering that they were buying their way into a class which at any rate had a tradition of public service, one might have expected that able rulers could be produced in some such way. (p. 89)[9]

Despite these historical advantages, the ruling class 'somehow' decayed, and by 1930 their usefulness was at an end. They grasped what was 'clearly the only escape' for them - they retreated into stupidity. After citing several examples of ruling class stupidity, Orwell moderates his attack by conceding

that they are at least 'morally fairly sound' - the deaths of dukes in Flanders proved that 'these people were [not] the cynical scoundrels that they are sometimes declared to be' (p. 93). He concludes : 'They are not wicked, or not altogether wicked; they are merely unteachable' (p. 93).

Orwell's indulgent caricature of the British ruling classes is a product of his own formation within the Eton network. His description is also consistent with his consensual conception of society; it is an elaboration of the bed-ridden aunts image, although there are further aspects that reveal his conservative strain more clearly. First, there is the remarkable suggestion that 'able rulers' should have been produced by the fusing of a 'caring aristocracy' and 'dynamic entrepreneurs' ; the issue of political leadership is thus presented as one of genetic rather than socio-political concern: how do we breed good leaders? With the Nazis literally engaged in such enquiries at the time, Orwell's flippant observation jars somewhat. Second, there is the clear assumption that the ruling-class in fact had a useful function at some stage in the past; that only by 1930 did they become parasites. On a slightly different tack, his perception of them as stupid and 'unteachable' is demonstrably false: although there are moments in British history - like during the First World War - when members of the ruling-class displayed extraordinary political and military ineptitude, to dismiss them as a class ignores the fact that they have maintained uninterrupted control of the means of production.

After dealing with the ruling class, Orwell continues by looking at the other classes in his society. He discusses firstly the imperialist middle-class, 'the Blimps', whose admirable vitality has been sapped by the bureaucratisation of the colonial service:

> Men like Clive, Nelson, Nicholson, Gordon would find no place for themselves in the modern British Empire .... The one-time empire builders were reduced to the status of clerks, buried deeper and deeper under the mounds of paper and red tape. (pp. 93-4)

This barely disguised nostalgia for the golden days of Empire throws into question Orwell's earlier claims in Wigan Pier that ' I hated the imperialism I was serving with a bitterness which I probably cannot make clear' (p. 244). If there is inconsistency in Orwell's perception of the Blimp class, his discussion of the left-wing intelligentsia, a related sub-section of the middle class (according to Orwell), is a faithful repetition of earlier arguments: 'There is little in them except the irresponsible carping of people who have never been and never expect to be in a position of power' (p. 95). And further: 'In left-wing circles it is always felt that there is something slightly disgraceful in being an Englishman and that it is a duty to snigger at every English institution' (p. 95). Despite the obsolescence of the Blimps and the shallowness of the intellectuals, Orwell argues that they should bury their differences and draw together. The contradictions and compromises involved in this rapprochement are occluded by the bluff common sense of the plain man, who relies again on the external threat of the war as his main argument:

> The Bloomsbury highbrow, with his mechanical snigger, is as out-of-date as the cavalry colonel. A modern nation cannot afford either of them. Patriotism and intelligence will have to come together again. It is the fact that we are fighting a war and a very peculiar kind of war, that may make this possible. (p. 96)

Orwell was at different periods closely identified with these antagonistic fractions of the middle-class, and his own identity as a patriotic socialist was forged by 'reconciling' the values of both fractions. What he proposes here as a viable political alliance is therefore an extension of his own (partially resolved) identity crisis.

Orwell concludes his search to find 'what England is' by describing the dissolution of the class system. He argues that:

> the upward and downward extension of the middle class . . . has happened on such a scale as to make the old classification of society into capitalists, proletarians and petit bourgeois (small property owners) almost obsolete. (p. 96)

He substantiates this by outlining the general improvement in living standards; the drawing together of the tastes, manners and outlook of the working-and middle-class; and the rapid emergence of a new indeterminate social class trained to manage the 'modern world' . He concludes that: 'This war, unless we are defeated, will wipe out most of the existing class privileges. There are every day fewer people who wish them to continue' (p. 98-9).

In trying to explain these optimistic predicitons, it must be acknowledged firstly that, although limited in extent, there was indeed a narrowing of the differences in wealth and income during this period. This was largely the result of the special demands of the war-time economy.[10] However, it must be noted that after the War, these trends were reversed: inequalities in the distribution of wealth, opportunity and income increased after this brief boom. Furthermore, the myth of a classless society propagated here by

Orwell was cynically used by the right-wing of the Labour Party in particular to obscure the de facto widening of the gulf between rich and poor.

The unique historical juncture at which Orwell was writing can, however, only partly explain his mistaken conclusions. Orwell's conception of class is tied centrally to factors like dress, accent and choice of newspaper, and accordingly he sees a change in these differentiated cultural patterns leading inevitably to a classless society: people simply need to relinquish their outdated class identities in order to dissolve the present system; that navvy and stockbroker should learn to accept and respect each others' cultural differences is for Orwell more central than that their respective relations to the means of production be radically changed. This argument represents another manifestation of Orwell's inability to understand British capitalism as a system made up of groups with irreconcilable material interests. By focusing his analysis on cultural differences, Orwell fails to appreciate the structural nature of these inequalities; the very survival of the system depends upon the existing differences in wealth etc. being maintained. Further, it is naïve to imply - as Orwell does - that the dominant class would acquiesce in the abolition of class privileges because 'fewer people every day wish them to continue.' The struggle and resistance involved in such a transformation would clearly be a great deal more complex and painful than this polite projection suggests.

Orwell applies the finishing touches to the England he creates in Part I in the concluding paragraphs of The Lion and the Unicorn. He conveys a sense of the 'real England' as some mythical entity latent within the existing reality. He identifies the idea of human equality with the English speaking world, arguing that 'from the English-speaking culture, if it does not perish, a society of free and equal human beings will ultimately arise' (p. 130). It is

this ideal that makes English civilisation - for all its sloth, hypocrisy and exploitation - preferable to the totalitarian regimes in Germany and Russia. It is by building on this tradition of equality and eliminating the injustices that the 'real England' might emerge, since England' is not being true to herself while the refugees who have sought our shores are penned up in concentration camps, and company directors work out subtle schemes to dodge their Excess Profits Tax' (p. 133). These hopes are built into Orwell's understanding of socialism, which he elaborates in the second and third parts of The Lion and the Unicorn.

In Part II, entitled 'Shopkeepers at War', Orwell argues:

> What this war has demonstrated is that private capitalism - that is, an economic system in which land, factories, mines and transport are owned privately and operated solely for profit - does not work. (p. 99)

What the War has also shown, according to Orwell, is that the competing systems of Socialism and Fascism do work, and the key to their superior effeciency is that they are planned economies. He digresses briefly to define Fascism and Socialism, insisting in the case of the latter that political democracy, approximate equality of income and the abolition of privilege are as essential as the common ownership of the means of production. He then concludes by emphasizing the positive effect of the War.

> It was a great step forward. From that time onwards the ghastly job of trying to convince artificially stupefied people that a planned economy might be better than a free-for-all in which the worst man

wins - that job will never be so ghastly again. (p. 105)

Several features of Orwell's socialism can be derived from this. First, he sees socialism as by definition a highly centralised economic system, and, basing his views on the successes of the German, Russian and British war-time economies, he argues further that superior efficiency is an inevitable benefit. The considerable problems with planned economies in countries of 'existing socialism' have been extensively described[11]; in particular, the structural constraints imposed by such economies upon democratic values and practices have been highlighted. Further, the elements of planning in the German and British economies stopped well short of adjusting the distribution of wealth; indeed the material power base of the ruling class was in no way threatened. Secondly, and in line with his myth of 'the real England', Orwell emphasized that existing democratic ideals and freedoms must be embraced and extended because a socialism relinquishing them (as in Soviet Russia) becomes synonymous with fascism. It is this libertarian dimension of Orwell's socialism that provides the moral basis of his attacks on totalitarianism in Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four. Thirdly, and extending from his consensual model of Britain, he places enormous faith in the power of reason: the plain man will undertake 'the ghastly job of convincing artificially stupefied people' that the solution lies with socialism. By reasoned argument, capitalism might thus be discredited and ultimately destroyed.

In the third and final part, 'The English Revolution' he sets out a six-point programme of socialist reform. The measures he suggests are: nationalisation of all major industries; equalisation of incomes; democratisation of the education system; granting independence to India; forming a genuinely

representative Imperial General Council; and declaring alliances with nations subject to Fascist powers. He recognizes there will be bitter political struggle over these policies, but he insists that:

> because the English sense of national unity has never disintegrated, because patriotism is finally stronger than class-hatred, the chances are that the will of the majority will prevail. (p. 118)

This programme of reform takes the existing structure as immutable: the state is seen merely as a neutral arena in which opposing interest groups work out their differences so that the will of the majority might be imposed. Orwell 's understanding here coheres entirely with the dominant myth of parliamentary legitimacy. Perry Anderson argues in 'The Antimonies of Antonio Gramsci' :[12]

> the general form of the representative State - bourgeois democracy - is itself the principal ideological lynchpin of Western capitalism, whose very existence deprives the working class of the idea of socialism as a different type of State , and the means of communication and other mechanisms of cultural control thereafter clinch this central ideological 'effect'. (p. 28)

Orwell's failure to penetrate this myth means he is blind to the fact that the bourgeois state, 'the government' in his terms, represents its population abstracted from its distribution into economic classes. The judicial parity between exploiter and exploited in the electoral process reassures him in his

belief that 'British governments . . . represent the will of the people'. By arguing for socialist reform without insisting on new democratic structures, Orwell fails to appreciate that a new form of state would be integral to the struggle for socialism. The policies he suggests would leave the existing state intact, and could comfortably be assimilated within a reformist social democracy in which control of the means of production remains substantially in the hands of the traditional ruling class.

In 'The English Revolution', Orwell also sets out who the agents of socialism will be. He attributes the failure of socialism in Britain in the 1930 s to the fact that' no one genuinely wanted any major change to happen' (p. 116). He argues further that the success of his six-point programme 'depends entirely on ourselves' (p. 124). He elaborates who 'ourselves' are: 'we', the potential agents of the English Revolution, are ordinary people who do not earn 'more than £2000 a year' (p. 108), 'whole classes of necessary people' (p. 116), who have the skills to administer the modern industrial state. The capacity to direct the course of history still lies with people, but a different class of people:

> The heirs of Nelson and Cromwell are not in the House of Lords. They are in the fields and the streets, in the factories and the armed forces, in the four-ale bar and the suburban back garden. (p. 133)

According to Orwell, the existing socialist parties are not equal to the task of mobilising this alliance of worker and petit-bourgeois, and are therefore inadequate agents of socialism. The Labour Party

> was and is primarily a party of the trade unions, devoted to

> raising wages and improving working conditions. This meant that through all the critical years it was directly interested in the prosperity of British capitalism. (p. 113)

He also dismisses the British Communist Party: they have a pathetically small support base; they preach an anachronistic political doctrine; and they eschew patriotism. He sees the War as having provided a unique opportunity to form a new Socialist party which overcomes the crippling defects of the existing alternatives:

> A Socialist movement which can swing the mass of the people behind it, drive the pro-Fascists out of positions of control, wipe out the grosser injustices and let the working class see they have something to fight for, win over the middle classes instead of antagonizing them, produce a workable imperial policy . . . bring patriotism and intelligence into partnership - for the first time, a movement of such a kind becomes possible. (p. 117)

Orwell's account of British history and also here of the struggle for socialism is in terms of the human actors: 'the ruling class lost their nerve', and 'the people will overcome'. As such, his arguments represent a limited response to the question of agency. Philip Abrams in his article 'History, Sociology, Historical Sociology', formulates this problem as follows:

> It is the problem of finding a way of accounting for human experience which recognizes simultaneously and in equal measure that history and society are made by constant, more or less

> purposeful, individual action and that individual action, however purposeful is made by history and society. (p. 7)

The underlying assumption in The Lion and the Unicorn is that since the state reflects the will of the people, and the economy too is obedient to the wishes of those controlling it. It is the consciousness of (English) people that must be analysed rather than the economy or state. For Orwell, change of consciousness always initiates economic and political change rather than vice versa.

The results of seeing 'the system' as secondary are crippling: most obviously, Orwell underestimates the economic, political and ideological constraints acting upon 'the people', and as a result projects a mood of unfounded optimism. Corelli Barnett's sober analysis of the war-time economy demonstrates the specious basis of Orwell's projections (and those of his contemporaries). Further, when 'the real England' fails to emerge in response to the pressure exerted by the agents of socialism, he blames 'the people' for the failure, instead of looking to the structural constraints acting upon them and adjusting his strategic goals accordingly.

1-2 Britain in the 1960 s

The Britain in which Williams wrote The Long Revolution was very different to the nation Orwell addressed in The Lion and the Unicorn; the austerity of the war years had rapidly been replaced by a more affluent order. Due to the world-wide economic boom which was to last until the 1960 s, and the temporary absence from world markets of economies destroyed by the War, Britain enjoyed in the 1950 s a period of unprecedented economic growth: output grew by 35% between 1951 and 1961, and real average earnings rose by 2,7% a year. A second difference was that laissez faire capitalism was replaced not by a planned economy - as Orwell had anticipated - but by a 'mixed economy'. Attlee's government nationalised certain (unprofitable) industries, set up the basic institutions of the welfare state, and ensured the maintenance of full employment with a series of Keynesian budgets. These reform measures, however, left the essential configuration of British capital unchanged. A third difference was that Britain's position as an independent imperial power was eroded; in return for substantial assistance in post-War reconstruction, Britain was forced to cede imperial preference to the United States. This was brought home harshly during the Suez crisis. A fourth development that warrants mention was the revival of London as a financial and commercial centre after the War. The British economy came to be controlled increasingly by finance - as opposed to industrial and manufacturing capital.[1]

In this period, there existed a remarkable degree of consensus between the two major political parties as to the shape Britain should assume. The Conservative government was content to claim the credit for the new prosperity and uphold the modest institutions of the welfare state, while the

Labour Party saw the thriving capitalist economy as providing the basis for a more caring society. Both parties failed to register the weaknesses of British capitalism and the temporary nature of this affluence. Colin Leys concludes his analysis of this era by observing:

> For twenty years after 1945 the Conservatives had not dared, and mostly had not wished, to advocate restoring high unemployment, dismantling the welfare state or ending public ownership of the principal nationalised industries; any more than the Labour Party had seriously advocated any significant extension of public ownership or new measures of popular control of industry. Over the next twenty years, this consensus disappeared. (p. 63)

Also prominent in the political context of the Fifties were certain extra-Parliamentary groupings, notably the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which sprang up after the first Aldermaston march of 1958, and the New Left, which was created by the twin crises of Hungary and Suez. Perry Anderson[2] pays tribute to these formations, as well as to the Labour Left, in his overview of the decade:

> [These were] the three living sources of opposition within British society, unsilenced by prosperity or fear .... Separately and together, it was the vitality of these forces which prevented England in this period from becoming anything like a replica of North America or West Germany. (pp. 17-18)

The two main strands of the dominant ideology were 'affluence' and

anti-Communism. Associated with the objective rise in living standards was an unprecedented consumerism, and with it the myth that the class system was 'withering away'. The new affluence was projected as a vindication of welfare capitalism and a crushing refutation of obsolete forms of class analysis. The second component was anti-Communism, which although never reaching the hysterical extremes of Mc Carthyism in the U.S.A., acted as an ideological check on socialist activism in Britain.

Anderson describes the pattern of English culture at the time in his influential essay, 'Components of a National Culture.' His conclusions are scathing:

> The various traditional disciplines discussed cluster about an absent centre - what should have been the emergence of a classical sociology or a national Marxism. Lacking this centre, they form a vicious circle of self-reproducing fragmentation and limitation. (pp. 46-7)

This state of affairs is attributed to the failure of the bourgeoise to achieve a social or political revolution; this failure meant they never generated a 'revolutionary ideology' which called society as a whole into question; instead, its thinkers were confined within a bourgeois corporatism which never sought to challenge conservative assumptions about society underlying each discipline. Although Anderson's arguments have since been subject to formidable criticism[3], his map of the social sciences provides a sense of the humble resources Williams had to draw upon in trying to develop a theory and strategy for an authentic socialist culture. Edward Thompson makes this point in his famous review of The Long Revolution:

> With a compromised tradition at his back, and with a broken vocabulary in his hands, he did the only thing that was left to him; he took over the vocabulary of his opponents, followed them into the heart of their arguments, and fought them to a standstill in their own terms. (p. 27)

This then is the context in which Williams sets out to describe the process of 'the long revolution'. Before moving on to analyse 'Britain in the 1960 s', however, we need to mention Williams's 'political' writing that precedes The Long Revolution. The main contribution is his Conclusion of Culture and Society, in which he first traces the meanings and implications of 'masses', 'mass-communication' and 'mass-observation', and then proceeds to argue that:

> The inequalities of many kinds which still divide our community make effective communication difficult or impossible. We lack a genuinely common experience, save in rare and dangerous moments of crisis. What we are paying for this lack, in every kind of currency, is now sufficiently evident. We need a common culture, not for the sake of it, but because we shall not survive without it. (p. 304)

He then looks more closely at the cleavages in British society, and expresses them in the following terms:

> The primary distinction [between working-class and bourgeois] is to be sought in the whole way of life, and here, again, we must not

> confine ourselves to such evidence as housing, dress and modes of leisure .... The crucial distinction is between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship. (p. 311)

According to Williams, the bourgeois idea of social relationship is founded on an ethic of service and of individualism, whereas the working-class emphasis is on community. He extends his discussion of working class values to culture and politics:

> The working-class, because of its position, has not, since the Industrial Revolution, produced a culture in the narrow sense. The culture which it has produced, and which it is important to recognize, is the collective democratic institution, whether in the trade unions, the cooperative movement , or a political party. (p. 313) [4]

The ultimate challenge is to develop from these distinct forms of consciousness a common culture, with the working-class ethic of solidarity acting as a guiding principle. This involves centrally the struggle to develop a common vocabulary and common meanings. Williams concludes:

> To take a meaning from experience, and to try to make it active is in fact our process of growth. Some of these meanings we receive and re-create. Others we must make for ourselves and try to communicate. The human crisis is always a crisis of understanding: what we genuinely understand we can do. (p. 323)

Since Williams elaborates upon these ideas substantially in 'Britain in the

1960 s' , I will incorporate criticism of this Conclusion in the analysis to follow.

The personal pronoun that directs discussion in The Long Revolution is 'we', but the character of the narrative persona and of the audience implied by the 'we' shifts substantially. In Part I, Williams writes:

> No word in English carries a more consistently positive reference than 'creative', and obviously we should be glad of this, when we think of the values it seeks to express and the activities it offers to describe (emphasis added). (p. 19)

And: 'The best aesthetic definitions can seem quite unreal as we turn back to the latest novel, the new book of poems, the current play or film, the ordinary exhibition' (emphasis added) (p. 45). The persona adopted here is of the concerned man of culture, and the audience constituted is highly literate, concerned with esoteric enquiries into the positive connotations of 'creative', and the unreliability of aesthetic definitions. It resembles the elite audience F. R. Leavis refers to in For Continuity , the 'very small minority [upon whom] the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends' (p. 13).

However, this is not the only persona connoted by 'we'; nor is it the only audience that Williams addresses. In 'Britain in the 1960 s', 'we' is used in a wider sense: 'we reject the idea of this kind of [planned] economic system controlling our lives. True, we are controlled now and will continue to be controlled by a quite different system' (emphasis added) (p. 321). The persona here is the representative citizen, bewildered by the great and mysterious social forces that control his life, and the audience he projects is

an undefined group of decent folk; they share his concerns and he promises to show them the way to a just programme for social change.

The identity of the 'we' acquires further connotations when Williams refers cautiously to socialism:

> What is the alternative to capitalism? Socialism. What is a socialist culture? State control. There are many good liberals, and many anxious socialists, who draw back if this is the prospect . . . . Here is the deepest difficulty in the whole development of our democracy: that we seem reduced to a choice between speculator and bureaucrat, and while we do not like the speculator, the bureaucrat is not exactly inviting either. (p. 367)

Williams tries here to nudge his audience of decent folk in the direction of socialism. His appeal rests heavily on the reasonableness of his stance; unlike, for example, the irresponsible rejection of the Establishment by the 'Angry Young Men' of the time, Williams's protest is considered and rational. His persona becomes in the process that of 'the reasonable socialist' , and his audience are constituted as 'ordinary people sympathetic to socialist ideas'.

In the Introduction to The Long Revolution, Williams sets out the structure of his argument. He explains what he means by 'long revolution' :

> It is a genuine revolution, transforming men and institutions; continually extended and deepened by the actions of millions, continually and variously opposed by explicit reaction and by the pressure of habitual forms and ideas. (p. 10)

Emphasising the extreme complexity of this process, he goes on to separate three levels: first, the democratic revolution, in which 'people' are registering their determination to govern themselves and make their own decisions; second, the industrial revolution, in which scientific development is producing the impetus for rapid economic changes; and third, the cultural revolution, in which the processes of learning are being made more widely available. The key to understanding the long revolution lies in recognising the complicated interaction between these three levels; no one level should be abstracted and afforded priority:

> My own view is that we must keep trying to grasp the process as a whole, to see it in new ways as a long revolution, if we are to understand either the theoretical crisis, or our actual history, or the reality of our immediate condition and the terms of change. (p. 13)

In Part I of The Long Revolution , Williams examines certain key principles in his conception of the cultural process, and in Part II, he traces the history of particular institutions and forms in British culture. In Part III, 'Britain in the 1960 s', he:

> returns to the theme of the long revolution, which I have outlined in this introduction, by attempting a description of our contemporary culture and society in terms of what I see as a pattern of change. Briefly I attempt to assess the progress of the long revolution in Britain, and to consider its next stages. (p. 14)

He then refers obliquely to his proposed method of analysis:

> I do not confine myself to British society because of any lack of interest in what is happening elsewhere, but because the kind of evidence I am interested in is only really available where one lives. (p. 14)

In the first section of 'Britain in the 1960 s' , Williams repeats his conviction that 'quite different forms of analysis' (p. 320) need to be developed in order to understand the complexities and contradictions in the economic, political and cultural dimensions of the long revolution. He then proceeds to focus on the economy, and although he refers to Britain's industrial decline and the dubious basis of the proclaimed affluence, his main concern is with the images used to present the total process of production and distribution. He argues that the way in which capitalist images of the 'consumer' and 'market' are projected onto society has led to a situation where 'our modes of thinking habitually suppress large areas of our real relationships, including our real dependencies on others' (p. 325). The solution lies principally in developing an alternative conception of the economy:

> if we started not from the market but from the needs of persons, not only could we understand this part of our working activity more clearly, but also we should have a means of judging the 'ordinary' economic activity itself . . . . The danger now . . . is of fitting human beings to a system, rather than a system to human beings. (p. 326)

Central to Williams's proposal is the need to cultivate 'a realistic sense of community' (p. 326), and in this light he reviews his argument in Culture and

Society that the institutions of the working-class are the bearers of the values of community, democracy and solidarity. He concedes that he had failed to register the extent to which they are subordinated to the institutions of capital, but nonetheless insists:

> If I seem eccentric in continuing to look to these institutions for effective alternative patterns, while seeing all too clearly their present limitations, I can only repeat that they can go either way, and that their crisis is not yet permanently resolved. (p. 329)

He concludes the section by repeating the need 'to create new meanings' (p. 332) that might displace 'the consumer' and 'market' from the centre of the social order.

In discussing the economic or industrial aspect of the long revolution, Williams maintains a sense of the 'total social process', and in so doing he fails to analyse economic production as a separate instance. He makes no attempt to differentiate or describe the forms and relations of production in the 'Affluent Age', choosing instead to concentrate on how the economy is expressed in corresponding modes of culture. Richard Johnson makes this point in his essay 'Three problematics' :

> As literary critic and cultural theorist, Williams does stress certain kinds of practices, all of them broadly cultural and, within that, mainly literary. Other practices tend to be marginalized or defined away. There is no check on this from theoretical controls. Thus the early works are particularly inattentive to political processes . . . .

> Though some of this is repaired in later work, there is a persistent neglect of the particular character and force of economic relations and therefore of economic definitions in relation to class. (p. 218)

The cost of this inattention can perhaps best be illustrated by referring again to the kinds of economic data ignored by Williams: between 1951 and 1961, while Britain's economic output increased by 35%, France's rose by 100%, Italy and Germany's by 200%, and Japan's by 400%.[5] Had Williams attended more closely to these details he might have predicted the crisis faced by British capital in the late 1960 s, and suggested more concrete socialist strategies to take advantage of it.

In the second section, Williams explores the progress of the democratic revolution. His discussion is based on his own experiences of struggling for democratic practice: 'I know from my own experience, in helping to work out such ways [of establishing democracy] in my own job, some of the difficulties yet also some of the real gains' (p. 332). He recalls how his own encounters with local committee politics have shown that democracy can be frustrated by the practice of 'man-management', an insidious style of ruling-class co-option. A second potential obstacle to democracy is the tone of discussion: both the tentative statement of the graduate and the blunt assertion of the trade unionist can exclude the necessary participation of all. He concludes that 'we do not get enough practice in the working of democracy, even where its forms exist' (p. 337). The absence of democracy at local level is reinforced at the national level. Although 'the general influence of public opinion counts for something, since in the long run the court has to be re-elected', the tightly organised party system and

parliament ensure that it is difficult for 'any of us to feel even the smallest share in the government of our affairs' (p. 336-7). From the evidence assembled at this immediate level, Williams moves on to expose the absence of genuine democracy in Britain generally. He then suggests ways in which the undemocratic nature of existing political structures might be challenged. These include: a two-year interval between elections for the House of Commons; a reform of the electoral process so that the will of the people (rather than that of a narrow majority) might be reflected; a democratising of the procedures of consultation and decision-making in the work-place; and a revision of the procedures for the development of communities. He concludes:

> The pressure now, in a wide area of our social life, should be towards a participating democracy, in which the ways and means of involving people much more closely in the process of self-government can be learned and extended. (p. 343)

Williams's method, his procedure of moving from the particular (man-management) to the general (parliamentary 'democracy'), should be understood in the light of Anderson's thesis about the 'absent centre' of British culture. With no sociology, with no totalising perspective for Williams to use to structure his analysis, he is obliged, in Fred Inglis's phrase, 'to start from where people really are and ask what may be done with that' (p. 158). In Marxism and Totality , Martin Jay amplifies Anderson's point that any notion of totality was alien to English Marxism:

> One very important distinction between continental and English Marxism was, in fact, the far greater importance afforded by the former to the concept of totality. Aside from several references to culture as a "whole way of life" in the early work of Wiliams, totality did not really enter the English debate until the Althusserian wave of the 1970 s. Many English Marxists were historians with the discipline's characteristic distaste for generalising concepts. (p. 4, note 7)

The 'Althusserian wave', as Jay terms it, with theoretical concepts like 'totality' and 'ideology', challenged the assumptions and practices of British critics like Williams. These concepts call the social system as a whole into question, and thus highlight Williams's tendency to assess the system in its own terms: public opinion, rather than 'counting for something', is seen as the creation or reflection of ruling-class ideology, and 'feeling a share in the government of our affairs' is seen not as positive emotion, but as an instance of the successful functioning of ideology.

Williams's failure to appreciate the role of ideology (in the Althusserian sense), and particularly the ideological function of the state, is evident in his reform proposals. Williams embraces the existing 'bourgeois freedoms' as essential building blocks for socialism and tries to extend them in order to make them more active. The measures he suggests involve reforming the existing structures so that all might be represented and participate effectively in the decision-making procedures. Crucially, he does not call into question the existing form of the state. Indeed, instead of seeing parliament and the party system as a formidable ideological weapon of the

dominant class, Williams tends to see the existing structure as a neutral, and therefore adequate arena in which opposing interest groups resolve their differences. Ultimately therefore, these strategies fail to threaten the material power base of the dominant class; they are the measures of co-option and concession which run quite counter to the ideals of the long revolution.

