

The Reconstruction of Working-Class Ethical Identity in Raymond Williams' Idea of Adult Literary Education

Sun Yanping & Zhou Chengyi

Abstract: As an active promoter of adult education, Raymond Williams has attracted academic attention recently for his contribution to British adult education. However, few scholarly discussions have examined his emphasis on literary education in the realm of adult education and its ethical significance in constructing a working-class ethical identity. Williams discerned a misrepresentation of working-class identity, either as a mere “machine” of the labour force or as a passive consumer of culture devoid of rational will, akin to an animal. This erroneous construction is closely tied to the neglect of literary education in working-class education following industrialization. The profession-oriented education failed to incorporate literary enlightenment, depriving workers of their entitlement to ethical insights from literature. The adult literary education spearheaded by Cambridge elites didn't solve the problem, identifying the working class as a mass devoid of rationality for literary criticism or creation, relegated to a status subordinate to animalistic instincts. Williams, in his endeavour to destigmatize the working class from the “mob” and distinguish popular culture from industrial civilization, attempted to reconstruct a working-class ethical identity characterized by rationality, creativity, and initiative. To achieve this goal, Williams envisioned an adult literary education focusing on the practical skill of criticism and remaining open to popular culture across various media. Through these ways, Williams emphasized the intellectual and aesthetic potential inherent in the working class, and advocated for their active involvement in the creation of a dynamic and inclusive common culture, one not only shared but co-constructed by all.

Keywords: Raymond Williams; ethical identity; adult literary education; Sphinx factor

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标题：雷蒙德·威廉斯成人文学教育观中的工人阶级伦理身份重塑

内容摘要：作为成人教育的积极推动者，雷蒙德·威廉斯近来因其对英国成人教育的贡献而受到学术界的关注。然而，研究者很少深入探讨他在成人教育中重视文学教育的原因及其构建工人阶级伦理身份的伦理意义。威廉斯发现过去的教育对工人阶级身份的塑造一直是错误的、扭曲的。工人阶级群体或被视为劳动力“机器”，或被看作充满兽性的、缺乏理性意志的、被动的文化消费者。他意识到，这种错误的身份建构与工业革命以来工人阶级教育中文学教育的缺失密切相关：职业化、技能化的教育未能融入文学的启蒙，剥夺了工人从文学中获取伦理洞见的权利。而由剑桥精英主导的成人文学教育也未能有效解决这一问题。他们认为工人阶级缺乏文学鉴赏、文学批评与文学创作能力，只会遵从兽性本能。威廉斯试图解开精英语境下工人阶级与“暴民”的勾连，区分大众文化与工业文明，以此重构一个以具有理性、创造力和主动性的工人阶级伦理身份。为实现这一目标，威廉斯形成了自己的成人文学教育观，在融入不同媒体的大众文化的同时专注于培养工人阶级实用批评的能力。由此，威廉斯肯定了工人阶级的智性与审美潜力，呼吁他们积极创建一个多样包容、共享共建的公共文化。

关键词：雷蒙德·威廉斯；伦理身份；成人文学教育；斯芬克斯因子

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Introduction

Raymond Williams, a prominent British cultural critic and theorist, is widely recognised for his substantial contributions to cultural criticism. While his insights have been instrumental in shaping the theory of cultural criticism, however, his ideas on education only garnered scattered attention until lately. In 2020, *Raymond and Education: History, Culture, Democracy*, the first monograph exploring Williams' educational philosophy systematically came out. In the monograph, the author Ian Menter concludes Williams' view on education as pervasive (non-selective), comprehensive, responsive and democratic. As Menter observes, Williams keenly engaged in various educational activities with a particular focus on adult education throughout his lifetime. His exploration of and contribution to adult education has usually been unavoidable parts while addressing his view on education.

Literature, as Menter suggests, is indispensable in Williams' educational career.

In his fourteen-year teaching experience in adult education, Williams not only designed a literary syllabus for the working class¹ but also took text-reading and literary analysis as the most important skill to teach and train². During his career, Williams kept reflecting on the significance of literature in education and practising literary criticism, which suggests his strong passion for literature and approval of its value. After returning to Cambridge, he continued to teach drama and applied his educational theories in literary teaching practice. It is not exaggerated to say that literary education is a clue running through Williams' life.

