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The intent of this essay review is to introduce, via his major work, the ideas of Raymond Williams and to suggest a translation of his significant arguments into the rural North American experience of schooling. This major work is *The Country and the City* (Williams, 1973).

It is not accidental that "country" comes first. Williams grew up in rural Wales and became a literature professor, teaching at Cambridge University. Like many rural people, he remained keenly appreciative of his rural upbringing, but, unlike many in his generation and ours, he pondered it and wrote forcefully about it. We are particularly concerned in this review to show the importance of Williams' work for the imaginative project that enables decent research: Too much of what passes as "rural education research" fails completely to imagine the complexity of rural life. Instead, "rural" becomes a residual geographic or residential category, worthy of interest principally through charity.

For this imaginative project, which is a kind of preparation, researchers must develop an understanding of rural education as an arena of cultural construction and inevitable contest. Such an understanding is an essential aid to the capacity to pose just those questions that have the potential to disclose rural realities. Williams understood, as few enough have, the things of which rural *is* constituted. And his own life was a struggle with and for that constitution. Thankfully, he succeeded where many have failed. Thanklessly, he is ignored today by rural education scholars throughout the English-speaking world.

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Why Should North Americans Bother With a British Book from the 1970s?

The relevance of *The Country and the City* to rural education in North America is not, of course, immediately apparent. The book, after all, is a critical history of English literature from Sidney to Hardy. And over the course of more than a dozen books, Raymond Williams (1921-87) published only a few short essays specifically addressing issues of education and schooling. In his major work, he makes direct reference to education only briefly and within the context of a larger argument. It is easy to see why he is so roundly ignored.

Though easily overlooked, Williams has much to offer the reader who seeks a serious and rigorous intellectual engagement with some of the broader issues shaping rural life and rural education. Within the context of a literary history, the author explores the persistent cultural images of the country and of the city, analyzing the validity and reliability of those images as they measure up against actual history. What he uncovers is a rural world whose depiction has been continually and systematically altered in ways that stem from and contribute to the development of a capitalist economy and the resulting distributions of wealth and power. His primary data source for the persistent images is the canon of English literature, the same canon that still dominates anthologies and syllabi (in both high school and college) today—a fact that, in and of itself, implicates schooling in the creation and maintenance of country and city images that articulate a story serving definite and contestable ideological ends.

As a literary critic with a comprehensive knowledge of English literature and a subversive bent for bringing to the table diverse voices, Williams is able to move beyond the genteel hegemony of the canon to deconstruct the social and economic history of rural Britain. This deft work brings to light the conflicting and contradictory images that disclose a rural world that has been obscured and marginalized by generations of literati, by academia and, consequently, by at least 150 years of "popular culture." The uncovering of these conflicting and contradictory images—and the recognition of the institutional and ideological forces at work behind their obfuscation—constitutes a significant step toward achieving a more truthful representation of the circumstances that continue to shape rural education and rural society today.

The Work in Brief

The Escalator

The persistent images of country and city that Williams confronts are familiar ones:

> On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved center: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness, and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. (p. 1)

These are simple, obvious stereotypes, easy to dismiss as romanticism and as cynicism. Were Williams to stop at simply debunking these images of country and city life, the book would fall well short of its potential. Fortunately, the exploration does not stop there, but asks two far more probing questions: *where did these images come from?* and *why and how have they persisted?*

The obvious place to look for answers to questions about the origins of these country and city images would be in the past. Williams looks back in time, through literature, to see if the images with us today are merely the lingering remnants of ways of life no longer in existence. The result of this search is an experience he describes as a ride on an escalator.

