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## Schizophrenic Border and Viral Optics in Raymond Williams's *Border Country*

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⊙ Jiayan Mi, Jason Tonic

The College of New Jersey, Glen Rock Public Schools and Montclair State University

**Abstract:** This essay examines Raymond Williams's autobiographical novel *Border Country*, the first novel of his ambitious "Welsh Trilogy." The aim of the essay is twofold. Firstly, it analyzes the unsettling issue of how a bio-regional place (native place) shapes polyvalent identities in a historically changing environment and how the boundary that crisscrosses the passages of life is redrawn through narrative re-circumscription and optical revision. Secondly, the essay calls this trope of internalizing "border-crossing" into question in the context of global diaspora and critically problematizes Williams's identity politics as schizophrenic split from British post-colonial empire.

**Keywords:** Raymond Williams, *Border country*, identity politics, optical semiotics, landscape and power, post-colonial Schizophrenia

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In his classic *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams perceptively describes the country of Hardy's fiction as a "border country," one that represents ambivalences and conflicts pertinent to Hardy's native countryside, a borderland between "custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change" (197). It is true that Hardy's novel *The Return of the Native* focuses on the troubled reality of a vanishing agricultural community in the second half of the 19th century, foregrounding the dangers of nostalgia and the resulting destruction of homecoming at a time of disjunction and radical transition. However, Hardy's position is problematic: on the one hand, he launches a critique of Clym Yeobright's class utopianism and his nostalgic return when a rural idyll is no longer available; on the other hand, Hardy's framing of the rural scenery as the setting of the novel precisely reflects the ideology of the urban middle class that perceives the countryside as a landscape ideal, an iconic image

embodying their values, the power of property, and the aesthetic of the picturesque (Bishop; Helsinger).

It is exactly this mythical image of the English countryside that Williams investigates and begins to demystify in both his literary and academic works, from a critical perspective of what he calls “cultural materialism”—a committed theoretical engagement and interpretative practice that rejects the notion of any general history and autonomy of culture, and is directed to the study of the social-historical conditions in which a cultural product is produced (Williams, *Culture and Society*). In his autobiographical *Border Country*, the first novel of his ambitious “Welsh Trilogy,”<sup>1</sup> Williams grapples with the unsettling issue of how a bio-regional place (native place) shapes polyvalent identities in a historically changing environment and how the boundary that crisscrosses the passages of life is measured. In this essay we examine the particular strategies and technologies that Williams appropriates to engage with live-place, one eco-system where the border of contesting identities is negotiated through narrative re-circumscription and translation. We further call this trope of internalizing “border-crossing” into question in the context of global migration and critically problematize Williams’s identity politics as schizophrenic split from British colonial empire.

### **Affective Flashbacks: Williams’s Optics of Binocular Vision**

Set in Glynmawr, a rural village on the Welsh border with England where Williams grew up, *Border Country*, like Hardy’s novel, tells the story of the return of the native. Matthew Price, a Cambridge lecturer in economic history who is working on “population movements into the Welsh mining valleys in the middle decades of the nineteenth century” (9), is urgently called back to his native village when his father Harry, a railway signalman and an active unionist, has a stroke. During his stay in the home village, Matthew suffers from a deep sense of alienation, betrayal, guilt, and strangeness because of his migration out of Wales, which forces him to cross different borders and to think through questions of identity, history, time, and space. Although the plot itself is deceptively simple, the novel’s “structure of feeling”—a concept Williams employs to describe a dynamic structure of affective experiences (both individual and general) that serves to mediate the social-historical and cultural-ideological interactions (*Marxism and Literature*)—is very complex.

On one level, since the story is centered on Matthew’s journey back to his home country of Wales, *Border Country* is obviously a narrative of self-exploration leading to the identity-reformation of the hero. As Matthew’s life exactly parallels that of Williams’s (a Welsh working class origin, the railway-signalman father, then movement out of Wales to a Cambridge degree and employment as a university lecturer in London), there is no doubt that Matthew is the persona of Williams; therefore, Matthew’s self-exploratory journey into Wales mirrors that of the author himself. On another level, just as Matthew is a scholar/economic historian who is conducting research on generational movements and its effects on the rural community in Wales, so this story

also explores the history of Wales, its changes, and the formation of class differences. In this light, Williams actually continues “a reevaluation of the ‘organic’ rural community in the tradition of Hardy and the Welsh novels” (Michele 22). Williams can also be said to pick up where Hardy’s story ends, and examines the residues of the vanished countryside, just as Hardy predicts in that story, “In the heath’s barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian” (13). These two lines of exploration are often intertwined, overlapping, and mutually reflexive: from personal to historical, from individual to communal, from cultural to political, and from regional to national, thereby reflecting Williams’s motto that “the personal is political.” Such an approach is further theoretically crystallized in his classic *The Country and the City*.