While various scholars have explored Raymond Williams' educational philosophy, few have specifically examined the role and significance of literature in his adult education initiatives. Notably, John McIlroy identifies the intellectual influences of Cambridge literary studies and the "broad, left, literary culture" (8) of Marxism as motivating his deep involvement in adult education. Li Li, considering Williams as a member of the early Birmingham School, acknowledges that he "challenged traditional literary education" (198) and substantially contributed to education through cultural studies. However, scant attention has been dedicated to unravelling the specific importance of literature in Williams' adult education or probing into the reasons underpinning his decision to place literature education at the core of this endeavour. Williams' insistence on teaching literature to the working class is often simplistically linked to his personal passion or perceived as an enlightened move toward fostering a richer common culture, akin to the efforts of his predecessors among the Scrutineers. A more nuanced exploration of the motivations and impacts of Williams' emphasis on literature in adult education awaits scholarly attention.

The discussion of Williams' adult literary education should not avoid his treatment of ethical identities and ethical choices, as his own ethical identity shifted from a working-class scholarship boy to a middle-class intellectual. Without a study of his idea about the working-class identity, it is easy to find self-contradictory standpoints in Williams' theories, for example, his passion for enabling working-class readers to discern good writings contrasting to his support for popular culture. It may also help to answer the lasting question of how to bridge the "high

1 In *Reading and Criticism* (1950), Williams sets out a suggested syllabus for a four-year program of study, three years of which are about literature readings and criticism. See Ian Menter, *Raymond Williams and Education: History, Culture, Democracy*, London: Bloomsbury, 2022, 84.

2 Lisa Rabin believed his early teaching made connections between service learning and literature education. See Lisa Rabin, "Literacy Narratives for Social Change: Making Connections between Service-Learning and Literature Education," *Enculturation* 1 (2008). Available at: <http://enculturation.gmu.edu/6.1/rabin>.

culture” and “mass culture,” which still puzzles contemporary scholars. Entering the academic field and adult education with an ideal to serve the interest of the working class, Williams was facing one crucial problem, the inauthentic, biased and slanderous impression of the working-class identity. He found the huge discrepancy between the working class in the academic’s eyes and those in his life when he failed to find the “lack of quality” in his working-class family and friends. After criticizing the capital ethics of alienation in the professionalism of working-class education and reflecting on the condescending adult education led by middle-class elites, Williams established his way of adult literary education that helped reconstruct a new identity for the working-class group.

The Working Class as a Mechanical Labour Force in the Profession-Oriented Working-Class Education Lacking Literature

According to Williams, three general purposes intertwined with each other in actual education systems, “[...] first, the accepted behaviour and values of his society; second, the general knowledge and attitudes appropriate to an educated man, and third, a particular skill by which he will earn his living and contribute to the welfare of his society” (Long 147). However, he found that, in mid-20th century Britain, the third purpose of utilitarian skill training gradually became the primary one for working-class education, echoing the trend of professionalization in all walks of life. This shift deprived the majority of the working class of a fair opportunity to learn literature and treated them as a mechanical labour force without individual identity.

Professionalization is a process through which a particular occupation or field develops and establishes itself as a distinct and recognized profession. The development of professionalization caters for the needs of industry for specialized personnel who are familiar with certain complex technical processes. In Britain, the number of professionalized occupations increased rapidly in the first half-century, and more than half of professional qualifying associations were established after 1900.¹ Professionalization brought the working-class people under regulation and examination: their professional competencies were to be tested, and certificates of training and education were required.² Thus, the demand for technique-oriented and

1 According to the statistics from a 1967 table, 22 associations among 43 were established between 1900 to 1952. See David Hickson and Martin Thomas, “Professionalization in Britain: A Preliminary Measurement,” *Sociology* 1 (1969): 47.

2 “Competence tested” and “Training and Education” are listed as one of the professional characteristics in a table of “professionalization items and scale values” in a study on professionalization in Britain. See David Hickson and Martin Thomas, “Professionalization in Britain: A Preliminary Measurement,” *Sociology* 1 (1969): 41.

profession-oriented education arose.

