Structure of feeling and autobiography in *The country and the city*[1]

Luiz Carlos Jackson*
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6269-6096
Ugo Rivetti**
http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3368-7219
Dimitri Pinheiro*
http://orcid.org/0000-001-7907-9943

Introduction

This article examines Raymond Williams' book under two key aspects. On the one hand, we attempt to explain the uses and meanings of "structure of feeling", which organizes the book's argument as a kind of analytical tool[2]. On the other hand, we will discuss the frequent autobiographical passages that reinforce the reflective and political tone of this work.

The book achieved great editorial and academic success, both in England and the United States. It was reviewed in major newspapers and magazines (e.g., *The Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *Sunday Times*, and *Sunday Telegraph*), as well as prestigious academic and cultural journals (e.g., *Times Literary Supplement*, *The New*

* Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil.
** Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Espírito Santo, Brasil.

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2. This notion had previously appeared in several of his works, but never so emphatically. It is mainly seen at: *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952), *Drama in performance* (1954), *Culture and society* (1958), *The long revolution* (1961), *Modern tragedy* (1966), *The English novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970) and *Marxism and literature* (1977).

York Review of Books, *Yale Review*, and *Times Book Review*). The book also gave rise to a documentary presented by Williams himself, produced and broadcasted by the BBC in 1979[3].

The book's subtitle, "in history and literature", indicates its scope and ambition. In general, the analysis of the structures of feeling present in different expressive forms, mainly poetry and novels, emphasises the imbrications between history and literature, at a time when both were transformed by the advance of agrarian capitalism and its ensuing social and political effects. Present in almost every chapter, Williams mobilises this analytical instrument within a long-term historical reconstitution[4]. It is precisely these various occurrences, alongside significant autobiographical passages, that this article intends to examine.

The author assumes that literature actively integrates a complex historical process. In his characteristic method, Williams interprets texts from its historical inscription and history through literary analysis. In this regard, we disagree with De Bolla (1995), for whom *The country and the city* merely presents a juxtaposition between literary analysis and economic and social history. In this sense, we align ourselves with Lizzie e John Eldridge, who believe that the "the pendulum-like movement between the literature and the social experience is an inevitable aspect of Williams' methodological approach" (Eldridge and Eldridge, 1994, p. 126).

The subtitle also points to his broader position-taking within the British intellectual field and its disputes among the various opposing strands of literary critics and historians in the 1920-1970s period. Conditioned by the expansion of the educational system at different levels, such disputes led literary criticism to a prominent position in the public debate whilst consigning historiography to a more specialized position. This conflict intensified after the Second World War, especially in the 1960s, when historians, counterattacking literary critics, imposed themselves on the public debate (Collini, 2019).

The implications do not end here. Disciplinary dispute, in turn, was politically charged. Believing that literature evidenced more general continuities and changes in both language and ways of living, critics emphasised literature's central position within culture. Functioning above all as a privileged way of evaluating the "quality of life" in English society, they directly criticized industrialism and its presumed cultural degradation. Historians, however, saw the transformations triggered by

3. *The country and the city: A film with Raymond Williams* (1979). Directed by: Mike Dibbs. Executive producer: Christopher Martin. Where We Live Now: Five Writers Look at Our Surroundings, BBC (60 min.). Available at: <http://mikedibb.co.uk/filmdet.php?filmid=30>. Access: 15 Jun. 2020.
4. This contrasts with previous works, such as *Culture and society* and *The long revolution*. In these the concept appears only in specific chapters, analyzing shorter-term historical processes.

the industrial revolution positively, sometimes even enthusiastically, and stressed the gains arising from such changes. As such, they believed that it was via archival research related to political and diplomatic activities that the standards of disciplinary excellence lay.

Thus, the "pendular movement" between literature and social experience would not only have conceptual and methodological implications but also disciplinary and political ones, inscribing Williams' intellectual production in a field of interrelated disputes. As we intend to demonstrate, these circumstances are especially important in the course of the analysis undertaken in *The country and the city*, which occasionally claims literary criticism as a counterpoint to Marxist historians whilst also converging with Marxists to deny the conservatism of critics.

Pastoral and counter-pastoral

Let us commence with the book's dedication, "For the country workers who were my grandparents", its first autobiographical reference and that signals a particular point of view. By naming all his four grandparents, from its very first words Williams unequivocally points to his rural ancestry. This is a decisive move since it announces a personal and political engagement central to his argument, which is, in turn, informed by his social experience[5]. It is also worth noting the use of "country workers" instead of "peasants". Here the author equals country and urban workers. Had he chosen "peasantry" and "proletariat" instead, it would have established a great difference between the two[6].

The explicitation of the social, geographic, and family origins immediately continues in the first chapter, "Country and city". After stating the book's subject, reconstituting the aforesaid contrast from its usual meanings, as well as the positive and negative values associated with both, there is a long autobiographical reflection in which we highlight the following:

> This importance can be stated, and will have to be assessed, as a general problem. *But it is as well to say at the outset that this has been for me a personal issue, for as long as I remember* (Williams, 1975a, p. 2, our emphasis).

5. It is extremely likely that Willians was inspired by a similar strategy adopted by Richard Hoggart's (1918-2014) *The uses of literacy* (1957). The difference here is that Hoggart's autobiography is used much more directly and centrally in his argument.
6. This question involves an important debate in English Marxism: the status of dominated groups in rural society in the long transition from feudalism to capitalism in Great Britain.

Initially referring to his birthplace in a village on the Welsh border, Williams testifies the changes triggered by the development of capitalism already then – "I saw them on the ground" (Williams, 1975a, p. 4) – revealing the impropriety of representations about the field as a separate, stable, or timeless reality. Then, after listing recurring images of the countryside in his memory, he mentions his father and grandfather, both rural workers who had been displaced to other activities: the first as a railway signalman and the second as a road worker[7]. "He had been as much born to the land as his own father, yet, like him, he could not live by it" (Williams, 1975a, p. 4).

As the chapter ends, Williams refers to the migration between country and city, a process that involves Williams' own experience as someone who moved between these spaces via a formal education path, first as a student and then reaching the highest echelons of the English educational system as a Cambridge Professor. In an acid remark, he mentions that he would come to know the "reality" of the country at the university, through researchers or authors disconnected from rural society and, even less so, its workers. His unease is made explicit by the admission of the problematic character of his own conversion into an "academic intellectual" (Coser, 1997): "[...] I found I was by virtue or default of an intellectual appointment an aspect, an unwilling member, of a collective and perpetual landlord [...]" (Williams, 1975a, p. 6).

Especially concerning the way rural workers are portrayed, from the second chapter onwards, his autobiography is correlated with the description and analysis of successive "structures of feeling" pertaining to the development of English capitalism and its effects on the country and the city (as well as its interrelationships). In this way, Williams' memory and experience would serve as a counterpoint to the various "structures of feeling" described in the text, allowing him to evaluate each inherited bias. This modus operandi renders a permanent self-reflective and political emphasis, as a result of Williams' identification with the situation of rural workers in a changing English society[8].