What is most essential in *Border Country*, just as its title powerfully suggests, is the consciousness of the border or, rather, the awareness of the peripheral vision that determines Matthew’s and Williams’s way of perception. Geographically speaking, Matthew’s home village Glynmawr is located in Wales on the English border. But the territorial borderline as such implicates a deeper and broader meaning. In general terms, the notion of border suggests the spatial limits of a national sovereignty or the diffuse margins of a political hegemony, thus often indicating an oppositional tension between the core and the periphery (Giddens); on the other hand, the border is the demarcative line that both separates and joins two entities at the same time, hence the meeting place of differences: inside/outside, beginning/ending, here/there, or in Bhabha’s words, the interstitial zone of cultural heterogeneity, hybridity, and in-betweenness. As such, the spatial liminality of the border designates the discursive and interpretative undecidability, the fluid circulation of visual perception, and the open-ended communication between contending cultures.

Such is the vantage point where Williams positions Matthew’s way of seeing after he crosses the border between Wales and England— “Abruptly the rhythm changed, as the wheels crossed the bridge” (*Border Country* 12). For Matthew, this is not simply a crossing of the border between Wales and England, but more significantly of the border between past and present (history), between Will (his actual birth name) and Matthew (identity of the individual), between the workers and the university lecturers (class), between father and son (generation), between the country and the city (modes of productions/ways of life), and between the Welsh and the English (race/nationality). Once he traverses these borders, Matthew is moving deep into the heart of darkness of Wales from which he has to find a way out, not in the form of nostalgic reduction but of historical rediscovery, a dialectic route which Dai Smith terms “circuitous yet not circular” (38), namely, away from Glynmawr, Wales to London, England; and back from London, England to Glynmawr, Wales.

This dual route/movement locates the observer simultaneously on the border and beyond the border, which gives rise to constant cognitive sensibility of the two worlds: the observer views Wales from England and England from Wales. In the former, he sees change and continuity; in the latter, estrangement and discontinuity. But this circuitous movement could lead to the rediscovery of the interconnectedness and interrelationship between the two communities— “The real

substance, and its roots, seemed to lie far back. This was a border defined, a border crossed" (254). Laura Di Michele has provided an excellent comment on the significance of the border vision in Williams's fiction:

The border offers a privileged angle of observation, a place from where one can relate Wales to England and Wales to its own history and myth, to the various "imagined communities" which constitute the idea of "Wales" as the nation experienced by different people at different times. From this point of view, in Williams's fiction, too, "Wales" becomes a useful metaphor to fight against the image of a timeless, mythical Wales and—at the same time—to throw light on dark England. (30)

This binocular vision enables Matthew/Will to cross the thresholds of history, penetrate into reality, and ultimately "measure" ("It is a problem of measurement, of the means of measurement" [Williams, *Border Country* 9]) the distance between his two identities. Even the naming of Matthew/Will has ramifications, "For while it is true that naming, above all, presupposes knowing, which in turn requires rootedness in a place, there can also be naming, and especially renaming, without knowing" (Klaus 142-152). The nomination of the protagonist as both Matthew and William interrogates his identity not as simply self, but as the self-reflective self; or, the self that must name itself. Matthew/Will's name is a product not only of Harry and Ellen, but a parcel of the author, Williams himself, which is ultimately reconstituted into a tool of measurement—not into Matthew/Will's place in society but into his perceived place within the family, home, social settings.

Two optical apparatuses effectively facilitate Matthew's vision of measurement: the telescope and the microscope which Arthur Pugh, the vicar of his parish, shows him for the first time in his boyhood in Glynmawr.<sup>2</sup> Both optical apparatuses can augment his vision, but in totally different ways. The telescope extends the vision, which directs the eye from the near to the far horizon and from the lower to the higher level, and the microscope enlarges the vision, leading the eye from the external to the internal and from the macro to the micro level. In this light, the telescope offers Matthew the vision through which he achieves a sense of transcendence, always looking beyond from the present to the past, from the individual to the social, from the personal to the political, and from the local to the cosmopolitan. Such a telescopic vision opens a new spatial world for Matthew where he gains insights about the history of his home valley and Wales, and his own growing maturity (Williams, *Border Country* 221). Looking beyond sometimes carries the risk of overlooking the immediate and the present. Yet such a risk is contrapuntally overcome by the perception of the microscope by which the internal structure of life and the details of reality are revealed. The microscopic vision endows Matthew with a strong sense of commitment to penetrate the turbulent reality in which he is caught.