The third section of 'Britain in the 1960 s' focuses on the meaning of class. Williams argues that the present confusion about class is based on the fact that economic and social conceptions of the word have been conflated, and then traces briefly the history of the present class system. Drawing also on his own experience, he concludes '[i]t is then less the injustice of the British class system than its stupidity that really strikes one' (p. 348); further, the resentments and confusions arising from the class system are a serious barrier to developing an organised and unified opposition to capitalism:

> The true description is one that recognizes that the traditional definitions have broken down, and that the resulting confusion is a serious diminution of consciousness . . . . Our true condition is that in relation to a complicated economic and social organisation which we have not learned to control, most of us are factually servants. (p. 352-3)

He then demonstrates the analytical weakness of the middle/working class distinction by showing how it fails to explain voting patterns in Britain from the thirties to the fifties: the Labour Party - the representatives of the

working-class - in fact received more support in the 1950 s when class barriers were supposedly 'withering away' than they did in the 1930 s when the working class was still intact. For these many reasons, Williams proposes that the middle/working class differential be abolished. Two related emphases should replace it: first, we need to identify the 'hard economic centre' (p. 363) which sustains the class system i.e. we need to know who controls the means of production. Secondly, a real feeling of community - the 'true knowledge that we are working for ourselves and for each other' (p. 363) should be developed. He concludes:

> With that basic inequality isolated we could stop the irrelevant discussion of class, of which most of us are truly sick and tired, and let through the more interesting discussion of human differences, between real people and communities living in their valuably various ways. (p. 363)

Williams's conception of society oscillates between a consensual and conflict model.[7] The emphasis on conflict is retained in his perception of 'the hard economic centre' : he recognizes that in Britain the means of production are owned 'by a small part of [society] which then employs the rest' (p. 363); the interests of 'the rest' are thus in fundamental conflict with those of the owners. His description of the economic dimension of the long revolution is largely premised on this notion of society. However in his discussion of the democratic revolution, and more particularly here in the section on class and politics, it is images of consensus that predominate. Both his analysis of the state and his reform proposals suggest a society in

which differences between classes can be reconciled or resolved within the existing framework; his understanding of 'the cultural revolution' (to be discussed below) also implies that class differences need not be seen as structural. His most potent image of consensus, of shared interest, however, remains that of the community.

Based upon his own deeply-felt experience of community, Williams projects a vision of society in which 'we are working for ourselves and for each other.' There are several difficulties with this formulation.[8] First, Williams fails to historicise sufficiently his own experience of community. Instead of foregrounding the objective conditions which enabled Welsh working-class communities to establish an alternative culture, he abstracts their sense of community and seeks to re-create it in very different social contexts. This leads to a second difficulty, namely confusion as to the question of scale: the complex mediations involved in moving from a local - to a national level are not taken into account. 'Community' conceived on a national level involves particularly severe problems since it coheres at many points with Orwell's myth of the united English family, and as such denies the irreconcilable economic conflict at the basis of the society. Thirdly, even on a local scale the term 'community' acts as a shorthand for a superficially homogeneous group united by certain interests. Within any such group, there will inevitably be contradictory interests and degrees of exploitation. In Williams's own experience, these differences might have appeared slight, but to deny them would be to misrepresent the actual set of relations within the group. Further, this might well deflect attention from other forms of oppression in working-class communities, notably sexism and racism.

In the final two sections, Williams focuses on the 'cultural revolution'. In the fourth section he addresses the ownership and organisation of cultural organisations, and argues:

> Instead of the ritual indignation and despair at the cultural condition of 'the masses' (now increasingly uttered even by their supposed friends) it is necessary to break through to the central fact that most of our cultural institutions are in the hands of speculators, interested not in the health and growth of the sociey, but in the quick profits. (p. 366)

He continues: 'We should be much clearer about these cultural questions if we saw them as a consequence of a basically capitalist organization, and I at least know no better reason for capitalism to be ended' (p. 367). He concedes that the alternative to this - a socialist organisation of the arts - has the dangers of censorship and bureaucracy, but pledges his belief that public control of cultural institutions can be compatible with democracy, since' if we can agree that this end is desirable, no society is better qualified from experience to devise adequate practical methods' (p. 368). He then illustrates how drama, cinema, publishing and broadcasting might be organised by the 'sensible application of public resources' in a way that would guarantee the freedom of cultural producers. Although not anticipating overnight transformation, Williams sees these cultural interventions as being crucial catalysts in the long revolution:

> My whole case about social change is, moreover, that the

> interdependence of elements which I described as a matter of theory is an argument for conceiving change on the widest possible front: the changes in emphasis in our economy, in our ordinary working relationships, in our democratic institutions, and in education are all relevant to cultural change in this more explicit field. (p. 374)

He commences section V with the resounding affirmation that:

> The human energy of the long revolution springs from the conviction that men can direct their own lives, by breaking through the pressures and restrictions of older forms of society, and by discovering new common institutions. (p. 375)

He then proceeds to distinguish three kinds of thinking 'by which the long revolution is continually limited and opposed' (p. 377). These are: the resistance of privileged groups to an extension of wealth and opportunity to all; the co-option of opposition figures into the ruling bloc; and, most importantly, the apathy of 'the masses'. However, he concludes by restating his optimistic conviction that these attitudes (and ultimately society) can be transformed, since '[c]onsciousness really does change, and new experience finds new interpretations' (p. 381).

In Politics and Letters, Williams confesses that in The Long Revolution he failed to appreciate the limited potential of cultural intervention: 'What I was wrong about was to assume that a cultural and educational programme alone could revitalise the left' (p. 364). This error of judgement, he

continues, was the result of:

> a radical underestimate of the political power of the capitalist state. By our very closeness to the ways in which the society was changing culturally, we overestimated the possibilities of action by cultural change on the left. (p. 364)[9]

Williams's failure to appreciate the structural constraints acting upon cultural activism should be read in the same light as his analyses of the economy, the political process, and the role of class and community in British society; that is, it should be read as symptomatic of New Left politics in the 1950 s, with its (inherited) antipathy to theory, including Marxist theory of the state and economy. A closer engagement with Marxism at that stage might, for instance, have acted as a check on his exaggerated hopes for 'culturalist' strategies.

We are now in a position to try and draw together the similarities in the 'political' writings of Orwell and 'early' Williams, but before doing so certain central differences need to be foregrounded. In the first place, and most obviously, they write at different moments in British history; as a result, they confront different issues and direct their political strategies in appropriately different ways. Secondly, The Lion and the Unicorn and 'Britain in the 1960 s' differ in that the former is written in the lively register of the popular essay, whereas the latter employs a more 'academic' vocabulary and style of argument: in differentiating the economic, political and cultural dimensions of the long revolution, Williams deals with the question of socialism in Britain at a level of abstraction some distance from

the anecdotal and loosely-structured discussion Orwell offers.

Thirdly, and at a more substantive level, Orwell and Williams have different attitudes towards the working class. Gareth Stedman Jones in Languages of Class identifies the working-class and (professional) middle-class components of the Labour Party, and differentiates their associated forms of consciousness. The consciousness of the working-class is one of solidarity, and is summed up in the common (shared) culture of the music hall, football, pubs, and in distinctions of dress and accent; it asserts the separateness of a caste rather than 'the hegemonic potentialities of a particular position in production' (p. 247). He characterises the consciousness of the professional middle-class as : 'an ethic of service , of intelligence and expertise, in the pursuit of humanitarian ends' (p. 247). According to Stedman Jones, the success of the Labour Party up to 1950 lay in its ability to assimilate these two quite distinct constituencies into a single political discourse of reform. That Orwell and Williams represent these two different constituencies and forms of consciousness is evident from their respective perceptions of the working-class in The Lion and the Unicorn and 'Britain in the 1960 s' : Orwell typically poses the question 'what can we do to help them ? ; whereas Williams's enquiry might be summed up as, 'how do we help ourselves ?' Where Orwell sees the need for a new (managerial) class of rulers, Williams sees within the existing working-class institutions adequate forms of political organisation and leadership.[10]

The first area of similarity between Orwell and Williams is in the observer status they both assume. Both 'the plain man' in The Lion and the Unicorn and 'the reasonable socialist ' in 'Britain in the 1960 s' are

priveleged figures telling the truth about their respective experiences of Britain. In Orwell, Williams writes that all of Orwell's writing until 1937 should be seen 'as sketches towards the creation of his most successful character, "Orwell" ' (p. 52). 'Orwell', as we have noted, is the plain man, the voice of truth and reason in a confused world. By the same token, it could be argued that Williams's most successful creation has been the character 'Williams'.[11] 'Williams' is the reasonable socialist, an astute and reliable observer of contemporary reality. In other words, he is a more intellectual version of the plain man, occupying a similar position-as-observer, but, in Said's words, '[taking] in a lot more than Orwell took the time to do.'

The second similarity is closely related. Both Orwell and Williams rely heavily on the evidence of their experience: the plain man 'uses his eyes' to discern England's national character, while the reasonable socialist is interested primarily in using 'the evidence available where one lives' in his description of Britain. In thus privileging the evidence of the senses, they ignore the processes (particularly linguistic) by which the evidence is constructed in terms of their particular way of seeing. ' Theory' , which has the potential to foreground these processes, is absent from their work: Orwell indulges (and exemplifies) the 'English horror of abstract thought', and Williams, although he works towards a theory of the 'total social process', typically moves from the specific to the general in his discussion.

Thirdly, Orwell and Williams conceptualise 'Britain' in a similar way: both Orwell's image of the family and Williams's image of the community have strong connotations of co-operation, mutual respect, and latent unity; they both imply a consensual rather than a conflict model of society, a model in which membership of the same family or community ultimately overrides all differences of class, gender and race. This impression of potential consensus

is also created by the absence - in both Orwell and Williams - of any detailed analysis of the economic conflict at the core of British society.

The fourth area of overlap is in their respective understandings of socialism. There are certain important differences: Williams does not espouse English nationalism, which is such a prominent part of Orwell's creed in The Lion and the Unicorn [12] ; and, whereas Orwell identifies socialism with a centralised economy and argues that it is a more efficient form of government, Williams, having seen the costs and failures of Soviet centralism, looks to a flexible socialist alternative to Stalinism.

However, there are also several important similarities. They both insist upon the sanctity of 'bourgeois freedoms' in the struggle for socialism, Orwell in his identification of the idea of human equality with the English-speaking world (p. 130), and Williams in his proposals for making democracy more actual in Part II of 'Britain in the 1960 s.'[13] They both see 'reasonable argument', change of consciousness and cultural activism as central to socialist strategy: Orwell writes of 'the ghastly job of convincing artificially stupefied people' (p. 105), and Williams that 'consciousness really does change, and new experience finds new interpretations' (p. 381). They both propose relatively modest reform measures as first stages in the journey to socialism: both Orwell's suggestions for internal reform - nationalisation of industries, equalisation of income and educational improvement - and Williams's arguments for cultural - and electoral reform fail to recognise the hegemony of the capitalist state and its capacity to assimilate such proposals without adjusting the relations of production. Finally, both Orwell and Williams constitute in their respective texts audiences of 'ordinary people' who (they argue) have the potential to act as the agents of socialism.[14] Orwell writes about the success of the English Revolution depending 'entirely

on ourselves' (p. 124), the ordinary people earning no 'more than £2000 a year' (p. 108), and Williams believes that 'men can direct their lives, by breaking through the pressures and restrictions of older forms of society' (p. 375). In terms of political organisations, although Orwell is far more cynical about the Labour Party, they both effectively argue for the creation of a working-class and petit bourgeois alliance united in the fight for socialism.

Thus far I have identified the similarities between Orwell and 'early' Williams; in looking at Towards 2000, I trace the changes in Williams's relation to Orwell.

1.3. Towards 2000

In order to establish how Williams's relation to Orwell changed in the next twenty years, I first review Williams's writings on politics during this period; I then describe the context in which he wrote Towards 2000; and finally, I examine whether the similarities between Orwell and 'early' Williams can be extended to Towards 2000.

Williams's first major contribution to political debate in Britain after The Long Revolution was Communications[1], a short book in which he develops his analysis of the cultural revolution. Focusing on the media and mass communications, he elaborates proposals for 'a cultural organisation in which there would be genuine freedom and variety, protected alike from the bureaucrat and the speculator' (p. 178). Williams thus sought to initiate a new kind of left politics in the field of communications, and this remained a central emphasis in the years to follow : Communications went through three editions and several reprints; in 1974, Williams extended his arguments in Television : Technology and Cultural Form , where he continues to insist that 'the battle for free communications is then necessarily part of a much wider social struggle' (p. 150); and in 1978, he wrote 'Means of Communication as Means of Production' [2], in which he contests the Marxist view of communications as part of the 'superstructure' , and argues that 'means of communication are themselves means of production' (p. 50).

In 1965, responding to the election of the Labour government, he wrote 'The British Left' , in which he develops his earlier arguments about the Labour Party. He describes the four defining ideologies of the Labour Party as: the moral critique of capitalism; religious nonconformity; utilitarianism; and moral paternalism. He also refers with some optimism to the potential of C. N. D. and the New Left as contributors to the struggle for socialism.

In 1966, he repeated substantially his 'Long Revolution' arguments in an essay 'Towards a Socialist Society'. His tone here is more polemical:

> In this struggle for freedom of communications . . . we are making one of the major demands of a humanism which, to be realised, must become socialism. The fight in communications is not a competitor without other kinds of struggle for peace: for the ending of poverty and disease. It is at once a necessary part of all these struggles, and one of the permanent conditions and claims of the dignity of man. (p. 394)

Williams's next major intervention came in 1967 in collaboration with other members of the New Left : May Day Manifesto edited by Williams, Edward Thompson and Stuart Hall, was written in response to the policies of the second Wilson government, which was seen as betraying the socialist cause:

> The party created, as it was thought, to transform society, and still the party of the great majority . . . of the working people of Britain, faces us now in this alien form: a voting machine; an effective bureaucracy; an administration claiming no more than to run the existing system more efficiently. (p. 155)

The Manifesto is more detailed than 'Britain in the 1960 s'. It expands considerably on a number of issues, including the inequalities of wealth and specious claims of a new classless society; Britain's international position vis-a-vis its trading competitors and its former colonies; the threat of

nuclear war; the dubious strength of British capital; the role of the State in the economy; and the organisational weakness of the Labour Party. But certain essentials remain intact: the authority of 'experience' is frequently invoked; there is confidence in the potential of cultural activism; and 'socialist humanism' is the rallying call for resisting capitalism:

> The problems of whole men and women are now habitually relegated to specialized and disparate fields, where the society offers to manage or adjust them by this or that consideration or technique. Against this, we define socialism again as a humanism: a recognition of the social reality of man in all his activities, and of the consequent struggle for the direction of this reality by and for ordinary men and women. (p. 16)

After the Manifesto, there is a lapse of a number of years before Williams considers British politics directly again. The failure of the Manifesto to make any significant political impact doubtless played a part in enforcing this silence. In 1975, Williams reviewed and drew together the main aspects of his political position in 'You're a Marxist, Aren't You?' [3] After recording his sense of the vagueness of the term 'Marxist', and his objection to reducing the entire history of democratic struggle to the name of one thinker, Williams considers the main forms of 'Marxism' in twentieth century Britain. He argues that the two traditions - of Stalinism and Fabianism - had broken down:

> Neither Stalinism nor Fabianism, which in the 1930 s had seemed the two main competitors in the socialist political tradition, any

> longer offered us either an acceptable intellectual system or a viable mode of political action. (p. 233)

In discussing the Labour Party, the major political agency of Fabianism, Williams emphasizes its antipathy to Marxism and its theoretical impoverishment:

> The positive and complacent exclusion [of Marx] was a very much more serious matter for it was a deliberate exclusion of theory : not so much of this theory as of any theory; and the real reason for this was that in practice the Labour leadership shared the ruling class view of the world. They did not need theory; they had their world, and there were only practical arguments about their place in it. (p. 236)

Williams then sums up what he takes to be the central propositions of Marxism, of historical materialism, and declares his agreement with them:

> Now as I think through the basic positions of historical materialism, the basic definition of capitalist society and its evolution, and then the need to supersede it, to go beyond capitalist society, so that a socialist society, as apart from isolated measures of a socialist tendency, demands the destruction of capitalist society; as I think through these three propositions and try to define myself in relation to them, I have no real hesitation. These are all positions from which I now see the world and in terms of which I try to order my life and my activity. (p. 238)

Further, while insisting that revolutionary activity can take many forms, he acknowledges the place of violent struggle in challenging a repressive system. Finally, he argues that although the industrial working-class constitutes 'the fundamental resistance to capitalist state power' (p. 239), the key site of struggle is not so much the economy as the cultural domain. This is the distinguishing mark of Williams's socialism:

> in understanding cultural hegemony and in seeing it as the crucial dimension of the kind of society which has been emerging since the war under advanced capitalism, I felt the break both from mainline Marxism and even more from the traditions of social democracy, liberalism and Fabianism, which had been my immediate inheritance (emphasis added). (p. 241)

Williams's rapprochement with Marxism is further reflected in 'Notes on British Marxism since 1945', written for the hundredth edition of the New Left Review in 1976. In this short piece, he discusses the Rightward shift of the term 'Marxist' in British political debate; identifies three types of Marxist theory - legitimating, academic and operative, and examines the complex meanings of 'populism', 'culturism' and 'reformism'. He acknowledges the contributions of Althusser and Gramsci to British Marxism, and concedes the theoretical weakness of the analysis in The Long Revolution and the Manifesto, particularly with respect to the relation between the cultural and general economic and social processes within society. At the same time, he resists the 'ultra-Left' position of theoretical purity:

> To adopt a theoretical position from which, for example, the trade

> unions are seen as merely reformist, and the perceived political Left is dismissed as incurably reformist, is to go into a very dangerous kind of internal exile. (p. 93)

He concludes:

> there have been and still are as many failures of theory as of practice, and it is by respecting the struggle, as something lived and not as something assigned or assessed, that new operative theory and practice will be attained. (p. 93)

'Notes on British Marxism' can be read as a defence of Williams's earlier arguments, since the labels of populist/culturalist/reformist have often been attached to him.[4]

In Politics and Letters a series of interviews with the editorial board of the New Left Review , he takes the opportunity to explain and develop those earlier positions further. There are several passages in this valuable book dealing with the assumptions shared by Williams and Orwell. Firstly, with regard to the epistemological priority of 'experience', Williams insists that in expanding his conception of the economic to include cultural production, the category 'experience' is shifted to surer ground:

> once cultural production is itself seen as social and material, then this indissolubility of the whole social process has a different theoretical ground. It is no longer based on experience, but on the common character of the respective processes of production. (p. 139)

Pressed by the interviewers to dispense entirely with 'experience', Williams refuses:

> Experience becomes a forbidden word, whereas what we ought to say about it is that it is a limited word .... That is a necessary correction. But I find that just as I am moving in that direction, I see a kind of appalling parody of it beyond me - the claim that all experience is ideology, that the subject is wholly an ideological illusion, which is the last stage of formalism - and I even start to pull back a bit. (p. 172)

Also interesting in the context of Williams's critical method is his confessing that in The Long Revolution 'I could see the connections across, but I did not know how I could totalize them' (p. 153). This remark confirms Anderson's analysis of the 'absent centre' of British culture: starting from the immediate experience - as dictated by his intellectual heritage - it is not surprising that the totalised perspective remained for Williams so elusive. [5]

Secondly, the broadly consensual, pluralist conception of British society found in Orwell and early Williams is replaced here by a more Marxist or conflict-based orientation. Williams acknowledges his prior neglect of the economic in favour of the cultural:

> I can see that the effort to establish a new emphasis led me, I don't think to deny, but not sufficiently to state that historical causation must be seen primarily in terms of production and changes in modes of production. (p. 145)

However, this concession to the Marxist principle of economic determinacy is qualified by his insistence that 'production' be understood as referring to all productive activities (including cultural processes). He refuses the grading of these activities into a rigid hierarchy of cause and effect.

> I would not be willing to say that at the top of the hierarchy is productive industry, then come political institutions or means of mass communication, and then below them the cultural activities of philosophers or novelists . . . . The hierarchies, while in general following a line from activities which answer to basic physical needs down through to those of which you at least can state negatively that if they were not performed, human life would not be immediately threatened, are not immutable. (p. 355)

His conception of the state and the functioning of the dominant ideology also reflects a shift away from the received notions of parliamentary democracy expressed in The Long Revolution. He concedes that:

> I certainly had not at that time developed a full critique of the notion of representation, which now seems to me in its common ideological form fundamentally hostile to democracy. (p. 415)

Thirdly, and in keeping with the adoption of a conflict model, Williams records how his socialism acquired a 'revolutionary' rather than a 'reformist' character as a result of the disillusion of the late sixties:

> If one has in the end, and to me it was in the end after fifteen to

> twenty years of hesitation between the two possibilities, decided that the revolutionary path is the only way, then one really does have to think in a quite new fashion how to prepare for it. (p. 424)

Thinking in a quite new fashion involved above all recognising the limited potential of cultural intervention. The hope - expressed in Modern Tragedy - of achieving socialist revolution 'by a process of argument and consensus' (p. 78) was destroyed by political reverses which brought home the formidable strength of the existing capitalist structures.

A sense of the historical changes between The Long Revolution and Towards 2000 can be derived from these brief summaries of Williams's various articles. However, it nonetheless remains necessary to spell out the socio-political context confronting Williams in the 1980 s more explicitly. [6] The first and most important change has been the shift from the welfare state consensus of the 'affluent age', to the revitalised monetarism of Thatcher; the 'mixed economy' is to-day being dismantled as quickly as possible, and an undiluted and vigorous capitalism encouraged in its place. Policies dedicated to this end have included public spending cuts; deregulation of private capital; reduction in trade union power; privatisation of significant parts of the public sector; tax reduction for top income groups; and the introduction of commercial criteria into the remaining state institutions. Second, instead of following The Long Revolution projections towards greater democracy, the political system is being restructured to entrench Right-wing interests. The removal of borough councils is the most dramatic instance of this growing centralisation of state power. Third, the ideologies of affluence and classlessness propagated in the Fifties have been replaced by a more aggressive ideology described in 'Authoritarian

Populism' by Stuart Hall as a fusion of:

> the resonant themes of organic Toryism - nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism, patriarchalism - with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism - self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism. (p. 122)

The nature of leftist opposition has also changed since the 1950 s. We noted how in the late sixties Williams perceived for the first time that the Labour Party was no longer just an inadequate agency for socialism, but was an active collaborator in the process of reproducing the capitalist state. In the years since then the Labour Party has undergone changes under the prolonged pressure of Thatcher rule: the conservative reformist faction has been weakened by the forming of the S. D. P. Alliance, and also by the emergence of a substantial 'far left' lobby within the party itself; where these fermenting divisions will lead is an open question. Second, there has been an increase of extra-Parliamentary opposition organised around issues broadly compatible with socialism - nuclear disarmament, feminism and immigrant protection are the most visible examples. Third, largely as a result of the efforts of the 'new' New Left Review, Marxism has established itself firmly on the academic agenda at British universities; Williams came into contact with continental Marxist writing for the first time in the early 1970 s, and his subsequent work on politics, letters and language is marked by his engagement with it.[7]

The setting then in which Williams sets out to review and revise his 'long revolution' analysis of Britain is especially bleak. He reveals that what prompted this project 'is that there can be some sharing of this process of

consideration, reconsideration and revision of outlook' (p. 21). In the same way that 'Britain in 1960 s' was written in a spirit of optimism, Towards 2000 is intended as 'an examining but also a deliberately encouraging argument' (p. 21). Towards 2000 is accordingly structured in a way that demonstrates clearly the development of the earlier arguments. After reprinting 'Britain in the 1960's', Williams takes its four main themes and reconsiders them in separate chapters. They are: the economic/industrial configuration of Britain; the problems of political participation; the potential for cultural intervention; and the role of class in British politics. In Part Four, he provides the international perspective, previously absent, in chapters entitled 'The Culture of Nations', 'East-West, North-South' and 'War: The Last Enemy'. In the final section, he distils what he considers to be the possible resources for the journey towards 2000.

The first similarity between Orwell and 'early' Williams I listed was their assumption of the identity of a reliable observer: Orwell 'the plain man', and Williams 'the reasonable socialist'. In Towards 2000, although Williams continues to occupy the position of privileged observer in the text, his tone of infinite reasonableness in The Long Revolution is replaced by a more angry voice. Williams continues to assume a common identity with a wide community of fellow-readers: 'We all think about the future, but in very diverse ways' (p. 3). But 'the reasonable socialist' is clearly less concerned with observing the doubts and sensitivities of 'the good liberal' or the wavering petit bourgeois: 'It is an outrage that this [capitalist development] has happened and been allowed to happen' (p. 187). And: 'It [capitalism] is an evil system, by all fully human standards' (p. 190). This shift to a more angry register is symptomatic of the deeper changes in British society from welfare consensus to Thatcherism.

The second characteristic shared by Orwell and 'early' Williams was their reliance on experience: Orwell 'used his eyes', while Williams was 'only interested in the evidence available where one lives'. In the twenty years since The Long Revolution, British 'common sense' empiricism has been subjected to intense criticism from a structuralist position: the attempt by the interviewers in Politics and Letters to get Williams to dispense with the category 'experience' is indicative of this. However, perhaps the most famous structuralist critique of Williams is that of his former student, Terry Eagleton. In Criticism and Ideology [8], Eagleton employs the conceptual framework of Althusser and Pierre Macherey in order to 'place' Williams. He identifies the importance of 'experience' in Williams's work:

> it is precisely this insistence on experience, this passionate premium placed on the 'lived', which provides one of the centrally unifying themes of Williams's oeuvre - which supplies at once the formidable power and drastic limitation of his work. (p. 22)

Eagleton argues that this reliance on experience is intrinsic to Williams's 'Romantic populism' (p. 27), which is further characterised by an 'organicist aesthetics and corporatist sociology' (p. 27). As a result, Williams is guilty of 'consistently over-subjectivising . . . the social formation' (p. 32) and, at the same time, of displaying an excessive disdain for theory, including Marxist theory. Eagleton concedes, however, that: 'The intellectual synthesis which Williams undertook was one forced upon him by the non-availability of a revolutionary tradition and the paucity of working-class ideology' (p. 34).

In 'Cultural Studies; Two Paradigms', [9] Stuart Hall elaborates the differences between the 'culturalist' and 'structuralist' notions of experience:

> Whereas in 'culturalism', [Williams's tradition] experience was the ground - the terrain of 'the lived' - where consciousness and conditions intersected, structuralism insisted that 'experience' could not, by definition, be the ground of anything, since one could only 'live' and experience one's conditions in and through the categories, classifications and frameworks of the culture .... '[E]xperience' was conceived, not as an authenticating source, but as an effect: not as a reflection of the real but as an 'imaginary relation'. (p. 42)

From this perspective, Williams's determination not to relinquish 'experience' as a valid analytical category would be read as a failure on his part to perceive the way in which he himself and his own experience have been constituted by ideology. Or, as Hall put it, '[t]he authenticating power and reference of "experience" imposes a barrier between culturalism and a proper conception of "ideology" ' (p. 45).

In Towards 2000 , although Williams criticizes what he perceives as the confusions of late bourgeois subjectivism - presumably because it privileges or generalises its own ideological formation - he continues to appeal to experience, which is itself a form of subjectivism. [10] For example, he introduces his discussion of 'Class, Politics and Socialism' as follows:

> Ideologies have to engage with some otherwise observable elements of reality, if they are to retain plausibility. The new current forms ... engage with some real situations and some real changes, though they then overstate and distort them. We can see these processes as

we look into the evidence. (p. 153)

Although the term 'experience' is not mentioned, it is implied in the separation Williams perceives between 'observable reality' and the 'ideologies' trying to represent that reality: 'experience' is part of the stuff that makes up reality, whereas 'ideologies' are intellectual frameworks that explain or misrepresent 'experience'. The visual metaphors - observable elements of reality', 'we can see these processes' - recall Orwell's 'using his eyes'. And, as was the case with Orwell, they suggest an unmediated access to 'reality', a way of seeing that escapes the strictures of ideology. The conception of ideology referred to by Hall would involve at all times foregrounding the fact that 'experience' is not an independent category anterior to ideology, but is rather something constituted by ideology.

However, it would be a gross distortion to argue that Williams continues to analyse Britain in the same way as he did in 1959, having ignored all the criticisms of crude empiricism and Britain's intellectual parochialism. In the first place, Williams's reliance on 'experience' is greatly reduced. Whereas in 'Britain in the 1960 s', the analysis was typically from the individual experience (e.g. man-management) to the general social process, in Towards 2000 the discursive pattern is less easy to characterise. Francis Mulhern in his review article makes this crucial point:

> Demanding in range, the book is also variable in analytic focus, moving from the abstract (capitalist production as such) to the concrete (the international economic system), the general (bourgeois-democratic representative practices) to the particular (the British Labour Party), sometimes without notice. (p. 8)

As a result there are lengthy sections of the book where historical, theoretical and statistical modes of discourse displace entirely the empiricist forms of analysis: Part IV, the international perspective, for example, does not refer to 'experience' as a touchstone at all.