7. Williams' aim is not to present an alternative canon, but to challenge the very idea of canonic tradition and the notion of critique active in the works of Leavis, to whom formal aspects must always be considered in relation to moral standards. Thus Leavis idea of great art's mature and impersonal character: "The maturity of the author and the formal excellence of the novel come together in what might be called the practice of impersonality" (Higgins, 1999, p. 78). Therefore, great art can only be produced by a mature personality, distinguished by its intelligence and self-awareness. That is why, according to this view, when evaluating a particular work, the critic must compare it to what the critical tradition defined as the ideal standard: "In the ideal novel, a mature judgement of life is fully embodied in the visionary textuality of the writing. The task of the critic is to assess how far particular novels are able to go in releasing the ideals, and to offer criticism and correction where necessary" (Higgins, 1999, p. 78). That is why, for Leavis, the critic must always direct their attention to the tradition to which the particular work belongs.
8. This autobiographical approach is not restricted to *The country and the city*. As David Simpson (1995, pp. 31-32) highlights, Williams' work as a whole displays a very particular voice. Whatever his text (cri-

The term "structure of feeling" *first appears* at the end of chapter 2, "A problem of perspective". There Williams suggests that England has a reiterative movement of appreciation of the past and its traditional rural life. Writers of the late 19th century refer to the traditional countryside of the mid-19th century, whereas those of the latter refers to the late 18th century and so on, successively, until the beginning of agrarian capitalism around the early 16th century. Thus, at each step, there was no revaluation of a stable and harmonious traditional world. Instead, in each case, these assessed different stages in the long development of English capitalism. These considerations lead to a methodological reflection in the last paragraph:

> The witnesses we have summoned raise questions of historical fact and perspective, but they raise questions, also, of literary fact and perspective. The things they are saying are not all in the same mode. They range, as facts, from a speech in a play and a passage in a novel to an argument in an essay and a note in a journal. When the facts are poems, they are also, and perhaps crucially, poems of different kinds. We can only analyse these important structures of feeling if we make, from the beginning, these critical discriminations (Williams, 1975a, p. 12).

This first occurrence is one of the few that more directly confronts the methodological status of the concept, probably revealing his intentions of not stifling it and, instead, allowing it to be adjusted in each research project (and at each step of his argument), depending on the problem at hand[9]. In any case, although this is not a systematic definition, Williams reveals some of its features. First, by examining different authorial perspectives according to each particular social position, then crystallized in various literary genders (e.g., novels, plays, essays, journals and poems), the structure of feeling would make it possible to restore the links between "literary facts" and "historical facts". Second, it is also worth noting that, at the end of the passage, he discreetly claims the approach of literary criticism, associated here on equal footing with history and stealthily re-enacting the aforementioned clash between critics and historians.

We find the *second occurrence* approximately in the middle of chapter 3, "Pastoral and counter-pastoral". There we find the most frequent use of the notion, associated

tical, creative, or journalistic), the author would always assume a "dramatic" mode of writing, whereby Williams would present his own experience as historically representative.

9. Williams develops a similar line of thought over a long interview given to the *New Left Review* in the late 1970s: "[...] the key to the notion, both to all it can do and to all the difficulties it still leaves, is that it as developed as an analytic procedure for actual written works, ith a very strong stress on their forms and conventions [...] To this day I find that I keep coming back to this notion from the actual experience of literary analysis rather than from any theoretical satisfaction with the concept itself" (Williams, 1975b, p. 159).

with the deciphering of a certain literary material and inscribed in a specific historical conjuncture in the long development of English capitalism:

> Yet at the centre of the *structure of feeling* which is here in question – a relation between the country houses and a responsible civilisation – are poems to actual places and men: notably Ben Jonson's "Penhurst" and "To Sir Robert Wroth", and Thomas Carew's "To Saxham". These are not, in any simple sense, pastoral or neo-pastoral, but they use a particular version of country life as a way of expressing, in the form of a compliment to a house or its owner, certain social and moral values (Williams, 1975a, p. 27).

Opening with the first mention of the poet George Crabbe (1754-1832), this chapter begins an extensive part of the book, dedicated to the analysis of the country-houses ideology. The poems analyzed both in this chapter and in the following one – "Golden Ages" – are formed by a set of 17th-century poems that celebrated the countryside and manor houses in opposition to the city and the court. According to Williams, these new constructions would come to symbolize the consolidation of English agrarian capitalism, in opposition to the fortified castles that were representative of the previous phase. In this manner, written by poets subordinated to patronage, such poems can be understood as the apology of a proprietary class that is already then capitalist. Through a "structure of feeling" that valued the countryside to detriment of the city, one which praised an already capitalist countryside connected to the city and that ignored the existence of workers, these poems would, then, point to the internal disputes of dominant groups.

This specific analysis is excellent for capturing the logic of the argument developed in *The country and the city*. It explores successive "structures of feeling" and the way these are conditioned by class struggles shaping the advance of agrarian capitalism in England. It is also worth saying that the country and the city would not be antipodes, but articulated parts of the same advancing capitalist order.

The *third occurrence* of the term occurs at the beginning of chapter 4:

> The *structure of feeling* within which this backward reference is to be understood is then not primarily a matter of historical explanation and analysis. What is really significant is this particular kind of reaction to the fact of change, and this has more real and more interesting social causes (Williams, 1975a, p. 35).

Here Williams suggests that each "structure of feeling" is related to a certain ongoing change. The general problem would then be, in historical terms, "the nature of the capitalist transition" (Williams, 1975a, p. 36) as part of a long process

consisting not so much in the decline of a previous social order but in the "vigorous, often brutally vigorous, growth" of a new order, when "the new kind of landlord was at last in control" (Williams, 1975a, p. 39). A new order that became dominant in the wake of the Civil War (1642-1651) and the Restoration (1688-1689) and which was based on the country-houses, "the visible centres of the new social system" (Williams, 1975a, p. 39).

Another important aspect of this transition would be related to the various fractions of "the intermediate groups" (Williams, 1975a, p. 43), which were affected and reacted differently by the advance of this new social system. However, the instability of the positions reached as a result of new cycles of land incorporation and enclosure would undermine the possibilities of progression for both these groups and their intellectual attitudes, identified with these and exemplified by Thomas More's *Utopia*.

The *fourth occurrence* is found at the beginning of chapter 5, "Town and country", and emphasizes another dimension of the structures of feeling analyzed there: the tensions between the rural and urban fractions of the ruling class.

> Yet the eventual structure of feeling is not based only on an idea of the happier past. It is based also on that other and associated idea of innocence: the rural innocence of the pastoral, neo-pastoral and reflective poems. The key to its analysis is the contrast of country with the city and the court: here nature, there worldliness (Williams, 1975a, p. 46).

This passage retrieves the clash between country and urban life, whose apparent and real meanings originate from the examination of comedies during the reign of James I (1603-1625) and the Restoration. Conditioned by both the development of capitalism and the present forms of social integration, above all the marriage market, Willians emphasizes the links between the various fractions of the ruling class – between large (aristocracy) and middle (gentry) landowners, large merchants, lawyers, and politicians – without minimizing their disputes. By the end of the chapter, Williams warns that literature expressed the disputes between such class fractions while it disregarded the main contradiction, i.e., between owners and workers, whereas the latter is made invisible by a "fiction" whose logic would be "to promote superficial comparisons and to prevent real ones" (Williams, 1975a, p. 54).

After an analysis of Marvell's poem "Upon Appleton House", in the middle of the sixth chapter, "Their destiny their choice", we find the *fifth occurrence*. This poem deals with the settlement between the opposing sides of the 1640-1688 Revolution and the property transactions of victors. In the poem in question, it is a country-house, built on the site of a former nunnery, that typifies this arrangement and the ambivalent meaning of the ongoing political and economic transformations:

> What eventually emerged, from these complicated settlements, was a very different structure of feeling. Marvell's poem is truly transitional: a complication of feeling between an old order and a new. We can see the critical folly of assimilating all country-house poems to a single tradition, as if their occupants were some kind of unbroken line. In its extreme forms this is a true reification of the houses themselves: the house, and the by derivation its occupants, being the evident sign of an order, even though this order was being continually reconstituted by the political and economic formation of a new aristocracy and then a new agrarian capitalism (Williams, 1975a, p. 58).

Thus, there was a gradual change in country-houses poems: From those which celebrated country-houses for their supposedly traditional values, such as "Penhurst" (1616) and "To Saxham" (1640), although referring to properties whose agricultural production was already destined for the market[10], to those which tended to assimilate the ongoing changes as desirable, such as Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" (1651), Alexander Pope's "Epistle to Bathurst" (1733) and Alexander Pope's "Epistle to Burlington" (1731), as long as there was some charitable attitude to counterbalance the impoverishment of workers[11].