In the story, the two ways of seeing are dialectically related, supplementing while challenging each other: the telescopic eye dismantles the self-evident myth by re-inscribing it into the changing trajectory of history while the microscopic eye localizes historicity in a specific time-

space and social reality. In other words, one serves to re-historicize or to contextualize what is generally considered legitimate or spontaneous; and the other one functions to territorialize what is thought universal. So to look beyond and afar (telescopic mode) is actually to look into the history (microscopic mode), in which every detail is enlarged as the lived reality of life and history—the active pattern: “Pattern was the word that Will grasped at, through the crowded impressions of these first weeks” (Williams, *Border Country* 221). The pattern derived from the experiences both within and without is embodied in Williams’s “structure of feeling”: interconnectedness, community, friendship, neighborhood, settlement, and Welshness, the values Matthew ultimately rediscovers in the residuals of Glynmawr.

These two ways of seeing, the cognitive condition of life on the border, are best shown in two instances in the story: the utopian space of the signal-box and the flap-table, and the anti-space of the valley as landscape (Pinkney). After his father’s stroke, Matthew is asked to collect his father’s possessions in a signal-box in Glynmawr station where Harry had worked for thirty-six years (“a third of his life”), and where young Matthew used to play— “Once in early childhood, it had been a place of magic” (139). There are two doors leading into the box: the outer door and the inner door. When he opens the outer door, Matthew finds himself “in the little square between the two doors, and the place came back to him” (139). Step by step, deeper inside, he opens the inner door; he immediately feels “[T]he atmosphere of the box began here: a faint, sweet smell of dust, soot, lamp-oil, food” (139). The inner door also leads to a taboo zone wherein lies the innermost world of Harry’s secrets: his locker, and this world of taboo can only be exposed by his son (139-140).

At first glance, the detailed listing and cataloguing of Harry’s possessions sound somewhat monotonous, but such pinpointing acts actually represent Matthew’s microscopic penetration into his father’s private world. Although these fragments first appear senseless to Matthew, due to his alienation from that world, each fragment is a self-contained space of experiences reflecting a “whole way of life” for Harry. It is now up to the returning son to study and examine each item, and finds the pattern so as finally to reconnect items into a coherent narrative of life and history. He is urged by his inner voice “to watch, to interpret, to try to get clear. Only the wind narrowing your eyes, and so much living in you, deciding what you will see and how you will see it. Never above, watching. You’ll find what you’re watching is yourself” (293). Thus Matthew finds that he is watching himself in the box in his early childhood, a kind of Lacanian “*aha-Erlebnis*” mirror experience of self-recognition/mis-recognition.

From the hiding place under the flag-table Matthew sees everything that makes a personal, home-like space for the signal man: “the dusty, threadbare red and green flags, and the heavy black megaphone” (140); the four telephones, the notice board, and the open register; the round ruler and the white pen; the grid with twenty-six levers and the shining handles and clips; the model indicator signals, the bells in wooden clocks and the central master key. The magical space of the flag-table brings Matthew back to his past and his relationship with the valley. In his cherished space of flap-table and signal box Matthew experiences a Proustian recovery of a lost time (*temps*

*perdu*). The signal box, though personal, mirrors Harry's whole way of life and thus the life and history of Glynmawr and Wales; the flap-table, though an internal space, reflects Matthew's happy memory with his father in Gwenton train station and the life of the whole community. In this way, what is inside and personal turns into outside and historical; what is public and outside folds back into personal and inside. The boundary between the two is finally dissolved under the impact of the microscopic-telescopic perceptions. What one really has to do is to grasp the interconnectedness embedded within the two, just as Harry in his sickbed has urged Matthew: "Bring [...] together things you didn't know they were there" and "get these connexions" (Williams, *Border Country* 318).