The escalator ride begins with a 1966 critical work lamenting the *sudden end* of an idyllic pastoral world. Searching for a glimpse of that idyllic world before its demise, Williams looks back to 1932, and finds Leavis and Thompson mourning the *very recent loss* of the "organic community" of "Old England." Leavis and Thompson refer to Sturt, who in 1911 wrote of a rural England "dying out just now." Williams continues to move backward, looking for that lost rural world in 1809, in 1769, in the 1620s, in 1516, and in the 1370s. As far back as he travels, the exploration yields more of the same—a longing for the (just) passed way of rural life. Upon inspection of the historical evidence, he finds the present, in each of these rural settings, is characterized not by "peace, innocence, and simple virtue," but by social and economic inequities and the exploitation of natural and human resources. The escalator never arrives at the world only recently passed:

> ... shall we find the timeless rhythm in Domesday, when four men out of five are villains, bordars, cotters, or slaves? Or in a free Saxon world before what was later seen as the Norman rape and yoke? In a Celtic world, before the Saxons came up the rivers? In an Iberian world, before the Celts came with their gilded barbarism? Where indeed shall we go, before the escalator stops? (p. 11)

The short answer is this: there was no *Old England*, whose sudden end marked the advent of a troubled modern world—it never existed. There are, rather, a number of specific and identifiable *Old Englands*, each one differing substantively from its respective socio-historical context (i.e., differing substantially from its *reality*).

These various *Old Englands* are aligned chronologically with actual socio-historical settings, and take their interpretive (mis)cues from significant points of transition in the political economy of the state. Williams infers from this chronological alignment that these less-than-accurate representations are not random misrepresentations (i.e., they are not "errors"), but in fact constitute a form of corrective revision on the part of writers working within particular contexts. To confirm and clarify this assertion means getting past the artificial cultural representation to an actual social history—an effort of literary, sociological, political, and economic scholarship that requires something unique and *rural* on the part of the critic. Williams delivers. Education researchers—who can be seen as taking their own (mis)cues from contemporary transitions—would do well to listen up. Attention, in this case, should prove especially profitable for *rural* education researchers.

Structures of Feeling

Unable to find referents for these lost rural worlds in the social history of England, Williams (1981) turns to structural analysis, an approach that offers

> a theory of social relations which is in effect alternative to all other accounts of what are taken to be social relations. The basic cultural structures, either exhibiting their variations, or 'evolving' entirely within their own forms, are either independent or relatively autonomous from other social history and practice, or are even its deep, generally determining forms." (p. 143)

This passage is from *The Sociology of Culture,* but serves well as a summary statement of the ideas that ground the points argued in *The Country and the City.* When Williams examines the literary history of England from this structural vantage, a cultural history emerges. This alternate history evolved independent from the official social history of the state, but it nonetheless helped to shape that social history.

To enact his structural analysis of the cultural history of the country and the city, Williams devises a three-part framework consisting of *economic structures*, *social structures*, and *structures of feeling*. The economic and social structures are derived from a fairly straightforward application of Marxist historical materialism. The third, structures of feeling, is a bit more problematic, and appears to be an original construct on the part of the author (neither of us has seen it used elsewhere).

Structures of feeling are the artificial constructs whose evolution articulates a largely independent cultural history. These structures have their roots in literary conventions (e.g., the images and connotations of country versus city found in the eclogues and idylls), with substantial changes enacted by the various players who have appropriated and modified the given modes for their own specific purposes.

The Country and the City

Thus, Williams undertakes a deconstruction of the history of England's country and city by deconstructing, one at a time, these artificial *structures of feeling* that have come to define the historical narrative. Williams dismantles structures to reveal, in the conflicting and contradictory images and ideas that emerge, a narrative of the exploitation and colonization of rural people by the interests of capital. Significantly, the exploitation and colonization take place not exclusively at the hands of metropolitan interests ("city v. country," a generalization at the center of more than one structure of feeling), but of capitalist interests residing in country or city. For Williams, country and city is a story of class. Country people, not surprisingly, fare badly under an industrial regime. Williams would certainly agree with Wendell Berry on this point. But for Williams, class issues are the most telling.

Throughout, the raw material for piecing together this critical interpretation of English social and economic history exists within the cultural history; it exists in isolated and obscured bits and pieces, however, images and ideas lying side by side with the raw materials for the accepted history that is clearly aligned with a capitalist ideology.

Williams offers in *The Country and the City* a version of history that is not derived from the hegemony of the canon and the widely accepted, (decontextualized and recontextualized) readings of the individual works that comprise the canon. His interpretation is based on raw data (i.e., high-culture literature) largely obscured by its absorption into an artificial cultural representation (i.e., the high-culture literary canon) under the control of a small segment of society (i.e., not only professors of literature, but also English teachers around the English-speaking world). This unique outlook is something that bears further exploration and examination, one that yields interesting and relevant implications for rural education and rural education research.