However, the main transformation would consist in the transition of a rural property naturally inherited to a capitalist one, "subsidiary to the uses of money and productive investment" (p. 59). During this movement, man's work became more valued than the disordered natural paradise and a new structure of feeling (its *sixth occurrence*), in the form of a "morality of improvement", would surface[12]:

> Much of the *Epistle to Burlington* is near the head of that important eighteenth-century tradition of house-building and landscape-gardening, in which, as the new morality of improvement, the country was reshaped and redesigned. It is a condemnation of useless show and hollow palaces, as Jonson or Marvell might have expressed it, but it is also a conscious recommendation of how to build, how to lay out a park or a garden; the improvement of Nature: "In all, let Nature never be forgot./ But treat the Goddess like a modest fair,/ Nor

10. Described in Eric Hobsbawm's *The age of revolution* (1962).
11. Although Williams does not take this issue as much into account, it is worth noting that most of the writers of the period belonged to an Anglican and nonconformist intellectual elite: the clerics or parish priests responsible for the presbyteries, who are also recurring characters in the English novels of the 18th and 19th centuries. Educated at Cambridge and Oxford, an experience that possibly allowed some independence of opinion in relation to large and small landowners, these both descended and rendered religious and intellectual services for these landowners. Their point of view, in relation to the nobility, would then be more sensitive to the problems of the dominated classes.
12. "Improvement" refers both to the aesthetic changes in the house and garden and to the introduction of new agricultural production techniques and capitalist labour relations.

> over-dress, nor leave her wholly bare". In this persuasive recommendation a new structure of feeling has become explicit, as part of a new economy (Williams, 1975a, p. 59).

The eighth chapter, "Nature's threads", is of great interest to us. In addition to articulating "structure of feeling" and autobiography, it also contains five occurrences of the term. Let us see the *seventh occurrence* of the term in the book, right in the first paragraph of this chapter:

> It is in Young's eighteenth century – in the changes and contradiction of that rural England which he both helped to promote and incomparably recorded – that we find not only the genial accommodation of Fielding, the desperate and specialised fears of Richardson, but also a new and more serious social version of the lost peace and virtue of country life. The poems to the happy tenant, the idealised and independent self of the reflective pastoral tradition, are succeeded by poems of loss, change, regret: that structure of feeling, at once moved and mediating, appalled and withdrawn, which is caught so exactly in Goldsmith's couplet: "E'en now, methinks, as pondering here I stand/ I see the rural virtues leave the land" (Williams, 1975a, p. 68).

Characteristic of the period and its ongoing accelerating changes in the agrarian economy, whereupon both positive and negative assessments could be found, such as the one given by "the increase of corn-growing and corn exports" (Williams, 1975a, p. 69) or the growing reservations about the negative consequences for workers, in this paragraph an ambivalent "structure of feeling" emerges.

According to the excerpt that contains the *eighth occurrence* (the second in the chapter), the direct mention of workers in a poem by James Thomson (1700-1748) would be the innovative element of a changing structure of feeling:

> These "partners", the poor, had been the excluded element in the panegyric of order and plenty, and it is in a growing admission of their existence that the structure of feeling has changed. Thonson even goes on to reflect the relatively new recognition – it is basically an eighteenth-century "discovery" by the educated upper classes – that "the poor" are not simply a charitable burden, a weight on the economy, but the actual producers of wealth: Ye/ masters, then/ Be mindful of the/ rough laborious hand/ That sinks you soft in/ elegance, and ease (Williams, 1975a, p. 70).

Such discovery was accompanied by the emergence of a new tone of "melancholy and thoughtful withdrawal" (Williams, 1975a, p. 71) – as seen in the poem by William Cowper (1731-1800), from where Williams took the chapter's title, "Nature's

threads" –, through which the celebration of capitalist economy is counterbalanced by the register of its disruptive processes. Ahead, aiming to deepen the characterization of this structure of feeling, Williams compares it to an earlier, markedly conservative one, captured by Robert Herrick's (1591-1674) 17th-century poem, "A thanksgiving".

At this point, the author once again recalled a memory. He says that as a child he read Herrick's poem and was bothered by how it represented the poor in a prejudiced way. Years later, he would have confirmed this first childhood impression by reading another of his poems, thus opposing the favourable assessment of the poet that was then predominant in Cambridge. The autobiographical account then reinforces Williams' alignment with rural workers, the engaged bias that this position attributes to his analysis, and his problematic entry into the British academic establishment.

Nevertheless, as we can see in the *ninth occurrence*, the overcoming of this naïve and appeasing point of view would be the decisive step towards the emergence of the eighteenth-century changing structure of feeling: "It is this sense of farewell to simplicity that is the ultimate element of the new structure of feeling" (Williams, 1975a, p. 73).

However, this "farewell to simplicity" would not be easily achieved, and Williams notes the juxtaposition of appeasing and realist/critical views in various poems. Inherent to the structure of feeling under analysis, this tension is observed in the *tenth occurrence*:

> It cannot really be had both ways: the luck of the "cool sequester'd vale" and the acknowledged repression of "chill Penury". But in this structure of feeling, temporarily, the ambiguities of the appeal to simplicity were held and mediated (Williams, 1975a, p. 74).

According to the *eleventh occurrence*, this ambiguity would be progressively undone in favour of a more defined polarization, whose first signs Williams identifies in Goldsmith's poem "The deserted village", and that would foreshadow the unfolding of the romantic structure of feelings:

> Here, with unusual precision, what we can later call a Romantic structure of feeling – the assertion of nature against industry and of poetry against trade; the isolation of humanity and community into the idea of culture, against the real social pressures of the time – is projected. We can catch its echoes, exactly, in Blake, in Wordsworth, and Shelley (Williams, 1975a, p. 79).

The remainder of the chapter proceeds to examine the transition to Romanticism, starting from the analysis of John Langhorne's (1735-1779) poetic production at the

end of the 18th century, which shows the worsening of the social situation of rural workers with the advance of capitalism. The emergence of a contingent of people in a situation of penury and "vagrancy" would be the effect of both the justice system's and the state apparatus' inability to remedy this process, whose cause, however, would not be perceived by the poet. Langhorne's identification with the propertied class – he was married to the daughter of a landowner and had become a justice of the peace – would prevent him from perceiving the direct involvement of this class in the ongoing capitalist development and the dissolution of the rural community. According to Williams, Langhorne understands migration (one of the alternatives embraced by workers who lost their place in the new system) as a maladjustment and not as a consequence of economic displacement. This argument would have a long continuity in English literature, being mobilized by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) in the 20th century, and opposed by Williams through another autobiographical reflection at the very end of the chapter, where he justifies the exodus not by disinterestedness of the village, but by the impossibility of remaining there:

> I know these also personally: not only because I had to move out for an education and go on with a particular kind of work; but because the whole region in which I was born has been steadily and terribly losing its people, who can no longer make a living there. When I hear the idealisation of settlement, I do not need to borrow the first feelings; I know in just that sense, what neighbourhood means, and what is involved in separation and leaving. But I know, also, why people have had to move, why so many moved in my own family. So that I then see the idealisation of the settlement, in its ordinary literary-historical version, as an insolent indifference to most people's needs (Williams, 1975a, p. 84).

Again, the autobiographical passage directly inserts the author into the problem, stressing his identification with the rural working class. Yet, in this passage specifically, we can see his difficulty in dealing with the decision to go off to study and then establish himself as an academic intellectual, as if he could not entirely overcome feeling guilty about his decision.