The reason why figures of the flap-table and the signal box evoke a joyful memory for Matthew is that he views these spaces as active and lived spaces. Usually when a space is derealized, abstracted, and objectified as a spectacle, or an image, namely, an object of fetish, then it is no longer active but passive and dead, or an "anti-space" (Pinkney 37). Such a fetishistic creation of the space as an image is seen in the rediscovery of the English countryside as a rural idyll, and the picturesque improvement of the rural scenes as an iconic artifact that is movable and consumable (Helsing).

Williams, in *The Fight for Manod* (a continuation of Matthew's story), hypothesizes on a utopian-future city that blends urbanization and rural living, eliminating the need for commute almost altogether and banishing the specter of a border-country through the disestablishment of the urban/rural dichotomy. Williams remains relevant within the context of the individual: "It is of a piece with ecological considerations that the rural community portrayed in the novel does not consist of tourists or weekenders, for whom the countryside means beauty and recreation, but of small producers who wrest a living from the soil without recourse to industrial farming" (Klaus 145). Released nineteen years after the publication of *Border Country* (and nine years after "Thomas Hardy and the English Novel"), *The Fight for Manod* emphasizes Williams's stance in regards to the valley as a commercially tenable enterprise situated in the eyes of the urban elite.

### Remarking Bildungsroman on the Border

While Hardy's rural folk fail to appreciate the mythic and aesthetic characteristics of their environment, in *Border Country* Williams reveals the dangers of viewing the Welsh valley and rural landscape as objects of desire. Morgan Rosser, a native entrepreneur, appropriates the Holy Mountain as his commercial logo: "The jars, like all the containers Morgan was providing, came labeled with the distinctive sign: *Morgan Rosser—Country Foods*. The lettering was in red on white, with a gold border. Behind the lettering was a line-drawing of the valley and the Holy Mountain" (174). Morgan can be seen as a shadow character to Harry; his tendency to trend towards modernism is frequently juxtaposed to Harry's reluctance to accept change; this commerciality isolates the precise reification of pastoral Wales into an object to be sold—

the manifestation of the tourist/onlooker mentality apparent. The valley is also transformed and consumed from the outside: “Beyond Oxford the new emphasis was evident . . . from the window, the by-pass roads, the housing estates, the factories; the sharp primary colors of advertisement hoardings and petrol stations. Glynmawr now had gone back to a memory and an image” (347).

Matthew himself sometimes is not immune to such a way of seeing but he differs from Clym in that he is quick to realize the tensions between the image and the reality, between the ideological representation and its social condition. His very ambivalent contemplation of these two contending views produces perhaps the most vivid and powerful passage in the novel, a passage that epitomizes Williams’s formative critique of the rural myth in his later works. Matthew comes back from his tour in Gwenton. The valley is “replaced” by a mute image, its history repressed and its living substance emptied out by the dominant ideology. In a word, the Welsh valley has been reified into a visual space fetishized for tourism and pastoral fantasy. But Matthew, in a position of border vision and equipped with both telescopic and microscopic apparatuses, is determined to “re-place” the reified space back into its living reality and dissolve its images into its historical substances: “He was here not only to be in the house, but as a kind of re-placement, to carry life on” (73). In his telescopic flashback, Matthew recalls Glynmawr as a land of “farming country” in which lies a working land inhabited with “figures”—quotidian, domestic, familial, and familiar; nothing looks glamorous and picturesque, as suggested by the words “huddled,” “tussocky,” and “dirty.”

Most significantly, these rural scenes are not merely perceptible but more experiential, that is, less associated with the eye that creates them than with the feelings that grow out of/towards them and are imbedded within them. In other words, these spatially interconnected rural scenes convey a sense of belonging to which the inhabitants attach but also with which they like to identify. Through their “walking” and their experientiality in the fertile country fields, both Harry and Ellen obtain a sense of settlement, identity, and that easiness of dwelling: “but settling into this house was particularly easy” (35), and “[he] seemed still deeply centered in himself, as if something in his mind drew in all his energy. But he was happy with Ellen, and to be settled in the valley” (37). Likewise, later on Matthew follows the same way of “walking” as his parents and maps out the boundaries of his home valley by transforming the tourist-guiding map into a “tour.” In this way, he rediscovers “within the very mapping of space a troubling gap or border between tour and map, the lived and the systematic or, as it were, between ‘Will’ and ‘Matthew’” (Pinkney 45).