Culture, Ideology, Hegemony

Williams makes frequent use of the phrase "social ratification" to denote the effect that the structures of feeling have enacted on popular consciousness. In his conception, culturally articulated history works to legitimate a political economy devised to serve the interests of a select few, at the expense, throughout most of "modern" history, of a rural majority. Popular consciousness is purposively cultivated to institutionalize this system. On the terms of Marxian culturalists, such a system is an "ideological formation," a nexus of ideas and sentiments taken (more often mistaken) as evident reality. (Is it any wonder that a view of what Williams calls the "real history" of rural areas is so difficult to see?)

Terry Eagleton (1991) observes that "ideological formation is rather like a novel" (p. 23). A novel has factual and fictional elements, altered and moved about to suit the theme of a particular work. Clearly, the history of England and its rural areas (as culturally articulated and widely accepted) is just such a novel.

Thus, the canon is so articulated as to propagate an ideology that positions rural areas and rural people as open targets for exploitation and colonization by the interests that guide the capitalist economic structure. It's a version of Locke's liberal political economic in which, however, labor benevolently mixes with resources to produce private property.

Such a theoretical construct, of course, presupposes that free land for working be widely available (i.e., that there is no need to displace or dispossess other individuals) and that all individuals have broadly equal opportunity to access it—a myth, as Williams' deconstructed history demonstrates (e.g., the parliamentary power behind the acts of enclosure). In this way, therefore, as private property accumulates, "the commons" (common land and common-feeling, the very commons of which Paul Theobald has written so eloquently) dwindle proportionately. In Williams' account, 500 years of such history and such economic maneuvering has created the rural world whose surface we educational researchers can barely scratch today. The available cues do not lead us beneath that surface.

Cultural Colonization and the Rural Cultural Worker: Stephen Duck

Stephen Duck, the so-called "thresher-poet," is one of those voices outside the canon (i.e., known patronizingly as "minor poets" within the canon) whom Williams interrogates at his table. The inclusion of Duck's work in this literary history is one feature (among many) that demonstrates the rural quality of this telling.

Duck's history provides a useful, if depressing, example of the impact of cultural manipulation that drives and is driven by economic colonization and exploitation—and of the ways that a dominant cultural structure places limitations on the artist's ability to be "truthful." Shelley called poets "the unacknowledged legislators of the world," people with sufficient insight to see both the truth about the world and ways for living in it well. Of course, they are

to legislate only within the forms prescribed by literary convention. In Duck's case, working within those forms was ruinous to a voice that was fresh, original, and necessary. His success ensured his eventual status as minor poet.

Duck was the real thing, a farm laborer whose early writing gave voice to his own hard-pressed class:

> Let those who feast at ease on dainty Fare
> Pity the reapers, who their Feasts prepare;
> Our toils scarce ever ceasing press us now;
> Rest never does, but on the Sabbath, show;
> And barely that our Masters will allow.
> (Williams, 1973, p. 88)

Noticed by the upper classes and the nobility, Duck was patronized (in both senses of the word) and, through his adoption of the dominant literary forms, subsumed into the culturally-constructed support for the class system his earlier work had so clearly challenged. Significantly, despite the fact that he began to write like his non-laborer counterparts, he was himself never accepted socially. His royal patronage involved serving as a guide to Merlin's Cave, an exhibit at Kew Gardens, a position roughly equivalent to our present-day indigenous peoples of Cherokee, North Carolina who stand by the road and, in full (Sioux) headdress, allow tourists to take their picture for a dollar. So, it is far too easy to brand Duck a sell-out. Like most humans, his options were few and meager.