Chapter nine, "Bred to till the earth", can be understood as the end of the book's first part (from the second chapter onwards), centred on the analysis of country-houses poetry. Perhaps its argument can be summarized by the contrast between two typical structures of feeling, bucolic and anti-bucolic: the first, close to an ideology of the country-house and the second, in contrast, of realistic intentions[13].

13. In the first occurrence of the term "structure of feeling" in *Culture and society*, Williams states that "changes in convention only occur when there are radical changes in the general structure of feeling",

The slow transformation underwent by the structure of feeling from "Penhurst" and "To Saxham" to Crabbe's reaction constitutes, then, the argumentative axis of this first part, synthesized in the *twelfth occurrence* of the term, a commentary on an emblematic passage from a poem by the same Crabbe, which opens chapter 9:

> No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain/ But own the Village Life a life of pain. Crabbe's insistence is now easier to understand. The observation is that of Goldsmith or Langhorne, but in a new structure of feeling, which can dispense with retrospect. What is seen, in a new convention, is an existing, active and social contrast. The energy of the new convention springs from a rejection of "pastoral" (Williams, 1975a, p. 87).

The realistic intention in Crabbe's *The village* can be verified by its constant mention of workers, which then justifies Williams' hypothesis that the writer would have reached a more sensitive view of the working class, in relation to owners, because of his relative independence as a clergyman. Yet, he was not able to completely break with the bucolic perspective. Since he did not pay attention to the factors that produced poverty – the capitalist development of agricultural production and the economic orientation of the noble landowner – Crabbe focused on the assistance needs of indigents[14].

Hence, if Crabbe had a truthful "realistic intention" (the objective consciousness demanded by Williams), he would have attributed to the propertied class and its country-houses direct responsibility for both the economic exploitation of the working class and the disparity between the life-of dominant and dominated classes.

From capitalism to industrialism

Seeking to explain the process underlying the evolution of structures of feeling (the *thirteenth occurrence*), in chapter 10, "Enclosures, commons and communities", Williams makes a historical digression by which he summarizes the book's argument up to that point:

(Williams, 1983, p. 39). This seems to be precisely the point here, in the transition from bucolic to anti-bucolic.

14. Crabbe's ambiguous solution, according to our interpretation, would be based on the ambivalence of his social position. On the one hand, dependent, since the presbyteries were located in the interior of the lands of the nobility, and because clerics depended on the endorsement of the nobles to occupy it. On the other hand, however, independent, since clerics were religious authorities and had academic training.

> Yet there is a sense in which the idea of the enclosures, localised to just that period in which the Industrial Revolution was beginning, can shift our attention form the real history and become an element of that very powerful myth of modern England in which the transition from rural to an industrial society is seen as a kind of fall, the true cause and origin of our social suffering and disorder. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this myth, in modern social thought. It is a main source for the structure of feeling which we begin by examining: the perpetual retrospect to an "organic" or "natural" society. But it is also a main source for that last protecting illusion in the crisis of our own time: that is not capitalism which is injuring us, but the more isolable, more evident system of urban industrialism (Williams, 1975a, p. 96).

In this chapter, Williams defends the hypothesis that the emergence of urban industrialism should not be thought away from the broader, long-term process of capitalist development that includes the rural economy, commerce, manufacturing etc., that is to say, the entire economic system[15].

In this way, enclosures (that were intensified from the late 18th century onwards) and the Industrial Revolution were stages in the development of capitalism and not entirely new processes. In rural society, these transformations implied the expansion of cultivated land, the concentration of ownership, the expulsion of workers and the gradual advance of capitalist relations of production, exemplified bythe "economic system of landlord, tenant and labourer" (Williams, 1975a, p. 107). This would become generalized despite the intermediate stage that had favoured the remedied fraction of the peasantry, the "yeoman" (later negatively affected by the unfolding of capitalist development). Regardless, claims for "small rights", such as the free extraction of firewood, permission to grow crops on available areas of large properties, beekeeping, fruit collection, etc. were considered legitimate demands, albeit marginal – as forms of resistance against capitalist exploitation. The following autobiographical reflection supports this point:

> When I was a child my father had not only the garden that went with his cottage, but a strip for potatoes on a farm where he helped in the harvest, and two gardens which he rented

15. We can assume that this general thesis nods to Eric Hobsbawm's argument in the chapter "The Industrial Revolution" of *The age of revolutions*. There it is argued that the English lead as a precursor of industrial development was not of a technological order, but instead of an economic nature, given the capitalist orientation of its agriculture. Although not explicitly acknowledging Hobsbawm's influence here, he is quoted by Williams once in the book, at the beginning of chapter 17: "Yet there was always a contradiction in English agrarian capitalism: its economics were those of a market order; its politics were those of a self-styled aristocracy squirearchy, exerting quite different and 'traditional' disciplines and controls. This contradiction has been seen (by Hobsbawm and Rudé) as the most convincing explanation of the notorious Speenhamland and its effects" (Williams, 1975a, p. 182).

> from the railway company from which he drew his wages. Such marginal possibilities are important not only for their produce, but for their direct and immediate satisfactions and for the felt reality of an area of control of one's own immediate labour (Williams, 1975a, p. 102-103).

For the remainder of the chapter, one can glimpse Williams' perception of what would be the most realistic and consequent political consciousness. Once again resorting to his own social trajectory, he argues that the cause of the disruptive processes would be the brutal economic exploitation prevailing in English agrarian capitalism, which was then carried out by the propertied class and symbolized by the country-house:

> It has always seemed to me, from some relevant family experience, that the distance or absence of one of those great houses' of the landlords can be a critical factor in the survival of a traditional kind of community: that of tolerant neighbourliness (Williams, 1975a, p. 105).

Later in the *fourteenth occurrence*, Williams identifies in William Cobbett, one of the "Three around Farnham", title of chapter 11, the strengthening of the structure of feeling more clearly identified with workers and their exploitation. Articulated by his "*rich land* and *poor workers*" (Cobbett *apud* Williams, 1975a, p. 109), the reason for Cobbett grasping this realistic awareness could be found, according to Williams, in his modest social origin, as the son of a small farmer:

> The structure of feeling that had held in direct appeal and in internal moral discrimination – the moral case, the moral warning, of such verse as Goldsmith's or Crabbe's – was now necessarily transformed into a different order of thinking and feeling. The maturity of capitalism as a system was forcing systematic organisation against it (Williams, 1975a, p. 112).

Only partially incorporated into Jane Austen's novels for example, which was also analyzed in the chapter as a counterpoint to Cobbett's perspective, this consciousness would imply a change of convention, through which the interaction between classes became the axis of a new type of novel, especially from the 1830s onwards. Although both Austen and Cobbett were based in the same region and were attentive to the same changes, they personified different points of view, conditioned by their distinct social origins, since she was the daughter of a gentry clergyman[16]: "Cobbett

16. The chapter title alludes to three writers, of whom the third, Gilbert White, is less important for the development of the chapter and also for our argument.

and Jane Austen mark two ways of seeing, two contrasted viewpoints, within the same country" (Williams, 1975a, p. 118)[17].

When the demand for a new conception of nature would be associated with an equally new poetic experience, another new variant of the anti-bucolic structure of feeling would emerge with the Romantic poets of the early 19th century, analyzed in chapter 13, "The green language". Although Williams does not establish an explicit relationship here[18], it is possible to link the chapter "The romantic artist" from *Culture and society* (1958) and the author's hypothesis that in the context of English Romanticism (between the 18th and 19th centuries) "there is a radical change also in ideas of art, of the artist, and of their place in society" (Williams, 1983, p. 32). According to Williams, it is within the framework of these transformations that the poet's new social position, of greater autonomy (the artist would no longer be subject to patronage, but to the market) must be understood. In turn, the basis of this new structure of feeling (the *fifteenth occurrence*) was expressed by authors such as Wordsworth and, chiefly, by Clare:

> Thus an essential isolation and silence and loneliness have become the only carriers of nature and community against the rigours, the cold abstinence, the selfish ease of ordinary society. It is a complex structure of feeling, but in its achievement a decisive phase of what must still be called country writing has been inaugurated (Williams, 1975a, p. 131).