The natural connection between professionalization with industrialization decides its downsides concerning utilitarianism and specialization, which attracted criticism from humanists, including Williams. In the 1958 article “Culture is Ordinary,” Williams announced his disagreement against the professionalization purpose of education:

I cannot accept that education is training for jobs, or for making useful citizens (that is, fitting into this system). It is a society’s confirmation of its common meanings and of the human skills for their amendment. Jobs follow from this confirmation: the purpose, and then the working skill. We are moving into an economy where we shall need many more highly trained specialists. For this precise reason, I ask for a common education that will give our society its cohesion, and prevent it from disintegrating into a series of specialist departments, the nation become[s] a firm. (99)

For Williams, education is “a process of becoming: the experiential process through which individual identities are shaped and formed” (Menter 27). By comparing nation with firm, Williams critically pointed out the ethic of capitalism that takes profit and economy as the overarching goal, which neglects the individual identities students possess. Under such an ethic the absence or deficiency of literary education became an evident situation for working-class adults, as the learning of literature was considered irrelevant and helpless to the efficiency of industrial production. Although the significance of literature had never been overshadowed by utilitarianism, the field of literature had been separated from the working-class group before Williams’ time.

The professionalization of literary criticism led to a deficiency in literary education for the working class. Williams realized that with the professionalism creeping to literary education, the right of literary criticism was confined to high education institutions, which repelled the majority group of the working class: “A large part of important modern literature [...] has been communicated through the institutions or this minority public” (Williams, *Long* 267), and the working-class people “have little or no contact with the work of literary critics” (Williams, *Reading* 5). That’s why Williams announced his rejection of the specialization of literature in a 1977 interview: “The key moment, perhaps, was my rejection of literary criticism: not only as an academic subject but as an intellectual discipline [...] I don’t believe, in a simple way, in the specialization of literature” (qtd. in Higgins

144). For Williams, professionalization and institutionalization of literature made literary criticism a profession only accessible to critics, and thus deprived others of the right to learn about how to read maturely, blocking the light of literary education to reach working-class people.

The profit-oriented and competitive ethics of capitalism also appeared in secondary education, contaminating the non-utilitarian purpose of literary education for working-class juveniles. In Williams' half-autobiographical novel *Border Country* (1960), grammar schools that majorly teach Latin language and literature became a representative institution of literary education in Britain preparing working-class students for more advanced studies in literature and humanities. However, these formal and institutionalized patterns of education worked less to bring up cultured men than to equip them with basic professional abilities of reading and writing to acquire a middle-class position. The education was selective and competitive, offering working-class boys exceptional educational opportunities for upward mobility. Moreover, the boys who were selected would face an identity crisis. When their education dragged them out from the working-class background, they usually failed to fit in the new middle-class environment. As a "scholarship boy" who entered the teaching profession through the examination system of teaching and learning, Williams emphasized the negative side of selective education that "deracinates" (Menter 38) a working-class individual from his roots and culture. Although these students represented by Williams acquired professional abilities to appreciate literature and its significance, they suffered from losing their working-class identity when they struggled to identify themselves with a middle-class profession. And by deracinating those educated boys from their birth class, the secondary education deprived working class of their position in the literary field.

The problem of separation between the working class and literature highlighted by Williams foregrounds the issue of working-class ethical identity in mid-20th century British society. As F. R. Leavis located literature as the centre of the Humanities, literary education had been considered critical in the formation of human character and ethical identity. According to Ethical Literary Criticism, ethical value is the core value of literature, encapsulating all other values of literature, such as aesthetic value.¹ The fundamental function of literature is moral teaching, through which the readers find a way to make ethical choices and grow into moral beings. Through reading literature, one acquires rationality. However, in the utilitarian

1 See Nie Zhenzhao, "Ethical Literary Criticism: A Basic Theory," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 2 (2021): 190-191; Nie Zhenzhao, "The Scientific Turn of Humanities Studies," *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 4 (2022): 563-568.

ethics of capitalism, the working-class group was confined to their professions and diminished into “machines,” for whom labour and production became the only purpose of existence, without any consideration of ethics. The deprivation of literature indicates the neglect of the working-class necessity to be endowed with ethical enlightenment, simplifying working-class identity into a mechanical labour force.