Now, in this section about Duck, Williams is clearly holding a mirror up to academics. Many of us, in fact, seem to share Duck's fate. Williams notes trenchantly:

> Poets have often lent their tongues to princes, who are in a position to pay or to reply. What has been lent to shepherds, and at what rates of interest, is much more in question. It is not easy to forget that Sidney's *Arcadia,* which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants. The elegant game was then only at arm's length—a rough arm's length—from a visible reality of country life. (p. 22)

That rural areas have been the object of internal colonization by capitalist interests is an aspect of the political economy that has been discussed well and often in the North American context (e.g., Berry, 1972, 1996; Davidson, 1989; Whisnant, 1994). In Duck's history, as in the case of so many other writers from many nations and many time periods (and doubtless including educational researchers), we see that political and economic colonization is mirrored by cultural colonization, and that the two dynamics operate cyclically to reproduce and sustain existing power relations. In the field of economics, Marx (*Capital,* Volume I), for instance, castigated the work of academician Nassau Senior as an apologist for the most egregious era of laissez-faire capitalism in Britain.

Modern counterparts of Nassau Senior will come easily to readers' minds, but the field of education is perhaps more prone to such an influence. A legion of educationists, in virtually every specialty, who know little and care less about rural people and communities prescribe the details of schooling for rural areas. Do these prescriptions necessarily arise from high-minded disinterest? Obviously, we think not. The implications of this cultural and educational colonization are obvious when we consider the rural voices—European and North American; literary and scholarly—that are less likely to be heard because they do not fit within the ideologically and structurally dominant modes of discourse.

Ironically, schooling might do something about this. Usually it has not, since it has so often brought working class teachers into the middle class (e.g., Lortie, 1971), and, in rural areas, often turned them into local elites whose efforts reflect cosmopolitan agendas and interests to the detriment of rural ones. The practical work is pressingly difficult; but so is the scholarly work that might support it.

Curricular Selectivity and Historical Trajectories

Williams (1961) offers pertinent commentary on the decisions we make regarding the content of the schooling experience in "Education and British Society":

> Yet to conduct this business as if it were the distribution of a simple product is wholly misleading. . . . what has been thought of as simple distribution is in fact an active shaping to particular social ends.
>
> The content of education, which is subject to great historical variation, again expresses, again both consciously and unconsciously, certain basic elements in the culture, what is thought of as an education being in fact a particular selection, a particular set of emphases and omissions. (p. 124)

Williams is writing most particularly of the educative potential of mass schooling (i.e., low potential) in intense contradiction with the educative potential of elite schooling (i.e., high). The mass of people are led to kneel before the canon (however rowdy and disorderly their kneeling) but not to understand. The elite need not kneel, but they *had better* understand. This is their story after all, and in their understanding of it lives a kind of power never accessible to the hoi-polloi.

Clearly, the culturally constructed history of England that Williams contends with is an example of this active shaping to social ends (Eagleton's "novel"). As *The Country and the City* demonstrates, specific and questionable images of rural life and rural society have been imbedded within a collective consciousness by a form of cultural colonization. Williams (1961) continues:

> Further, when this selection of content is examined more closely, it will be seen to be one of the most decisive factors effecting its distribution: the cultural choices involved in the selection of content have an organic relation to the social choices involved in the practical organization. If we are to discuss education adequately, we must examine, in historical terms, this organic relation, for to be conscious of a choice made is to be conscious of further and alternative choices available. (p. 125)

There *are* other choices we can make, other artists, writers, philosophers and historians we can include in our curriculum and readings alternative to the ones we have inherited. This observation is consonant with Paul Theobald's (1997) consideration of the *trajectories* defined by the choices (positive and negative) of alternative representations and ways of thinking. Theobald, for instance, considers the trajectory that could have resulted had Winstanley been embraced rather than Hobbes. Williams' argument offers an explanation for the choice: Hobbes was the natural choice because of ideological alignment with the broader consciousness of the (literate) populace, a consciousness that, even in the 17th century, was being defined, imbedded, and sustained by literary images.

Williams' Applicability to the North American Rural Circumstance

Are Williams' historical observations parochial to Britain or do they have wider implications? What about contemporary North America? Where does the application lie here? Several seem likely.

Let us dispose of the misconception that "the country and the city" of reference lie only in Britain. In the line of qualitative research, let us consider Williams' seminal work as a case study, from which we can generalize the findings to theory. The case, in this instance, is a mild sort of deconstruction of British literature.