Extracted from a poem by Clare and based on the experience of the English Romantic poet, Williams posits that such a structure could be summarized by the expression "green language". The "nature" inscribed in the poems would be the condensation of Clare's "creative imagination" (Williams, 1975a, p. 132), the only able to access the deep reality of life and nature. In addition to being a "romantic artist", Clare was also a "labourer-poet", and this social origin would similarly imply a more realistic and critical point of view regarding the ongoing transformations,

17. Perhaps Williams' view of Jane Austen could be more favorable if he considered her feminine condition and the gender relations within which she found herself, i.e., had he responded to her context, not only as representative of the gentry but also as woman, while it was also worth noting the weight of female authorship in the 19th century English novel, in large part due to her importance. Regardless, Williams is most interested in the author's acute awareness of the interactions between the different fractions of the ruling classes, which revolve around the big question of the matrimonial market and the tensions between country and city, with the former being clearly privileged by Austen as the space of an authentic life, specially by educated nobility, so valued by her and to which she belonged to.
18. If there is no explicit step in this direction, there are some passages that support this statement, such as the following: "But it was a new kind of poet, as it was a new kind of nature, that was now being formed" (Williams, 1975a, p. 133).

especially concerning the enclosures. In the same chapter there are two more occurrences of the term (*sixteenth and seventeenth occurrences*), exemplary of these combined dispositions (of the romantic artist and the rural worker):

> And then it is very much to the point that the first general word chosen to describe the instigators of the "curse" of enclosure is "tasteless". This connects with that structure of feeling which was beginning to form, from Goldsmith to the poets of the Romantic movement and which is particularly visible in Clare: the loss of the "old country" is a loss of poetry; the cultivation of natural feeling is dispossessed by the consequences of improved cultivation of the land; wealth is not only hard and cruel but tasteless (Williams, 1975a, p. 137).

In both this and the following occurrence, Williams notes in Clare's poems the union between the romantic appreciation of nature with the critical view of improvements, made possible by the poet's humble origins:

> As a way of seeing the dispossession of labour by capital, this is exact. but it is set in a structure of feeling in which what wealth is most visibly destroying is "Nature": that complex of the land as it was, in the past and in childhood, which both ageing and alteration destroy (Williams, 1975a, p. 138).

Clare's familial origin, as the son of a farmer, would also justify Williams' identification with the poet in yet another autobiographical passage, this time reinforcing the critic's analytical perspective and guiding, as we have seen, by his identification with the rural worker:

> Over a century and a half I can recognise what Clare is describing: particular trees, and a particular brook, by which I played as a child, have gone in just this way, in the last few years, in a improved use of marginal land (Williams, 1975a, p. 138).

From chapter 14 ("Change in the city") onwards the analysis is shifted to the city, or rather to a new moment in the relationship between the country and the city, which results from the Industrial Revolution. Until the end of the 18th century, the city (and especially London) "was the astonishing creation of an agrarian and mercantile capitalism, within an aristocratic and political order" (Williams, 1975a, p. 146).

In the 19th century it was "the creation of industrial capitalism" and the emergence of this new type of city that would result in ambivalent representations in poems, novels, and essays. In any case, the various authors of that period – Henry

Fielding (1707-1754), Adam Smith (1723-1790), William Blake (1757-1827), William Cobbett (1763-1835) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850) – would share a new perspective, informed by the urban experience and by "a new set of physical and sense relationships" (Williams, 1975a, p. 150). This was the very matter of Charles Dickens' novels (1812-1870), whom the writer analyzed in the following chapter, "People of the city", and where the notion of structure of feeling is again mobilized to apprehend the writer's "fictional method":

> This method is very remarkable. It has its basis, of course, in certain properties of the language: perceptions of relations between persons and things. But in Dickens it is critical. It 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 (Williams, 1975a, p. 158).

This structure of feeling (the *eighteenth occurrence*) refers specifically to London, not industrial cities. Unlike the latter, which would tend towards uniformity, the metropolis was an ancient city in transformation, rendering its heterogeneity and "apparent randomness". Consequently, the contradiction or paradox between "the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured" would be the core feature of this structure of feeling. What Dickens' novels dramatize, without falling into simplifying conclusions, is precisely the constant perception of change and the emergence of a new order that was centred on the metropolis and that was the "capital city of a complex national and overseas economy and society" (Williams, 1975a, p.154).

Specifically, what distinguishes Dickens' novels is the "way of seeing" that does not frame the city and its characters in a Manichean or teleological way. Instead, it problematizes the relationships between individuals, social institutions, and the material city (streets, avenues, buildings, rivers, air) as imbricated dimensions of experience both in reality and within the novels. Hence the recurrence of characters' names referring to institutions and moral orientations, in addition to attributing human traits to houses and buildings – "the experience of the city is the fictional method; or the fictional method is the experience of the city" (Williams, 1975a, p. 154). As such, without even foreseeing a likely outcome, Dickens' work thus reaches "the dynamic centre of this transforming social experience" (Williams, 1975a, p. 164).

In the following chapters (16, 17 and 18) the rural theme is reestablished in a direct dialogue with F.R. Leavis' *The great tradition* (1948). Initially approached from the relations of continuity and discontinuity with Jane Austen, chapter 16, "Knowable communities", is centred on George Eliot's novels. The term "knowable

communities" refers to the fractions of social reality extracted by novelists to constitute a space for fictional analysis and creation.

In this sense, Jane Austen's knowable community would be the "network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen" (Williams, 1975a, p. 166). In contrast George Eliot, according to Williams, having an unfavourable social origin if compared to her predecessor (although their roots are superficially and hastily characterized), would portray different fractions of the working and middle classes, although panoramically and in a somewhat stereotyped way. This structure of feeling employed by the novelist is directly interrogated in a section that highlights Williams' engagement with the matter. In its *nineteenth occurrence* Williams ponders that:

> I can feel enough connection with the problems George Eliot was facing to believe I could make these points in her presence; that I am, in a sense, making them in her presence, since her particular intelligence, in a particular structure of feeling, persists and connects (Williams, 1975a, p. 170).

This occurrence directly involves Williams' autobiography and his personal and political engagement. His discomfort concerning Eliot would be in the distanced representation of workers as undifferentiated individuals devoid of autonomy and complexity.

Next, Williams refers to his own educational background, identifying himself with the educational trajectories of Eliot, Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence, who, despite modest social origins – "Their fathers were a bailiff, a builder, and a miner" (Williams, 1975a, p. 170) –, would have achieved a relatively prominent educational level (even though they are considered to be self-taught by English literary history). By including the working class in the knowable community of their novels this social experience, albeit uneven, would have allowed these authors to approach a more comprehensive and realistic point of view. Yet Eliot would not have followed this change of perspective to the end, since she fell back into a simplifying and even prejudiced view. According to Williams in the *twentieth occurrence***,** this halfway solution, hesitant and ambiguous, would reconduct to the revaluation of the propertied classes and country-houses:

> It is more persuasive and more substantial than the dream of Old Leisure, but in its whole organisation shows even more clearly the structure of feeling which was being laid over de country (Williams, 1975a, p. 178). (citação)

Eliot's ambiguous rejection towards the proprietor classes' perspective would manifest itself in the expression "dream of Old Leisure", taken from *Adam Bede* (1859). Then, with the *twenty-first occurrence*, Williams concludes the chapter by establishing a relationship between this structure of feeling, still linked to the bucolic, and Leavis' "great tradition", identified with that England of country-houses:

> Whe can then see why Mr. Leavis, who is the most distinguished modern exponent of just this structure of feeling, should go on, in outlining the great tradition, from George Eliot to Henry James (Williams, 1975a, p. 180-181).