It was under such a circumstance that modern adult education was adapted to equip working-class adults with fundamental literacy to read and write as well as moral sensibility. Scrutineers follow the tradition of Mathew Arnold and T. S. Eliot to pursue a common culture of “sweetness and light,” endeavouring to revive the wasteland taken by industrialization. Nevertheless, Williams noticed that their common culture failed to give an impartial working-class identity, when those elites still underestimated working-class ability to approach serious literature, and equalled the majority with mobs, popular culture with industrialized culture.

The Working Class as “Animal” in Elite-Led Adult Literary Education

Although the history of adult education in Britain can be traced back to Medieval times, it was the establishment of the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) in 1903 marked the milestone in providing adult education to workers. Raymond Williams was a strong supporter of adult education for workers. In Cambridge, young Williams had already demonstrated a firm dedication to the significance of adult education; in the late 1940s, he began to serve as a tutor for the WEA, and devoted 14 years of his teaching career to adult education, which he believed could provide educational opportunities to workers who were beyond the age of school or college. Not long after he entered the field, Williams added many courses in literature and arts to the curriculum. He hoped to serve the interest of the working class by equipping them with “emancipatory knowledge for the extension of working-class democracy and the best of working-class culture” (McIlroy 14) through the humanities from which the workers had been excluded in their youth.

Williams’ passion for adult education partly stemmed from the aspirations of the Cambridge humanists represented by Leavis, who envisioned a common culture shared and accessible to all. Hoping to build a better culture to replace the industrial one, the intellectual elites before Williams keenly made contributions to the literary teaching of adult education. The Leavises, Denys Thompson, D. W. Harding, one of the editors of *Scrutiny*, all devoted to the development of literature teaching in

the WEA.¹ By introducing practical criticism, the scrutineers countered literary historians' treatment of literature as an extension of social history, insisting "there is only one approach to a study of literature and that is through a study of words" (Phelps 75). It is on the foundation made by those elites that Williams set his life goal to contribute to working-class education.

However, Williams soon found the purpose of his elite predecessors went awry with his own. While he proposed to extend adult literary education "so that both writers and audiences can come through in their own terms" (Long 270) to avoid the monopoly of minority groups in literary criticism, and to construct a knowable community of true working-class culture, the elite-led adult education only serves to preserve "the best of the existing high minority culture" (McIlroy 15). For the Scrutineers, literary teaching in adult education was but a process of "simply the transmission of the received body of intellectual and imaginative work to working-class people" (McIlroy 307), which neither enabled workers' mind to approach literature initiatively nor equipped them with ability to create their own literature. Although the literature was open to them, the separation between literature and the working class remained.

While industrialization split workers and literature in a real sense, the elites separated them in a conceptual sense, when they put "the minority culture" of literature as an entity that cannot be constructed by the majority of the working class. The separation was established on the wide-acknowledged concept of "the lowness of taste and habit" (Williams, "Culture is Ordinary" 96) of the working-class group. As the primary consumers and recipients of industrial civilization and cultural industries, the working class was often portrayed as indulging in the imagery of cheap pleasures, seemingly lacking the discerning ability for critical reflection on the cultural industry and consumer society. Within the opinions of the elites in early modern Britain, there existed a prevailing notion that the working class could not discern art with a reflective and critical nature, and they were perceived to have a deficiency in their ability to create serious literary works. One of the representative ideas is from Leavis, for whom literature, as the centre of humanistic education, is antagonistic to mass civilization, which in his

1 For further details about Scrutineers' contribution to literary teaching in adult education, see P. W. Musgrave, "Scrutiny and Education," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 3 (1973): 253-276; McIlroy John, "Teacher, Critic, Explorer," *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters*, edited by John Morgan and Peter Preston, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993, 14-46; Poole Herbert Edmund. *The Teaching of Literature in the WEA*, London: British Institute of Adult Education, 1938.