To rediscover the border or to re-mark the margins is to break the preconceived boundaries and to redraw them in terms of “cognitive mapping” (Jameson). This cognitive reformulation enforces frame-breaking and frame-restructuring from text to world, from image to materiality. In this case, it is the binocular vision that enables Matthew to break the fixation of the icon, the image, and the spectacle invested in the rural landscape of Wales and to reclaim its authenticity. To put it another way, Matthew embraces the vision of debordement that enables him to re-cross

different borders from the pole of English cultural hegemony in which he is working to the pole of Welsh repressed history in which he grew up. Or more accurately, his return to Glynmawr successfully crosses the presumed boundary from the discursive to the traversive, that is, from the spell of myth to the identity of a living Wales. Such a traversive glance is most impressively registered in a scene in Chapter 10 where Will/Matthew is “sitting above the Kestrel, looking down across the valley” (Williams, *Border Country* 290). In a microscopic way, he first sees a living valley and an actual countryside—the fields and orchards, the houses and farm buildings, and the smoking train.

Under such a minimalist pinpointing “seen close,” the “here-now” of the valley is a concrete country: the soil of the valley, the quotidian life-world and the people who labor in it. But looking “far out” in a telescopic way, this valley is also a country made by history and memory: the Roman conquest, the ruined abbey, the lords and legends. In this light this traverse glance not only transcends the personal sentiments and the “here-now” but also stretches afar and penetrates deeply into the “there-then” of Wales: its history and past. In so doing, Matthew could bring back the history of Wales that has already been repressed, marginalized or erased, and could analyze its cultural legacy and “carry life on.” To use his own words, to re-search Welsh history is to give “meaning to this moving history” (307). As long as the past is recovered, a sense of place will be achieved. That is to say, the recuperation of the Welsh past from its temporal mutations will certainly grant Matthew a sense of direction of where he is now in space—that is, the full awareness of his self-identity in spatial location. This self-awareness is why, as he is walking in this “known country,” he feels strongly that “a sense of settlement came back” (307).

Williams’s active performance, through Matthew, of the binocular vision reconstructs the split between two identities (Will/Matthew) and two generations (Harry/Matthew), and infuses the symptomatic present with the past. As a result, personal story is illuminated through history. One device that is essential to make this vision possible and effective is the flashback, which Williams employs throughout the story. The whole story is constructed by a series of flashbacks to Matthew: his childhood in the country village, his parents’ first cottage, the General Strike of 1926, and his early romance with Morgan’s daughter Eira. Matthew’s flashbacks actually reflect an effective historical vision that travels through personal history, social history, and the political history of Wales. Whenever a symptom emerges that breaks down the circuit of communication, that is, the inscription of a cut into the three senses of time—the past, the present, and the future—a flashback occurs, resulting in the interruption of historical narrative and the displacement of the symbolic order of signification.

In such a situation, flashbacks help fuse the disrupted consciousness of the time, thus leading to the resolution of the crisis, of conflicts between (for instance) father and son, past and present, and the individual and the social. As John and Lizzie Eldridge have observed, “[t]he use of flashback enables him [Williams] to focus emphatically upon those tenses which he regards as central to the creative process and, simultaneously, to extend the reality of his fictional



characters” (142). Matthew’s involuntary remembering guides him to the past, a past that has been suppressed/repressed by a hegemonic power, with the expectations of the present, which is actually recovered to open a new horizon for the future—the anticipatory return of the repressed. Hence, the *pre*—the originary—is reconfigured in the time of the post.

This *post* reinvention of a *pre* is articulated in the temporal movement of *Bildung*, the evolutionary formation of a self-identity. Thematically speaking, *Border Country* is a story of *Bildung* about Matthew’s awareness of his self-identity. This sense of self-maturity, however, is accomplished not in terms of evolutionary formation but of anti-evolutionary, i.e., retroactive, reformulation. From this perspective, the story is actually a *Bildungsroman* in reverse. In other words, the story is centered not on the linear movement of the traditional *Bildungsroman* which often “portrays a young person’s initiation into adulthood through a series of adventures in search of self and of one’s proper place in society, or initiations seen as *Entwicklung* (development, evolution), or . . . as rebirth, palingenesis” (Koepke 229), but on the reverse movement in time of a person’s life from adulthood back to early youth and to childhood. This retroactive movement is provoked by the occurrence of symptoms that seriously threaten growth and continuity.