Progressively subordinated to the industrial and urban economy, in chapter 17, "The shadowed country", Williams presents a historical digression on the transformations of the English rural society in the 19th century. There, in the final half of the chapter, he analyzes four writers of modest rural origins (Alexander Somerville, Joseph Arch, Joseph Ashby, and Richard Jefferies). Children of dispossessed workers and smallholders, they are torn between their modest origins and the subordination to the landlords, on whom they depended to advance their literary careers. Still, all would ponder on the effects of countryside changes on workers. Williams' argument is supported by autobiographical passages, which again make explicit his involvement. In the first passage, Williams mentions his grandfather's proud speeches on hunting. These would serve as a momentary relief in the face of the crisis affecting most rural workers in the course of the 19th century, itself a result of the growing concentration of land in agrarian capitalism. The second and third passages dialogue directly with the authors analyzed in the text, registering family experiences similar to those described by them, with an emphasis on the last one, which is coupled with another occurrence of structure of feeling (the *twenty-second* one). After mentioning Jefferies' claim for the "development of rural democracy" through the various possible forms of associations of workers themselves, Williams states:

> It is a crucial recognition. It connects with my own feeling, which I learned in a family that had lived through this experience, that there is more real community in the modern village than at any period in the remembered past. The changes that came, through democratic development and through economic struggle, sweetened and purifies an older order. Yet to hold to this reality is to recognise an extending connection, for it is not, in the strict sense, a rural vision at all. Or at least it does not seem so when it is set against that structure of feeling which in a way derives from the earlier Jefferies (Williams, 1975a, p. 195).

According to Williams, Jefferies moved from an attitude of reverence and subordination to large landowners (minimizing the exploitation and suffering of workers) to scathing criticism of those (from the bucolic to the anti-bucolic). He did not value a supposedly stable and harmonious rural past, tended by the landlords. Instead, it was the actual political resistance of rural worker communities, despite all the violence and exploitation that they suffered, what Jefferies cherished. It is worth noting that the direct connection between the structure of feeling and autobiographical reflection reinforces our hypothesis that these would be the book's main analytical basis.

Chapter 18, "Wessex and the border", is one of the main chapters of the book, as Williams attributes Thomas Hardy with having reached the best solution within the literary tradition that dealt with the relations between country and city. This is because, like no other author, Hardy would have realized the complexity of the changing English rural society in the second half of the 19th century, transposing into his novels, without stereotyping, the different fractions of the working and middle classes of agrarian capitalism.

Linked to this problem, the autobiographical dimension of *The country and the city* is very much present in this chapter. Here Williams identifies with the axis that, according to him, is present in several of Hardy's books, i.e., that of the contrast between tradition and education, especially seen in *Jude the obscure* (1895), where via formal education and university access the possibility of social ascension and life change is directly thematized into the trajectory of the novel's protagonist. Here it is worth noting, however, Williams' resemblance with characters such as Jude or Clym (from *The return of the native*, from 1878). Although objectively successful, unlike the tragic fates of Hardy's characters, this might indicate the psychological afflictions that accompanied Williams' own trajectory:

> But it is more than a matter of picking up terms and tones. It is what happens to us, really happens to us, as we try to mediate those contrasted worlds: as we stand with Jude but a Jude who has been let in; or as we go back to our own places, our own families, and know what is meant, in idea and in feeling, by the return of the nature. This has a special importance to a particular generation, who have gone to the university from ordinary families and have to discover, through a life, what that experience means (Williams, 1975a, p. 198).

According to Williams, the perception and thematization of the social changes in progress would justify placing Hardy amongst the most important English writers of the 19th century; an author of novels that, in this interpretation, would go beyond the domain of regional fiction.

Through this position-taking, Williams challenged the previous canon, claimed especially by Leavis and Henry James. His argument retrieves Hardy's social and family origins, disagreeing with those who attributed to him a supposed peasant origin. Differently from the previous interpretation, Williams demonstrates that Hardy would come from the middle class of rural society – his father "was a builder who employed six or seven workmen" (Williams, 1975a, p. 200) – and although he never attended university, he had a relatively high educational upbringing for the time. From this position, Hardy could grasp the destabilizing consequences of those economic transformations, which became ever more intense in the course of the 19th century with the advance of industrialization. For Williams, Hardy's writings did not have the peasant of an idealized past as a reference. Instead, his mainstay was the crisis of a changing society:

> It is also obvious that in most rural landscapes there are very old and often unaltered physical features, which sustain a quite different time-scale. Hardy gave great importance to these, and this is not really surprising when we consider this whole structure of feeling. But all these elements were overridden, as for his kind of novelist they must be, by the immediate and actual relationships between people, which occurred within existing contemporary pressures and were at most modulated and interpreted by the available continuities (Williams, 1975a, p. 209).

According to Williams' assessment, it is worth noting that the aforementioned structure of feeling, the *twenty-third*, is specific to Hardy. Since he is an innovator, this structure is specific to him. Given his lack of interest in the propertied classes (the aristocracy and the gentry), Hardy distinguishes his work by totally surpassing the bucolic convention. His attention turns, as the aforesaid passage reveals, to the relationships between the various fractions of the middle and working classes, embodied in the integrity of the "ordinary processes of life and work" (Williams, 1975a, p. 211). Thus, as the following passage summarizes at the end of the chapter, the *twenty-fourth* occurrence, members of these groups would appear as complex and individualized protagonists (with their personal dramas) on Hardy's novels, a position hitherto restricted, in realism, to characters of the dominant classes.

> The general structure of feeling in Hardy would be much less convincing if there were only the alienation, the frustration, the separation and isolation, the final catastrophes. What is defeated but not destroyed at the end of The Woodlanders or the end of Tess or the end of Jude is a warmth, a seriousness, an endurance in love and work that are the necessary definition of what Hardy knows and mourns as loss. Vitally – and it is the difference from Lawrence,

> as we shall see; a difference of generation and of history but also of character – Hardy does not celebrate isolation and separation (Williams, 1975a, p. 213).

Chapters 19 and 20 are focused on the urbanization process that furiously went forward in the 19th century, at a time when the urban population outnumbered the rural whilst the total population grew dramatically. Such aspects would justify another analytical digression towards the city and the literature focused on it, giving rise to a new language and structure of feeling, the *twenty-fifth* occurrence of the term: "In distinguishable ways, in these very different writers, a common structure of feeling was being formed" (Williams, 1975a, pp. 235-236).

The chapter runs through an extensive list of authors, from Charles Dickens, James Thomson, and Richard Jefferies to Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Yet, the kind of literature represented by these last two is minimally and indirectly discussed, a surprising choice, given the importance of both for the renewal of English literature. It seems to us that this approach indicates an asymmetry between the attention given to rural and urban literature, even if Williams' *The country and the city* emphasizes the imbrication between these social spaces and their literary expressions. It is worth noting that the discussion regarding the urban novel always emphasizes more general dynamics, such as the transience and fragmentation of social experience, and its problematic internalization, mobilizing terms such as "anguished consciousness", "discontinuity", "atomism", "the racing and separated forms of consciousness". Differently than one might expect, given the book's argumentative axis, which focuses on how class struggle in the rural world is addressed by writers, in these passages Williams hardly considers the numerous literary elaborations that the confrontation of classes and the proletariat (specifically) allowed[19].

Returning to the historical context of the late 19th century, Williams examines literature's reaction to the process through which the country-houses of land gave way to the country-houses of capital. It was against this background that Henry James' novels presented country-houses no longer as the centre of the social system, but as spaces occupied by individuals completely unaware of what was going on around them: "But the point is that the country-house, in the twentieth century, has just this quality of abstract disposability and indifference of function" (Williams, 1975a, p. 250). This was accompanied by a wrong and stereotypical literary representation of the rural workers, reflected in the image of the vulgar peasant.