Secondly, and closely related to the first development , in Towards 2000 Williams's sense of the 'whole social process' is considerably enlarged; as a result of his engagement with Marxism particularly, his analysis displays - to use Anderson's term - a more comprehensive 'totalising perspective.' To demonstrate: in revising his understanding of the economic dimension of 'The Long Revolution ', he concedes that - contrary to his earlier projections - there is in fact very limited space to introduce socialist institutions of production within the interstices of the capitalist order:

> There was never any way in which the genuinely new ideas and provisions for a caring society could persist as an exceptional sector, contradicted by systematic inequality and competition everywhere else. (p. 100)

He reaches a similar conclusion vis-a-vis the potential for socialist intervention in the cultural domain. (Recall his proposals for organising theatre, cinema, publishing etc. according to socialist principles).
He acknowledges: 'It is now clear that it is impossible to identify any 'public service' institution without at once relating it to the social order within which it is operating' (p. 134). With respect to the 'democratic revolution', he attaches a more accurate emphasis to the ideological function of parliament; he is particularly sensitive to the way in which the limited democratic freedoms (including free speech, candidature and election) in the

bourgeois state are used 'as a cover for its retention of economic and associated political power over its citizens' (p. 120). A fourth way in which his analysis is extended is, of course, in the provision of an international perspective on British socialist alternatives. Ultimately, although he never disavows his commitment to certain empiricist assumptions, Williams overcomes many of their limitations by absorbing (and practising) other modes of social analysis. The use of theoretical categories provided by Marxist discourse - the 'dominant ideology', the 'state', the 'economic base' - has been a particularly prominent supplement.

The third point of comparison between The Lion and the Unicorn and 'Britain in the 1960 s' was their common assumption of a consensual model of British society; notwithstanding certain contradictory aspects (like Williams's more conflict-orientated perception of the economy), Orwell's family and Williams's community both expressed the belief in a society ultimately united by common interests rather than one divided by irreconcilable class conflict.

In The Long Revolution, Williams argues that class differences have to be overcome by nurturing 'a real feeling of community' (p. 362). In Towards 2000 despite the radical additions to his analysis, the term 'community' again occupies a central position. In the chapter 'Class, Politics and Socialism', he repeats his plea:

> There is only one good way out of all this. A practical and possible general interest, which really does include all reasonable particular interests, has to be inquired into, found, negotiated, agreed, constructed. (p. 165)

There are adjustments to the concept of community. In 'Democracy Old and

New', Williams acknowledges the omission in his earlier study of a developed appreciation of the necessary scales of decision-making:

> It is then a matter of urgency to discuss and identify the appropriate scales of decision-making, through a range of size of communities from the parish or ward to the country or city, on through the minority nation or region to presumed national levels, and beyond these again to any wider international community. (p. 125)

The solution he offers is two-pronged : on the local level, communities should attain the highest degree of self-management; on the broader level, 'a practical and possible general interest' should be cultivated - this could be paraphrased as the developing of a broad sense of community.

In 'The Culture of Nations', the notion of community acquires further content. According to Williams, the last natural communities were in the process of being destroyed during the lifetime of William Cobbett: 'In all later periods, the kind of continuity which Cobbett still saw as ideal, from home and birthplace to county and country - none in tension with or cancelling the other- was increasingly unavailable' (p. 185). What has replaced these communities is artificial: private small-family units, and a zealous patriotism inculcated by the ruling class.

Williams, however, does not see this process as irresistible. He draws inspiration from the examples of the 'remarkably solid and mutually loyal communities' established under extremely harsh conditions in the Welsh mining villages and Clyde shipping centres during the last century. Although he does not say as much, he no doubt also draws on the memory of his own boyhood experience of community in Wales. He concludes:

> These are the real grounds of hope. It is by working and living together, with some real place and common interest to identify with, and as free as may be from external ideological definitions, whether divisive or universalist, that real social identities are formed. (p. 196)

Although Williams has tried to make appropriate changes to accommodate communities from a local to an international level, most of the criticisms of his use of 'community' in The Long Revolution still obtain: that in abstracting 'community' as a political goal, he fails to recognise the historic specificity of past communities; that he diminishes the contradictory interests within any community, and that he does not account for other forms of oppression - like sexism and racism - that occur in working class communities.

To those - two further criticisms can be added. Firstly, the dubious basis of Williams's distinction between natural (good) and artificial (bad) communities in Towards 2000 becomes clear when the oppressive and exploitative aspects of 'natural' communities are recognised. Indeed, there is no reason why other factors of importance in socialist strategy should not be more in evidence in artificial orders. Second, Williams's quest for 'real social identities' and 'natural communities' needs to be related to the residual empiricism in his analysis. The acquisition of 'real social identities' by membership of 'natural communities' far away from 'external ideological definitions' is the experience Williams privileges above all; it remains in some way 'authentic', unmediated by the confusing representations of the dominant ideology. Therefore, although in Towards 2000 Williams perceives to a greater extent the ideological nature of social formations, this experience of natural community still represents to him a realistic means of defying the ideological onslaught of

the dominant class. Besides the obvious practical objection as to where such a community might be created, it is Williams's limited notion of ideology - as something communities can partially escape - that is ultimately disabling. The role of ideology in constituting social identities and communities, whether in Cobbett's time or the year 2000, will remain the same.

The fourth area of overlap between Orwell and 'early' Williams was in their respective understandings of socialism. I argued that Williams's socialism resembles that of Orwell in his insistence on the importance of 'bourgeois freedoms'; his commitment to 'reasonable argument'; the reformist nature of his policy suggestions; and in his faith in 'people' as the agents of socialism. These similarities can be extended, with qualifications, to Towards 2000.

First, Williams retains his commitment to existing democratic freedoms in the struggle for socialism. As was the case with Orwell, he sees these victories of bourgeois revolution as indispensable:

> It is my belief that the only kind of socialism which now stands any chance of being established, in the old industrialised bourgeois-democratic societies, is one centrally based on new kinds of communal, cooperative and collective institutions. In these the full democratic practices of free speech, free assembly, free candidature for elections, and also open decision-making, of a reviewable kind, by all those concerned with the decision, would be both legally guaranteed and, in now technically possible ways, active. (p. 123)

Second, as in The Lion and the Unicorn and 'Britain in the 1960 s', in

Towards 2000, the struggle of ideas, of trying to change consciousness, remains a central focus. This is evident in Williams's insistence on the need to recognise and move beyond the ideological constraints imposed by the capitalist categories of 'employment', 'skilled' and 'overmanning' (pp 85-91). It is also evident in his argument that for a socialist programme to succeed, certain patterns of thought would have to change: first, the tendency to see everything - the earth, people, the self - as raw material for schemes of profit or power; the second and related type of thinking is that which abstracts and generalises 'production' as a central priority over all other natural and human processes; the third is thinking which elevates rational intelligence (conventionally associated with dominant systems and institutions) and denigrates the validity of emotion (associated with the new social movements). (pp. 260-7). Finally, the stress on change of consciousness is strongly realised in his desire to see a culture of general (community) interest nurtured (pp. 193ff).

Thirdly, notwithstanding Williams's claim in the concluding pages of Politics and Letters that the politics of reform belong to a distant phase of his political development, it is difficult to discern in Towards 2000 a new and distinctive revolutionary socialism. Indeed, the different levels of discourse Williams uses in Towards 2000 make it difficult to distil his socialist strategy: suggestions relating to possible strategies are interspersed with theoretical discussion, and even in the final part he describes resources available for building a socialist future rather than a socialist strategy as such. In addition to the 'cultural' strategies suggested above, at various points in the book he proposes: creating parallel representative institutions capable of increasing democracy (pp. 126ff); appropriating new technologies for alternative use in media and education (pp. 147 ff); and developing

maximum self-management in industry within an ethos of general interest (p. 193). The continuity from The Lion and the Unicorn to Towards 2000 in this context is perhaps best demonstrated in their shared interest in education as an area of struggle: Orwell's appeal for educational reform is repeated in Williams's proposal that new technology be used to extend the scope of alternative education.

The final similarity - that they both see 'people' as the agents of history - can be extended to Towards 2000. Williams repeats this central affirmation several times: 'We have to begin again with people and build new political forms' (p. 199). And: 'The difficult business [is] of gaining confidence in our own energies and capacities' (p. 269). And: 'But if we look at the whole process we have also to blame ourselves, for letting politics be like this' (p. 9).

Recall that both Orwell and Williams in The Long Revolution argued that the existing class barriers between worker and petit bourgeois should be broken down in the forming of a broad front against capitalism. In Towards 2000 Williams refines this argument. Perceiving on the one hand the compromised state of the traditional labour movement and on the other, the emergence of substantial oppositional groups like the peace, women's and ecology movements, he concludes:

> The real struggle has broadened so much, the decisive issues have been so radically changed, that only a new kind of socialist movement, fully contemporary in its ideas and methods, bringing a wide range of needs and interests together in a new definition of general interest, has any real future. (p. 174)

Francis Mulhern (pp. 26-30) argues that the danger with this kind of programme is that - as with the broad fronts proposed in the earlier arguments - it can diminish the strategic role of the traditional working-class. The issues have not changed so radically that working-class activism has lost the capacity to place the capitalist system under profound pressure. The defeat of the Conservatives in 1974 was evidence of the decisive political intervention British trade unionism could make. Perry Anderson puts that victory into perspective in his essay 'Figures of Descent' :

> A bourgeois government had been brought down by the direct action of a strategic group of industrial workers - the only time in modern European history that an economic strike has precipitated the political collapse of a government. (p. 64)

Therefore, although Williams's renewed calls for a broader and more democratic front should be heeded, it would be a mistake to suggest, as he does, that the political leadership of such a movement be shifted from the working-class.

In conclusion, in this opening chapter I have established that there are several important similarities in Orwell and Williams's respective understandings of politics in Britain. In the next chapter, I propose to examine how they understand literature, and particularly the relation between politics and literature.

Chapter Two: Letters

I have argued thus far that in their respective understandings of 'politics' Orwell and Williams employ a similar problematic: that they share an identity of privileged observer in their texts; that they rely on the evidence of 'experience'; that they hold to a 'consensual' conception of Britain; and that they are committed to similar versions of socialist-humanism. In this chapter, I hope to show that this common problematic informs their ways of conceiving the study of letters.

In order to demonstrate this, I undertake as in the first chapter 'a close historical reading of exemplary texts', focusing here on their work on letters. Again, there will be four threads in the discussion: description of the historical context in which the texts were produced; a locating of the selected texts within the broader context of their work; a close reading of the texts chosen; and a synthesis of their common assumptions and arguments.

The texts selected are: Orwell's essay on Charles Dickens (I, pp. 454-504); Williams's chapter on Dickens in The English Novel : From Dickens to Lawrence ; and the essay on Dickens in Writing in Society.

These texts satisfy broadly the selection criteria referred to in the Introduction. First, and most obviously, both Orwell and Williams have written in detail about Dickens. Where these texts do not convey sufficient detail - as in the case of Williams's essay in Writing in Society - I draw on their other work on letters in order to define their positions more clearly.

Second, their work on Dickens has been singled out from their literary criticism as a whole for particular praise. Of Orwell's essay, George Woodcock concludes:

> the essay on Dickens is, though the earliest, one of the best of

> Orwell's major critical pieces, humane, informed, pleasantly discursive and unusually balanced between the sociological, the historical, the personal and the aesthetic. (p. 247)

In his review of The English Novel, Bernard Bergon writes: 'in the best of these chapters - the one on Dickens - he is more than merely interesting. It offers a brilliant account of Dickens' response to new modes of urban life' (p. 742). And, in an otherwise unfriendly review of Writing in Society, Denis Donoghue distinguishes Williams essay on Hard Times: 'The essay I like best is a dogged effort to make sense of Hard Times and of the "two incompatible ideological positions it articulates" ' (p. 20).

The third criterion, that the texts have 'reciprocal relevance' is self-evident. From the wide range of topics dealt with by both Orwell and Williams in their literary and cultural criticism, I have selected their work on Dickens in order to define the area of overlap between them as precisely as possible.

2.1 'Charles Dickens'

Having described in the first chapter the general context in which Orwell produced his work, here I focus specifically on the dominant literary/critical practices against which he was writing.

In trying to reconstruct the dominant patterns of literary criticism in Britain in the 1930 s through Orwell's writing, it is striking how little attention he pays to major critics like I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis.

He refers only once to Richards in his Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (I pp. 171-2), in a scornful review of Practical Criticism , a book he recommends 'for anyone who wants a good laugh' (p. 171). He concentrates on Richards's experiment with his English students in which he gave them thirteen poems to criticise without revealing the authorship of the poems. What the experiment confirms for Orwell is that: 'many people who would describe themselves as lovers of poetry have no more notion of distinguishing between a good poem and a bad one than a dog has of arithmetic' (p. 171).

Orwell shows no knowledge of the critical 'revolution' Richards's work represented. In his article 'Practical Criticism, Critical Practices' [1], John Bowen sets out the difference between Richards and his predecessor at Cambridge, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch:

> It is not merely a difference of class position - the cultivated gentleman-amateur against the petit-bourgeois state professional, but an entire shift of discourse and practice. Quiller-Couch . . . appeals to those great nineteenth century totalising discourses - the classics, the Bible, ancestry; Richards to science, to medicine, to psychology. It is a

> shift too of practices, from the unified discourse of a master sensibility to the 'piece of field-work in comparative ideology'. Against 'Q's' breeding we set Richards' training. (pp. 84-5)

For Orwell, however, the term 'literary criticism' in 1940 still connotes the genteel belle lettrism of Quiller Couch and Saintsbury's generation, and Richards' work is seen as no more than a continuation of their style of criticism. The reason for Orwell's ignorance as to the unique nature of Richards's project can be located partly in his choice of Burma rather than Cambridge as his place of 'tertiary education', and partly in the fact that at this stage this 'critical revolution ' was largely limited to students, who had yet to form the dominant school of criticism.

Orwell's interest in T. S. Eliot is substantial, although it is Eliot's poetry rather than the impact of his literary criticism that attracts Orwell's attention. He lists Eliot as one of his favourite writers (II, p. 39), in spite of his rejection of the central conservative impulse in Eliot's work. One piece, however, that does have a bearing on Eliot's literary criticism is Orwell's review of Notes Towards a Definition of Culture (IV, pp. 514-7).[2]

Orwell first summarises Eliot's argument that 'culture' depends on the existence of a hierarchical society with distinct classes and elites, and then raises two main objections: that 'class privilege has ceased to be defensible' (p. 516), and secondly, that ' [Eliot's] pessimism seems to be exaggerated' (p. 517). He concludes: 'Cultures are not manufactured, they grow of their own accord. Is it too much to hope that the classless society will secrete a culture of its own?' (p. 517). Orwell thus makes it clear that Eliot's proposals run counter to his own more democratic hopes for society and culture. Orwell sees Eliot's conception of culture as elitist, but also

anachronistic, and looks forward himself to a culture that is both popular and humane.

As regards the Leavises and Scrutiny, there is only one reference to them in his collected works, and it is contained in a generalised attack on the literary establishment. In an early essay, 'In Defence of the Novel' (I, pp. 281-7), he argues:

> But the novel is a popular form of art, and it is no use to approach it with the Criterion -Scrutiny assumption that literature is a game of back-scratching (claws in or out according to circumstances) between tiny cliques of highbrows. (p. 285)

As in the case of Richards, so here too Orwell displays no knowledge of Cambridge literary politics and the unique nature of the Leavises' project. However, several years later, in a review of The Great Tradition published in The Observer [3] shortly before his death, Orwell provides a more focused response. He criticises firstly Leavis's desire to induce in the reader 'a feeling of due reverence towards the "great" and of due irreverence towards everybody else' (p. 22), and secondly, he objects to the school-masterish tone of Leavis's criticism. He detects behind the authoritative grading of authors a voice which says:

> 'Remember boys . . . I was once a boy myself' . . . . But though the boys know that this must be true, they are not altogether reassured. They can still hear the chilly rustle of the gown, and they are aware that there is a cane under the desk which will be produced on not very much provocation. (p. 22)

As was the case with Eliot, so here too it is the elitist and also the authoritarian strain in Leavis that offends Orwell.

What then for Orwell were the dominant literary/critical formations of his age? He gives the answer in a broadcast talk given on the B.B.C in 1941 entitled 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda' (II, pp. 149-53), where he distinguishes the 'art for art's sake' school and the political criticism of the English Marxists. His starting premise is: 'Both the aesthetic and the political attitude to literature were produced, or at any rate conditioned by the social atmosphere of a certain period' (p. 151).

The period between 1890 and 1930 had, according to Orwell, been one of exceptional comfort and security, and accordingly:

> in that kind of atmosphere intellectual detachment, and also dilettantism, are possible. It is that feeling of continuity, of security, that could make it possible for a critic like Saintsbury . . . to be scrupulously fair to books written by men whose political and moral outlook he detested. (p. 152)

Since 1930, however, that sense of security had dissolved entirely, and literary criticism had therefore also changed:

> In a world in which Fascism and Socialism were fighting one another, any thinking person had to take sides, and his feelings had to find their way not only into his writing but into his judgements on literature. Literature had to become political, because anything else would have entailed mental dishonesty. (p. 152)

In the process of literature 'becoming political', the illusion of pure aestheticism was destroyed. This advance - in Orwell's terms - was, however, achieved at some cost: 'because it caused countless young writers to try to tie their minds to a political discipline which, if they had stuck to it, would have made mental honesty impossible' (p. 152). The result is a critical impasse: 'Aesthetic scrupulousness is not enough, but political rectitude is not enough either' (p. 153). This opposition Orwell establishes between 'political' and 'aesthetic' criticism is clearly an immense and inaccurate oversimplification. The 'political' critics can be identified easily enough: they would be the English Marxists, who 'praise or dispraise a book because its tendency is Communist' (I, p. 289). But the 'aesthetic' critics, defined simply by their refusal to judge literature in terms of its political content, do not form a similarly homogeneous group. On Orwell's definition, they would include everyone else, from Saintsbury to Richards and 'the Scrutineers'. The artificiality of Orwell's distinction is best illustrated by reference to the work of L. C. Knights, an 'aesthetic' critic in Orwell's terms, who saw himself as a Marxist, and who applied Marxist categories to literature in his major work Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson.

However, it should be emphasized that Orwell was not alone in his (unsuccessful) struggle to discern the terms of the literary critical debates in the 1930 s. Graham Pechey concludes his valuable analysis of Scrutiny and English Marxism in the 1930 s by observing: 'with the participants talking past each other in this way, discussing in effect different things, its not surprising that the dialogue came to nothing' (p. 69). By offering simplistic definitions of the 'types of criticism', Orwell no doubt contributed to the failure of this dialogue. But, it should be added that he shared in the cost of this failure, since his own literary and cultural criticism bears witness to

the absence of genuine radical debate.

Perhaps more significant than the absence of 'real dialogue' between the different fractions of radical critics, was the absence of critical theory. In discussing The Lion and the Unicorn, I noted how Orwell's conception of the British state and of socialism was limited by the 'absent centre' of British culture. This absence of a theoretical framework or vocabulary imposed similarly severe constraints in the context of literary criticism. Perry Anderson argues in 'Components' that in the thirties, Leavis's effort to make English the 'chief of the humanities' was 'a symptom of the objective vacuum at the centre of the culture' (p. 50). Anderson argues further that the absence of a classical sociology or a theoretical Marxism meant that Leavis was unable to explain the cultural decline he denounced: 'Lacking any sociological formation, registering a decline but unable to provide a theory of it, Leavis was ultimately trapped in the cultural nexus he hated' (p. 55). Orwell shared the same 'cultural nexus' as Leavis, and in trying to write a 'semi-sociological literary criticism', [4] he came up against the same intellectual barriers that circumscribed Leavis's cultural criticism. For Orwell, the problem can be stated quite simply: how does one write a 'semi-sociological literary criticism' without a sociology?

In describing the context in which Orwell wrote his literary criticism, it is necessary finally to identify the broad trends in Dickens criticism during the period. In his study, Dickens and his Readers , George H. Ford emphasizes the difficulty in generalising about Dickens criticism in the early 1940 s. Nonetheless, he sketches two broad sets of opinion. The first, with its roots in the nineteenth century, is what Ford refers to as 'the high aesthetic line' : deriving their standards from the Henry James - type novel, these critics (including G. H. Lewes, George Saintsbury and Robert

Graves) saw Dickens variously as childish, sentimental, melodramatic, superficial and unconvincing. The second group of Dickens critics sought to refute these charges, often overstating their arguments in their zeal to defend Dickens. They included H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, G. K. Chesterton and George Gissing. They perceived many appealing qualities in Dickens: a penetrating social criticism; an enormous ability to entertain; an eye for realistic detail; and an underrated capacity to use symbols (like the fog in Bleak House). Although he makes numerous and substantial criticisms of Dickens in his essay, Ford groups Orwell in this second category of critics. Indeed, Ford sees him as an exceptionally astute defender of Dickens:

> The most perceptive essay on the subject which has so far appeared was written, appropriately, by George Orwell. Orwell is one of the few critics who has recognised some of the complexities and contradictions of the social criticism in Dickens' novels and yet retained a respect and love for them. (p. 237)

Having described the intellectual context of Orwell's essay on Dickens, we now need to place this particular essay in the context of Orwell's work on 'letters' as a whole. To summarise all of Orwell's work on culture and literature is beyond the scope of this study,[5] but for our purposes it is possible to identify three very broad categories of interest.

The first is his criticism of 'literature' specifically. This group can be sub-divided further, because Orwell's interest in 'literature' ranges from Shakespeare to P. G. Wodehouse. The first sub-category might be his essays on 'recognised writers of the past' : this would include the

discussions of Dickens, Shakespeare and Tolstoy (II, pp. 153-7; IV, pp. 331-48), and of Swift (IV, pp. 241-61). The second sub-category might be his essays on contemporaries and near-contemporaries he perceives as worthy additions to the canon of 'good writers' : this would include the essays on Henry Miller (I, pp. 178-80; 259-61; 540-78), T. S. Eliot (II, pp. 272-9), W. B. Yeats (II, pp. 311-17), D. H. Lawrence (III, pp. 50-3), Joseph Conrad (III, pp. 439-41; IV, pp. 550-1), and George Gissing (IV, pp. 483-94). The third sub-category might be the essays on writers of uncertain reputation; those whose work, for whatever reason, stands on the border between 'good' and merely 'interesting' literature: this would include his essays on Rudyard Kipling (I, pp. 183-4; II, pp. 215-29), Charles Reade (II, pp. 50-4), H. G. Wells (II, pp. 166-72), Arthur Koestler (III, pp. 370-82), P. G. Wodehouse (III, pp. 388-403), and Jack London (IV, pp. 41-8). In the critical analysis of the essay on Dickens to follow, I will draw on these essays to reinforce the distinctive features of Orwell's criticism.

The second group of essays reflects his interest in diverse forms of 'popular culture'. It includes: 'Boys' Weeklies' (I, pp. 505-31); 'Benefit of Clergy: Some Notes on Salvador Dali' (III, pp. 185-95), and 'Raffles and Miss Blandish' (III, pp. 246-60). Here Orwell introduces previously neglected forms of cultural production for serious consideration, and analyses them from the same 'semi-sociological' perspective as he uses in the essays on 'literature'. In 'Boys Weeklies', for example, he gives a detailed account of Gem and Magnet, and then focuses on the silences in these magazines:

> The working classes only enter into the Gem and Magnet as

> comics or semi-villains (race-course touts etc.). As for class-friction, trade unionism, strikes, slumps, unemployment, Fascism and civil war - not a mention. (p. 517)

In 'Raffles and Miss Blandish', he again pays careful attention to these forms of popular fiction, and speculates about the different worlds for which Raffles and No Orchids for Miss Blandish were written. Of No Orchids, for example, he writes:

> the book has not the smallest connexion with politics and very little with social or economic problems. It has merely the same relation to Fascism as, say, Trollope's novels have to nineteenth-century capitalism. It is a day-dream appropriate to a totalitarian age. In his imagined world of gangsters Chase is presenting, as it were, a distilled version of the modern political scene. (p. 259)

The third group of essays are those Orwell wrote in the 1940 s dealing with the relation between 'literature' and the modern age. They include: 'Inside the Whale' (I, pp. 540-78), 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda' (discussed above); Literature and Totalitarianism' (II, pp. 161-5); 'Literature and the Left' (II, pp. 334-7); 'Propaganda and Demotic Speech' (III, pp. 161-8); 'The Prevention of Literature' (IV, pp. 81-95); and 'Writers and Leviathan' (IV, pp. 463-70). In 'Inside the Whale', Orwell argues the connection between the gloomy introspection of pre-1930 literature and the relatively comfortable living standard enjoyed by those writers:

> Why always the sense of decadence, the skulls and cactuses, the yearning after lost faith and impossible civilizations? Was it not, after all, because these people were writing in an exceptionally comfortable epoch? It is just in such times that 'cosmic despair' can flourish. People with empty bellies never despair of the universe, nor even think about the universe, for that matter. (p. 558)

With the Great Depression and the rise of Fascism, however, the political context changed, and the literary patterns changed accordingly. In Orwell's words:

> The typical literary man ceases to be a cultured expatriate with a leaning towards the Church, and becomes an eager-minded schoolboy with a leaning towards Communism. If the keynote of the writers of the twenties is 'tragic sense of life', the keynote of the new writers is 'serious purpose'. (p. 559)

Orwell concludes the section on the Auden-generation by voicing a fear which haunts his subsequent writings: that in the intensely politicised atmosphere of the thirties and forties the integrity of the individual creative writer will be compromised, even destroyed, by the political demands made upon him:

> there remains the psychological fact that without this 'bourgeois' liberty the creative powers wither away. In the future a totalitarian literature may arise, but it will be quite different

> from anything we can now imagine. Literature as we know it is an individual thing, demanding mental honesty and a minimum of censorship. (p. 568)

He repeats the fear with greater urgency in the radio broadcast 'Literature and Totalitarianism' (1942):

> I believe the hope of literature's survival lies in those countries in which liberalism has struck its deepest roots, the non-military countries .... I believe - it may be no more than a pious hope - that though a collectivised economy is bound to come, those countries will know how to evolve a form of Socialism that is not totalitarian, in which freedom of thought can survive the disappearance of economic individualism. That, at any rate, is the only hope to which anyone who cares for literature can cling. (p. 164)

In his most extensive treatment of the theme in 'Writers and Leviathan' (1948), he suggests a defensive strategy for protecting the writer's creative integrity against either the 'party' or the totalitarian state: when a writer engages in politics, 'he should do so as a citizen, as a human being, but not as a writer' (p. 468). To 'split his life [thus] into two compartments' (p. 469) is the only possible path Orwell sees. And indeed, it is the path (unsuccessfully) taken by Winston Smith in Nineteen Eighty-Four: as a citizen, he re-writes history for the Ministry of Truth, but as a writer, he keeps the personal diary for recording his 'true' feelings.

Finally, one essay that does not fall clearly into these three categories,

but which is nonetheless of relevance to Orwell's critical work, is 'Why I Write' (I, pp. 23-30). In this essay, Orwell argues that all writers are driven by various combinations of the following four motives: sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm; historical impulse; and political purpose. He declares that in his case the first three would in a peaceful age have predominated, but that the politically-charged atmosphere of the thirties had 'forced' (p. 26) him to become a 'sort of pamphleteer' (p. 26). As a result, his work is defined by its political purpose, which he explains thus: 'Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, <u>against</u> totalitarianism and <u>for</u> democratic socialism, as I understand it' (p. 28). Although Orwell is writing here primarily about fiction, his work on 'letters' after 1936 is also informed (perhaps 'indirectly') by this explicit political commitment.

Orwell opens his essay on Dickens with the observation that 'Dickens is one of those writers who are well worth stealing' (p. 454). He notes that Marxists claim Dickens as 'almost' a Marxist, Catholics as 'almost' a Catholic. Orwell then tries for the remainder of the first section to define Dickens's 'position' or 'message' in order to understand why he is appropriated by such diverse tendencies. He asks: 'Where exactly does he stand, socially, morally and politically?' (p. 455); and decides that the easiest way to answer this would be to decide what Dickens was <u>not</u>.

Firstly, he was not, according to Orwell, a 'proletarian' writer, because quite simply he did not write about the working-classes. Secondly, he was not, 'in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word . . . a 'revolutionary' writer' (p. 456). Orwell elaborates upon this second negative definition: although Dickens' novels reflect 'a consciousness that society is wrong somewhere at the root' (p. 456) , his criticism of society is 'almost

exclusively moral' (p. 457). Orwell continues:

> For in reality his target is not so much society as 'human nature'. It would be difficult to point anywhere in his books to a passage suggesting that the economic system is wrong as a system. (p. 457)

As a result: 'His whole 'message' is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent' (p. 457).