understanding basically equals industrial civilization: “the prospects of culture, then, are very dark. There is the less room for hope in that a standardized civilization is rapidly enveloping the whole world” (Leavis 169). As Williams observes, “[...] ‘cheap literature’ has been compromised by its use as a form of class distinction” (Long 169). The popular culture including film, magazines and newspapers was regarded as evidence of the majority’s deficiency in critical thinking. A dearth of literary criticism produced by the working class is also perceived, framing them as participants in a culture of mass consumption rather than as discerning connoisseurs or producers of literary art. For such reasons, the working class had been primarily treated as passive recipients rather than active contributors to the cultural and literary landscape in the elite-led common culture.

Williams vehemently rejected the perspective of the Scrutineers regarding the working class, asserting that they had conflated and confused certain concepts, thereby revealing biases and misunderstandings about the identity of the working class. Firstly, Williams contended that the equation of the majority of the working class with the term “mob” was a misjudgement. He further challenged the assumption that ordinary people conform to a stereotypical description of being “low and trivial in taste and habit,” arguing that “this lowness is not inherent in ordinary people” (“Culture is Ordinary” 96). He highlighted that the college elites, influenced by Arnoldian thought, inaccurately equated the working class with the “mob,” a term used by Mathew Arnold to refer to the collective masses or common people within a society, implying a lack of sophistication or refinement in their tastes, habits, and cultural pursuits. The equation positions the working-class mass in opposition to the “minority culture” pursued by intellectuals “expressing the finest consciousness of the age” (Leavis 164). This binary opposition perpetuates a divisive characterization of the working class as antithetical to the intellectual pursuits of a privileged few.

Moreover, Williams believed the elites’ equation of mass popular culture with industrial civilization was also not an accurate representation of reality. He contended that the prevalent vulgar and lowbrow nature of popular culture during that time did not authentically reflect the lives and sentiments of the working class, and challenged the assumption that the observable shortcomings of widely distributed popular culture can serve as a true guide to the state of mind and quality of life of its consumers. Contrary to this perspective, Williams, through his interactions with the working class in their everyday lives, discovered a more nuanced reality. He noted, “I found as much natural fineness of feeling, as much quick discrimination, as much clear grasp of ideas within the range of experience as

I have found anywhere” (“Culture is Ordinary” 97). Furthermore, Williams observed cultural progress among the majority: “The editions of good literature are very much larger than they were; the listeners to good music are much more numerous than they were; the number of people who look at good visual art is larger than it has ever been. we live in an expanding culture, and all the elements of this culture are themselves expanding” (“Culture is Ordinary” 98). He argued for a re-evaluation of popular culture, suggesting that it should be seen as a fluid and evolving entity, not inevitably dictated by industrial civilization. Williams asserted that popular culture has the potential to authentically represent the lives and experiences of the working class while encompassing refined tastes and sensibilities. Thus, he challenged the elitist perception of popular culture as a monolithic and degrading force, emphasizing its capacity for diversity and growth within the broader cultural landscape.

Williams’ reflection addresses the core issue of elitism within the Leavision conception of adult literary education, highlighting a fundamental ethical problem—the failure to regard the working-class collective as rational and wilful individuals, instead reducing them to subjugated beings driven solely by desire. Ethical literary criticism recognizes the coexistence of the “animal factor” and “human factor” in individuals, which combines to form the “Sphinx factor” (Nie, “Ethical Literary Criticism: Sphinx Factor and Ethical Selection” 398). The animal factor manifests in natural will and free will, where natural will represents innate willpower and instinctive reactions, while free will arises from unbounded desires. Conversely, the human factor manifests as rational will, guiding individuals to make ethical choices. The elitism perspective, equating the working class to a mindless mob succumbing to natural and free will, oversimplifies their nature. This reductionist view neglects the rational foundation of working-class humanity, denying their capacity to restrain their animalistic instincts and appreciate literature with complex ethical significance. By emphasizing the uncultivated animal side and downplaying their rational “human” side, the elites perceive the working class as “masses to save, to capture, or to direct” (Williams, “Culture is Ordinary” 102). This biased view not only fails elite-led adult literary education but also hinders the realization of a shared cultural ideal. The authentic working class possesses its intellectual autonomy, resisting the imposition of elite culture through indoctrinatory methods.

