

BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

BORDER COUNTRY: RAYMOND WILLIAMS IN ADULT EDUCATION.

J. McIlroy and S. Westwood (1993). Leicester: NIACE

The late Raymond Williams is best known as a cultural critic. What is often forgotten is his contribution to adult education. In *Border Country*, John McIlroy and Sallie Westwood have taken a step towards remedying this, one that is long overdue.

Since Williams' death in 1988, several posthumous anthologies and critical essays have been published by notables such as Terry Eagleton and Alan O'Connor. Anyone with a general interest in Raymond Williams will find these well worth reading, and it is gratifying to see tribute paid to this articulate and original socialist thinker. *Border Country*, featuring as it does selections of Williams' writings on a range of topics, is unique. This book situates Williams' theoretical work in relation to his practice as an adult educator, a practice spanning the 15 year period between 1946 and 1961. To borrow a formulation used by Williams himself, adult education is the *context* in which *texts* such as *The Long Revolution* and *Culture and Society* had their genesis. This point should be emphasized, lest we slip into the error of assuming that his work as a WEA tutor was merely a "day job"—something Raymond Williams did to support his family, while his real preoccupation was with criticism.

As *Border Country* shows, this was not the case; McIlroy and Westwood present a portrait of an integrated intellectual. On the surface, Raymond Williams was a study in contradictions, the "scholarship boy" who became a Cambridge professor, the self-declared Marxist who rejected the dogmatism of party orthodoxy. However, as McIlroy and Westwood point out, Williams also rejected the view that education was a ladder designed to enable a minority of bright individuals to rise above their peers. His practice in adult education helped keep him in touch with his roots in the Welsh working class:

For Williams, involvement in adult education was first and foremost about the working class, his own relationship with the class he came from and the collective emancipation of that class...the complex interrelations between education and class were to haunt his work for the rest of his life (p. 14).

Raymond Williams struggled to maintain this connectedness throughout his career. His consistent refusal to either romanticize, or condescend to working people was expressed not only in his critiques of both revolutionary and evolutionary socialism but also (as McIlroy and Westwood make clear) through his manner and methods of teaching adults. All the above will likely appeal to Raymond Williams scholars, since McIlroy and Westwoods' perspective differs

from that of other writers and editors. What about the overall significance of *Border Country* for adult education here and now? Consider the following:

In the section entitled "Teaching and Learning", McIlroy and Westwood present Raymond Williams' analyses of his own activities as a tutor. Some aspects deal specifically with teaching literature. As an early admirer of the practical criticism of F.R. Leavis, Williams believed that the best way to learn to criticize and thus come to understand literature was by actually doing it. He differed from mainstream academics because he assumed that people in general, "an elementary-school-trained boy in a steelworks office, a forty-year old village-school-educated farrier's wife, and a sub-editor on a provincial paper who went to a minor public school" (p. 137), were just as able to do textual criticism as were Cambridge undergraduates. The expectation was not that the "boy in a steelworks office" would turn out to be another F.R. Leavis (few Cambridge undergraduates, with the exception of Raymond Williams, managed that!). Rather, through their life experience and the sharing of a common language, relatively uneducated adults could, given the opportunity, not only learn but learn well. They possessed what Williams termed the "potential for sensibility" (p. 137).

This example is typical of Raymond Williams' conviction, as summed up by McIlroy, that adult education "must provide the tools for understanding not received understandings" (p. 205). Referring to his students, Williams commented that "they didn't want the conclusions of arguments, they wanted to reach their own conclusions" (p. 258). One hears echoes of Paulo Freire's critique of "knowledge banking", and it does not denigrate Freire to point out that Raymond Williams arrived at similar conclusions independently and expressed them publicly earlier on. If anything, it is an affirmation of the emancipatory power of learning.

The section of *Border Country* entitled "Adult Education" is also relevant to current concerns. Here we encounter discussions and debates on the purpose of adult education, the nature of its constituency, and whose interests it serves. For Raymond Williams, adult education was about increasing access and providing the broadest and best education for everyone:

Williams saw the threat of market economics and philistinism as embodied in "the industrial trainers". Adult educators had to confront this threat. Adult education was not relevant to industrial training—it was essentially part of public education. Adult education, he emphasized, was not relevant "to expanding productivity nor to increasing the efficiency of the society in direct terms". Its objective was the extension of democracy and the deepening of the quality of active participation in society" (p. 311).

In Canada today, adult educators who attempt to advance populist goals—goals that challenge the human capital model—face similar dilemmas.

Raymond Williams' vision and practice of adult education unifies *Border Country*. Some readers may be surprised at the breadth of the material included (on social movements, the mass media, literary and film criticism, and the

importance of community). In fact such inclusion is crucial. While McIlroy and Westwood situate Williams in the context of his work as an adult educator, they also stress that this is only part of the picture. Raymond Williams saw education in terms of its broader social implications. Education was an aspect of culture and an informed, critical culture was central to the "long revolution" that would, he believed, help create a more humane and genuinely democratic society.

There are lessons here as well. Currently in Canada we face a situation in which publicly funded cultural institutions (schools, universities, libraries, publishing and broadcasting, to name only a few), are being either privatized or starved to death. The next time we hear (yet another) politician assert that there is simply no more money, we may want to recall the words of Raymond Williams:

Any existing economic system is the expression of real preferences... [attention] must be turned to these actual preferences and not to an arbitrary argument in terms of total production, which obscures the real choices we are making or underwriting (p. 240).

Arguments for fiscal restraint may conceal choices that are actually ideological and adult educators, among others, need to challenge the underlying assumptions of these arguments. As McIlroy and Westwood remind us:

Adult education, too, has felt the winds of privatisation, commercialisation and the market economy. The emphasis is not on the public education Williams espoused—despite the crying need for it—but on education seen as a consumption good or help up the vocational ladder. Courses about work proliferate, but are centred on professional techniques, not the social and personal meanings of work. His "Industrial Trainers" are in the saddle; his "Old Humanists" and "Public Educators" are embattled. But they are still battling; [and] a glance at the curriculum of adult education shows that the game is far from up! (p. 19)

In some ways, the "long revolution" that Raymond Williams spoke of has never seemed farther away. But *Border Country* reminds us that we are not without "resources of hope". This is Raymond Williams' legacy to adult education.

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BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF DIFFERENCE.

William G. Tierney (1993). Toronto: OISE Press

Tierney's book positioning higher education in the twenty-first century is part of the *Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series* edited by Henry A. Giroux and Paulo Freire. In introducing this work, Giroux says, "For Tierney, theory is...a borderland where conversations begin, differences confront each other, hopes are initiated, and social struggles are waged" (p. ix). With these