Orwell backs up this argument by referring first to Dickens' novels which describe revolutions: A Tale of Two Cities and Barnaby Rudge. The descriptions of mob violence in these novels reveal 'how deep was Dickens's horror of revolutionary hysteria' (p. 463). He then refers to David Copperfield and Nicholas Nickelby , in which Dickens depicts the education system; Orwell sums up Dickens's implied argument as follows:

> As always, what he appears to want is a moralized version of the existing thing - the old type of school, but with no caning, no bullying or under-feeding, and not quite so much Greek. (p. 467)

In concluding his assessment of Dickens as 'a change of spirit' rather than 'a change of structure' thinker, Orwell makes a crucial qualification. Although Orwell concedes that 'in the accepted sense [Dickens is not] a revolutionary writer' (p. 468), he insists that 'the strongest single impression one carries away from his books is that of a hatred of tyranny' (p. 468), and further, that the dichotomy between 'revolutionary' and

'moralist' is not as simple as it seems:

> two viewpoints are always tenable. The one, how can you improve human nature until you have changed the system? The other, what is the use of changing the system before you have improved human nature? They appeal to different individuals, and they probably show a tendency to alternate in point of time. (p. 469)

Despite his criticisms of Dickens's 'unsystematic' turn of mind, Orwell concludes by defending the moralist position that Dickens embodies:

> The central problem - how to prevent power from being abused - remains unsolved. Dickens, who had not the vision to see that private property is an obstructive nuisance, had the vision to see that. 'If men would behave decently the world would be decent' is not such a platitude as it sounds. (p. 469)

What emerges here is that despite the opening disclaimer, Orwell is as eager as any Marxist or Catholic to 'steal' Dickens. The 'Dickens' that Orwell constitutes here is a rather muddled ancestor of 'the plain man': like 'Orwell', Dickens believes that change of consciousness ('change of spirit') must necessarily precede any change in the political or economic system ('change of structure'); and, also like 'Orwell', he expresses the deep hatred of tyranny that represents the indispensable emotional basis of socialism. Orwell's criticisms of Dickens arise from Orwell's (misguided) confidence in his own understanding of 'the system' : Dickens does not in effect satisfy

Orwell's standards of political analysis.

In the next three sections, Orwell defines Dickens's attitudes to various issues, and tries to explain them in terms of his context.[6] In the first section, Orwell indicates in an aside that Dickens's attitude to the London mob and to children should be understood in the light of prevailing opinion in Victorian England. In the second section, however, Dickens's milieu and its effect on his ideas moves into more central focus. He observes: 'More completely than most writers, perhaps, Dickens can be explained in terms of his social origin' (p. 469); and then proceeds to show how Dickens's formation as a member of the urban petit bourgeoisie influenced his attitudes to the poor (generalised sympathy); to the rising bourgeoisie (more keenly focused sympathy); and to the landed gentry (bitter scorn).

In the third section, Orwell continues to list what Dickens thought and felt about various issues. The discussion ranges from Dickens's horror of proletarian roughness, to his snobbish treatment of criminals (vide Magwitch), to his prudish attitude to sex across the class barrier, and finally to his uncritical depiction of servants. His explanation of these - sometimes quite offensive - attitudes is offered briefly:

> Given his origins, and the time he lived in, it could hardly be otherwise. In the early nineteenth century class-animosities may have been no sharper than they are now, but the surface differences between class and class were enormously greater. (p. 478)

In the fourth section, he insists on the importance of Dickens having lived in London, since London 'is a city of consumers, of people who are deeply civilized but not primarily useful' (p. 483). This explains for Orwell Dickens's

failure to write about work:

> What exactly went on in Gradgrind's factories? How did Podsnap make his money? How did Merdle work his swindles? . . . . As soon as he has to deal with trade, finance, industry or politics he takes refuge in vagueness, or in satire. (p. 484)

Dickens's distance from the productive centre of nineteenth century England leads him to see people 'always in private life, as 'characters', not as functional members of society' (p. 485).

Although Orwell refers liberally to Dickens's novels to reinforce his arguments, his discussion of Dickens's relation to his milieu remains fragmentary and anecdotal. Furthermore, he does not historicise the particular novels discussed, thus creating an impression of 'the essential Dickens', a static figure who changed little during his lifetime as a writer. For example, in discussing Dickens' attitude to servants, Orwell does not attempt to trace any development or changes from Pickwick Papers to Our Mutual Friend : Sam Weller and Sloppy are cited simply to confirm Orwell's argument that Dickens could not conceive a social system without servants, and therefore did no more than 'reach out for an idealised version of the existing thing' (p. 483).[7]

In section five, Orwell moves from examining Dickens's message to assessing his aesthetic or 'literary' qualities. He makes an important qualification at the outset:

> But every writer, especially every novelist, has a 'message', whether he admits it or not, and the minutest details of his work are influenced by it. All art is propaganda . . . . On the other hand, not all

> propaganda is art. (pp. 491-2)

He repeats his doubts as to the independence of the 'aesthetic' in the next paragraph:

> As a rule, an aesthetic preference is either something inexplicable or it is so corrupted by non-aesthetic motive as to make one wonder whether the whole of literary criticism is not a huge network of humbug. (p. 492)

Despite these hesitations, Orwell proceeds to examine Dickens's literary qualities, and his conclusions are generally unfavourable. Dickens's style is described as 'florid' (p. 494); his 'imagination overwhelms everything, like a kind of weed' (p. 495); and he is 'a writer whose parts are greater than his wholes' (p. 497). According to 'aesthetic' or 'literary' standards, Dickens is therefore not a 'great writer'.

However, Orwell refuses this line of argument, and for two quite different reasons. Firstly, he insists that 'for any work of art, there is only one test worth bothering about - survival' (p. 499); and according to <u>this</u> test, Dickens succeeds handsomely. Secondly, he rejects the whole process of 'grading' authors itself. Referring to Dickens and Tolstoy, he observes:

> The truth is that it is absurd to make comparisons of 'better' and 'worse' . . . . [O]ne is no more obliged to choose between them than between a sausage and a rose. Their purposes barely intersect. (p. 500)

Two quite contradictory aesthetics are expressed in unresolved tension in

this section. The first, the 'radical' aesthetic, is introduced in Orwell's refusal to privilege 'art' or 'literature' ; the first half of the aphorism - 'all art is propaganda' - might be paraphrased as : 'all forms of cultural production have political origins and consequences' . This is developed in his perception of Dickens as having been 'stolen' by different types of readers. The implication is that the texts, rather than being inviolable repositories of meaning, are reconstituted ('stolen') in the act of reading; and hence Dickens the Marxist, the Catholic or Conservative. Therefore, not only the production of texts, but also their subsequent reproduction, are by definition political processes. This line of argument is taken yet further in his comments about the literary/critical industry - 'a huge network of humbug.' According to Orwell, the claims that aesthetic criteria are 'innocent' are quite spurious: definitions of 'literature' and in particular 'good literature' are determined by non-aesthetic motives; political considerations govern these purportedly 'artistic' or 'literary' questions. Finally, in refusing to compare Dickens and Tolstoy, Orwell clears the way for an aesthetic which judges texts in terms of their context instead of in terms of a (mystified) set of transcendent criteria.

The contrary, 'conservative' aesthetic is implied in the second half of the aphorism: 'on the other hand, not all propaganda is art'. This might be paraphrased as : 'although all texts have a political dimension, not all texts have that special quality which elevates them into the category of "art" .' The sense of 'art' (and aesthetic values) as in some way transcending the political is further suggested in Orwell's use of the verb 'corrupted' in describing the presence of a political component in all aesthetic preference ; the implication is that if it were not for the 'corrupting' influence of politics, 'pure' aesthetic judgements might prevail. This privileging of 'art' is taken further in Orwell's separation of 'message' and 'style' , content and form. It is suggested

that it is not the content (propaganda) but the form (artistic skill) that determines whether a text is art or not; according to 'pure' aesthetic standards, the content is largely irrelevant, and it is quite possible to have 'good' literature with poor or offensive content. [8] This line of reasoning is concluded in Orwell's perception of 'survival' as the only aesthetic standard 'worth bothering about.' Instead of seeing a text's survival as the result of continuities in cultural reproduction, Orwell sees it as proof of the text's intrinsic (artistic) value : 'great art' will establish its superiority by rising above the petty (politically-motivated) objections of its own day, and will survive into future generations.

In the concluding section of the essay, Orwell repeats his view of Dickens as the defender of the underdog; he argues that such '[a] good-tempered antinomianism rather of Dickens's type is one of the marks of western popular culture' (p. 503) ; and it is in this that the key to Dickens popularity is to be found: 'But in his own age and ours he has been popular chiefly because he was able to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable form the native decency of the common man' (p. 503). In the same way in which he equates democratic freedoms with the English-speaking world in The Lion and the Unicorn, so here Orwell identifies 'the idea of freedom and equality' (p. 504) with Dickens. In the final sentence, the identification of 'Orwell' with 'Dickens' is extremely close, as Orwell contemplates the place of Dickens (and the values he stands for) in the middle of the twentieth century:

> It is the face of a man [Dickens] who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is generously angry - in other words, of a nineteenth

> century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls. (p. 509)

Orwell thus tries to relate Dickens to the context in which he is reproduced (the 1930 s), and more specifically, tries to enlist him as a close ally of the plain man.[9]

2.2 Chapter One of The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence.

The cultural landscape of post-War Britain was dominated by the work of F. R. Leavis and Scrutiny. They had discredited the genteel amateurism of Saintsbury's generation, and had more than withstood the forays into the field of culture undertaken by the English Marxists. In an article, 'Our Debt to Dr. Leavis' , Williams registers Leavis' overwhelming presence:

> In my own case, I have both learned from him and criticized him, and though I do not know whether he would want me to do so, I repeat what I have written over the past twelve years: that he is the most interesting critic of his generation, that his educational influence has been central to the best work of his period, and that his life's work is a major contribution to our culture. (p. 245)

This then was the context in which Williams conceived and wrote The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence, and looking back, he recalls the particularly powerful influence exerted by Leavis's The Great Tradition in the area of novel-criticism:

> by this time, [Leavis] had completely won. I mean if you talked to anyone about the English novel, including people who were hostile to Leavis, they were in fact reproducing his sense of the shape of its history. So I couldn't but talk to that situation. (Politics and Letters, p. 245)

In The Great Tradition , Leavis argues that the only English novelists

worthy of the epithet 'great' are: Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence. Dickens fails to make the grade, although Hard Times is singled out as an exceptional work. Leavis describes what distinguished 'the few really great' (p. 10) as follows:

> the major novelists . . . count in the same way as the major poets, in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of that human awareness they promote; awareness of the possiblities of life. (p. 10)

And:

> The great novelists in that tradition are all very much concerned with 'form'; they are all very original technically, having turned their genius to the working out of their own appropriate methods and procedures. (p. 16)

A further sense of what is meant by 'great' can be derived from the adjectives he attaches to these select few: George Eliot is praised for her 'intellectual weight and moral earnestness' (p. 18) ; Henry James because in his work 'certain human potentialities are nobly celebrated' (p. 21) ; and Conrad for being 'an innovator in 'form' and method (and) the servant of a profoundly serious interest in life' (p. 27).

Dickens's exclusion is explained thus:

> That Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the

> classics is certain. But the genius was that of a great entertainer, and he had for the most part no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than this description suggests . . . . The adult mind doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to an unusual and sustained seriousness. (p. 29)

Hard Times is an exception because it is 'a completely serious work of art' (p. 249). Leavis praises the novel for, among other things, its comprehensive vision: 'one in which the inhumanities of Victorian civilisation are seen as fostered and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit' (p. 250). He also praises the presentation of the circus people who embody a 'vital human impulse' (p. 255). According to Leavis, the novel's flaws - the sentimental depiction of Stephen Blackpool and dubious descriptions of trade unionism - in no way diminish its stature, since: 'Dickens's understanding of Victorian civilisation is adequate for his purpose; the justice and penetration of his criticism are unaffected' (p. 271).

From this summary of The Great Tradition, several important characteristics of Leavis's criticism can be discerned. The first is the narrow definition of literature and even narrower definition of 'great' literature. Unlike Orwell, Leavis sees a clear and unbreachable line between 'art' and 'propaganda' : 'Art' or 'Literature' for the latter are terms to be conferred occasionally and with great caution on certain privileged texts. The second characteristic that is evident is the theoretical impoverishment of Leavis's work. In The Great Tradition, Leavis's critical vocabulary rests on a very limited stock of terms: 'serious' , 'vital', 'possibilities of life', 'humane' , and one or two others. The third characteristic is related to the second: The absence of 'politics' in Leavis criticism. Mulhern emphasizes the significance

of this silence in the conclusion of his study, The Moment of Scrutiny:

> the basic and constant discursive organization of the journal, the matrix of its literary and cultural criticism and of its educational policies, of its radical and conservative manifestations alike, was one defined by a dialectic of 'culture' and 'civilization' whose main and logically necessary effect was a depreciation, a repression and, at the limit, a categorial dissolution of politics as such. Nothing could be more disorienting for socialist cultural theory than the ingestion of a discourse whose main effect is to undo the intelligibility of its ultimate concern: political mobilization against the existing structures of society and State. (pp. 330-1)

For Mulhern, the major challenge facing the socialist critic is therefore to resurrect the category of politics in literary criticism by systematically exposing the obfuscation produced by the discourse of Scrutiny.

Regarding specifically Dickens criticism, I noted that Orwell's essay falls in the broad category of those defending Dickens from critics arguing 'the high aesthetic line'. By the time Williams writes, the need to defend Dickens from this quarter has passed. According to Williams:

> Dickens certainly is now more admired, more respected, more carefully studied than he has ever been, and especially within a minority critical public; the majority of readers he has of course always kept. (p. 29)

Despite this change in critical fashion since Orwell's essay - and particularly

the amelioration in the reception of Dickens - there continue to be critics that find fault with Dickens. There are those, Williams argues, that criticise him for failing to satisfy 'the standard of one kind of novel, . . . the fiction of an educated minority' (p. 31). Leavis is present here in all but name, and in this chapter Williams defends Dickens from such negative judgements with even more zeal than Orwell does.

Another development in Dickens criticism with a bearing on Williams's work was the emergence in the late 1950 s of more rigorous efforts to read Dickens in his context. In the introduction to John Gross' collection of essays on Dickens, Gabriel Pearson summarises the main contributions:

> [John] Holloway . . . makes an effort to see [Dickens] as involved, however inarticulately, in the ideological debates of his age. His essay on Hard Times makes a salutary corrective to Dr. Leavis's perhaps too Lawrentian account . . . . [Jack] Lindsay is mostly concerned with the way in which profound social forces interact with the lives of individuals; [Arnold] Kettle with Dickens's conscious rejection of capitalist social relationships. (p. xxiv)

Finally, in outlining the context of The English Novel , it should be noted that it was based on Williams's lectures on the novel given at Cambridge between 1962 and 1968.[1] In Politics and Letters (pp. 244-5), he describes The English Novel as partly the product of institutional pressure: employed as a literary critic, he was expected to produce books of literary criticism.

It is now necessary to place The English Novel in the context of Williams's work on literature during his 'early' phase. His first major work on literature was Reading and Criticism , in which he sets out 'to offer suggestions and

material for the development of responsive and intelligent reading of literature' (p. 1). He argues in the introductory chapter that criticism should be concerned not with 'books for pleasure', but with books that 'have value'; criticism, according to Williams, 'is concerned with evaluation, with comparison, and with standards. It is mature reading' (p. 3). At present he notes that the 'public for serious literature' (p. 4) remains small, but insists that there are remedial reasons for this state of affairs. He argues further that 'serious literature' is primarily important as 'a record of human experience' (p. 8), and that to appreciate it requires training. There is no short cut in this training: 'through attentive reading, through orderly discussion under a capable tutor, and through regular reference to examples of good written criticism, progress may be made' (p. 8). He concludes that it is only by 'contact with actual literature rather than with abstractions' (p. 8), that the exercise of judgment and value might be developed. [2] In the second chapter, he reviews current reading habits, and finds them to be superficial and slovenly. The reason for this is 'that much of our reading has become dissociated from experience that is important to us in our directly personal living' (pp. 17-18). In Chapter Three, he goes on to assess the role of the critic, and argues:

> the importance of the critic's function hardly needs stressing. He is the mediator between the artist and the serious reading public; his criticism is the articulation of adequate response and trained evaluation. (p. 21)

He considers the competing types of criticism available to the 'ordinary reader', and then sets out what he believes criticism should encompass. In the

first place, in order to read adequately, one should 'set one's reading in order with relation to one's personal experience and to the experience of the culture to which one belongs' (p. 26). By following this method, by the 'application of intelligence and sensibility' (p. 26), the resulting criticism will contribute ultimately to the emergence of 'an organic and contemporary body of judgment' (p. 29).[3]

In Chapter Four, Williams demonstrates how critical analysis should be performed by giving a close reading of selected passages. He concludes:

> Analysis will lead us to judgments of particular pieces of writing and will develop a capacity for close reading. From a number of such judgments certain general ideas about reading will be constructed, so that in our normal reading of complete works our response is more aware and more controlled. (p. 44)

The next four chapters deal in turn with the analysis of verse, prose, a novel (Heart of Darkness) and drama as Williams puts into practice the critical method outlined in the opening chapters.

In the final chapter, Williams considers the relation between literature and society. He concedes that 'in one important sense the arts can only be fully understood when they are examined within the context of the society in which they were produced' (p. 100), but argues nonetheless that literature should not be treated as merely a reflection of its age: those who do 'are too often persons whose training has been exclusively sociological and who are in many ways unfitted for the reading of creative literature' (p. 100). He concludes: 'It is not that the relation of literature to society ought to be ignored, it is simply that the relation is a great deal more complicated than is

good for tidiness' (p. 102). [4]

Further, literature should not be judged in terms of its 'message' or 'ideology', since the true test of literary value is:

> the width of exploration, the depth of response .... And this width and depth, since they exist primarily in words, can only be measured by literary analysis. Language is the scale. (p. 106)

In the Preface, Williams acknowledges his debt to among others Leavis, Richards and Eliot, and although there are differences in detail [5], Reading and Criticism reproduces in succinct form the assumptions and practices of these critics. The influence of Eliot is evident in the expressions of cultural pessimism; of Richards in the exposition of 'practical criticism' ; and of Leavis in the narrow definition of 'serious literature' , in the suspicion of sociology (which can be read as 'Marxism'), and in the repression of politics. The extent to which Williams - the committed socialist - was constrained by this intellectual inheritance is perhaps best illustrated by reference to the complete absence of 'politics' in his discussion of Heart of Darkness: throughout the chapter on the novel he deals only with textual strategies and ignores the history of colonialism entirely.

In the twenty years between Reading and Criticism and The English Novel, Williams did not produce another book on literature as such, writing instead about drama (Drama From Ibsen to Brecht and Modern Tragedy), culture (Culture and Society and The Long Revolution) and politics (May Day Manifesto). However, there are two short texts Williams wrote during this period that have a bearing on his understanding of literature and of Dickens particularly.

The first text is Culture and Society , in which Williams traces the changing meanings of the word 'culture', which he sees as:

> a record of a number of important and continuing reactions to these changes in our social, economic and political life, and may be seen, in itself, as a special kind of map by means of which the nature of the changes can be explored. (p. 16)

He records the major shift in the meaning of 'culture' as follows:

> the recognition of a separate body of moral and intellectual activities, and the offering of a court of human appeal, which comprise the early meanings of the word, are joined, and in themselves changed, by the growing assertion of a whole way of life. (pp. 17-18)

He traces this shift by examining 'particular thinkers and their actual statements' (p. 18), from Burke and Cobbett to Orwell. In his Conclusion, he endorses the sense of culture as 'a whole way of life' , and argues for the development of a common culture based on values of solidarity, community and democracy.

Although Williams does not carry the argument through here, his democratic definition of culture has implications for the meaning of 'literature'. If the meaning of 'culture' is to be democratised and is not to refer only to the activities of a privileged elite, so 'literature' - a part of culture - should refer not only to 'serious' works of fiction but to all forms of writing; or, at the very least, 'literature' should not be separated off from

other forms of writing and held up for special veneration.

One of the figures Williams discusses in Culture and Society is Dickens. He focuses on Hard Times, and like Leavis, he praises Dickens for providing ' a thorough-going and creative examination of the dominant philosophy of industrialism' (p. 104), and also for preserving in his novels the positive values traced in the 'Culture and Society' tradition. In Hard Times, they are dramatised in the spontaneous, unorganised life of the Circus; Williams argues that Sleary's faith:

> 'that there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-intereth after all' . . . is a characteristic conclusion, in a vitally important tradition which based its values on such grounds. It is the major criticism of Industrialism as a whole way of life, and its grounds in experience have been firm. (p. 106)

Williams's positives - 'tradition' , 'values' , 'way of life' and 'experience' - closely echo those of Leavis. However, unlike Leavis, Williams is not able to overlook the flaws in Hard Times. According to Williams, Dickens locates these positive values exclusively in individual experience, thus establishing a limiting opposition between individuals - seen as passive repositories of virtue - and the evil system. The most paralysing consequence of this is that Dickens could not see any way of expressing positive values in the organisation of society: in Hard Times, for example, there are no social alternatives to Gradgrind and Bounderby, and Dickens goes outside industrialised society to the Circus to give expression to his values. Williams further criticises Dickens's depiction of the working-class alternately as objects of pity if they are helpless and passive (Stephen Blackpool), or as

perverse agitators if they try to improve their condition (Slackbridge). Williams also describes Dickens's tone as that of 'an adolescent' ; with a combination of patronising compassion for the meek and suffering, and a selfrighteous sense of having seen through society and found everyone out, Dickens 'shames the adult world, but also rejects it' (p. 107). Williams's concluding assessment is severe: 'As a whole response, Hard Times is more a symptom of the confusion of industrial society than an understanding of it, but it is a symptom that is significant and continuing' (p. 107).

Although there is still evidence of Williams's debt to Leavis in Culture and Society (notably in his critical vocabulary and methods of textual analysis), there are several important changes in his position as expressed in Reading and Criticism. Besides the explicit rejection of Leavis' elitist conception of culture there is also the overtly 'political' standards used in the discussion of Dickens. As a socialist, Williams is not prepared to allow (as Leavis does) that 'Dickens' s understanding of Victorian civilisation is adequate for its purpose'. He demands a more coherent socialist analysis in the novels, and focuses his criticisms accordingly: Dickens's emphasis on individual salvation is limited; his depiction of workers is patronising; and his understanding of Victorian capitalism confused. Further, in commending Dickens's optimistic humanism, Williams resists the gloomy conclusions of Leavis's (and Eliot's) cultural pessimism.

The second text of direct relevance to Williams's understanding of literature and of Dickens is his 'Notes on English Prose 1780-1950', first published as the Introduction to Volume II of Pelican Book of English Prose in 1969.[6] In this article, Williams emphasises the importance of foregrounding the changing nature of the relation between writers and readers in the production of prose:

> In its most general sense, the writing of prose is a transaction between discoverable numbers of writers and readers, organized in certain changing social relations which include education, class habits, distribution and publishing costs. (p. 72)

This expanded perspective involves firstly a reconsideration of 'literature' and particularly the novel: Williams adjusts his earlier views on 'serious literature' when he argues 'there is no single tradition of fiction in the period, and not even a single major tradition' (p. 80). Secondly, in applying this perspective to Dickens' prose specifically, he argues that:

> for expressing the actual life of a hard-pressed, hard-driven, excluded majority, a different prose was absolutely required; a different language as expressing the altered relation of writer and reader. (p. 90)

In the Introduction to The English Novel, Williams sets out the main thesis of his study: that in the 1840 s there was a major crisis of experience in Britain; that the central bearing in this crisis was 'the exploration of community: the substance and meaning of community' (p. 11); and that the novel was the most important form used to realise this new and critical experience.

He then notes two important developments in the history of the novel during this period. The first is that by 1840 the historical novel had run its course. Williams cites the major achievement of the historical novel as: 'the establishment of a position in human experience that was capable of judging . . . the very society that was forming and changing it' (p. 13). This

position was no longer available after the Industrial Revolution, because society became an agent in its own right: 'Society, now, was not just a code to measure, an institution to control, a standard to define or to change. It was a process that entered lives, to shape or to deform' (p. 13).

The second development was the disappearance of 'knowable communities'. According to Williams, 'the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways' (p. 14). However, because of the rapid changes in society, 'any assumption of a knowable community - a whole community, wholly knowable - becomes harder and harder to sustain' (p. 16). He emphasizes that this is of particular concern for novelists, because:

> A knowable community . . . is a matter of consciousness as well as of evident fact. Indeed it is to just this problem of knowing a community - of finding a position, a position convincingly experienced, from which community can begin to be known - that one of the major phases in the development of the novel must be related. (p. 17).

He concludes that Dickens is the crucial figure in this exploration of community, because whereas earlier writers could refer to relatively stable rural communities, Dickens had to find a basis for community in the new experience of the city.

The analytical limitations of 'experience' here in the context of literary criticism are as damaging as they were in Williams's political analysis. In the first chapter, we saw that 'experience' owed its prominence in Williams's work to the historical ascendancy of common sense empiricism; that it acted as a constant check on theoretical enquiry; and that, viewed from a

structuralist position, 'experience' could not be the basis for anything, since it was the effect or result of living in and through the categories, processes and frameworks of the culture. In The English Novel , 'experience' is still the stuff of the real world, providing the basis for literature, and functioning as a catch-all phrase for the various economic, political and social processes that inform the novel. As a 'theoretical' category, it has to bear an enormous weight of meanings, and as a result cannot differentiate the complex of material and cultural forms involved in the production of the novel.

Williams's emphasis on the theme of 'community' is also dubious. In Chapter One, we saw that Williams tends to project his own (extremely positive) 'experience of community' beyond its historical limits, neglecting in the process the divisive force of the class system. In The English Novel, although Williams's discussion of community represents a valuable perspective, it is at least arguable that Williams again privileges his own 'experience' here, and that there are other bearings in the development of the novel that are of equal weight: for example, the emergence and fate of the individual protagonist; the competing claims to 'realism'; and the relation between the novel and other forms of cultural production.

The third premise in Williams's thesis - that the novel (and especially the novels he discusses in this study) is the most important form employed in realising the crisis of experience - reflects strongly the influence of Leavis. In The Great Tradition, Leavis holds up the novels of Eliot, James and Conrad as the documents of cultural excellence; in so doing, he diminishes not only the work of other novelists, but also the work of 'lesser' cultural producers, like cartoonists, journalists and music-hall performers. In focusing on the same group of novels as Leavis, Williams therefore reproduces Leavis's map of English literature. Eagleton makes this point emphatically in Criticism

and Ideology :

> [The English Novel] is a powerful plea for the 'English tradition' - not, to be sure, Leavis's tradition exactly, for suppressed links are inserted (Hardy), lines of continuity consequently redrawn, and the political assumptions forcefully at odds with the Leavisian ideology. But for all that the book is a rewriting of the 'great tradition' from an alternative standpoint, rather than a total displacement of that critical terrain. (p. 36)

In the chapter on Dickens, Williams first repeats his view that Dickens was writing 'at the time of the critical remaking of the novel and of the critical emergence of a new urban popular culture' (p. 29) ; and then refines his main argument that:

> The central case we have to make is that Dickens could write a new kind of novel - fiction uniquely capable of realising a new kind of reality - just because he shared with the new urban popular culture certain decisive experiences and responses . . . . [He] is a new kind of novelist and . . . his method is his experience. (p. 32)

According to Williams the characteristic pattern of the Dickens novel is: first, he established a way of seeing where there is an absence of connection and development in the relations of men and women; then, 'as the action develops, unknown and unacknowledged relationships, profound and decisive connections, definite and committing recognitions and avowals are as it were forced into consciousness' (p. 33). Williams concludes that this

creation of consciousness, of an 'imaginative community', is the main purpose of Dickens's later fictional works.

Williams then discusses another aspect of Dickens's originality, his ability 'to dramatise those social institutions and consequences which are not accessible to ordinary physical observation' (p. 34). Quoting Dickens's descriptions of buildings and the people who live in them in Little Dorrit and Dombey and Son, Williams argues that Dickens's method: 'is a conscious way of seeing and showing. The city is shown as at once a social fact and a human landscape. What is dramatised in it is a very complex structure of feeling. (p. 37)[7] He then shows how Dickens is capable of combining his rhetorical external view of the city with a view of the city from the inside, from the perspective of the characters. This latter way of seeing is tied to Dickens' sense of the physical world as always being 'of [man's] making, his manufacture, his interpretation' (p. 40). This ability to make new worlds, however, is ambiguous: quoting from passages where Dickens describes the new railway system, Williams shows how for Dickens the railway is 'at once the "life blood" and "the triumphant monster, Death" ' (p. 44).