Realizing the elite’s tendency to regard the working class as uncivilized “animals,” Williams endeavoured to reshape the ethical identity of the working class within adult literary education. He positioned the working class in a more initiative and active role, contending that they, like intellectuals, possess the ability

to think critically and appreciate literature, with the potential to elevate their cultural sensibilities. Williams believed that these inherent capabilities can be harnessed and stimulated through appropriate approaches to literary education. In his effort to challenge the dehumanizing perspectives held by the elite, Williams advocated for a more inclusive and empowering narrative that recognizes the intellectual and aesthetic potential of the working class, through which he manifested the working-class ethical identity as “human.”

The Working Class as “Human” in Williams’ Adult Literary Education

Williams believed that literary education should contribute to the formation of working-class identity by emancipating itself from the monopoly of professionalism and elite institutions, enabling moral teaching with the change of ethical environment, and constructing a common culture with the political and aesthetic engagement of the working class.

Firstly, Raymond Williams conducted a historical examination of the reading public to disentangle the working class from the stereotype of a mob indulging solely in the consumption of cheap and ephemeral literature. He contended that indulgent reading is not exclusive to the working class, asserting that “I doubt if any educated person has not used books – any books – in this way [of ‘reading as addiction’]” (*Long* 172). Correspondingly, he suggested that “The kind of attention required by serious literature is both personally and socially only variously possible” (*Long* 172). Essentially, every reader, regardless of class, has the potential to read for entertainment while possessing the capacity for serious engagement with literature. These dual reading approaches mirror the two facets of the Sphinx factor, where indulgent and leisurely reading, driven by free will, reflects an aspect of the animal factor, while mature reading, guided by rational will, represents a part of the human factor. Just as the animal factor is an integral aspect of the human factor, leisure and critical reading, entertainment and education are inseparable facets of life. “The modern separation of pleasure and learning, rationalised into the alienated categories (which then acquire their appropriate methods) of entertainment and instruction, has been very damaging to our ideas of art and, it may be said, of education” (Williams, *Long* 385). Consequently, one should not demonize or negate the animalistic aspect entirely, nor should it be generalized as an innate weakness of the working class. Through this perspective, the ethical identity of the working class as “human” is restored.

Furthermore, Raymond Williams dissolved the opposition between popular culture and serious literature by disentangling popular culture from industrial

civilization, thereby liberating the identity of the working class from the shackles of industrial civilization. When examining the history of reading, Williams emphasized the blurred boundary between popular culture and serious literature: “The disparity in value is not evidence of a fundamentally different practice and intention, especially since we find not only great art and bad art, but a range of infinite gradations between these, with no obvious line where a difference in kind can be drawn” (*Long* 45). The discussion indicates that both popular culture and serious literature are fluid and open categories that transform with the changes in societal history, and they should not be directly linked to the human character, human factor, or animal factor of a particular group. While discussing I. A. Richards’ experiments in practical criticism, Williams challenged the notion that scholarship alone can define the canon, emphasizing the importance of critical judgment as a condition for retaining the defining idea of literature: “He [Richards] showed that even highly trained students could be taught the canon but could not in majority produce for themselves its implicit valuations. [...] Literature came to be paired with Criticism [...] scholarship could not itself establish the literary canon [...] critical judgement -had to be taught as the condition of retaining the defining idea of Literature” (*Writing* 193). The canon, as Williams suggested, is not something to be extended to the masses as “a ready-made culture” but, rather, an evolving entity that changes as it is extended, and some may be “peered” or “radically criticized” (“Culture is Ordinary” 100). Williams did not advocate for a clear definition and scope of canon, but believed that the canon is distinguishable, with standards that can be constructed with the participation of the working class. Although his ambiguous stance on canon causes controversy among scholars¹, his perspective emphasizes the dynamic nature of the canon and underscores the idea that the construction of standards requires the active involvement of diverse voices, including those of the working class.