19. As Williams would directly oppose the dominant interpretations in certain Marxist strands, this change in emphasis and approach may be understood as a strategy (conscious or unconscious) of privileging the history of the rural worker to the detriment of the urban one.

Another consequence of the country's growing subordination to the city would be its apprehension as "a place of physical and spiritual regeneration" (Williams, 1975, p. 252), the core of a new structure of feeling (*twenty-sixth occurrence*):

> It was now the teeming life of an isolated nature, or the seasonal rhythm of the fundamental life processes. Neither of these feelings was new in itself. What was new was their fusion into a structure of feeling in which the earth and its creatures – animals and peasants almost alike – were an affirmation of vitality and of the possibility of rest in conscious contrast with the mechanical order, the artificial routines, of the cities (Williams, 1975a, p. 252).

According to Williams, the literature of the first decades of the 20th century, especially those of Georgian writers, despite its realistic pretensions, rested over representations of the rural and the bucolic already selected and sedimented by tradition. In another markedly autobiographical passage, Williams then contrasts this perspective to his own familial experience:

> Perhaps they were wrong; some things were outside their experience. But they were not and are not figures of decline. The crisis of rural Britain, which indeed they lived through in its actual consequences, was not this crisis that had been projected from the cities and the universities. It was a crisis of wages, conditions, prices; of the use of land and work on the land (Williams, 1975a, p. 257).

Meaningfully, at the end of the chapter, Williams takes sides in Fred Kitchen's (a "modern farm labourer") autobiographical account in *Brother to the ox* (1939), which is claimed to be the best expression of mid-twentieth-century English literature on rural workers.

With the suggestive title "The border again", chapter 22 recovers the polysemic term "border", referring to both geographic borders between countries (notably, between England and Wales), as well as those between country and city, and traditional and erudite/scholastic culture – dimensions explored by Williams in the analysis of works by D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and Lewis Grassic Gibbon (1901-1935). We should also note the direct reference to Wales. Together with Scotland and Ireland it, according to Williams, still hosted regions not fully integrated into the "English capitalist rural order" and that, as a result, preserved a resilient community spirit. The mention of Wales cannot be separated from the book's recurrent resort to autobiographical experience. Here, reference is made to "a subordinated and relatively isolated rural community, which is conscious, in old and new ways, of its hard but independent life" (Williams, 1975a, p. 269). This would result in an

"spiritual self-subsistence", a significant aspect of the *twenty-seventh* occurrence of "structure of feeling":

> This is a decisively different structure of feeling. The spiritual feeling for the land and for labour, the pagan' emphasis which is always latent in the imagery of the earth (very similar, through is different rhythms, to the Lawrence of the beginning of *The Rainbown*), is made available and is stressed in the new struggles: through the General Strike, in the period of *Cloud Howe*, to the time of the hunger marches in the period of *Grey Granite* (Williams, 1975a, p. 270).

Continuing this passage, Williams suggests that this structure of feeling presupposes the benefits of the political militancy of rural workers, which in turn would be reflected in the struggle of industrial workers:

> More historically and more convincingly, the radical independence of the small farmers, the craftsmen and the labourers is seen as transitional to the militancy of the industrial workers. The shape of a whole history is them decisively transformed (Williams, 1975a, p. 270).

This passage unambiguously explains one of the book's main fronts, namely: to reject the prevailing tendency in a more orthodox Marxism to decouple urban from rural workers, which attributes political protagonism only to the former, and, more generally, privileges urban and industrial "progress" over rural and agricultural "backwardness". Against this position, the critic descendant of Welsh rural workers defends the political unity of the rural and urban proletariat, pointing to the possible overcoming, in socialism, of this false dichotomy.

Another dispute in the chapter involves how Lawrence is inscribed in the English literary canon. Here Williams muddles Lawrence's placement by unusually positioning an exponent of the "great tradition" side-by-side with a lesser Scottish writer, Gibbon. This analytical operation is then justified by how both authors portray rural life and work as well as the multiple crossings on the border between country and city.

The *last two occurrences* of "structure of feeling" (*twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth*) appear at the end of the chapter "Cities and countries". This inversion of the book's title points to the major significance of the long-term historical change examined throughout the book. The first occurrence, cited below, summarizes the common tendency to idealize the past noticeable in the various structures of feeling emerging in specific historical contexts:

> We have seen how often an idea of the country is an idea of childhood: not only the local memories, or the ideally shared communal memory, but the feel of the childhood: of delighted absorption in our own world, from which, eventually, in the course of growing up, we are distanced and separated, so that it and the world become things we observe. In Wordsworth and Clare, and in many other writers, this structure of feeling is powerfully expressed, and we have seen how often it is then converted into illusory ideas of rural past: those successive and endlessly recessive "happy Englands of my childhood" (Williams, 1975a, p. 297).

Thus, the option to focus on the reconstruction of the structures of feeling embodied in literary works enabled Williams to estimate, in the different periods and writings considered, both the perspectives favorable to the landowners and the critical approaches to the social conflict identified with the workers. Williams' interpretation encompasses historical reconstruction and textual criticism, the political and reflexive dimensions, as can be seen in the following occurrence.

> Yet what we have finally to say is that we live in a world in which the dominant mode of production and social relationships teaches, impresses, offers to make normal and even rigid, modes of detached, separated, external perception and action: modes of using and consuming rather than accepting and enjoying people and things. The structure of feeling of the memoirs is then significant and indispensable as a response to this specific social deformation (Williams, 1975a, p. 298).

It is worth noting that the direct reference to the "structure of feeling of the memoirs" reasserts the autobiographical dimension and the particular interpretative weight that it imposes on the book. Not coincidentally, in the next section Williams analyzes two novels of his own, *Border country* (1960) and *Second generation* (1964), where the former, a book with an evident autobiographical character, significantly conducts us to the end of *The country and the city*:

> In the late nineteen-forties I knew that I was at last separated from the village in which I had grown up. I began to write what I thought this experience was, in the seven versions that eventually became the novel *Border country*. It wasn't only, through those versions, that I found myself connecting the experience to a more general history of physical and social mobility, and beyond that to a crisis of education and class which when I had worked it through I went back and read, as if for the first time, in George Eliot and Hardy and Lawrence. It was also that I had to look at the village again, and to set up some tension between my childhood memories and the adult working experience of my father's generation (Williams, 1975a, pp. 298-299).

Rendering Williams' interpretation a very personal and political tone, the aforementioned excerpt reinforces the overlap between the autobiographical account that runs through the book and its argumentative axis. On the one hand, from a subjective point of view, his work can be understood as an attempt to atone for the guilt of having migrated from his country community to socially ascend through education. On the other hand, from a political point of view, it can be seen as a way to confront that image of the country as backwards, something very appealing to socialist and progressive ranks, and the city as the space where the socialist revolution would be carried out. Intending to counter this image, Williams highlights the centrality of agriculture in peripheral economies and in the entire capitalist world system:

> The common idea of a lost rural world is then not only an abstraction of this or that stage in a continuing history (and many of the stages we can be glad have gone or are going). It is in direct contradiction to any effective shape of our future, in which work on the land will have to become more rather than less important and central (Williams, 1975a, p. 300).

The effort to reclaim agriculture's place in the broader framework of capitalism sheds light on another crucial point in Williams' argument: the political task of confronting not industrialism but capitalism:

> Neither will the city save the country nor the country the city. Rather the long struggle within both will become a general struggle, as in a sense it has always been (Williams, 1975a, p. 301).