In the next step of his argument, Williams returns to his point in the Introduction that after 1840 'society' was conceived in a new way. Dickens, according to Williams, sees society as both 'a background against which the drama of personal virtues and vices is enacted', and, 'the creator of virtues and vices' (p. 44). Williams records how in Dombey and Son it is the latter view of society that prevails at first :

> social institutions, particular social purposes, reshape not only the physical but the moral world. And the question then arises: what is the nature, the human nature, by which this can be judged? (p. 46)

At the point in the novel where the conclusion that the diseased slums of the city ('society') must inevitably produce vice and evil ('human nature') seems inescapable, Dickens the narrator intervenes, creating in the face of this suffering a positive social alternative.

This is in fact the stage at which The Country and the City chapter ends, and the 1964 Critical Quarterly article begins. However, Williams's argument is not unduly interrupted because he moves to consider more closely the nature of Dickens's 'creative intervention', arguing that Dickens's novels in fact constitute a powerful form of social criticism.

Williams first considers the contrary argument that Dickens was in fact an ineffectual social critic, that 'he is curiously blind to the real forces in nineteenth century society' (p. 48). He (incorrectly) [8] sees Orwell as one of the chief purveyors of this argument, which he then rejects quite firmly:

> it is stupid of Orwell to dismiss Dickens as a 'change-of-heart' man .... To see a change of heart and a change of institutions as alternatives is already to ratify an alienated society, for neither can be separated, or ever is, from the other; simply one or other can be ignored. (p. 49)

Williams argues that Dickens in fact has a sure sense of the general human condition, and is aware of the limits of piecemeal reform. He compares Dickens's general vision to that of Marx :

> [Marx's] vision is structurally similar to that of Dickens. Absolute human exclusion is more important than the relative kinds of exclusion which can be remedied by partial and piecemeal change.

> What Dickens saw as redemption through love and innocence Marx saw as revolution, and the difference is crucial. But still, [for both] total change is seen as the necessary response to a total condition . . . (p. 50)

Quoting from Nicholas Nickleby, Williams shows how in his novels Dickens employs deliberately generalising description to depict a general condition, and how within the description there is an implied determinism : circumstances create evil. To that condition, Dickens proposes a humane response. Williams summarises the pattern:

> having defined a social condition as the cause of virtue and vice, Dickens then produces virtue, almost magically as in Little Dorrit, from the same conditions which in others bred vice; or produces charity by making an exceptional and surprising benevolence flourish, overriding the determinism of the system. (p. 52)

In an important passage, Williams approves this resolution warmly:

> There is no reason . . . for love and innocence, except that almost obliterated by this general condition there is humanity . . . . The inexplicable quality of the indestructible innocence, of the miraculously intervening goodness, on which Dickens so much depends and which has been casually written off as sentimentality is genuine because it is inexplicable . . . . To believe that a human spirit exists, ultimately more powerful than even this system, is an act of faith but an act of faith in ourselves. (p. 53)

Williams then mentions how Dickens draws randomly on the ideas of Carlyle, Cobbett, Arnold and Owen in attacking what he saw as the evils in his society. Although these ideas might be contradictory, Williams insists that Dickens's general vision is 'deep and remarkable' (p. 57); indeed, he concludes that Dickens's novels: 'are more penetrating into the reality of nineteenth century England than any of the systems which were in fact made clear and consistent. (p. 57). As social criticism, his work is 'marvellously achieved and still profoundly active' (p. 58).

We are now finally in a position to compare the ideas of Orwell and Williams on the subject of 'letters', and particularly on Dickens. However, before drawing together the points of similarity, it is necessary to specify the differences.

The first difference is in the literary /critical contexts in which Orwell and Williams wrote about Dickens. The 1930 s were different to the fifties and sixties in several ways. Firstly, in the thirties, there were several competing critical discourses: the 'Scrutineers', the English Marxists and the 'aesthetic' critics all enjoyed a degree of influence. Second , largely as a result of the efforts of the English Marxists,'politics' was firmly on the agenda for literary critics. By the time of the Cold War, however, Scrutiny had achieved formidable hegemony, and 'politics' as a component of literary critical discourse had been shifted from chapter headings to occasional footnotes. Nonetheless, there was one important continuity through this period, namely the absence of critical theory in English literary criticism. This theoretical vacuum was shored up by the intellectual insularity of the British Left - the closely related critical work of European contemporaries like Georg Lukacs and Walter Benjamin only became available in the late

1960 s.

A second difference is that whereas Orwell wrote as a popular essayist, Williams's work on Dickens is that of a professional academic. Inglis places Orwell's essays on popular culture as follows:

> in them Orwell is able to start from the literary provenance by which as a writer and belletlettriste and upperclass journalist, he was intellectually shaped, and then in the name of elementary radicalism, to turn its terms upside down. (p. 121)

In 'Charles Dickens', Orwell was therefore subject to the demands and conventions of popular literary journalism, and was challenging those conventions by introducing political considerations into his assessment of Dickens. Williams, on the other hand, was subject to the institutional demands of the academy: responding within a context dominated by Scrutiny, he was obliged to obey the rules of a discourse quite different to the one governing Orwell. Orwell's style is accordingly that of 'the plain man', spontaneous, untheoretical and provocative, whereas Williams's prose[9] is careful, academic, and punctuated by the use of a limited 'theoretical' vocabulary (notably 'experience', 'form', and 'structure of feeling').

The third difference relates to their respective appreciations of Dickens. Although they both ultimately embrace Dickens's achievement (more below), Orwell's praise is more strongly qualified than that of Williams. For example, Orwell is obedient to traditonal aesthetic criteria, and criticises Dickens's style as profuse, overwhelming the narrative ' like a kind of weed' (p. 495). Williams, on the other hand, applying his categories of experience and form, argues that Dickens is a new kind of novelist and that his method ('style') is

his experience: he concludes warmly that Dickens's writing is 'uniquely capable of expressing the experience of living in cities' (p. 32). Second, in terms of Williams's analysis , Orwell's criticisms of Dickens's middle-class bias are beside the point: instead of judging Dickens's social attitudes according to twentieth century standards, Williams explains Dickens's inability to create a convincing worker or aristocrat by pointing to the 'unknowable' nature of his urban experience; it would therefore have been impossible to expect Dickens to capture all aspects of the experience with equal veracity. Third, whereas Orwell criticizes Dickens's inability to conceptualise British capitalism as a system, Williams again tries to see Dickens in terms of his context rather than in terms of current levels of political analysis. Dickens's inconsistencies, which Orwell foregrounds and attributes to his 'change of heart' philosophy, are for Williams quite secondary because he sees Dickens's total vision 'as more penetrating into the reality of nineteenth- century England than any of the systems which were in fact made clear and consistent' (p. 57).

These are substantial differences, and the similarities between Orwell and Williams's respective understandings of 'letters' described below do not cancel them out. However, these differences are contained within a number of broad areas of overlap.

The first point of comparison is that Orwell and Williams share a similar definition of 'literature'. Orwell's conception of 'art' or 'literature' as containing a 'residuum of something that elevates it above "lesser" forms of writing' corresponds to the Leavisite definition of literature assumed by Williams in The English Novel. Both Orwell and Williams see 'literature' as referring to particular privileged texts, 'superior' in some undefinable way to other forms of cultural production. (I refer to their implicit questioning of

this definition presently.)

The second similarity is that both Orwell and Williams are centrally concerned with exploring the relation between 'letters' and 'politics'. This is the point made by Said, and quoted in the Introduction that both Orwell and Williams are actors:

> in a very complicated drama which is continuing to unfold. The drama has to do with problems of superstructure and base. Are the political and economic circumstances more determining than the ideological and cultural? What is the relationship between them? (p. 126)

Orwell's enquiry into the relation between 'politics' and 'letters' in 'Charles Dickens' takes the form of untheoretical ad hoc digressions into the history of the nineteenth century: in section 2-4 of the essay, he tries to explain Dickens's attitudes and prejudices in the context of Victorian England.

Williams's enquiry into this complex relationship is largely in the language of Leavis, who, for him, articulates the 'real relations between art and experience' far more clearly than Marx, with his reductionist categories of base and superstructure. In the chapter on Dickens, Williams writes in some detail about the 'crisis of experience' in the 1840 s ('politics') , and how it at the same time produced - and was realised in - the novels of Dickens ('letters'). Williams's deep interest in this relationship is perhaps best expressed in his term 'structure of feeling' : invented by Williams in order to join the analysis of particular forms (structure) and a sense of inchoate experience (feeling), it could also be understood as another way of trying to

relate politics (feeling) and letters (structure).

Implicit in their (common) exploration of this relation between 'politics' and 'letters' is a privileging of the 'real world of politics'. In Chapter One, I described how both Orwell and Williams rely on 'their eyes' or 'experience' in order to describe and analyse contemporary Britain; in writing about Dickens, they obviously cannot refer to the authority of their own experience, but they nonetheless both assume the existence of some objective experience of Victorian England that precedes language and which is subsequently reflected or distorted in the novels. In Orwell's case, this assumption underlies his entire discussion of Dickens and his context: for example, he comments at one point that 'when one looks below the surface of Dickens's books, [it strikes one] that, as nineteenth century novelists go, he is rather ignorant' (p. 483): 'below the surface' is the 'reality' that Dickens sometimes captured in his novels. In Williams's case, his separation of 'experience' and 'form' also privileges the former term: instead of seeing 'the crisis of experience' he describes as but one competing version of English nineteenth century history, Williams tends to use it as an objective reference point against which the literary products of the period can be measured. Both Orwell and Williams therefore ultimately diminish the role of language (including literature) in constituting reality (in this case the reality of Victorian England), and in the process privilege their own 'objective' versions of reality.

The third point of comparison is that more than trying to articulate the relation between 'politics' and 'letters', both Orwell and Williams seek to use the study of 'letters' in the service of (socialist) 'politics':[10] both Orwell and Williams bring their commitment to socialism to bear in their literary criticism.

Orwell's 'socialism' is evident in the essay on Dickens in several ways: in the 'radical' aesthetic he proposes; in his 'sociological' interest in Dickens and his context; and, perhaps most importantly, in his application of 'political' criteria in his assessment of Dickens. Orwell criticises Dickens for failing to satisfy his own standards of socialist political analysis, but 'claims' him where he conforms to Orwell's version of socialist-humanism: socialism, according to Orwell in Wigan Pier, means the hatred of tyranny, and Dickens is accordingly embraced for realising this in memorable fashion in his novels. Orwell also sees in Dickens's bouyant optimism a correlative to his own conviction that 'people' always remain potential agents of history: 'to behave decently', which Orwell sees as Dickens's message, is 'not such a platitude as it sounds.'

Writing in the critical framework established by Scrutiny - a process described by Mulhern as quite 'disorienting for socialist cultural theory' - Williams's work in The English Novel does not reveal his commitment to socialism in an obvious way. Nonetheless, his political values are indirectly evident in his aesthetic disagreements with Leavis (Hardy over James); in his efforts to historicise the development of the novel; in his democratising of 'culture' in his related work; and in his interest in the problem of agency (his passage on Marx and Dickens is virtually a paraphrase of Orwell's passage on 'the revolutionary' and 'the moralist'). Also, as Orwell does, he reads Dickens as a legitimate ancestor to his version of socialist-humanism: in Chapter One, we saw how in The Long Revolution the central core of Williams's socialism was a desire to establish 'a real feeling of community' (p. 363); Dickens's

ability in his novels to create 'imaginative communities' is therefore so warmly endorsed by Williams because it corresponds to his own political goal. Further, Williams celebrates Dickens's humanism with more enthusiasm than Orwell: 'To believe that a human spirit exists, ultimately more powerful than even this system, . . . is an act of faith in ourselves' (p. 53).

Thus far I have established some basis for comparing Orwell and Williams on 'letters' ; in the next section I will consider whether the comparison can be extended to 'late' Williams.

2.3. 'The Reader in Hard Times' in Writing in Society.

After describing the context in which Williams wrote 'The Reader in Hard Times', I then summarise Williams's contributions to the study of letters in the period between The English Novel and Writing in Society; having established the grounds of comparison between Orwell and 'early' Williams, this summary focuses largely on whether the comparison can be sustained into the 1980 s. I then analyse 'The Reader in Hard Times ', and finally draw together the points of similarity between Orwell and 'late' Williams.

In 'Culture is Ordinary', we read how Williams saw Leavis and Marx as his two great influences; in the latter part of his career Williams's orientation shifted from Leavis to Marxism, and his critical practice was revised in the process.

Whereas in the 1950 s and sixties literary criticism was dominated by Scrutiny, the 1970 s saw the unfolding of a fresh 'crisis' in English studies.[1] In a valuable overview of the period, Alan Sinfield[2] identifies several reasons for the crisis: the pressure exerted by students distrustful of the elitism in literary studies; the impact of the women's movement and its critique of traditional Western values as embodied in literature; and the development of theory. As a result of these developments, exponents of traditional literary/critical practices were thrown onto the defensive: Sinfield quotes from C. B. Cox's editorial in a Critical Quarterly of 1971: 'The traditional belief that study of great literature releases us from the debased myths of the present, that it ennobles and civilises, needs to be fought for' (p. 35). According to Sinfield, the new work challenges traditional literary studies on several fronts: it denies that literature expresses transcendant values or that it has privileged access to 'human experience' ; it foregrounds the political function of literary education in society; and it insists upon the

political nature of all criticism - criticism claiming neutrality is in fact effacing its political assumptions and thus obfuscating its complicity within the dominant ideology.

Dickens criticism since The English Novel reflects these rapid changes in critical practice. The traditional methods of novel criticism and the arguments about Dickens's place in the canon persist [3], but an increasing amount of criticism is concerned with applying the new theoretical insights to Dickens. Two recent works exemplary in this regard are David Simpson's Fetishism and Imagination , in which semiotic and psychoanalytic theory are employed to explain Dickens's Victorian 'world view', and Lawrence Frank's Charles Dickens and the Romantic Self , in which Michel Foucault's theories of the subject, of language and of power are used as a basis for reading Dickens.

Williams himself was deeply affected by such developments. In Marxism and Literature, he recalls the invigorating effect of newly-accessible Continental Marxist theory:

> I felt the excitement of contact with more new Marxist work: the later work of Lukacs, the later work of Sartre, the developing work of Goldmann and of Althusser, the variable and developing syntheses of Marxism and some forms of structuralism. At the same time, within this significant new activity, there was further access to older work, notably that of the Frankfurt School (in its most significant period in the twenties and the thirties) and especially the work of Walter Benjamin; the extroardinarily original work of Antonio Gramsci; and, as a decisive element of a new sense of the tradition, newly translated work of Marx and especially the Grundrisse. (p. 4)

He goes on to contrast the situation of the socialist student of literature in 1940 and 1970:

> I had reason to reflect on the contrast for any student of literature, in a situation in which an argument that had drifted into deadlock, or into local and partial positions, in the late thirties and forties, was being vigorously and significantly reopened. (p. 4)

Reverting to Anderson's thesis, the 'absent centre' of British culture was therefore being rapidly filled. Whereas both Williams in the 1960 s and Orwell earlier had been limited by the absence of theory in their efforts to define literature, to articulate the relation between text and context, and to politicise the practice of literary criticism, in the 1970 s Williams had a wealth of imported theory to draw upon in continuing these enquiries.

It should be added that for all its critical force, this body of European Marxist theory also contains potentially disabling contradictions. Perhaps the most significant is the fact that it was without exception produced in conditions of political defeat. Anderson recognizes this in Considerations on Western Marxism: [4]

> all the major departures or developments of substance within this tradition are distinguished from the classical heritage of historical materialism by the darkness of their implications or conclusions. (p. 88)

In appropriating the work of these theorists, British Marxists therefore run the danger of unconsciously reproducing the pessimistic assumptions derived

in the bleak settings of Eastern and Western Europe. [5]

The first book published by Williams after The English Novel was Orwell (1971). Although I discuss this work in the Introduction, it is worth adding that Orwell is significant in that the subject-matter enables Williams to address his interests in 'politics' and 'letters' in one text. He continues to employ the techniques of 'textual analysis', but provides in addition a substantial historical and political narrative, insisting that one of the keys to understanding Orwell is 'the nature of capitalist democracy in an epoch of socialist revolutions, of imperialism, of fascism, and of war' (p. 90).

Williams's next work was The Country and the City (1973). [6] This long and complex work warrants more than a couple of paragraphs, but for our purposes it will suffice to note in what respects it represents a shift in Williams's critical orientation. In the first chapter, Williams defines his purpose as: to describe and analyse the images and associations of country and city, and 'to see them in relation to the historically varied experience' (p. 2). After setting out the complex relation between country and city as a general problem, he admits that for him it has also been a personal issue: he describes his personal history, his own deeply-felt experience of country and city, and concludes:

> whenever I consider the relations between country and city, and between birth and learning, I find this history active and continuous: the relations are not only of ideas and experiences, but of rent and interest, of situation and power; a wider system. (p. 7)

His discussion of versions of the country and the city includes an enormously wide range of writers: the pastoral poetry of Hesiod and Virgil; the 'country

house' poems of Jonson and Carew; Jacobean and Restoration dramas; the novels of Richardson and Fielding; the rural poetry of Goldsmith, Herrick and Gray; Cobbett's Rural Rides ; Jane Austen's novels; the poetry of the Romantics (notably Clare, Wordsworth and Blake); the novels of 'the great tradition' (placed in a different context here); the futuristic fictions of Wells and Huxley; and the 'post-colonial' literature of inter alia Chinua Achebe. Interspersed with the analyses of these varied forms of writing are several chapters describing the historical changes accompanying them (for example, Chapter 10 describes the process of parliamentary enclosures).

In the final chapter, Williams argues that although the contrast between country and city is 'one of the major forms in which we become conscious of our experience and of the crises of our society' (p. 289), nonetheless, these forms must not be abstracted and be given 'a primarily psychological or metaphysical status' (p. 289). Rather, he continues, 'we have to be able to explain, in related terms, both the persistence and the historicity of concepts' (p. 289). Further on, he writes that understanding this relation 'is not, was not, a question of study alone' (p. 292). What is at issue in understanding all these competing images of country and city 'is a growth and alteration of consciousness: a history repeated in many lives and many places is fundamentally an alteration of perception and relationship' (p. 297). By grasping this relation more clearly, by in effect changing consciousness,

> we perceive a total environment, and as we register the consequences of so many abstracted and separated activities, we begin to see that all the real decisions are about modes of social interest and control. We begin to see, in fact, that the active powers of minority capital, in all its possible forms, are our most active enemies, and that

> they will have to be not just persuaded but defeated and superseded. (p. 301)

He concludes by criticising the tendency in Marxist - and other influential forms of socialism - to patronise the rural working-class, and cites the revolutions in China and Cuba as resounding refutations of this attitude: 'the "rural idiots" . . . have been, for the last forty years, the main revolutionary force in the world' (p. 304).

Published only three years after The English Novel, The Country and the City indeed represents a substantial development in Williams's study of 'letters'. Although it would still be classed as belonging to his 'pre-Marxist' phase, it challenges the dominant critical orthodoxy in a more fundamental way than any of his earlier works of literary criticism. In the first place, with its wide-ranging selection of subject-matter, it subverts the conventional division of literature into discreet genres; further, in foregrounding the political dimension of the literature reviewed, it implies an aesthetic at odds with the standards of the traditional canon. Williams elaborates this aesthetic in Politics and Letters: as a first stage, all writing should be 'restored to its conditions of production' (p. 306) ; this would reveal that the conventions defining the text are not merely formal devices, but have social roots. At a second stage, the conventions themselves must be judged, 'from a deliberate and declared position of interest' (p. 306). Although it is 'not unhelpful' to judge between good and bad examples within the convention, the crucial evaluative judgment applies to the second stage, because 'it is related to a much more general historical assesment' (p. 307) which is also a political affiliation. The force of Williams's 'aesthetic assessment' of, for example, the country house poems is therefore directed not so much against the poems

themselves as the social relations that produced them.

Secondly, although not conducted in a 'Marxist' or 'neo-Marxist' vocabulary, Williams's exploration of the relation between 'politics' and 'letters' in The Country and the City also shows some development: no longer background information to the texts (as was largely the case in The English Novel), historical narrative constitutes a substantial part of the discussion.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, in The Country and the City Williams's opposition to capitalism is no longer contained and disguised within the terms of a specifically 'literary' discourse. Particularly in the Conclusion, he expresses his commitment to socialism in the polemical register previously reserved only for his work on 'politics' (like May Day Manifesto). The result is a work of oppositional criticism that cannot be assimilated into the 'decent pluralism' [7] of contemporary English studies, since its assumptions and arguments challenge directly the parameters of traditional critical practices.

Although there is a chapter in Keywords (1976) in which he traces the history of the word 'literature', Williams next major work on letters was Marxism and Literature (1977). In Marxism and Literature, Williams records his own rapprochement with Marxism, defining and in the process incorporating into his own critical vocabulary a formidable set of new terms, including 'hegemony', 'ideology' and 'totality'. He traces carefully the evolution of the meanings associated with 'literature', and argues that literature should be seen not as Great Works, but as a 'specialising social and historical category' (p. 53). He explains the persistence of the former sense as follows:

> It is in no way surprising that the specialized concept of 'literature',

> developed in precise forms of correspondence with a particular social class, a particular organization of learning , and the appropriate technology of print, should be now so often invoked in retrospective, nostalgic, or reactionary moods, as a form of opposition to what is correctly seen as a new phase of civilization. (p. 54)

With this definition, the study of literature as an autonomous discipline cannot be sustained; rather, for Williams it forms but one component of a broader project which he calls 'cultural materialism'. He defines it thus: 'It is a position which can be briefly described as cultural materialism; a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism' (p. 5).[8] Certain critics have complained about the obscurity of Williams's language at this point, and at the vagueness that surrounds his definition.[9] Yet for others, the phrase 'cultural materialism' has become a kind of rallying point. For example, a recent collection of essays entitled Political Shakespeare,[10] to which Williams contributes an Afterword, is sub-titled 'New essays in cultural materialism'. In the Introduction, the editors provide an expanded definition:

> our belief is that a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis offers the strongest challenge and has already contributed substantial work. Historical context undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text and allows us to recover its histories; theoretical method detaches the text from immanent criticism which seeks only to reproduce it in its own terms; socialist and feminist commitment confronts the conservative categories in which most

> criticism has hitherto been conducted; textual analysis locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored. We call this 'cultural materialism'. (p. vii)

Williams's adoption of Marxist terminology does not represent a total 'epistemological break' with his earlier work because he also retains in Marxism and Literature certain key terms like 'culture', 'experience' and 'structure of feeling'. Trying to reconcile structure of feeling with his new theoretical additions, according to Gallagher, results in 'certainly his most confused chapter' (p. 645). According to Williams, structure of feeling refers to 'social experiences in solution' (p. 133), which have not as yet been incorporated into more formal concepts like 'ideology' or 'world-view'. He tries to define it further:

> We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone . . . practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a structure: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still in process. (p. 132)

There is a tension here between Williams's residual empiricism - which insists that there are authentic pre-ideological experiences that are expressed in emergent cultural practices - and structuralist Marxism, which holds that all social experience (including the experiences in solution denoted by structure of feeling) is represented and constituted within ideology. By retaining structure of feeling, and by using a limited sense of ideology,

Williams preserves the continuity with his early work.

In Politics and Letters (1979), the interviewers from New Left Review question Williams in detail about his major works on culture (pp. 95-185) and literature (pp. 235-358). Since I have included several of Williams's responses in my summary thus far, I will not dwell on the detail of this work, but will continue to quote from it where appropriate in the balance of this discussion. There is, however, one particular exchange I wish to refer to, the discussion of the chapter on Dickens in The English Novel. In Politics and Letters, the interviewers criticise the 'logic of mysticism' that underlies Williams's arguments in The English Novel; they single out for censure the passage that ends: 'To believe that a human spirit exists, ultimately more powerful than even this system, is an act of faith but an act of faith in ourselves' (p. 252). Williams concedes that he 'wouldn't want to defend the terms of that passage now' (p. 252), but nonetheless insists that the dominant system of values and meanings:

> cannot exhaust all social experience, which therefore always contain space for alternative acts and alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project. (p. 252)

And: 'in reality there were other social experiences as possible sources of opposition or alternative direction in the society of Dickens's time' (p. 253). In the same way that certain terms like structure of feeling are retained, so too there is continuity from the 'early' Williams reading of Dickens (his sense of Dickens's inspiring faith in 'the human spirit'), to the emphasis of 'late' Williams on Dickens's ability to 'articulate alternative acts and alternative intentions'.

Problems in Materialism and Culture (1980) contains a number of essays written during the 1970 s. The essay I wish to examine, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' was first published in 1973, and is an important record of Williams engagement with Marxism and also of his reformulation of the relation between 'politics' and 'letters'. Williams, as a literary critic, focuses carefully on several key Marxist terms, and in the process absorbs them into his (revised) critical vocabulary. He starts with the principle 'base determines superstructure', arguing that :

> We have to revalue 'determination' towards the setting of limits and the exerting of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue 'superstructure' towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process. (p. 34)

The spatial metaphor of base and superstructure therefore collapses in Williams's redefinition, because cultural activities conventionally located in the superstructure are seen by Williams to be primary social practices. The 'base' then refers not to 'primary production within the terms of capitalist economic relationships', but rather to 'the primary production of society itself, and of men themselves, the material production and reproduction of

real life' (p. 35).

Questioned about his rejection of base and superstructure in Politics and Letters, Williams elaborates his position:

> My aim was to emphasize that cultural practices are forms of material production, and that until this is understood it is impossible to think about them in their real social relations - there can only ever be a second order of correlation. But, of course, it is true that there are forms of material production which always and everywhere precede all other forms . . . . [T]hey are the production of food, the production of shelter, and the production of the means of producing food and shelter. (p. 353)

The fact that these forms of production precede all others, however, does not mean that they are automatically at the top of the hierarchy of cause and effect:

> I would not be willing to say that at the top of the hierarchy is productive industry, then come political institutions or means of mass communication, and then below them the cultural activities of philosophers or novelists . . . . The hierarchies, while in general following a line from activities which answer to basic physical needs down through to those of which you at least can state negatively that if they were not performed human life would not be immediately threatened, are not immutable. (p. 355)

By insisting on the materiality of cultural production, and further by

refusing to attribute ultimate determinacy dogmatically to any particular form of production, Williams thus rescues cultural practices from the derivative status thy occupy in crude versions of Marxism.

In the 'Base and Superstructure' essay, Williams commences his alternative to the base/superstructure model by looking firstly at Lukacs' notion of totality. He observes:

> The totality of social practices was opposed to this layered notion of base and consequent superstructure. This concept of a totality of practices is compatible with the notion of social being determining consciousness, but it does not necessarily interpret this process in terms of a base and a superstructure. (p. 35)

He identifies a potential weakness in the concept of totality: in defining society as a large number of social practices, totality might fail to explain processes of determination and of social intention.[11] As a result, Williams argues, totality should only be used when it is combined with Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony'.

The meaning of 'hegemony' is controversial.[12] Williams defines it as follows:

> [Hegemony] is the central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived .... It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as

> reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. (p. 38)

Hegemony functions by a process of incorporation, and at an ideological level this involves the construction of a selective tradition: 'the terms of an effective dominant culture are always passed off as "the tradition", "the significant past" ' (p. 39). For Williams, a crucial part of the appeal of hegemony (as he understands it) is that, unlike Althusser's notion of ideology, it allows space for values and meanings in opposition to the dominant system:

> we have to recognize the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world, which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture. (p. 39)

After differentiating between residual culture, which he describes as 'experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, [but are] nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue . . . of some previous social formation' (p. 40), and emergent culture, defined as 'new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences . . . continually being created' (p. 41), Williams returns to this theme:

> no mode of production, and therefore no dominant society or

> order of society, and therefore no dominant culture, in reality exhausts the full range of human practice, human energy, human intention .... I am saying then that in relation to the full range of human practice at any one time, the dominant mode is a conscious selection and organization .... But there are always sources of actual human practice which it neglects or excludes. (p. 43)

It is in this space neglected or excluded by the hegemonic modes that Williams locates his own oppositional critical practice. It is worth repeating that it is Williams's definition of hegemony that allows this space: there are interpretations of hegemony - like the one Althusser assimilates to his concept of ideology [13] - which construe hegemony as more 'total', thus diminishing drastically the potential of cultural opposition.