Williams' major theoretical contribution is the critique of "the retrospective glance," that escalator into the past that never actually reaches ground level. It is curious that every generation back to 1370 posits a vanishing rural idyll. In fact, Williams' key insight is that this idyll is deployed as a means of sentimentalizing, indeed "sanitizing," the always difficult reality of the rural lifeworld.

The imagined rural future lines up conveniently with this sentimentalized history as something that one might *return* to: the future as a reactionary vision. The only alternative seems a vastly postmodern, deracinated, cybernized rural environ, populated, perhaps by techno-wizards. An agrarian future is thus condemned as reactionary or romantic. In this way, a properly rural future (where nature, outdoor work, family, and community define significance) is put out of mind, at least out of the popular mind where its continuance might be dangerous to the new capital, with its techno-colored plans for the rural zone.

Why is rural life so simultaneously vilified and longingly admired? Williams' analysis demonstrates that the two perspectives are consistent. In magazines, books, movies, talk shows, and education research, the two versions serve a genuinely reactionary function with respect to alternative rural futures: they suppress such alternatives. Thoughtful representations of rural life do, of course, appear at the cultural fringes.[1] But among ordinary people (and ordinary researchers), the alternative views remain incomprehensible.

There are short steps from this alternation between nostalgia and vilification, first to reactionary misconceptions of "family values," then to racism and sexism (major themes in the real rural American history), and finally to fantasies of survivalist isolation. Setting this mutually destructive circle in full motion, Williams tells us, helps complete the erosion of "the commons." What of schools? Williams would insist that rural schools play a role in creating new meanings and at least re-imagining the proscribed rural future. They face a monumental struggle to do so, as John Dewey certainly knew.

Williams explains and demonstrates—via his deconstruction of the canon of British literature—how such images are constructed and how they work to the detriment of the rural lifeworld. Williams' theorizing has obvious utility to rural education researchers with a critical bent. But he can perhaps help others to appreciate the usefulness of sharper critique to the project of representing the real complexities of the rural circumstance.

Williams, in fact, enables the doubt to which rural education researchers (working in the scientific mode) are bound to adhere. The tragedy of "normal science" is that it

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[1]View the film *Bottomland* for one of the rare exceptions. The film, a winner at the Houston film festival, is the work of carpenter-director-writer Edward Radtke and was shot on the farm where he worked as a youth. He financed *Bottomland* working construction and borrowing from friends and credit card lenders. The movie is indeed from "the margins": Radtke was arrested for robbery at 16 and a father at 17. *Dream-catchers* is a newly released film by Radtke. (source: http://www.bigbeef.com/dreamcat/notes.htm)

deploys too little doubt about things that matter, and great doubt about things that matter little. Most of us do too much of the one and too little of the other. Williams' counsel, if heard, can help rural education researchers wriggle out of the strictures of conventional wisdom that so often confine their investigations to a canon of trite preoccupations. The next time you apply for a grant, Williams might advise, remember Stephen Duck.

Coda/Epilog

An American version of Williams' study might well produce details and patterns consistent with those in *The Country and the City*. But then, Williams was not only writing about the depiction of *England's* rural communities; he was writing about their depiction in the curiously dated domain of *great literature*. In contemporary North America, such literature is now widely regarded as being as useless as philosophy, serviceable principally as an adornment of the elite.

In the contexts examined by Williams, however, literature was *the* dominant mode of purveying ideas about the world, albeit with a limited audience. Only the elite could access them. Today, by contrast, we have movies and television. It's a comparison that worked for Williams (see *The Politics of Modernism*, 1989): both involve artists, and other cultural workers such as researchers, subsidized—directly and indirectly—by a corporate elite whose continued success depends partly on the dissemination of a supportive ideology. As the dominant modes of communication in contemporary society, these media might be more applicable to a Williams-type deconstruction effort.

Eagleton (1991) tells us that marginalized people must be *actively taught* the ideology that condemns them to their fate. Williams' work in *The Country and the City* unpacks an extensive curriculum that has been implemented to teach an ideology that has served to marginalize rural areas in both England and North America. If this is an ideology that can be actively taught, so can other ideologies. Rural education researchers should be wondering why so few do.

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