In the personal realm, his father, who embodies moral integrity and the past of old Wales, is dying; the pending death of a father could be seen as the end of an era and a generation, so Matthew is forced to carry on a legacy from which he had separated for long and from which he had felt so alienated. In his career, Matthew has been “initiated” into a university lectureship in London, but his research on the population movements into the Welsh mining valley during the industrial revolution has stalled. He “had started so well, had made little real progress over the last three years” (Williams, *Border Country* 9) in his research, which now he can “feel but not handle, touch but not grasp” (10). But the retroactive flashbacks offer him the introspective/investigative vision to explore both psychologically and historically the source of his anxiety and crisis. His return to Wales is precisely such a retroactive movement that crosses the border from his adulthood to his early youth and to his boyhood, ultimately leading to the rediscovery of his identity in relation to his father in particular and to Wales in general, to the resolution of the conflicts between past and present, and to the epiphanic awareness that he is no longer homeless and in exile (351): “He was feeling the recovery of a childhood which at the moment of recovery was a child’s experience no more, but a living connexion between memory and substance” (317).

The visual markers such as “looked up,” “low skyline,” “below,” “lower down,” and “looked down again” (76) show how the point of view revolves in surveying the landscape from high to low, from surface to interior. On the surface, a physical eye seems to view the scenery vertically; but what is most significant is that the eye starts to look downward precisely at the moment when the boundary between the fantasy and reality totally dissolves. That is to say, the eye obviously penetrates into the world of the spatial unconscious. So each time the eye looks downward, the viewing subject turns into an inward space; each layer of the space that the inward eye touches is where time hurts: traces of memory and history, changes and dislocation. From such a historico-

geopolitical perspective, Matthew/William could dismiss the illusion of the myth so as to locate a history in space or to situate a space in history.

### Imperial Remapping and Anthropological Gaze

Traveling both spatially and temporally to visit his ailing father, Matthew removes from his baggage a train map from his childhood; splotted with water stains, the map delineates that little has changed in the geopolitical sphere of the Wales-England topography since he was a child, and yet his labored, microscopic description of the map beg the reader to investigate the parchment to decipher just what Matthew envisions (not sees) when he crosses back into Wales, his birthplace.

In *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*, Jed Esty discusses Williams's "metropolitan perspective," how Williams "draws together the urban-imperial base and rich cultural superstructure of modernism" and yet such a description of the interior self and exterior other is liminal in its ability to reach beyond the sphere of England (3). Edward Said questions just this in *Culture and Imperialism* when he posits that there is "a limitation in his feeling that English literature is mainly about England, an idea that is central to his work as it is to most scholars and critics" (14). In this postcolonial time period, right when England has relinquished its previous claim as a hegemonic superpower, Williams does little to address the many distinct colonies which were beginning to question their national identities and seeking to rewrite the histories that they were distanced from during their colonization.

But while we do agree with Said's insight into Williams's non-inclusion of colonial acknowledgement, perhaps such a lack can be accounted for by the contiguity of the map Matthew retrieves from his luggage; that is, Williams elects to deal with the geographic aspects of the British empire insofar as the topographical features were adjoined to the British center and could thus be seen contrapuntally to the urban localities he wished to create a disparity between. When Esty acknowledges the "metropolitan perspective" Williams manipulates in his work, it does not simply invoke the abstract concept of an interior/exterior binary, but this "metropolitan perspective" also contains the actual process of *looking*, of seeing the physical connections between pieces of land; it is simple to find cultural differentiation overseas, yet it becomes more trying in a society afflicted by homogenizing factors from its spatial and political neighbor.

Such an alteration in the apotheosis of the British/colonial novel is apparent in Matthew's description of the map he retrieved from his parcel; no longer does London hold the physical center of the map (a "map of Englishness"), but rather the focus is on Wales. In looking at the parchment (with the entirety of the British locality not physically delineated, but rather only alluded to by train rails jutting off of the map), we see the physical restructuring of the "map" for the colonial British writer with a relocated center; since the rail-map is further described as "nearly his own age" and possessing "arteries" there exists a conflation between the restructured map and the self/memory that Matthew brings to Wales. In traveling back, Matthew is traveling inward

toward his own center.

Thus, although Williams does not explicitly refer to *expatria* colonial writers, he champions their cause through a visual metaphor that analogizes the interior/exterior dichotomy and relocation (to a new center). In reading postcolonial writers, Simon Gikandi warns that “postcolonialism has to begin by recognizing the force of the totality of the empire” (191). In Williams’s *Glynmawr*, then, we must conceive of the entirety and not only the nebulous center. Matthew’s rail-map suggests movement and transmission both to and from either center, the empire or the colonial, as the railways function both as components of travel (interior/exterior) and political restraint (since the railway stations are immobile and predicated by socioeconomic and sociopolitical reasons).