Having set out the terms of his analysis, Williams returns to consider the relation between literature and society. He argues:

> If we are looking for the relations between literature and society, we cannot either separate out this one practice from a formed body of other practices, nor when we have identified a particular practice can we give it a uniform, static and ahistorical relation to some abstract social formation. The arts of writing and the arts of creation and performance, over their whole range, are parts of the cultural process in all the different ways, the different sectors, that I have been seeking to describe. They contribute to the effective dominant culture and are a central articulation of it. They embody residual meanings and values, not all of which are incorporated, though many are. They express also and significantly some emergent practices

> and meanings, yet some of these may eventually be incorporated. (p. 45)

What this means for critical practice is that the work of art should be seen not as an object which is then related to its components, but rather as a practice related to its conditions. He concludes:

> what we are actively seeking is the true practice which has been alienated to an object, and the true conditions of practice - whether as literary conventions or as social relationships - which have been alienated to components or to mere background. (p. 49)

From the discussion thus far of 'late' Williams, it should be clear that the study of 'letters' as a separate discipline no longer forms part of his critical enquiry; rather, it is contained as one element within a wider study of 'culture'. Of all the work referred to in this section, Culture (1981) [14] represents the best single guide to Williams's understanding of culture, and by extension, of literature; it sets out in carefully-organised form the arguments for 'cultural materialism', and draws together Williams's interests in literature, the media, politics, culture and society.

He concludes his case for cultural materialism in the final chapter of Culture by emphasizing the ubiquity of signifying systems:

> For a signifying system is intrinsic to any economic system, any political system, any generational system and, most generally, to any social system. Yet is also in practice distinguishable as a system in itself: as a language, most evidently; as a system of thought or

> consciousness, or, to use that difficult alternative term, an ideology; and again as a body of specifically signifying works of art and thought. Moreover all these exist not only as institutions and works, and not only as systems, but necessarily as active practices and states of mind. (p. 208)

The challenge of cultural materialism is to study these signifying institutions, practices and works (including the signifying practice of 'literature'), and crucially, to study the relation between these and other institutions, practices and work. Williams makes one important qualification:

> It would be wrong to reduce [a social system] to the signifying system alone, for this would make all human actions and relationships mere functions of signification and, in doing so, radically diminish them. (p. 207)

By drawing a line between 'signifying practices' and 'other' practices, Williams thus retains in radically revised form the separation between 'letters' (a signifying practice) and 'politics' (the 'other' practices that are 'more than mere functions of signification').

Writing in Society (1983), like Problems, is a collection of essays drawn largely from Williams's assumption of the term 'cultural materialism'. Writing in Society represents an illustration of what Williams's project might involve because it includes essays on several different forms of cultural production: he focuses on drama (section 1); philosophy (the essay on Hume); current academic politics (section 4); 'sub-literary' novels (the essays on 'The Ragged Arsed Philanthropists' and 'Region and Class in the Novel');

and 'literature' (the short essay on Dickens). All these different signifying practices or forms of cultural production are subject to the same analytical procedures.

In section four, Williams examines for the first time in any detail the institutional reproduction of English Literature by focusing on Cambridge English. In 'Cambridge English, Past and Present', he traces the contributions of Richards, Leavis and their successors, and concludes that the combined effect of their work was to 'shut off or at best postpone bodies of knowledge and ways of seeing and thinking which could at last fully substantiate English studies' (p. 189). In 'Crisis in English Studies', he reviews current literary practices and distinguishes those which can be assimilated within the dominant paradigm, and those which 'are not so assimilable and indeed quite incongruent with the received definitions' (p. 196). Cultural materialism, radical semiotics, and the kind of political criticism practised in The Country and the City fall into the latter category, according to Williams. What these oppositional modes share is their conception of the paradigm itself as a central matter for analysis, rather than as defining the object of knowledge. And in 'Beyond Cambridge English', Williams argues that there are certain practices of 'traditional' English studies that should be retained (historical analysis of the language and conventions of past literature; close textual analysis; and research on the reading public); that the way forward for Cambridge English should be found within a strongly inter-disciplinary School of Humanities; and that the estranging and isolating assumptions and practices of modernism - which Williams sees as the major intellectual formation at present - should be challenged. He concludes: 'In all my work I have tried to be on the other side, but I say "tried" because to succeed would be beyond the powers of any individual or small group' (p. 225).

Moving to 'The Reader in Hard Times', Williams argues that the great interest of this novel lies in the fact that it is not coherent, that it articulates two incompatible ideological positions:

> [F]irst, that environment influences and in some sense determines character; second, that some virtues and vices are original and both triumph over and in some cases can change any environment. (p. 169)

According to Williams, Dickens shows that the oppressive situation in the novel can be overcome by developing either of these positions: by the path of personal virtue (as followed by Sissy Jupe, Louisa, Rachel and Gradgrind), or by reforming the system (including 'fancy' as well as fact in the education system, and by moving from 'thelf-intereth' to a sense of community in the wider social order). In order to understand the general effect Dickens seeks to achieve by dramatising these alternative positions, we need to look beyond the text:

> This question takes from the text beyond the text: not so much into the general social context or background, though in reading Hard Times , especially, much can be learned from that kind of sociological inquiry; but into the social relations of its specific composition. (p. 172)

This inquiry leads Williams to the conclusion that by employing a comprehensive strategy of composition, Dickens constitutes in the novel a

general reader; not, Williams emphasizes ' any general reader. Sympathy, indignation, concern: all these are written into the reader's characterisation' (p. 173). This reader is thus engaged and made responsible for the realities described in the novel. Williams concludes that Hard Times is:

> an unusually precise expression, not of an ideology but of a structure of feeling: the most generous, the most indignant, but because of those very qualities the most anxious, the most uncertain, of its divided time. (p. 174)

In describing the literary/critical context of the 1970 s and eighties, and in tracing the developments in Williams's understanding of 'letters' during this period, I hope to have conveyed some sense of both the differences (most notably Williams's 'acquisition' of a Marxist vocabulary) and also the continuities (his retention of concepts like structure of feeling, for example) between 'early' and 'late' Williams in this area of his work. What now remains is to consider whether the differences affect the points of similarity between Orwell and Williams established at the end of the previous section.

The first similarity between Orwell and 'early' Williams was their conception of 'literature'. In terms of Orwell's 'conservative' aesthetic and the critical framework of The English Novel, both Orwell and Williams perceived literature as 'Great Works of English Fiction'. 'Late' Williams, with his understanding of literature as but one of many signifying practices or forms of cultural production, breaks entirely with this traditonal notion of literature. But before crossing off this point of comparison, it should be recalled that in 'Charles Dickens' there is in tension with the 'conservative' aesthetic a more radical conception of literature, which is premised on the

assertions that 'all art is propaganda' and 'it is absurd to compare different authors'. And indeed, this alternative aesthetic, with its refusal to privilege Literature or to slot certain authors into the category 'great', shares with Williams's cultural materialism a firm opposition to the definitions and assumptions of the dominant critical discourse. Therefore, although Orwell's 'conservative' definition of literature corresponds to that of Williams in The English Novel, Orwell's 'radical' definition anticipates Williams's rejection of literature as a 'superior' form of writing in his later work.

The second similarity was in their common exploration of the relation between 'letters' and 'politics', as well as the tendency to privilege the latter term by treating it as 'the stuff of the real world'. Although after The Country and the City, Williams's enquiry into this relation assumes a new (Marxist) register, the enterprise itself remains a central concern. In the 'Base and Superstructure' essay, for example, Williams concludes his critical assimilation of a number of Marxist and neo-Marxist terms by considering how they might assist in articulating 'the relation between literature and society' (p. 45). What should be stressed is that the sophisticated literary academic plotting this relation in books like Marxism and Literature and Culture is an enormous distance further down the road than the plain man with his horror of abstract thought. As Said observes:

> [Williams] can be much more interesting on this sort of thing . . . [he] takes in a lot more than Orwell ever took the time to do, trying precisely to gauge the inflection in the relationship between culture and social polity. (p. 126)

The question as to whether Williams continues to privilege 'politics' (or

'experience', 'society', 'the real world') has to be assessed in terms of his redefinition of literature as being but one of many signifying systems. The question becomes: does Williams privilege 'politics' with respect to signifying systems in general. The answer suggested in Marxism and Literature , in Writing in Society and Culture is affirmative. In Marxism and Literature, Williams retains the term 'structure of feeling', arguing that it refers to 'social experiences in solution' (politics) that in some sense precede ideologies and world views (signifying systems). This argument is carried through in the essay on Hard Times, where Williams concludes that there are certain complex feelings and experiences that occur outside ideology and are then presented in the novel. In Culture, Williams insists upon the presence of 'other practices' that are not mere functions of signifying practices. (Recall too his refusal to relinquish the category 'experience' in Politics and Letters). This repeated insistence on 'authentic experience' ('politics') preceding signifying systems seems to bear out Norris' general point that:

> the commitment to empiricism - as a mode of historical experience, if not a full blown ideology - continues to exercise a rival claim in Williams's dealings with Continental Marxism. For him, as for Thompson, it acts as a qualifying check on the powers of theoretical abstraction. (p. 261)

However, it should be noted that although 'politics' remains a privileged category, Williams does not accredit it with ultimate agency; indeed, he argues rather that a social system should be understood in terms of the relations between signifying practices themselves, as well as between

signifying - and 'other' - practices.

The third ground of comparison was that both Orwell and 'early' Williams attempt to foreground their (similar) political values in the study of literature: 'letters' in the service of (socialist) 'politics'. This was done by challenging the definitions and judgments of the dominant critical orthodoxy; by historicising the texts studied as carefully as possible; and by 'claiming' Dickens as an authentic ancestor of their respective versions of socialist-humanism. This desire to politicise literary criticism remains central to Williams's work: his project of cultural materialism represents for him the culmination of his wanting to be 'on the other side' ; together with radical semiotics and the political criticism practised in The Country and the City, he sees it as being in fundamental opposition to dominant critical practice. Further, he demonstrates the political nature of all writing and criticism with greater force by establishing the relation between context and text in the more sophisticated vocabulary of Marxism.

As to Dickens criticism, both Orwell in his essay and Williams in The English Novel perceive Dickens in a similarly positive way: for Orwell, Dickens confirms that to 'behave decently' is not a platitude and that 'hatred of tyranny' is an emotion to value, and for Williams, Dickens reinforces the truth that 'there is a human spirit more powerful than the system' and that the ideal of 'community' should not be forsaken. In Politics and Letters, Williams rejects the terms of the passages in The English Novel, but nonetheless re-affirms his belief in Dickens' capacity to exploit in his novels 'the space for alternative acts and alternative intentions' . And in 'The Reader in Hard Times' , Williams reverses his earlier ideas on Dickens in Culture and Society, and approves Dickens' creation in the novel of two alternative routes to change (personal virtue/reform the system), and of a

sympathetic general reader. Recalling Williams's argument in 'Base and Superstructure' that 'we have to recognise the alternative meanings and values . . . tolerated within a particular and effective dominant culture' (p. 39), and recalling the way in which Williams locates his own oppositional critical practice within the space neglected by the hegemonic mode, his approval of Dickens can again be seen as based on a sense of kinship: in realising 'alternative meanings to the dominant culture' , Dickens' novels have achieved what Williams hopes his own cultural criticism might achieve.

In this chapter, perhaps even more so than was the case in the chapter of politics, the difference between Orwell the essayist and Williams the scholar represents a substantial check on the extent to which they can be compared. Nonetheless, I have established what I take to be three fundamental similarities, and in the final chapter I will examine whether these can be added to in comparing their respective views on language.

Chapter Three: Language.

Both Orwell and Williams neglect to analyse their assumptions about language until relatively late in their respective careers, but having done so, they attach central importance in their work to the nature and role of language.

The texts I have selected are: 'Politics and the English Language' by Orwell, and the chapter on language in Marxism and Literature by Williams. The structure of the discussion follows the pattern established in the first two chapters: the broader intellectual contexts of the selected texts will be described, concentrating here on the dominant theories of language; second, the texts are located more clearly in the contexts of their work as a whole (I will also look at their undeveloped early ideas about language); third, a close analysis of the texts will be undertaken, attempting to draw out their assumptions about language and style; and fourth,the common ground between Orwell's and Williams's ideas about language is delineated.

3.1. 'Politics and the English Language'.

The value of Orwell's writings about language has long been debated. In the editorial of History Workshop Journal 10, which focuses on language and history, the editors confess that 'disagreements centred especially on the paragraph on plain speaking and Orwell'; and, ' [i]n spite of going through four drafts we were not able to reach unanimity' (p. 5). In writing about 'Politics and the English Language' I will accordingly obey the spirit of Williams's argument expressed in Orwell that ' [i]nstead of flattening out the contradictions by choosing this or that as the "real" Orwell. . . we ought to say that it is the paradoxes which are finally significant' (p. 87). In other words, it is the contradictions in Orwell's assumptions and arguments about language that I hope to foreground.

Orwell's intellectual context [1] can be extrapolated from the opening paragraph of the essay:

> Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilisation is decadent, and our language - so the argument runs - must inevitably share in the general collapse . . . . Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes. (p. 156)

Firstly, Orwell is correct that 'most people. . . think that the English language is in a bad way'. Bob Hodge and Roger Fowler in 'Orwellian Linguistics' identify the wide currency of similarly gloomy views in the 1930s and 1940s by referring to the arguments of C. K. Odgen, I. A. Richards, Count

Korzybski and Stuart Chase. F. R. Leavis and T. S. Eliot are further names that might be added to their list. In 'Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture',[2] Leavis describes the cultural disorientation caused by the industrialisation of twentieth century Britain, and quotes with approval Eliot's perception of the confused intellectual situation:

> When there is so much to be known, when there are so many fields of knowledge in which the same words are used with different meanings, when every one knows a little about a great many things, it becomes increasingly difficult for anyone to know whether he knows what he is talking about or not. (p. 31)

In addressing the 'deplorable condition of the English language' Orwell therefore joins a diverse group of intellectuals who in fact 'bother with the matter' a great deal. Indeed, it is the very diversity of the group, and also of those in the past who have concerned themselves with this issue, that suggests the basis for the first contradiction in Orwell's essay. On one reading, 'Politics and the English Language' reads like a letter from an old Etonian to the Daily Telegraph, bewailing the state of English. As Hodge and Fowler point out, his pedantic objections to the use of foreign phrases and the influence of 'American English':

> sound as if they belong to a familiar conservative, purist and chauvinistic tradition which stretches back to Sir John Choke's condemnation of 'inkhorn terms' in the sixteenth century. (p. 7)

Leavis's efforts to preserve the language register of the embattled 'minority

culture' fit (if slightly uncomfortably) in this tradition.

On another reading however, Orwell's criticisms are directed primarily at the obtuse language used by the leaders and representatives of the English ruling class, the same people broadly who would concur with the letters (and editorials) in the Telegraph . And with this emphasis, Orwell's insistence on correct usage, on 'plain-speaking', might be traced to quite different roots. Christopher Hill [3] points out that the idea of plain-speaking has an honourable lineage on the English Left, going back to the Puritan revolutionaries of the seventeenth century and their opposition of plain-preaching to the baroque mystifications of High Church theology. Orwell's socialist values ensure that his assault on 'bad' English builds upon this authentic radical tradition.

In the second sentence, Orwell reinforces the ubiquity of the argument that there is a causal chain binding the state of the language to the state of the civilisation. It is an argument that might come from English Marxism or from Leavis. In the crude terms of the English Marxists, language would be seen as part of the 'superstructure' and as such a reflection of the 'base'.[4] In Leavis's terms, language would be seen as integral to the declining culture of the minority:

> when we used the metaphor of 'language' in defining culture we were using more than a metaphor. The most important part of this 'language' is actually a matter of the use of words. Without the living subtlety of the finest idiom (which is dependent upon use) the heritage dies. (p. 44)

He then in an important footnote quotes from Richards's Practical Criticism:

> From the beginning civilisation has been dependent upon speech, for words are our chief link with the past and with one another and the channel of our spiritual inheritance. As the other vehicles of tradition, the family and the community, for example, are dissolved, we are forced more and more to rely upon language. (p. 44)

Orwell's response to this argument is contained in the final sentence. Although he concedes in the next paragraph that 'the decline of a language must have political and economic causes' (p. 156), he resists the pessimistic conclusions that Richards and Leavis pursue: language is not for Orwell 'a natural growth', but rather 'an instrument which we shape for our own purposes'. In this phrase, Orwell articulates two deeply embedded ideological assumptions. The first is the conception of language as an instrument, and in order to contextualise this we need to refer once again to E. H. Carr's discussion of British empiricism in the nineteenth century. Carr defines this vulgar strain of empiricism as presupposing 'a complete separation of subject and object, and facts, like sense-impressions impinge on the observer from outside and are independent of his consciousness' (p. 9). Securely grounded on the economic supremacy of the Empire, the subject (an upperclass Englishman) observed whatever object, and remained serenely untroubled that the object - whether history, society or language - might determine his way of seeing. In this scheme, language was considered as object, and its funtion was purely instrumental - to convey thoughts from one inviolable subject to another. In seeing language as an instrument, a medium of communication, Orwell reproduces this limited theory of language and in the process represses the possibility that language might have some central constitutive function.

The second assumption is intrinsic to this form of empiricism, i.e. that 'we shape language for our own purposes'. This form of humanism, also with deep roots in English culture, is based on the conviction that the unified individual subject, distinct from the objective world, has the power to shape and reshape that world, including language. What this means is that all agency and ultimately all meaning lies with the individual subject; any constitutive role for the 'object' is denied, and the individual actors hold the key to understanding the social order. In Orwell's case, this enables him to privilege his narrative persona, the plain man, as the one with direct and unmediated access to the objective truth, which would include the 'truth' about what form the instrument of communication should take.

Orwell's opening paragraph therefore expresses in compressed form the dominant themes in English linguistic 'theory' of the time: the conviction that language is in a state of decline; the idea that there is some kind of relation between language and the political 'reality'; the conception of language as primarily an instrument of communication; and finally, the belief that 'we' ultimately control language. Before looking more closely at how he tries to reconcile these themes, I wish to trace briefly the development of his interest in language.

In 'Why I Write', Orwell describes how at a young age it was the decorative, expressive capacity of language that appealed to him: 'When I was about sixteen I discovered the joy of mere words i.e. the sounds and associations of words. (I, p. 24) And:

> I wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake

of their sound. (p. 25)

However, he goes on, it was impossible to do this because the political realities of his age demanded a more engaged response. Instead of following his true nature and writing 'ornate or merely descriptive books' (p. 26), he was 'forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer' (p. 26). This means for Orwell that the decorative function of language had to be ignored in favour of using language as a means of fighting oppression. To this end, he concludes 'of later years I have tried to write less picturesquely and more exactly' (p. 29).

What alerted Orwell to the political nature of language and convinced him to shun its decorative appeal were the spectacular media distortions perpetrated during the Spanish Civil War. In 'Looking Back on the Spanish War'(II, pp. 286-306), he records his feelings of alarm:

> This kind of thing is frightening to me, because it often gives me the feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. After all, the chances are that those lies, or at any rate similar lies, will pass into history. (p. 295)

According to Orwell, there are only two factors that can secure the survival of objective truth:

> One is that however much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing, as it were, behind your back . . . The other is that so long as some parts of the earth remain unconquered, the liberal tradition can be kept alive. (p. 297)

Orwell thus establishes an indivisible bond between 'objective truth' and 'the liberal tradition'; by undermining the former, the latter is placed in grave jeopardy. The crucial insight is that language has the power to subvert the 'objective truth' and by implication the liberal tradition.

In one of his 'As I Please' columns for the Tribune in 1944 (III, pp. 232-5), Orwell takes the argument one step further. With the evidence of Nazi propaganda and the Stalinist purges reinforcing his memories of Spain, he writes:

> By shooting at your enemy you are not in the deepest sense wronging him. But by hating him, by inventing lies about him and bringing children up to believe them . . . you are striking not at one perishable generation, but at humanity itself. (p. 233)

The fear that 'humanity itself' might be annihilated by language in the service of totalitarianism is one that haunts Orwell's later writings; we will return to it in analysing 'Politics and the English Language'.

Another basis for Orwell's interest in language is evident in 'New Words' (II, pp. 17-27), where he argues that on the level of personal exchange, language is incapable of communicating certain feelings and ideas. What he proposes is: 'to invest a vocabulary, perhaps amounting to several thousands of words, which would deal with parts of our experience now practically unamenable to language' (p. 17). These new words are needed particularly to describe the 'inner life', and the need is most apparent in literature, where Orwell observes that words often fail to serve ' their supposed function as vehicles of thought' (p. 21). He compares inventing

words to 'invent[ing] new parts for a motor car engine' (p. 21), insisting further: 'Aeroplanes and bicycles are invented, and we invent names for them, which is the natural thing to do. It is only a step to coining names for the now unnamed things that exist in the mind' (p. 22). The main obstacle to such a programme is people's conservatism, the argument being that because a language grows slowly and haphazardly, 'therefore language cannot grow otherwise' (p. 22). All that is wanted to counter this: 'is several thousands of gifted but normal people who would give themselves to word-invention as seriously as people now give themselves to Shakespeare research' (pp. 23-4). In the process of inventing words, the two main considerations would be the appropriateness of the sound and the exactness of the meaning (p. 25). Orwell concludes:

> To most people in any case the whole idea of reforming language would seem either dilettantish or crankish. Yet it is worth considering what utter incomprehension exists between human beings - at least between those who are not deeply intimate .... It need not be so if our language were more adequate. (pp. 26-7)

What is striking about this argument is that it assumes a quite different relation between language and 'humanity' to the passages on language and politics. Whereas in the 'political' passages, Orwell stresses the potential of language to destroy 'humanity', here there is a confidence in the individual language user's capacity to subdue language and fashion it into a more efficient 'vehicle' for conveying thought. The residue of nineteenth century humanism and common sense empiricism is therefore especially prominent here; language is seen in the same context as motor cars - as part of the

objective world 'out there' ; the feelings of the individual are privileged - they have a pre-linguistic identity, and the problem for Orwell is simply to find the right words to describe them; and there is Orwell's naive trust in the ability of 'several thousands of gifted but normal people' to invent these new words and ensure their introduction into general usage. Written in 1940, Orwell in'New Words' does not discuss the primacy of the relation between language and power: he does not consider that language is more likely to be created by the Ministry of Truth than by 'gifted but normal people'.

In a long essay on 'The English People', Orwell writes a short section on 'The English Language' (III, pp. 40-6), in which he develops these ideas. He starts off adapting the stance of a comparative linguist, with some commonplace observations about the English language's large vocabulary, its simple grammar and its range of tone. He then returns to the argument that English can fail to effect an accurate transfer of thought if it is used badly. He sets down the general principle 'that concrete words are better than abstract ones, and that the shortest way of saying anything is always the best' (p. 42). He argues further:

> Whoever writes English is involved in a struggle that never lets up even for a sentence. He is struggling against vagueness, against obscurity, against the lure of the decorative adjective, against the encroachment of Latin and Greek, and, above all, against the worn- out phrases and dead metaphors with which the language is cluttered up. (p. 42)

He blames the disappearance of clear English on the proliferation of official jargon: 'the language of leading articles, White Papers, political speeches, and

B. B. C. news bulletins' (p 43). He concludes that the deeper cause for the decadence of the language lies with the class system: 'Language ought to be the joint creation of poets and manual workers, and in modern England it is difficult for these two classes to meet' (p. 46).

The contradictions which are at the centre of 'Politics and the English Language' are present in undeveloped form in this piece. On the one hand, Orwell repeats his instrumental view of language, with the added argument that language can best convey thought when concrete words are used and the message kept brief. On the other hand, he suggests that language is the product of the class system, which calls into question the causal primacy of the individual i.e. to what extent can individual language users control language if it is the product of the class system.

'Politics and the English Language' was published in 1946, and represents the culmination of Orwell's thoughts on language and politics. It draws together - as the title suggests - his fears about the political manipulation of language (registered in 'Looking Back on the Spanish War') and his concern about the declining standard of English (registered in 'The English Language'). According to George Woodcock (p. 262), it was written at the end of a period during which Orwell himself had been working consciously on his own style to achieve the spare and direct form of Animal Farm.

Orwell argues that 'the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes' (p. 156), but insists that:

> the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets

> rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration. (p. 157)

In the remainder of the essay, he suggests ways in which the English language might be saved, focusing on examples of bad prose and offering rules and guidelines which might help to overcome the staleness and imprecision of modern English. The basic principle underlying Orwell's prescriptions is that the particular should always be preferred to the general (repeating his insistence on the concrete and brevity in 'The English Language'). He lists a number of categories of words he considers to be too vague and general. These include: philosophical terms like 'phenomenon', 'objective', 'primary', and 'basic' (classed as 'pretentious diction'); Latinate words which have practical Anglo Saxon equivalents; terms of literary criticism like 'romantic', 'sentimental' or 'vitality' - these 'are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they . . . do not point to any discoverable object' (p. 161); and political words like 'socialism', 'democracy' and 'freedom' - the manipulation of these terms, instead of extending their range of meanings, has stripped them of all meaning. His quest for simplicity extends to grammatical constructions: the passive voice should be avoided (!) where possible, and clauses and sentences should always be as short as possible - wordiness is always indicative of slovenly thought. These suggestions taken together produce Orwell's plain style, which, according to him, might show the way to linguistic - and ultimately political regeneration. Towards the end of the essay, he re-affirms the value of his project:

> I said earlier that the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue, if they produced any argument at

> all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words and constructions. So far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes, this may be true, but it is not true in detail. (pp. 167-8)

Two contradictory lines of argument can be identified. The first is based on Orwell's belief that 'the decadence of our language is curable', that 'the process (of decline) is reversible'. On this assumption, the thoughts of the pre-linguistic rational individual precede and therefore determine language:

> What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about .... When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualizing, you probably hunt about till you find the exact words that seem to fit it. (p. 168)

This perception of language as a reflection of conscious thought means that it is limited to being a means of communication, an instrument used by the rational individual to convey his/her thoughts to another individual; to quote again, 'it is not a natural growth (but) an instrument which we shape for our own purposes' (p. 156). The challenge then is to ensure that language acts as an efficient instrument, that it effects accurate thought transfer. Where language fails to do this, 'we' still are able to take steps to make it a reliable instrument once again.

What allows language to become a faulty communication system, according to Orwell, is the conventional nature of the relation between the

word and its meaning. Orwell never articulates this assumption, but it is evident in his enthusiasm for inventing new words - in order to invent a new word, all that is necessary to fix the word/concept bond is the co-operation of the language - users. In 'Politics and the English Language', it is the negative side of this relation that concerns Orwell: existing words - like 'democracy' - can lose all meaning if powerful interest groups exploit the conventional nature of the word/concept relation by attaching conflicting or opposing meanings to the word. In the resulting confusion, the original meaning is displaced, and the word can no longer be used to transfer thoughts accurately from one speaker to another. In terms of Orwell's project, such words would either have their range of meanings curtailed or would be dispensed with entirely.

The second line of argument exists in unresolved tension with Orwell's dominant set of assumptions. It is built upon Orwell's undeveloped observations that 'the decline of a language must have economic and political causes', and that 'as far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes . . . language merely reflects existing social conditions'. This line of argument shares the perception of language as conventional, but sees the struggle to control language in a pessimistic light. There is diminished faith in the capacity of the rational pre-linguistic individual to make language an effective instrument of communication; what is stressed instead is the determining force of language and society.

If language is determined by external factors to an extent that virtually negates the conscious efforts of rational individuals, then it is even more important to treat language with circumspection. Orwell prescribes an urgent duty to exercise care when using language, but observes,

> You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and letting the ready- made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you - even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent - and at need will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself. (p. 165)

The price of insufficient vigilance is particularly high in a society where both the external factors determining the language and the language itself are manipulated by power-hungry and dishonest elites.

Language, on this second reading, is more than a troublesome instrument for thought transfer; it actually has the power to invade and pervert the rational 'wordless' thought processes of the individual. For the unwary, 'bad' language habits will 'come crowding in' and impose certain ways of seeing and thinking. The essential reliable nature of the conscious individual is thus in grave danger of being changed: corrupted language has the capacity to reconstitute the individual in a way quite compatible with totalitarian patterns in society generally. This fear is expressed vividly in Orwell's satirical invention Newspeak: [5]

> The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other forms of thought impossible. (p. 917)

As a result of the limited linguistic alternatives provided by Newspeak, humankind loses its desire for democracy, justice and individual freedom, desires axiomatic in Orwell's conception of what it is to be human. The novel

was meant as a warning, and the grim scenario it sketches, or something very like it, can only be forestalled by ensuring that these concepts do not lose all their meaning.

It is significant that Orwell sees only 'bad' language as having the power to invade consciousness and do your thinking for you. There is no suggestion that his own celebrated 'plain style' might also have this power: the plain style will simply reflect the ideas of the rational human essence Orwell assumes as the source of meaning. His failure to extend this constitutive faculty to the plain style explains his inability to reconcile two conflicting conceptions of language in the essay: on the one hand, the notion of language as merely the instrument of the rational individual, and on the other hand, the perception of language as playing a central role in the constitution of any individual. Orwell ultimately resists the radical possibilities of the latter emphasis, and proceeds on the basis that rational individuals acting in concert could yet make language an obedient instrument of communication.