Therefore, after liberating the working class from the inauthentic ethical identities of “machine” and “animal,” and restoring it to that of “human,” Raymond Williams’ vision of adult literary education seeks to imbue it with a more dynamic significance—a role of participant and contributor to a common culture. In contrast to figures like Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis, and T. S. Eliot, whose concepts of common culture do not involve the broader public as active contributors, Williams introduces the notion of co-creation. As Terry Eagleton succinctly puts it, “For Williams, a common culture is one which is continuously remade and redefined by the collective practice of its members, not one in which values framed by the

1 On the argument about Williams’ view on canon and de-canonization, see Yin Qiping, “Canonization and Canonicity,” *Chinese Frontier of Language and Literature* 1 (2013): 140-147.

few are taken over and passively lived by the many. For this, he prefers the term ‘culture in common’” (119). Williams, therefore, placed significant emphasis on the public’s ability to actively participate in shaping and reshaping a common culture. His approach to adult literary education reflects a commitment to these aims, recognizing the potential of individuals not just as consumers but as active participants and creators within a common cultural landscape.

In pursuit of realizing the ideal of active participation by the working class in the co-creation of a common culture, Williams’ approach to adult literary education manifests two distinct characteristics, a primary focus on the cultivation of practical critical abilities and an open attitude toward mass media, which respectively dealt with capacity and motivation of the working-class group. Practical criticism, a concept introduced by I. A. Richards in his eponymous work, underscores the significance of cultivating critical abilities. Later, scholars of Scrutiny developed this concept into the method known as close reading, which involves isolating texts for thorough examination, focusing on semantic and structural analyses. This approach represents a paradigm shift, challenging the traditional emphasis on knowledge transmission in educational practices. As Menter observes, Williams agreed with Scrutineers in their valuation of critical ability, prioritising practical criticism over the transmission of knowledge of literature: “In its close focus on reading, Williams is emphasizing the importance of skills in textual analysis. It is not his students’ knowledge of literature, its history or its social significance on which he is concentrating; he is more concerned with the development of their skills” (83). His emphasis on practical criticism aims at improving working-class capacity in common culture contribution. Rooted in human rational will, practical criticism serves to amplify the human factor while subduing the animal factor. This capacity, when honed, aids working-class readers in making ethical choices during reading, wherein their current life experiences and ethical frameworks inform the interpretation of textual meaning.

However, to engage the working class in cultural contribution requires not only competent capacity but intrinsic motivation, which could hardly be aroused in close reading of isolated literary texts. Williams’ approach to adult literary education extends beyond the conventional emphasis on textual analysis by urging an examination of texts within their cultural context. He identified a potential drawback in the emphasis on isolated close readings, warning of the risk of textual isolation and detachment from societal contexts: “Any enquiry into the reading of literature, or into the present position of any of the arts, has a danger of becoming no more than marginal, unless the cultural atmosphere in which all the arts exist is recognised

in the discussion” (*Reading and Criticism* 1). Williams, therefore, advocated for an integration of life experiences and cultural backgrounds into the process of close reading, challenging the notion of a detached analysis. This approach also echoes Williams’ emphasis on adult literary education instead of juvenile literary education, as the engagement with serious literature, often dealing with specifically “adult experiences,” and “a school boy, however well instructed, could not be expected to respond adequately to it” (Williams, *Reading* 6). This perspective was later developed by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) into the “structure of feeling” theory, arguing that the most crucial characteristic of literature is its reflection of the “structure of feeling” of a particular era, closely intertwined with the culture that serves as a way of life.

Due to his attention to the connection between close reading of texts and their cultural contexts, Williams adopted an open and inclusive attitude towards mass media culture in his teaching. As Williams observed in *Writing in Society* (1983), new media such as radio, television and film changed the relations between writing, print and silent reading which had been taken for granted in literary studies.¹ This observation has shown evidence in his adult literary education curriculum in the 1950s, where Williams not only focused on traditional literary forms such as poetry, drama, and fiction but also incorporated elements of popular culture like newspaper extracts and advertisements for “pre-literary analysis” (*Reading and Criticism* 137).² He believed that these aspects of popular culture were closer to the everyday lives of the working class than serious literature, and integrating popular culture as life experiences into art can captivate readers’ interest, facilitate understanding, and enhance the effectiveness of critical training. In *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams emphasized the crucial role of communication in art: “It is the characteristic of aesthetic theory that it tacitly excludes communication, as a social fact. Yet communication is the crux of art, for any adequate description of experience must be more than simple transmission; it must also include reception and response” (45-46).³ He posited that influenced by traditional aesthetic theories,