To foreground such a reading we must return to the establishment of Wales as the Other within the context of the British empire. Williams’s explication draws attention first to the 1840s, when Britain made a concerted effort to remove the Welsh language from the school system. The 1880s saw a push toward creating an image of England as “home” through two distinct image archetypes: images of populous London and rural, unpeopled landscapes. In either case, the image was consumed by a population that came to relate the two images as consecutively primary and secondary, imperial and colonial, self and self-reflective. By “selling” the image of London as home, the Imperial gaze placed the unpeopled landscape as an image to be looked upon, but unworked. “The English countryside became the locus of timeless stability” (79) writes Wendy Joy Darby, but this unpeopled countryside removes the foreign aspect of Welsh culture and, by distancing Wales from its language, the viewer is left to incorporate his/her own voice into the space left by the landscape imagery.

The loss of voice can also be seen in *Border Country*. Williams writes offhandedly of Will’s grandfather, Jack Price, and how he “teased both Will and Harry with dialect words that he had known as a boy but that had gone out of use” (192). While little is made of such an exchange, the absence of its elaboration is telling. Since the Welsh language was made inaccessible to Will, he is mute when faced with the amputation of his mother tongue; such an absence of his language, especially when Williams was devoted to reexamining his culture and his past, is a loud silence, particularly in a novel written in the language of its colonizer. Gikandi writes, “...to discover Wales and what it meant to him [Williams], to indeed become cognizant of the location and power of the periphery, Williams had to pass through the eye of Englishness” (43). Perhaps this is why Hardy’s *Clym* ends in blindness—such a transmutation may be what one must suffer to escape the Imperial gaze. Williams’s inclusion of the microscopic/telescopic vision seems testament to this idea, but the dualities are ironically “spoken” with the eyes rather than the tongue (the selfsame product sold to the English through the images of London as “home” and the idyllic rural countryside as legacy).

In reimagining Wales as a center, Williams must return to the personal instead of the historical. Darby contests that the “distinctive way of Welsh life had gradually disappeared, its legal system had been suppressed, the Welsh language had been banned at the administrative level, and the bardic system, almost annihilated in the thirteenth century, had remained in a

state of atrophy” (80). When recreating the Welsh identity for British consumption, “remnants of bardic poetry were ‘Druidical’ relics, the Welsh language was somehow related to Hebrew, and landscape legends were embellished or invented” (81). The creation of a Welsh culture to be consumed by the outsider was the creation of an imaginary history: the British gaze wished to consume an Other that was controlled and recreated in the image that the colonizer itself created. By removing these components from his novel altogether, Williams empowers the vision of Wales as the center by diminishing the Imperial view of the Welsh and, instead, granting agency to the personal spaces of Glynmawr.

The rail-map that Matthew removed from his case has two aged photographs on it as well. The first, a “ruined abbey at Trawsfynydd” recalls the picturesque landscape movement in which the countryside was subjected to a consumerist view, unpeopled and derelict. It removes the lived-in countryside from sight. The second, the “front at Tenby,” which locates the coastal town, complete with medieval castle, populated by two young girls wearing “cloche hats” (a fashion which gained popularity in the 1920s) near an Austin’s radiator, simultaneously juxtaposes the coastal and the peripheral, the local and the commercial, and the ancient with the modern. More so than the ruined abbey, the second image suggests a lived-in space, or it would if the map itself were not over 30 years old. In traveling back to Wales, Matthew/Will must redraw the map that he had previously known as “pig-headed” Wales into a working map, an invisible map that cannot be delineated without removing its sense of self—a map that is as much internal as it is external, self as much as it is Other.

Perhaps such an idea is best encapsulated toward the end of the novel when Williams writes, “The station was out of sight, hidden in its cutting. Work went on there, in the ordinary routine, but from here it might not have existed, and the trains might have been moving themselves, with everyone gone from the valley” (*Border Country* 291). This return to the unpeopled landscape now acknowledges what is unseen. Or, the way of “reading” the emptiness has changed, as has Matthew/Will’s way of perceiving the country he once left behind. What he sees may be through the static “eye of Englishness,” but it is an ironic return, one in which the countryside is given a voice, Matthew/Will’s voice, an acknowledgement that places Wales onto an invisible map, a personal map, recreated by the lived-in world that Williams prefaces with a 30-year-old rail-map in much need of a new edition.