In addition to being based upon a limited conception of language, the plain style fails to meet the claims Orwell makes for it. In the first place, there is no necessary correlation between the plain style and radical criticism. This is brought out very clearly by Carl Freedman's astute observation in 'Writing, Ideology and Politics' (pp. 332-3) that the description of Newspeak in Nineteen Eighty-Four conforms in many respects to the rules laid down in 'Politics and the English Language'. Consider the following similarities: Newspeak has no difficulty with concrete terms like 'tree' and 'dog'; it seeks to exclude meaningless abstractions like 'freedom' and 'democracy'; it elevates brevity to an orthodoxy: 'reduction of vocabulary was regarded as an end in itself' (p. 918); and it strives to exclude ambiguities and subtleties of meaning in order to destroy the possibility of philosophical discussion. The

point is not that obedience to Orwell's language rules would lead inexorably to Newspeak; it is simply that the hegemony he seeks for this plain style would impose severe limitations, which are obvious when satirised as Newspeak, but more insidious when presented in the compelling mode of the 'reasonable man' explaining all.

In its denial of recourse to generalisation and 'pretentious diction', the plain style inhibits dialectical and philosophical thought processes. This in fact amounts to an anti-radical bias: social events are automatically presented and interpreted without historical or sociological contextualisation because the terminology of such analysis is seen as too vague/general/ intellectual. It is therefore hardly surprising that despite its radical pedigree, plain speaking has been appropriated within the dominant ideology in much the same way as 'common-sense'. The plain style has been influential as a convention well beyond the scope of literature: it has become a reportorial format and a television style, and is the preferred register in quarters as diverse as the Pentagon and university classrooms. [6]

This brings us to a second problem with the plain style. In 'On Not Teaching Orwell', Cleo McNelly argues that Orwell's language rules assume that the reader has already been taught how to write (badly), and, as a result:

> For students, coming from a different class to Orwell's prose, reading his work may be rather like pressing themselves against this invisible glass barrier: 'it is so easy to pretend that it isn't there, and so impossible to get through it.' (p. 559)

In other words, Orwell's plain style involves a set of pre-suppositions about class, race and language and it therefore functions as an exclusionary code all

the more subtle for its claims to 'plainness'; Orwell's attempt to privilege his own plain style ignores the fact that all language exists in a context involving elaborate social and linguistic codes.[7] As a result, the plain style cannot substantially improve the ability of language to fulfil the instrumental function Orwell ascribes it.

3.2. The Chapter 'Language' in Marxism and Literature.

Williams in his early critical writings inhabits a similar intellectual context to the one in which Orwell wrote 'Politics and the English Language', and his assumptions about language are as a result similar to Orwell's. Two contradictory sets of assumptions can also be found in 'early' Williams. The first is evident in Reading and Criticism, where Williams reproduces the definition of language assumed by Richards and Leavis: 'Automatic writing is subsidised by automatic reading. Neither has anything to do with literature or with language as a living means of communication' (p. 14). And: 'Literature is communication in written language' (p. 107). The role of the critic is as 'a mediator between the artist and the serious reading-public; his criticism is the articulation of adequate response and trained evaluation' (p. 21). Williams thus assumes that language is quite simply a means of communication and that the role of the critic is to facilitate the process of communication in the context of literature. This instrumental view of language, with its implied faith in the capacity of the conscious individual (in this case the critic) to control language, is very close to Orwell's main argument in 'Politics and the English Language', namely that 'the process [of linguistic decline] is reversible'.

In Culture and Society 1780-1950, however, Williams introduces a more sociological understanding of language. Instead of seeing language as simply an obedient servant of the skilful language-user, Williams emphasizes in the Introduction that language is also in some sense a product or reflection of society. He identifies five key words: industry, democracy, class, art and culture, and argues:

> The changes in their use, at this critical period, bear witness to a

> general change in our characteristic ways of thinking about our common life: about our social, political, and economic institutions; about the purposes which these institutions are designed to embody; and about the relations to these institutions and purposes of our activities in learning, education, and the arts. (p. 13)

He then traces the evolution of these words' meanings, and concludes: 'My terms of reference then are not only to distinguish the meanings, but to relate them to their sources and effects' (p. 18). Williams's emphasis here conforms broadly with Orwell's belief that 'the general tone or spirit of a language' is impervious to the efforts of individual language-users, that language might in fact play a more constitutive - rather than purely instrumental - function.

In Keywords (1976), Williams extends his enquiry into words and the history of their meanings. In the Introduction, he presents the central thesis of this study:

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

> as we find it necessary to change it, as we go on making our own language and history. (p. 24-5)

In this passage, Williams's faith in the capacity of 'people' to shape language is to the fore, although he continues to recognise the deep imprint of 'history' or 'society' on the development of language. However, whereas in Reading and Criticism (and in Orwell's prescriptions) this faith was located in individual language-users working consciously to communicate effectively, here Williams's faith is expressly social: 'we go on making our language'.

From the late 1960 s, the intellectual climate in Britain changed swiftly, and with the influx of theory the ideologies of vulgar empiricism and humanism which circumscribed Orwell's efforts to understand language were exposed.[1] Williams records in Politics and Letters the prominence of language theory in this changing context:

> Much of the new emphasis was sharpened up by work on language in the years immediately before writing [Marxism and Literature] - which came out of discussions with people I'm close to about structuralist theories of language, which at that time were the dominant Marxist current in literary studies and I suppose to an extent still are. (p. 324)

Williams insists that Marxism and Literature is a response to this context: 'my thrust was much more against the limits of the newly dominant mode of critical structuralism' (p. 339) ; it is not merely a continuation of the Scrutiny/English Marxism polemic.

With this dominant mode of structuralism foregrounding (its version of)

language theory, it is therefore not surprising that Williams in responding to it regards his chapter on language in Marxism and Literature as 'the most pivotal', and in Politics and Letters argues that, 'I don't think any of the rest can be sustained unless that position is seen as the basis' (p. 324). Before analysing the chapter, it is therefore necessary to indicate briefly the position of language within Williams's project of cultural materialism.

Williams defines cultural materialism in Writing in Society as: 'the analysis of all forms of signification, including centrally writing, within the means and conditions of their production' (p. 210). As the most pervasive 'form of signification', language is therefore the central focus rather than merely part of the superstructure, a second-order derivative of the economic base. Recall in Culture how Williams argues that each activity within the total social process has its own signifying system: 'For a signifying system is intrinsic to any economic system, any political system, any generational system and, most generally, to any social system' (p. 207). On this basis, a close analysis of language and particularly different forms of language lies at the core of Williams's critical enquiry.

In 'The Uses of Cultural Theory', Williams continues to emphasize the study of language as central in realising 'useful' forms cultural theory. He argues that: 'the "language paradigm" remains a key point of entry' (p. 29), and that:

> It is then precisely in this real work on language, including the language of works marked as temporarily independent and autonomous, that modern cultural theory can be centred: a systematic and dynamic social language, as distinct from the 'language paradigm.' (p. 29)

Williams's intention in his chapter on language in Marxism and Literature is to trace the uneven development of the relationship between Marxism and language theory, exploring in the process an appropriate theoretical basis for his own critical practice. He starts with a summary of the major historical phases in language theory. [2] He identifies firstly the Platonic separation of language and reality: this model dominated for centuries, effectively discouraging theoretical enquiry into the nature of language until the late seventeenth century; its most valuable legacy has been studies on the uses of language carried out within the disciplines of rhetoric, logic and grammar.

The break with this limiting conception of language occurred in the eighteenth century, and was expressed in two radical new emphases. The first was the idea of language as activity: this emerged as a necessary part of the insistence expressed by Vico that men make their own society - an active sense of language was the natural correlative to this active sense of the social process. The second was the idea of language as constitutive: more than an instrument added to man to facilitate communication, language was seen as a distinctly human faculty, 'an indissoluble element of human self-creation' (p. 29). According to Williams, this emphasis on language as constitutive should be seen as an attempt to maintain a sense of the uniquely human in the context of the rapidly expanding empirical procedures of the natural sciences - 'humanity' was in danger of becoming an undifferentiated area for study.

These valuable emphases were deflected by two distinct notions of language that developed subsequently. The first was the idea of language as a system. Williams attributes this to the extraordinary advance in the

empirical knowledges that accompanied the expanding colonialism of the West. In the earlier 'classical' stage of language studies, language had been studied as a body of records; this relationship of privileged (scientific) observer to a body of alien written material was powerfully reinforced by this subsequent encounter. As a consequence of this relationship, language was seen as a fixed, objective philological system, and actual speech was seen as derived from that given system. Williams concludes: 'the living speech of human beings in their specific social relationships in the world was theoretically reduced to instances and examples of a system which lay beyond them' (p. 27).

The emphasis on language as a constitutive activity was lost in a second parallel development. Vico's stress on language as activity was taken up by William von Humboldt in a way that denied its full radical potential. Instead of emphasizing the crucial social aspect of language, the idea of language as activity was projected into specific idealist forms. In other words, the active creative faculty was located not within actual social relations, but rather within a specific abstracted form - 'the nation', 'the collective unconscious' or 'the creative individual'. Orwell's 'gifted but normal people' might be seen as another such abstracted form.

Williams also summarises what for him are the most important Marxist forays into language theory. He mentions Marxism for the first time in his discussion of how language is perceived as a system: both this conception of language and Marxism assert a controlling system which is inaccessible to individual acts of will and intelligence. This affinity is the basis of Althusser's structuralist Marxism. Williams resists this rapprochement between structural linguistics and Marxism because, firstly, history disappears from the resulting account of language and society, and, secondly,

because the dominant bourgeois categories of 'society' and the 'individual' are uncritically adopted.

Further on Williams explores Marx's own undeveloped ideas about language. In Marx's writings he locates a strong sense of language as constitutive, as an 'indissoluble totality of development' (p. 30). Williams stresses this sense of constitutive as indissoluble: by breaking the idea of 'constitutive' into elements and ordering them, a kind of reduction is inevitable. In the writings of Vico and Herder, there was the danger that the primary constitutive nature of language they proclaimed would be interpreted as meaning that language preceded and determined all other connected activities. In Marx's case, his emphasis on an indissoluble constitutive role for language was displaced by the extension of simple materialist maxims - like 'the base determines the superstructure' - with the result that certain elements within the concept 'constitutive' were privileged; language on this construction was seen as part of the 'superstructure', and as such merely a reflection of the ultimately determining material production.

In reviewing the work of several 'Stalinist' linguistic theorists, Williams finds them to be constrained in this way by the dogmatic application of materialist truisms. Instead of seeing language and material production as connected practices playing constitutive roles in a total social process, both are abstracted as discrete stimuli acting on the human brain, with 'labour' preceding 'language' as the single effective origin. Furthermore, he argues, the reflection theory upheld in these versions of Marxism to explain the connection between the abstract categories of 'language' and 'reality' is unable to account for the active and constitutive faculties of language.

The next stage of Williams's examination focuses on the contributions of V. N. Volosinov and M. M. Bakhtin, whose work strongly influences his own

understanding of language. There are several related aspects of Volosinov's work that Williams describes with approval. The first is Volosinov's insistence that language involves the active creation of meanings, an emphasis that had been lost in the objectivist assumption of language as a closed formal system. Further, by stressing that the creation of meaning was a social action, he avoided the limitations of idealist projections of language as activity.

The second aspect Williams embraces is Volosinov's redefinition of the sign. Volosinov agrees with Saussure insofar as he argues that the relation between the formal element (signifier) and the meaning of the word (signified) is conventional, but he differs in that he does not see the relation as arbitrary or as fixed. He conceives the fusion of formal element and meaning rather as the result of an active social process, 'this product of continuing speech-activity between real individuals who are in some continuing social relationship' (p. 37). Two immediate conclusions are derived from this: firstly, individuals are born into - and shaped by - this continuing process, but they are also able to contribute to it; it is their ability to contribute to the process that guarantees that the signifier/signified relation is not arbitrary. Secondly, this new conceptualisation of the sign demands an appropriately adjusted conception of language itself: 'language' can no longer be construed as a category separate from 'society' or 'reality'. Instead, following Volosinov, Williams sees language as 'the articulation of this active and changing experience; a dynamic and articulated social presence in the world' (p. 38).

The third aspect of Volosinov's work that Williams describes is closely related. It is the perception firstly that signs exist as part of material reality, and secondly, that signs are the reflection and refraction of other categories

of material reality. This second distinguishing quality of a sign, the articulation of meaning by a process of representation, was recognised in formalist linguistics, but was characterised as a process occurring within the separated sphere of 'language' or 'consciousness'. In other words, meaning was seen as articulated in language only, and this process of articulation was independent of social material activity. Volosinov expands this conception, emphasizing that 'the process of articulation is necessarily also a material process, and . . . the sign itself becomes part of a (socially created) physical and material world' (p. 38). The conclusion Williams draws from this is of central importance to his own project of cultural materialism: 'Signification, the social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs, is then a practical material activity; it is indeed, literally, a means of production' p. 38). For Williams then, the creation of meaning with signs is emphatically a material process that has to be seen as a crucial part of all human, social and material activity.

The fourth aspect Williams discusses also relates to the nature of the sign. Volosinov distinguishes signs from signals: both contain a fusion of signifier and signified, and both are effective in communication. But whereas signals have fixed invariant meaning, signs are capable of modification and development. The sign must have a nucleus of meaning, but in practice the meaning will vary to suit the situation in which the sign is actively used; this variation is not random, but is rather 'a necessary element of practical consciousness' (p. 40). This quality of active variation means that individuals can use signs of their own initiative in acts of social communication which are personal, as well as in acts which are manifestly social. By contrast, the signal with its fixed meaning is generally confined to the social: it must be recognised in social practice, but it need not be

internalised. Only the sign has the capacity to be internalised, to become part of a verbally constituted practical consciousness.

Finally, what Volosinov's analysis of the sign confirms for Williams is the inadequacy of the dominant accounts of language as either derived from a given sign system, or as the product of an idealised form. His concluding assessment of Volosinov is revealing:

> This view [Volosinov's] is then radically opposed to the construction of all acts of communication from predetermined objective relationships and properties, within which no individual initiative, of a creative or self-generating kind, would be possible. It is thus a decisive rejection of mechanical, behaviourist, or Saussurean versions of an objective system which is beyond individual initiative or creative use. But it is also a theoretical rejection of subjectivist theories of language as individual expression, since what is internally constituted is the social fact of the sign, bearing a definite though never fixed or invariant social meaning and relationship. (p. 40)

Williams's own emphasis on language as a dynamic social activity comes through strongly.

The adjustments to Volosinov's theory that Williams suggests are in effect logical extensions of the notion of language as constitutive activity. Firstly, Williams endorses L. S. Vygotsky's argument that 'inner speech' is itself constitutive rather than merely transferred; both 'inner' and 'outer' speech should be seen as intrinsic to the active constitution of practical social consciousness. Second, Williams criticizes Volosinov's insufficiently - modified conception of the sign-system: according to Williams, 'sign' must be

defined in terms of its endless variability, and 'system' must be revalued as referring to active social process rather than an abstracted sociality. Abstract definition of the sign (or system) as an analytical procedure requires a theoretical freezing of language, but it can easily be extrapolated in a way that curtails a sense of language as a profoundly dynamic process. Finally, Williams clarifies what is meant when language is described as constitutive: the first sense is of language as a distinctly human faculty, 'exerting pressures and setting limits, in determinate ways, to human development itself' (p. 41); the second sense is derived again from Vygotsky: 'constitutive' also describes the role language plays in the historical and social process by which practical consciousness is constituted.

Having analysed 'Politics and the English Language' and now summarised Williams's chapter on language in Marxism and Literature, it might appear difficult to see what they have in common. They are written in quite different intellectual contexts. They are written in different registers - Orwell in the casual style of the popular essayist, Williams in closely argued academic discourse. Orwell and Williams also write about language for different reasons: Orwell to expose the verbosity and vagueness of politicians and intellectuals; Williams to explore the relation between Marxism and linguistic theory. In the texts themselves, there are important differences of emphasis: Orwell focuses on the responsibilities of the individual language-user and tries to install the plain style as the sole means to successful communication, whereas Williams consistently insists on the social nature of language and describes style elsewhere [3] as a quality inseparable from both the ideas and feelings expressed and the context in which they are expressed. In Politics and Letters he refutes the claims of Orwell's plain style, arguing his stance towards the social situation he is observing 'is simply the

popular journalistic expression of the whole mode of objectivist social study' (p. 388).

Notwithstanding these important differences, there are certain assumptions at the centre of Williams's language theory which have some correspondence in Orwell's understanding of language. The first is the assumption of a 'unified subject' which precedes language as the source of meaning. Orwell's essay reflects this assumption most obviously where he describes the need to 'think wordlessly . . . to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about' (p. 168). For Orwell therefore, the thoughts of the individual language-user can be protected from language; language is seen as something external to the language-user, as something to be shaped according to the subject's needs. Williams expresses a similar conviction when he argues that 'men relate and continue to relate before any system which is their product can . . . exercise its determination' (p. 42). For Williams too, the language system is ultimately a product of 'men relating' rather than 'men relating' being a derivative or product of language.

The second assumption they share is anticipated in the first. It is the belief that 'people' have some capacity to control and change language. In Orwell, this belief takes a voluntarist and individualist form: he argues that 'several thousand gifted but normal people' could make a decisive impression on the language system; for Orwell, the rehabilitation of English even represents a viable strategy for improving political conditions. Williams, on the other hand, goes no further than a theoretical defence of human agency vis a vis systems of determination, specifically that of language. In his comparison of objectivist linguistics and Marxism, he argues that both assert (wrongly) 'a controlling social system which is a priori inaccessible to "individual" acts of will and intelligence' (p. 28); and he objects to

'mechanical, behaviourist or Saussurean versions of an objective system [because they are] beyond individual initiative or creative use' (p. 40). Therefore, although Williams does not entertain any voluntarist schemes of language regeneration, like Orwell he insists upon a space for human agency by consistently attacking the idea of humanity being enslaved to a determining system, be it 'language', 'society', 'the economy', or any abstract combination of the above.

The third assumption they share relates to the nature of the sign. Orwell sees the designation of meaning as the result of people deciding what particular words should mean (recall in particular 'New Words', where he proposes the conscious creation of words to embody as yet inchoate meanings). Like Orwell, Williams sees the relation between the word and its meaning as conventional, and also like Orwell, he argues (in more sophisticated terms) that the relation is settled by conscious individuals in an active social process: 'The relation within the sign between the formal element and the meaning which this element carries is thus inevitably conventional . . . but it is not arbitrary and, crucially, it is not fixed' (p. 37). Also, like Orwell, Williams argues the existence of a relation between signifier and signified, that words reflect or refract other categories of reality. For Orwell, this conviction is registered in the strict language/reality separation of common sense empiricism: there is the real world and then there are words that correspond to parts of it. In 'Politics and the English Language' he applies this distinction when he argues that words in art criticism 'are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they . . . do not point to any discoverable object' (p. 161). Williams resists this dichotomy, arguing that language should not be construed as a category separate from 'reality', but should be seen rather as an articulation of reality, 'a dynamic and articulated social

presence in the world' (p. 38). Notwithstanding these efforts to unite these categories of language and reality, Williams continues to insist that there is a material reality to which language refers, and which is in some sense independent of language. Recall his observation in Culture that:

> It would be wrong to reduce [reality, society] to the signifying system alone, for this would make all human actions and relationships mere functions of signification and, in doing so, radically diminish them. (p. 207)

He re-iterates this fundamental empiricist assumption in Politics and Letters:

> we are in danger of reaching the opposite point in which the epistemological wholly absorbs the ontological: it is only in the ways of knowing that we exist at all . . . it is necessary to recall an absolutely founding presumption of materialism: namely that the natural world exists whether anyone signifies it or not. (p. 167)

Orwell and Williams therefore share a sense of some pre-linguistic 'reality': a 'signified'; 'the natural world'; 'discoverable objects' ; 'experience'.

The fourth assumption they share is that language is in some sense constitutive. In Orwell, this perception is expressed in the fear that language in the service of totalitarianism might reconstitute 'humanity' devoid of liberal virtues. Williams approaches the question of language's constitutive function by stressing firstly the inadequacy of seeing language as only an instrument of communication:

> [language] became a tool or an instrument or a medium taken up by individuals when they had something to communicate, as distinct from the faculty which made them, from the beginning, not only able to relate and communicate, but in real terms to be practically conscious and so to possess the active practice of language. (p. 32)

By this argument, Williams confronts the tension unresolved in Orwell's essay between language as obedient instrument of the rational individual, and language as irresistible determining force. While retaining a theoretical space for individuals to consciously create meaning in language, Williams at the same time defines the constitutive faculty more broadly. For Orwell, only 'bad' language could 'come crowding in and do your thinking for you' i.e. play a constitutive function; plain speech reflected quite accurately the wordless ideas of the individual, and therefore played no more than an instrumental function. Williams rejects this spurious distinction in his extended understanding of constitutive as referring to both the biological pressures and limits exerted by language on human development, and to the historical-social process defining 'the changing practical consciousness of human beings' (p. 44). The sense of language as constitutive represents a potential threat to the first three assumptions shared by Orwell and Williams in that if extended it might insist upon language as the source of all meaning, with individual language-users determined by language, and the 'material reality' existing only through language. Both Orwell and Williams in different ways seek to qualify this constitutive function so that human actors preserve some 'agency' with respect to the language system.

That Orwell and Williams share significant assumptions about language is brought home more clearly if one compares their ideas to those of someone

employing a quite different problematic. Jacques Lacan, [4] for example, constructs his theories of language and the subject on different assumptions, and although far more than a paragraph is needed to convey the subtlety and range of Lacan's thought, two or three points of comparison can be identified. In the first place, whereas Orwell and Williams insist upon the existence of a signified, Lacan re-defines the relation between the signifier and signified by arguing that it is not the relation between the signifier and signified that determines the meaning of the sign, but rather the relation of signifiers. Coward and Ellis quote Lacan: 'it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning insists, but none of its elements 'consists' in the meaning of which it is at that moment capable' (p. 97). The signifier is therefore the crucial conceptual category in Lacan's theory as it provides the means by which identities and differences can be established. Secondly, whereas Orwell and Williams conceive a unified subject preceding and in some sense controlling language, Lacan argues that language precedes the subject; he assumes that each individual enters into a pre-existent linguistic world. As a result, the subject's own identity, rather than being innate, is achieved by a process of differentiation in which it marks out separations between itself and its own surroundings in order that it may establish a place for itself in the signifying chain. The assumption of that place is only possible after the 'splitting' of the subject, a complex process in which the subject forms itself distinct from an outside. The conscious subject that emerges ensures communication and the creation of meaning, but it remains an effect of the signifying process, a kind of linguistically constructed mirage which is reified within the social and ideological matrix.

There is a fifth similarity in Orwell and Williams's ideas about language that is not so much a common assumption as a common evasion. I noted

above Williams's argument that Orwell's plain style 'cancels the social situation of the writer and his stance towards the social situation he is observing'; and also McNelly's argument that the plain style functions as an exclusionary code all the more subtle for its claims to 'plainness'. Although Williams employs what might be termed 'academic discourse' rather than the plain style, there is a sense in which he too represses his social situation in the text, and employs an exclusionary code to conduct his arguments: Williams in Marxism and Literature is silent about 'the reasonable socialist's' class, race, gender and educational background in much the same way as Orwell represses the plain man's history in 'Politics and the English Language'; and furthermore, Williams's 'academic discourse' is, if anything, a more powerful exclusionary code than the plain style in that it is conceived for a far narrower audience.

Finally, the relation between Orwell and Williams's ideas about language and the rest of their work should again be stressed. The idea that - notwithstanding extensive qualification - 'people' have the capacity to control language provides a theoretical justification for both the humanism informing their socialist commitment, and their related efforts to politicise the reading (and teaching) of literature.

Conclusion.

The general conclusion to be drawn from this study is that there are areas of significant overlap between the ideas of George Orwell and Raymond Williams.

In the chapter on 'politics', we noted a number of similarities: both Orwell and Williams occupy a privileged position-as-observer within the texts ('the plain man' and 'the reasonable socialist'); they both rely on 'experience' as a touchstone for political analysis (Orwell 'uses his eyes' and Williams is 'only interested in the evidence available where one lives'); and they both, in their respective images of the family and the community, represent Britain as a society governed ultimately by feelings of common interest rather than of irreconcilable class conflict. Finally, they are both committed to forms of socialism in which (bourgeois) democratic freedoms are preserved; 'reformist' measures are pursued as legitimate steps in the journey towards socialism; change of consciousness (achieved by reasonable argument and cultural intervention) is seen as essential; and 'people' (an alliance of worker and petit-bourgeois) are the agents of socialism.

In the chapter on 'letters', we noted that they shared a sense of the importance of literature; that they both resisted the definition of literature imposed by the dominant critical orthodoxy; that they both explored the relation between 'politics' and 'letters' ; and that they both privileged 'politics' as 'the real world of authentic experience', with literature a reflection or distortion of that world. (I make the qualifications about Williams's more sophisticated formulations presently). Finally, they both seek to use 'letters' in the service of (socialist) 'politics': indeed they both see their work on letters as part of the struggle to effect the change of consciousness central to socialist transformation. This desire is evident (sometimes indirectly) in their

literary and cultural criticism in several (similar) ways: in their challenging of the assumptions and practices of traditional critical discourse; in their attempts to historicise the reading of literature; in their use of explicitly 'socialist' standards of judgement in assessing literature (which includes, for example, their attempts to read Dickens as expressing their own values of socialist humanism).

We also noted that Orwell and Williams share certain assumptions about language: they both assume a 'unified subject' which precedes language as the source of meaning; they both see 'people' as having some capacity to control and change language; they both share a sense of some pre-linguistic 'reality', described variously as 'the signified' , 'the natural world' , 'discoverable objects' , and 'experience' ; and they both see language as in some way constituting that reality. Further, both Orwell and Williams in their actual use of language practise discursive modes which repress their personal histories and exclude a wide audience of readers.

The extent and nature of these similarities lead me to conclude that Orwell and Williams, for all the differences between them I will enumerate below, inhabit the same problematic.[1] In their pronouncements (and silences) about politics, letters and language, they develop their ideas from the same intellectual heritage, they make the same fundamental assumptions, and they pursue the same ends.

However, and the qualifications to follow are as important as the general conclusion, they (to sustain the spatial metaphor) inhabit very different regions of that same problematic. The differences between them which I draw together below confirm this.

In the first place, Orwell and Williams belong to different generations and write in different contexts. Although they both live and write in Britain in

the twentieth century, the economic, political and ideological configuration of the Britain in which Orwell writes is quite distinct from the Britain in which Williams produced his major work. That they employ the same problematic at different times in British history affects the extent to which their ideas can be identified as similar because as the context changes, so the words used to discuss issues arising in those contexts acquire new and different connotations (Williams demonstrates this point in 'Notes on British Marxism' where he traces the changing meanings of 'Communism').

Secondly, in the context of politics Orwell and Williams in fact represent two different constituencies of British socialism. Orwell typifies the middle-class socialist motivated by an ethic of service and pursuing humanitarian ends, whereas Williams represents the working-class socialist inspired by the values of community and solidarity. [2] Further, Williams's commitment to socialist-humanism is not supplemented by emotions of English nationalism; nor is it subject to any serious doubts as to the ability of 'people' to continue the journey to socialism. [3]

Thirdly, Orwell and Williams operate in different discourses. Orwell writes in the informal, often polemical register of the popular essayist, whereas Williams writes in the precise and carefully qualified language of the literary scholar. This difference is particularly evident in their work on letters and language, where Orwell's common sense formulations are refined almost beyond recognition in Williams's arguments, and we are left identifying very basic common assumptions and goals.

The difference also points to another deeper difference between Orwell and Williams. The plain style employed by Orwell places substantial limits upon the extent to which he is able to identify and question the terms of his own formation and problematic, whereas Williams's 'academic discourse'

affords a vocabulary (which Williams uses extensively) in order to pursue such enquiries. As a result, Orwell continues complacently within the boundaries of the problematic, indulging and at the same time exemplifying 'the English horror of abstract thought', whereas Williams constantly explores those boundaries, re-defining and extending them, but still ultimately never moving outside those boundaries into a different problematic.[4]

There are several areas of comparison between Orwell and Williams I have not explored (most notably the fact that they both wrote novels) and there are also further differences I have not mentioned (for example, the fact Williams's extensive research in the field of drama has no correspondence in Orwell). However, I hope that in this study I have clarified their central pre-occupations by focusing on their ideas on politics, letters and language; and also, that in the process, I have shed some light on the important and difficult issues they spent their lives investigating.