1 Williams observed that new media such as radio, television and film changed the relations between writing, print and silent reading which had been taken for granted in literary studies. For a more detailed discussion, see Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society*, London: Verso, 1983, 6.

2 Williams designed a draft syllabus for a four-year study of literature reading. For details, see Raymond Williams, *Reading and Criticism*, London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1950.

3 Williams viewed the success of communication and experience conveyance as indispensable criteria of successful art which requires efforts from both the artist and the reader. For a more detailed discussion, see Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961, 45-51.

literary education neglected the reception and response of students, predominantly prioritizing serious literature and overlooking the disparities between serious literature and working-class life experiences. The neglect left the working class to face challenges in genuinely embracing serious literature, which had been confined within the cultural domain of a select few. In critiquing the prevailing literary pedagogy, Williams underscored the need for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the diversity of readers' experiences and actively considers their responses. This critique forms a foundational element in Williams' broader advocacy for a re-evaluation of literary education to better align with the realities and varied perspectives of readers from different social backgrounds.

Consequently, Williams recognized the transformative power of new media, such as radio, television, and film, which intimately connect with people's common life and inject fresh perspectives into writing and reading. By starting with texts like advertisements, popular novels, and news articles that closely align with the life experiences of the working class, Williams believed that readers can more easily approach criticism, preparing them for more advanced and serious reading. Moreover, Williams's emphasis on reader acceptance and interaction is reflected in a shift in teaching methodology from a traditional teacher-led approach to a more participatory discussion model: "because he sought to develop the students' critical skills rather than to 'fill them with knowledge', the basis of his classes, especially in literature, should be that the students were provided with reading and that they should then learn through student-initiated discussion" (Menter 19). For Williams, film and other media have become indispensable elements of living culture, and only by understanding and analysing these emerging media beyond a consumerist perspective can the working class authentically create literature that reflects their life experiences. Williams emphasized the importance of transcending a passive consumption of media and, instead, actively engaging with it as a means to enrich the cultural and literary expressions of the working class. In this way, he envisioned a literature that emerges organically from the lived experiences and creative identity of the working class, embracing the evolving dynamics of contemporary culture. Williams' shift to such a critical pedagogy positively reflects his hope to build a more initiative role for the working class in common culture co-construction by equipping them with the capability and motivation to engage in the critique and construction of serious working-class literature.

Conclusion

Facing the misrepresentation of the working-class ethical identity as a mere

mechanical labour force or passive masses full of animality, Raymond Williams identified the absence of literary education and inappropriate manner as pivotal factors. Criticizing the practice of profession-oriented working-class education that severs literature from the working class, he further reflected on the Cambridge Scrutineers' attitude that posits the working class against literature as high art. Williams, in dismantling this separation and opposition, formulated his concept of adult literary education. Through the integration of close reading techniques and a closer engagement with working-class life experiences through popular culture, he aimed to cultivate workers' abilities of practical criticism, and thus reshape the ethical identity of the working class as rational, creative, initiative, and participatory "humans" contributing to a common culture. The ethical implications underlying Williams' conception of literary criticism as the foundation of adult education are profound. As literature provides ethical guidance and strengthens rational will, it shapes the ethical identity of individuals capable of ethical choices. Considering the working class as unrelated to or incapable of appreciating literature implies a denial of their ethical identity as "humans." By emphasizing the crucial role of literary education in adult education, Williams reaffirmed the working class's ethical identity as "humans," and their intellectual and aesthetic potential within the "human factor." In the context of contemporary China, where popular culture thrives while literary criticism remains confined to academic institutions, Williams' insights into adult literary education offer valuable inspiration for the construction of a dynamic, inclusive, and participatory culture.

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