### **Fearful Other: Viral Transgression of the Border**

Perhaps that is why when young Matthew boards the train to Glynmawr at the beginning of *Border Country*, he is immediately greeted by a “West Indian” conductress who seems to break the indifference and ennui he laments about experiencing in London. Williams collides two aspects of the imperial gaze: the West Indies (as prefaced by Froude’s writings) and travel (via the locomotive). When Matthew examines his train map, we thus see the multi-layered possibilities his

experiences impart to the paper: Matthew's train map is full of "lived" experiences which locate the gaze of the local individual upon Wales. Matthew, though, also brings with him an ancillary perspective formed during his eight years of study in London. In joining these two disparate viewpoints we examine the changing of the British Imperialist perspective and, contrariwise, the way colonial vision evolved both with and independent from the British gaze.

At a time when England begins to stare upon itself, men such as Williams and Gikandi, men from the colonies, arrive at the metropole to seek identity, history, and truth. Williams experienced what he called as "a rejection of my Welshness which I did not work through until well into my thirties, when I began to read the history and understand it" (Gikandi 28). This may explain why, when Matthew travels to London to study, he looks at his own past and the history of his home, the coal mining valleys of South Wales. The experience of travel through the periphery of a border relocates the metropole—when Matthew travels to London he does not start suddenly examining the history and geography of London. No, rather such a change in spatial location led only to an ambiguity between self and identity that Matthew must deconstruct through the topographical recreation of the "lived" map. In essence, Matthew never leaves South Wales, at least not cognitively, but he travels across the border to see it from a new viewpoint.

Williams expounds on the interplay of the border through the introduction of the 1926 General Strike. Told from the perspective of Matthew's father, Harry, there is a parallel between the rhetoric of the railway men and those of the colonies. When threatened to be relieved of their positions by the company for striking, Morgan replies, "We stand together now for our own cause no Company masters, national or local, can stop us. We are not the company's servants; this is a free country. Stand together and be loyal to your union, which is yourselves" (*Border Country* 93). Glynmawr's railway men's participation in the General Strike was incited by the same coal mine workers later referenced in Matthew's research and A. J. Cronin's novel *The Citadel*. By locating the railway as a principality in and of itself, Rosser is relocating the locus to Glynmawr and demanding reciprocity from the company.

Such an act underscores the importance of the railway as a hub for travel across borders; Gikandi notes that travel is situated (from the English point of view) around the *oikos* (privileged point) of Britain as both the origin and terminal conclusion of any trip. Yet if travel is removed from its destination, or the possibility threatened, then, just as colonially-produced texts "deconstruct and secularize this [dynastic] presence" and force "the British to be more self-reflective of their identities and subjectivities" (28), so too does the threat of cauterized travel incite the same swiveling-in of the anthropological gaze.

Through these disparate lenses, then, we attempt to find solidarity in Matthew's return home to Glynmawr and his reestablishment of identity through the lens of a postcolonial reading. Matthew's gaze, although colored by his time in London, is trained on Glynmawr and Wales through his attention on the economics of the population movements of the Welsh mining valleys during his time in London. Though he crosses the physical border of one metropole to another, his "lived" map, defined by the train map, is of Wales. It is only by leaving London that he escapes

the indifference that had so afflicted him for the previous years.

The journey Matt/Will took outside of Wales and back home was for the discovery of a self that he already carried: “As [Matthew] walked downstairs to the kitchen, he felt the past moving with him: this life, this house, the trains through the valley” (Williams, *Border Country* 24). For the colonized subject, the self and the other are two sides of the same coin, co-inhabiting simultaneously and interfusing interstitially. Adopting a British identity was not the obliteration of who Matthew was, but rather a vehicle he chose, through travel, to simultaneously picture himself as *both* self and other. Then, when he returned home, “Suddenly England, bourgeois England, wasn’t my point of reference any more. I was a Welsh European and both levels felt different” (Williams, *Border Country* 295).

## Notes

1. The other two novels from the trilogy are *Second Generation* and *The Fight for Manod*. For a discussion of these two novels, see Eldridge, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*, and J. P. Ward, *Writers of Wales: Raymond Williams*, U of Wales P, 1981.
2. For these two unique ways of vision or “double optics” in Williams’s novel, we are indebted to Tony Pinkney’s insight in his *Raymond Williams*. However, instead of treating them as merely two optical equipments, we have extended their significance in the story as a crucial trope for reformulating new identities for the protagonist.

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