Notes

Introduction

1 Thomas traces Williams's attitude to Orwell (pp. 433-5), emphasizing Williams's rejection of Orwell in Politics and Letters.

2 In Towards 2000 , Williams repeats in abridged form what he writes about Nineteen Eighty-Four in the second edition of Orwell: that Orwell's projections of three super-states and of brutal internal repression within each state, contain a strong element of truth, but that they ultimately belong to a 'pre-nuclear period, and above all to the experience of inter-war fascism and of Stalinism' (p. 224).

3 This kind of judgment has been widely repeated. For a wider selection of opinion, see the tributes to Williams listed by Robin Blackburn in his article 'Raymond Williams and the Politics of a New Left' (p. 13).

4 For a more complex range of Left-wing attitudes to Orwell, see Christopher Norris (ed), Inside the Myth .

Chapter One : Politics.

1 Wherever possible, I have drawn on Sonia Orwell and Angus, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. References will be to volumes and page numbers.

1.1 The Lion and the Unicorn

1 For a discussion of the cultural context of wartime Britain, see Angus Calder, The People's War pp. 501-23, and Correlli Barnett pp. 11-37. Calder's discussion ranges more widely and is forgiving, whereas Barnett launches a scathing attack on the political theorists of the time, 'the seekers for a New Jerusalem' as he terms them.

2 Crick in his biography of Orwell (pp. 278-96) describes how the work was commissioned, and traces Orwell's experiences during its production.

3 E. P. Thompson in 'Outside the Whale', The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays, pp. 211-43, assesses the damage caused by Orwell's abuse:

> It is true that specious apologetics and romantic attitudes were to be found amongst the Left intelligentsia in the thirties. Orwell succeeds in pinpointing those which most irritated him. What he does not do is suggest that any other, more honourable, motivations might have coexisted with the trivia. And in this he falsifies the record .... Popular Front, Left Book Club and the rest are seen, not as a political response within a definite political context, but as the projection of the neuroses and petty motives of a section of the English middle class . . . Socialist idealism was not discounted, it was explained away, as the function of middle-class guilt, frustration and ennui. (pp. 227-8)

4 Not in Sonia Orwell and Angus ; discussed by Jennie Calder, who writes that Orwell draws together in this essay all the elements of his socialism, which she sums up as:

> his belief in democracy, and his longing for physical revolution, his respect for tradition, particularly English tradition, his abhorrence of Marxist dogma, his reliance on ordinary people, his admiration of the short-lived revolution in Spain. (p. 174)

5 Alex Zwerdling discusses these writers' influence on Orwell:

> [Orwell] lists a group of books written by what he calls 'The Pessimists' : Voigt's Unto Caeser , Russell's Power , Hayek's Road to Serfdom , Burnham's Managerial Revolution , and a number of others. Such studies 'deny that a planned society can lead either to happiness or to true progress.' Although Orwell's attitude to these writers is critical, he concludes 'that they and other writers of kindred tendency have uttered much useful criticism of the folly and wickedness of the Totalitarian Age' (p. 85)

6 Zwerdling concludes his chapter on this final stage of Orwell's career as follows:

> we must distinguish between his political ideals and his

> sense of political realities. The ideals remained those of a democratic socialist . . . . He was unlike other socialists in that he finally did not believe his ideals would be, or could be realized. (p. 112-3)

Stuart Hall's essay 'Conjuring Leviathan: Orwell on the State' is a useful summary of Orwell's ideas on the state as reflected in his final works. Hall concludes:

> Orwell may not have been correct to follow the line of thought which traced all these divergent paths to the same mono-causal point of origin - totalitarianism; but at a less literal level he was not wrong in what he glimpses of certain historical tendencies in the advanced societies of the world. (p. 240)

7 Besides Carr's valuable discussion, British common sense empiricism is described by Perry Anderson in 'Origins of the Present Crisis' and 'Components of the National Culture' ; and Gareth Stedman Jones in 'History: The Poverty of Empiricism'.

8 Williams sets out this position in more detail in Orwell. (p. 26)

9 A much more detailed analysis of the British ruling class, which traces the family and kinship networks, is Noel Annan's 'The Intellectual Aristocracy'.

10 Discussed by John Westergaard, 'The Withering Away of Class: A Contemporary Myth' ; Williams et al. May Day Manifesto pp. 18-39; Williams, Politics and Letters , pp. 391-2.

11 See, for example, Williams's discussion of Rudolf Bahro's The Alternative in Eastern Europe in 'Beyond Actually Existing Socialism' in Problems in Materialism and Culture , pp. 252-73. Another clear critique of centralised economies (described as 'etatism') is Branko Horvat's Self-Governing Socialism .

12 I will refer in more detail to the major critiques of the pluralist conception of the state in section 1.3.

1.2. Britain in the 1960s

1 This discussion of the historical context of the 1950s is drawn from the following sources: Colin Leys pp. 60-3; Perry Anderson, 'The Figures of Descent' pp. 20-77, especially pp 52-7; James Cronin, pp. 146 ff; David Coates, pp. 75-96; and C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (eds), pp. 1-57.

2 Anderson, 'The Left in the Fifties'. There is useful discussion of the extra- Parliamentary Left and especially of the 'New Left' during this period in: Peter Sedgwick, 'The Two New Lefts'; E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English' in The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays , pp. 245-301; and Williams, Politics and Letters pp. 361-8.

3 These include: E.P.Thompson's 'Peculiarities of the English'. Thompson accuses Anderson of practising a kind of 'inverted Podsnappery': 'There is, indeed, throughout their analysis an undisclosed model of Other Countries, whose typological symmetry offers a reproach to British exceptionalism' (p. 247). (Thompson's essay is in fact an attack on an earlier piece of Anderson's namely, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', but his objections apply equally to 'Components'). Richard Johnson's essay 'Moore, Anderson and English social development', stresses the undue pessimism of Anderson's analysis:

> The theory of failure, indeed, coexists throughout the Anderson/Nairn early project with a contradictory half-recognition of the ideological and political resources of the dominant classes in England, a powerful defence in depth. Viewed differently, each of the Anderson/Nairn failures can also be read as assets, as symptoms of strength , as a large but finite repertoire of solutions . (p. 61)

4 Anderson in 'Origins' offers the following trenchant criticism of Williams's argument:

> the weakness of Williams's argument is that it fails to make a distinction between corporate and hegemonic institutional forms. The very density and specificity of English working-class culture

> has limited its political range and checked the emergence of a hegemonic socialism in England. Williams's attempt to solve the difficulty by attributing an ndefinite extendibility to working-class but not to bourgeois institutions, besides its factual weaknesses, rests on an evacuation of conflict concepts from his whole idiom. The truth seems to be that the nature of working-class culture is as he describes it, but that the will to universalize it, to make it the general model of society , which he tacitly assumes to be a concomitant, has only rarely existed. (pp. 38-9).

5 Leys sets out these statistics in detail. (p. 62)

6 I will discuss the influence of Althusser in the next section.

7 Michael Green in 'Raymond Williams and Cultural Studies', writes:

> His theoretical concepts, especially in his best-known though often difficult The Long Revolution, embody an oscillation between a liberal pluralist and a Marxist conception of history and society, though in later work the Marxist model is explicit. (p. 32)

Peter Sedgwick in 'The Two New Lefts' emphasizes the ascendancy of the consensual model in Williams's early work:

> What Williams finally offered was the replacement of a conflict model of society (of the sort which has been traditional among socialists and even radical reformers) with a communications model, in which the unity of humankind is primordially broken, not by the clash of rival social interests, but by blockages and faulty linkages in moral perception. Society is conceived as a kind of mental organism whose warring faculties, in the shape of sectional or partial value systems, eventually, if effortfully, knit together in a single communications net or 'common culture.' (p. 137)

8 Francis Mulhern, 'Towards 2000, or News - From You-Know-Where' ,especially pp. 23-6, analyses in greater detail the problems with Williams's

use of community.

9 The main thrust of Anthony Barnett's critique of Williams is concerned with this privileging of the cultural in Williams's early work:

> For despite the emphasis laid on the constraints of the capitalist economy and the incomplete character of liberal democracy in the West, he valorized cultural change (communication, understanding, art) at the expense of industrial , and, above all, political struggle by the working-class against bourgeois society. (p. 56)

10 However, the similarities in political thinking between Orwell and Williams described below would seem to reinforce Stedman Jones's argument that the working-class (Williams) and middle-class (Orwell) components of the British labour movement were united by a single socialist 'language' of reform.

11 Williams's peers in the British Left have also contributed substantially to the creation of 'Williams', the unwavering working-class socialist unbroken by the gloomy Thatcher years. The obituaries on his death apply more gilt to this venerated figure.

12 Although Williams never became an English nationalist like Orwell, J. P. Ward, in his short study Raymond Williams, stresses his rejection of Wales in his early work , and his immersion in the English cultural tradition. Ward emphasizes the liberating effect on Williams of Welsh nationalism when he returned to study Wales anew in his thirties: 'It seems fair to say that this experience of Wales has been genuinely allied by Raymond Williams to the sense of a new tangible social vision' (p. 10).

13 Recall Anthony Barnett's argument quoted in the introduction that Orwell and Williams are alike in their identification of democratic freedoms and the bourgeois state.

14 Looking only at this final part of The Long Revolution, it is therefore difficult to understand E. P. Thompson's charge in his review that Williams has given 'a record of impersonal forces at work and not a record of struggle' (p. 26). Williams's humanism seems to be merely a less strident version of Thompson's. But what Thompson's criticism draws attention to is the

difference between Part II - the history of cultural institutions - and 'Britain in the 1960 s' : in the former, Williams indeed emphasizes the abstract social forces at the expense of human agents, whereas - as we have seen - the tendency is reversed in the latter.

1.3. Towards 2000

1 Williams also discusses Communications in Politics and Letters, pp. 369-70.

2 'Means of Communication as Means of Production', reprinted in Problems in Materialism and Culture, pp. 50-63

3 Another important essay dealing with Williams's engagement with Marxism is 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' in Problems, pp. 31-49. I deal with it in detail in the next chapter.

4 See, for example, Anthony Barnett, pp. 55-6, and Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, pp. 28-32.

5 It should be added that in the discourse of Western Marxism generally, 'totality' has proved to be an elusive concept. A central theme of Martin Jay's Marxism and Totality is that 'the initial Western Marxist attempts at a viable concept of totality miscarried' (p. 20). He nonetheless argues in his conclusion that the search for some notion of totality should continue:

> The search for a viable concept of totality, which we have seen animating Western Marxism, should not therefore be written off as no more than a benighted exercise in nostalgia for a past plenitude or the ideology of intellectuals bent on legitimating their domination of the rest of mankind. For if the human race is to avoid the negative totality of nuclear catastrophe, we may well need to find some positive alternative. (pp. 536-7)

6 This synthesis of Britain in the 1980 s is drawn from the following sources: James Curran ; Eric Hobsbawm et al ; Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds), The Politics of Thatcherism ; Tom Nairn, The Break-Up of Britain pp. 365-404; Leys pp. 89-100; Anderson, 'Figures' pp. 66-77; Michael Barratt Brown; and Alex Callinicos.

7 In the Introduction to Marxism and Literature , Williams writes that in the early seventies 'my own long and often internal and solitary debate with what I had known as Marxism now took its place in a serious and extending international inquiry' (p. 4). In the context of political analysis, Williams will have been aided and influenced by the new Marxist work on the nature of the British state by Nicos Poulantzas and Tom Nairn. Leys summarizes these important contributions (pp. 227-33).

8 Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology . Eagleton's assessment of Williams is more generous in his later work. See The Function of Criticism pp. 108-15 ; his interview with Williams, 'The Practice of Possibility' ; and 'Resources for a Journey of Hope: The Significance of Raymond Williams'.

9 Stuart Hall. 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms.' Further detail on the culturalist/structuralist debate can be found in Richard Johnson, 'Histories of Culture/Theories of Ideology' and ' Three Problematics' ; E. P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays ; Perry Anderson, Arguments Within English Marxism ; Paul Hirst, Marxism and Historical Writing ; Raphael Samuel, pp. 376 -408.

10 Denis Donoghue in his review 'Examples' makes this point.

Chapter Two - Letters

2.1 'Charles Dickens'

1 For further detail on this transition, see: Chris Baldick, pp. 86-106 and pp. 134-161; Francis Mulhern, The Moment of Scrutiny pp. 19-28; Terry Eagleton, The Function of Criticism pp. 64-70.

2 There are useful summaries of Eliot's work on culture and criticism in Lesley Johnson, pp. 122-29; Baldick, pp. 109-133; and Frank Gloversmith, pp. 15-44.

3 Not in Sonia Orwell and Angus ; see Malcolm Evans, pp. 12-38. For more detail on the Leavises' work during this period, see: A. R. Jones, pp. 457-73 (for a generous judgement of Eliot, Richards and the Leavises); Lesley Johnson , pp. 93-115; Mulhern , The Moment of Scrutiny , especially pp. 325-31; and Eagleton , The Function of Criticism pp. 70-84. I return to Leavis and Scrutiny in more detail in the discussion of Williams.

4 Orwell's description of his critical essays in a letter to Geoffrey Gorer: I, p. 579.

5 George Woodcock, pp. 229-79 provides a more detailed summary of Orwell's interest in literature.

6 Orwell's efforts to place Dickens in his historical context are repeated in most of his essays on literary figures. In the essay on Gissing, for example, he distinguishes Gissing's London from the London of 1948:

> It is the fog-bound, gas-lit London of the eighties, a city of drunken puritans, where clothes, architecture and furniture had reached their rock-bottom of ugliness and where it was almost normal for a working-class family of ten persons to inhabit a single room. (p. 485)

7 A valuable summary of the important shifts in Dickens's political understanding is provided by Michael Goldberg, 'From Bentham to Carlyle: Dickens' Political Development.' Goldberg concludes:

> If Dickens' earlier radicalism is attributable to Bentham . . . his later political attitudes demonstrably owe a great deal more to Carlyle . . . . What he gained from Carlyle was a vision of Victorian society far more radical and pessimistic than anything he had entertained as a young novelist attacking the hydra of social abuses. He came to recognise the evil inherent in the social system and to know that it was far

more intractable than he had previously thought. (p. 76)

8 In "Tolstoy and Shakespeare' (II, pp 153-7), Orwell makes these points more explictly:

> Every piece of writing has its propaganda aspect, and yet in any book or play or poem or what not that is to endure there has to be a residuum of something that simply is not affected by its moral or meaning - a residuum of something we can only call art. Within certain limits, bad thought and bad morals can be good literature. (p. 157)

9 In his essays of literary criticism, Orwell often concludes by considering how the particular figure reviewed might fare in the 1930 s and 1940 s. Of Jack London, for example, he speculates:

> if one imagines him living on into our own day, instead of dying in 1915, it is very hard to be sure where his political allegiance would have lain. One can imagine him in the Communist Party, one can imagine him falling a victim to Nazi racial theory, and one can imagine him the quixotic champion of some Trotskyist or Anarchist sect. (p. 48)

2.2 Chapter One of the English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence.

1 The chapter on Dickens is in fact made up of two separate essays: pp. 28-48 are repeated in chapter 15 of The Country and the City, and pp. 48-59 are an abbreviated version of 'Social Criticism in Dickens'.

2 What Williams describes here is akin to I. A. Richards's 'practical criticism', which Bowen summarises as follows:

> Practical Criticism is a technique that involves the production of two things - what could be called a 'naked reader', and a 'naked text'. The text is isolated from its conditions of production, its genre, its history, its context, wrested from those laboriously-constructed unities of place, time and interpretation. And equally the reader is isolated, called upon to respond out of history and in general, removed under the command of the

> 'personal response' from the social production of cultural meaning. (p. 85)

3 The contradictory pressures of 'personal response' and the demands for 'an organic body of judgement' are summed up by Bowen as follows:

> What is exemplary about Richards is the explicitness with which he seeks to produce an impossible, impossibly sincere 'personal response' and equally an impossible consensus of socially produced evaluations. It is between these two poles, these two impossible demands, that students of English have had to pick their way ever since condemned to a plausible ventriloquism. (p. 91)

4 In 'Culture is Ordinary', Williams makes clear his preference for Leavis's formulations in describing the relation between 'literature' and 'society':

> Leavis has never liked Marxists, which is in one way a pity, for they know more than he does about modern English society, and about its immediate history. He, on the other hand, knows more than any Marxist I have met about the real relations between art and experience. (p. 81)

In a hostile review of Williams's work, Garry Watson emphasizes Williams's debt to the Leavises. He sees Williams as, among other things, "grossly misrepresenting the Leavises" (p. 482) in an attempt to disguise his own enormous debt to them.

5 In Politics and Letters, for example, Williams points out that he thought that he was providing some challenge to the critical orthodoxy by showing that the merit of novelists (George Eliot and Lawrence in his example) cannot be measured by comparing selected passages of their work (p. 237).

6 The references below are to the reprint of the articles in Writing in Society, pp. 67-120.

7 'Structure of feeling' is an important term in Williams's work. It is a difficult concept to grasp because it is partly made up of the undefined, and, furthermore, with each use it acquires slightly different connotations. The

meaning of 'structure of feeling' in The English Novel is perhaps best conveyed in the definition offered in Preface to Film :

> In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct, with more or less accuracy, the material life, the social organisation, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas .... To relate a work of art to any part of that observed reality may, in varying degrees, be useful, but is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. This element, I believe, is what I have named the structure of feeling of a period and it is only realizable through the experience of the work of art itself, as a whole. (pp. 21-2)

The term 'structure of feeling' has been subjected to intense criticism: Terry Eagleton (Criticism and Ideology) commends Williams's use of the term in The English Novel, but argues that it is ultimately limited: 'he lacks the theoretical terms which might specify the precise articulations of that structure' (p. 34). Catherine Gallagher describes structure of feeling as a category both 'reductive' and 'exasperatingly vague' (p. 44).

8 Although Orwell might see Dickens as a 'change-of-heart' man, he does not dismiss him as such. On the contrary, he endorses Dickens's moral criticism: ' "If men would behave decently the world would be decent" is not such a platitude as it sounds' (p. 469). In other words, to try and change people's hearts, as Dickens does, is for Orwell an 'honourable path to take'. Further, although Orwell might neglect Dickens's sense of the 'total condition', Orwell's grasp of how that condition might be changed is more subtle than Williams allows. Indeed Orwell's questions 'How can you improve human nature until you have changed the system?' and 'what is the use of changing the system before you have improved human nature?' (p. 469) anticipate in every sense Williams's argument that to hold up change of structure and change of spirit as alternatives 'is already to ratify an alienated society; for neither can be separated, or ever is, from the other; simply one or other can be ignored' (p. 49). Williams in fact concedes he was 'rough on Orwell' in a subsequent exchange with J. C. Maxwell; it is strange he makes no adjustment in The English Novel.

9 The quality of Williams's prose is debated. Watson quotes several opinions (E. P. Thompson, Terry Eagleton and Anthony Barnett), and

concludes:

> As their ingenious efforts at providing rationalisations and justifications clearly show, even Williams admirers are perfectly aware of the fact that he is a lousy writer. 'What appears at first glance the inert language of academicism is in fact' - yes, it is. Reading Williams . . . induces stupor. (p. 471)

This judgment seems overly harsh. I would ascribe the relative difficulty of Williams's prose not as much to a wilful obscurity on his part as to the discursive pressures of the academy.

14 This point is made by John Dunn in his review of Politics and Letters.

2.3. 'The Reader in Hard Times' in Writing in Society

1 Chris Baldick writes :

> In recent years much ink has been shed to the effect that a 'crisis' is besetting the study of English literature, particularly in higher education. As the following chapters may help to show, this is nothing new: from the very beginning, English Literature as a 'subject' has been founded upon a series of uncertainties and conflicts. (p. 1)

Acknowledging this, the 'crisis' took on a new form in the 1970 s.

2 Williams too has written on the subject; see Writing in Society pp. 192-211. I will discuss his perceptions presently.

3 See, for example, the Leavises' Dickens the Novelist , where The Great Tradition assessment is modified: 'Our purpose is to enforce as unanswerably as possible the conviction that Dickens was one of the greatest of creative writers' (p. ix). A useful bibliography of recent Dickens criticism is provided by Barbara Hardy, Charles Dickens: The Writer and His Work.

4 Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism Anderson takes up this discussion in In The Tracks of Historical Materialism where he reviews the failure (in his opinion) of post-structuralist versions of Marxism

to break out of this impasse. Also useful on the political implications of European Marxist theory is the editorial in History Workshop Journal 6.

5 An excellent essay on the migration of a 'Western Marxist' concept (totality) from Hungary to France and then to Britain is Edward Said's Travelling Theory' in The World, the Text, and the Critic pp. 226-247

6 There is a favourable review of The Country and the City by E. P. Thompson : in 'A Nice Place to Visit', Thompson emphasizes Williams's political commitment, and notes with approval that 'this book is angrier, more impatient of academic evasion, more plain-spoken than some of Williams's earlier works' (p. 34).

7 A phrase used by Williams in Writing in Society (p. 196).

8 He defines cultural materialism in Writing in Society in more detail: 'Cultural materialism is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the means and conditions of their production'. (p. 210).

9 See, for example, Catherine Gallagher's article, where she argues:

> Two further shortcomings of Williams's method are its (paradoxical) reductiveness and its vagueness. In their very attempts to capture the fluidity, complexity and variety of cultural production, chapter after chapter returns, with wearisome regularity, to the one certain truth: cultural production is a social, material process. There is, however, little discussion of just what this phrase means . . . . [W]e learn a great deal about the concepts Williams rejects and amends, but this central notion of 'cultural materialism' remains elusive. (p. 644)

Patrick Parrinderwrites in similar vein: 'the book [Marxism and Literature] offers no clear framework - only vague directions and a radical doubt as to how this is to be done' (p. 55).

10 A similarly positive use of the term is employed in the Foreword to John Barrell's Poetry, language and politics :

> our belief is that a combination of historical and cultural context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual

> analysis offers the strongest challenge .... We call this cultural materialism.

11 Williams writes in greater detail about the limits of totality in Problems, pp. 19-22. See also Said's discussion of Williams's use of totality in 'Travelling Theory'.

12 Anderson provides an excellent analysis of the available meanings of hegemony in The Prison Notebooks in 'The Antimonies of Antonio Gramsci.'

13 Anderson discusses this version of hegemony at pp. 33-9.

14 Williams develops his arguments about culture in 'The Uses of Cultural Theory.' He argues that:

> cultural theory is at its most significant when it is concerned precisely with the relations between the many and diverse human activities which have been historically and theoretically grouped in these ways, and especially when it explores these relations as at once dynamic and specific within describably whole historical situations which are also, as practice, changing and, in the present, changeable. It is then in this emphasis on a theory of such specific and changing relationships that cultural theory becomes appropriate and useful. (p. 20)

Taking the work of P. M. Medvedev, V. N. Volosinov and M. M. Bakhtin in Russia during the 1920 s as a paradigm case of what cultural theory might achieve, he reviews the role of theory in Britain from the 1950 s to the 1980 s. He describes the variety of leftist cultural theory, and then relates it to the changes in the educational and cultural formations:

> Yet the key task of all theoretical analysis is the identification of the matrix of any formation, and here the affiliation is clear: there were texts because there were syllabuses and there were syllabuses because there were institutions and there were institutions of that only marginally open kind because the drive for a majority public education of the most serious sort, as part of a more general democratization of the culture and the society, had been first halted, leaving an expanded but still privileged and relatively enclosed space, and then in the counterrevolution of the last ten years - from Callaghan to

> Joseph and Thatcher - pushed back, spreading unemployment and frustration among a generation which was still, on the whole, theoretically contained by the protected and self-protected modernisms of the intermediate stage. (pp. 27-8)

Williams argues that the way out of this stasis will be through agencies other than cultural theory, but that it remains important that 'at least theory does not hinder anyone' (p. 28). He concludes that theory can only become useful 'at that point where it identifies key linkages and key gaps wihin a real social history' (p. 28).

Chapter Three . Language

3.1. Politics and the English Language.

1 For an overview of the philosophical context, including the main arguments in linguistic philosophy, see Cox and Dyson, Vol. II, pp. 106-145. Although Orwell was unaware of the developments in philosophy, his ideas about language reflect similar assumptions and pre-occupations: for example, Orwell's suspicion of theoretical terms and preference for 'concrete' words is not unlike Wittgenstein's disdain for metaphysics and his desire to reduce reality to 'simple facts' as expressed in Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. (see pp. 108-13 of Cox and Dyson).

2 See For Continuity pp. 13-46. Mulhern in The Moment of Scrutiny paraphrases the Scrutiny arguments about the debased state of language in the following terms: 'the modern English language was the carrier of feelings, perceptions and ideas acceptable to the devitalised products of a machine economy' (p. 8).

3 In 'Robinson Crusoe' . Hill's argument is referred to with reference to Orwell in the editorial of History Workshop Journal 10, p. 4.

4 Williams explores this version of Marxist linguistic theory in Marxism and Literature , pp. 33-5. I return to this in the next section.

5 Nineteen Eighty-Four , in The Penguin Complete Novels of George Orwell . Paul Chilton summarises the main academic readings of Newspeak. His own conclusion is that:

> There are family resemblances between Utopian language schemes (like Newspeak), the ideal language movement in philosophy, and technical sublanguages. Orwell's novel relates such language theories and practices to social and political context. (p. 144)

6 See Freedman, p. 338 and Williams in Politics and Letters , p. 385.

7 Hugh Rank also criticizes Orwell's failure to foreground the context in which language manipulation occurs.

3.2. Chapter 1 (2) of Marxism and Literature

1 Particularly influential were Althusser's attacks on humanism in For Marx pp. 221-247, and on empiricism in Reading Capital pp. 34-46. Roger Fowler, pp. 200-24, provides a useful summary of the main contributions to linguistic theory in the twentieth century. He discusses Saussure, Chomsky, Jakobson and Bloomfield, but does not focus on 'Marxist' theories of language specifically.

2 Charles Taylor in Chapter 9 of Human Agency and Language provides a more detailed synopsis of the area covered by Williams. Taylor distinguishes between 'designative' and 'expressive' theories of language, arguing that the latter provide a more sophisticated understanding of language. Expressive theories insist that 'meaning cannot be fully separated from the medium, because it is only manifest in it. The meaning of an expression cannot be explained by its being related to something else, but only by another expression' (p. 221) ; designative theories, on the other hand, account 'for meaning by correlating signs to bits of the world, and these can in principle be identified objectively' (p. 221). Taylor sees empiricist theories of language as designative, but although both Orwell and to a lesser extent Williams display the designative propensity for seeing language as reflecting 'reality', there are aspects of their work which contradict designative assumptions: notably Orwell's fears that (bad) language might create a totalitarian reality, and Williams's sense of language as constitutive rather than as merely an instrument.

3 The essay, 'Notes on English Prose' , discussed in Chapter Two, contains Williams's ideas on the question of style; see especially pp. 73-5.

4 For useful introductions to Lacan, see Coward, R and Ellis, J Language and Materialism pp. 93-121, and Fredric Jameson 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan.'

Conclusion

1 Ben Brewster in the Glossary to Althusser's For Marx defines 'problematic' as follows:

> [The problematic] is not the essence of the thought of an individual or epoch which can be deduced from a body of texts by an empirical, generalizing reading; it is centred on the absence of problems and concepts within the problematic as much as their presence (pp. 253-4).

In using Althusserian terminology, I do not mean to privilege the Althusserian critique of Williams; Althusser inhabits a 'problematic' (albeit a different one) as subject to silences and fault lines as that of Williams.

2 Williams's identity as 'working-class intellectual' obviously wears a little thin once he establishes himself as a teacher and academic.

3 In the interview with Eagleton in response to the question, 'Could I ask you, then, whether after so long a struggle you now feel in any sense disillusioned?', Williams replies:

> Disillusionment, not at all; disappointment, of course. Yet looking back it seems to me I absorbed some of these disappointments quite early on, so the recent ones didn't come as so much of a surprise. (p. 19)

4 John Higgins encapsulates this difference when he argues that there are two kinds of empiricism:

> Vulgar empiricism takes for granted the existence of the knowing subject with an unmediated access to experience; its idea of language is language as a transparent means of communication which has no need of any epistemological guarantees as it is itself its own guarantee of truth. Radical

> empiricism questions the terms of the construction of that knowing subject and interrogates in particular the semantics of natural languages in relation to questions of human sociality. (p. 152)

Orwell exemplifies the former kind of empiricism, and Williams the latter.

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