Conclusion

Before we attempt to systematize the occurrences of "structure of feeling" in *The country and the city*, the reader should be aware that it is necessary to avoid understanding it as a concept that is closed (with a pre-defined outline, content, and scope) and abstract. As we have attempted to demonstrate, because it organizes a long-term historical analysis of the literature produced during the capitalist development of English agriculture, one of the main specificities of the use of structure of feeling is its pervasive and explicit character. We should recall that in previous books it is mobilized in specific parts, referring to relatively limited periods, as in *Culture and society* and *The long revolution*, respectively in the chapters "The industrial novels" and "The analysis of culture".

Using as a reference a particularly representative excerpt, from here onwards we attempt to summarize the method displayed in *The country and the city*, and, more specifically, how the idea of structure of feeling is mobilized in the book.

> For what is knowable is not only a function of objects – of what is there to be known. It is also a function of subjects, of observers – of what is desired and what needs to be known. And what we have then to see, as throughout, in the country writing, is not only the reality of the rural community; it is the observer's position in and towards it; a position which is part of the community being known (Williams, 1975a, p. 165).

Here Williams presents the dimensions considered in the analysis of structures of feeling.

Its main determining factors were the writer's familial origin, their formal education, and the relations of production involved in the literary creation: direct dependence (writers subject to patronage), indirect dependence (clerics) or partial independence (writers in the market). Regarding these sometimes-implicit aspects, Williams' scrutiny of literary forms aims to identify the ways by which different classes and fractions of classes are depicted – confronting these with his own memories.

More precisely, Williams analyzes the transition between a pastoral structure of feeling to an anti-pastoral one. The former was embodied and expressed by writers subject to the patronage of large landowners (aristocracy) and identified with their mode of domination, materialized in the country-house. The latter was conveyed by increasingly independent writers, first clerics and then professional ones, that are increasingly attentive and supportive (despite certain ambivalence) to the existence of the working classes and intermediate groups.

His perspective combines social and literary history and is supported by his own biographical experience, resulting in his demand for an intellectual and political correction regarding the representation of country and rural workers. This position should be understood within the context of his longstanding disputes with the English intellectual establishment and, particularly, with two groups: on the right, literary critics, and on the left, historians.

Williams' clash with the conservative literary criticism found in Cambridge and the *Scrutiny* magazine group, under the leadership of the Leavis, involved questioning the canon espoused by *The great tradition* on the basis of a realistic criterion that highlighted a series of authors Leavis considered minor. In this dispute, Williams frames Thomas Hardy as an exponent of the English novel and not as an author limited to regional literature. Unlike more sophisticated novelists such as George Eliot and Henry James, Hardy would have achieved a properly anti-bucolic structure of feeling, attentive to the reality of the working and the rural middle classes as well as to the complexity of the changes taking place between country and city. In this view, Hardy overcame simplifying oppositions that are recurrent in English literature – of those between country and city, tradition and instruction, rural and

urban work, observation and participation – inaugurating a new literary trend in which Williams himself would partake: first as a novelist (especially with *Border country*) and later as a critic (especially with *The country and the city*). Therefore, in political terms, he fought the conservative English criticism and its elitist defence of a strong moral community based on highbrow culture, which itself is associated with a nostalgia for country-houses and the system of power that it symbolized.

On the other front of his dispute, Williams responds to the reviews and the circumstantial reservations of his fellow New Left colleagues, the Marxist historians E. P. Thompson and Perry Anderson. They questioned the supposedly abstract character of Williams's *Culture and society* and *The long revolution*, works that would have disregarded the class struggle involved in the examined historical and literary processes[20]. This criticism paralleled the positioning of these agents within that political movement (divided by programmatic and generational lines), in which Williams occupied, in Thompson and Anderson's view, a more moderate and reformist position. It is also worth noting that, in the early years of the New Left, Williams was a Labor Party affiliate, a position he left in 1966. Thompson and Anderson, for their part, were never affiliated with the party and always took a tougher attitude towards it.

On the one hand, the importance given to social history and class struggle in *The country and the city* seems to suggest that Williams accepted the reservations levelled at his previous approach. On the other hand, as a direct descendant of rural workers (and unlike Thompson and Anderson who came from a relatively privileged background), he counters the political criticism of his colleagues by detailing his social origin, which also serves as a way to legitimize his position within English Marxism. In this direction, by affirming the structural equivalence between rural and urban workers within capitalism, as well as their struggle against it, Williams intended to combat the political disqualification of the peasantry. This defence presumed a profound critique of what he called an "ambiguity in Marxism":

> They denounced what was being done in the tearing progress of capitalism and imperialism; they insisted that men must struggle to supersede it, and they showed us some ways. But implicit in the denunciation was another set of value-judgements: the bourgeoisie had "rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life"; the subjected nations were "barbarian and semi-barbarian", the dominant powers "civilised". It was then

20. Here we refer to Thompson's review of *The long revolution*, published in the *New Left Review* in 1961, and to the interviews with Williams conducted by Anderson, Anthony Barnett and Francis Mulhern in 1977 and 1978, published in *Politics and letters* (1979).

> on this kind of confidence in the singular values of modernisation and civilisation that a major distortion in the history of communism was erected. The exposed urban proletariat would learn and create new and higher forms of society: if that was all that had been said it would have been very different. But if the forms of bourgeois development contained, with whatever contradiction, values higher than "rural idiocy" or "barbarism", then almost any programme, in the name of the urban proletariat, could be justified and imposed (Williams, 1975a, p. 303).

Therefore, Williams defends not only the equivalence between the urban and rural proletariat but also the equivalence between workers from the centre and the periphery. At last, by employing an autobiographical narrative and the structure of feeling as analytic tools, Williams managed to scrutinize the tradition of English rural literature and its social basis while also detailing his point of view. Especially in this book, structure of feeling is a tool that allows us to reconcile rigorous textual analysis with a very personal political perspective that is clearly postulated in course of the argument. In this regard, *The country and the city* was also an attempt to elaborate on both the subjective and objective impasses that are derived from his ascension through the educational and academic worlds, a development that may have brought material security and enormous recognition in the English intellectual field, but that also rendered Williams as an individual irremediably split between origin and destiny.

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Abstract

Structure of feeling and autobiography in The country and the city

In the context of the 50th anniversary of its publication, this article examines Raymond Williams' *The country and the city* under two key aspects. On the one hand, we attempt to explain the uses and meanings of "structure of feeling", which organizes the book's argument as a kind of analytical tool. On the other hand, we will discuss the frequent autobiographical passages that reinforce the reflective and political tone of this work.

Keywords: English literature; Structure of feeling; Autobiography; Agrarian capitalism; Industrialism.

Resumo

Estrutura de sentimento e autobiografia em O campo e a cidade

Aproveitando a efeméride dos cinquenta anos da publicação de *O campo e a cidade*, este artigo examina o livro de Raymond Williams sob dois aspectos principais. De um lado, pretendemos elucidar os usos e significados da noção "estrutura de sentimento", que nesse trabalho organiza toda a argumentação, como uma espécie de operador analítico; de outro, discutimos as frequentes referências autobiográficas, que reforçam seu tom reflexivo e político.

Palavras-chave: Literatura inglesa; Estrutura de sentimento; Autobiografia; Capitalismo agrário; Industrialismo.

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Luiz Carlos Jackson é professor do Departamento de Sociologia da Universidade de São Paulo. E-mail: ljackson@usp.br.
Ugo Rivetti é doutor em Sociologia pela Universidade de São Paulo. Atualmente é professor substituto junto ao Departamento de Ciências Sociais da Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo. Também é pesquisador do Núcleo de Sociologia da Cultura da USP. E-mail: uc.rivetti@gmail.com.
Dimitri Pinheiro é doutor em Sociologia pela Universidade de São Paulo e integra o Núcleo de Sociologia da Cultura da mesma instituição. E-mail: dimitri.pinheiro@usp.br.