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FATHERS AND PHANTOMS: REVEALING THE UNCONSCIOUS RESIDUES IN RAYMOND WILLIAMS'S *BORDER COUNTRY*¹

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When reflecting on the decade-long gestation of his first novel *Border Country*, Raymond Williams claimed that with each draft he 'was never quite starting afresh ... it was more a case of revising drafts.'² Exploring the tangled origins of Williams's novel can be a way of unlocking its textual secrets; just as the novel's protagonist Matthew Price is haunted by his Welsh working-class origins, the novel is itself haunted by its origins. Williams wrote and re-wrote what would eventually become *Border Country* from the late 1940s until its eventual publication in 1960, leaving unpublished but completed early versions of the novel. The major catalyst for Williams's completion of the novel was the death of his father Harry Williams in 1958; while the novel is indeed multi-layered (it explores, for instance, the value of a local culture rooted in working-class south Wales), it is the portrayal of a father-son relationship that is at the heart of the novel. But the writing of the fictional father Harry Price was not based wholly on Williams's own father, Harry Williams, as we can see:

Harry is not my own father, because a lot of him went into Morgan too. It would have been possible to combine his contradictory impulses in the same character; I tried that but in the end decided to separate them out by creating another figure who represented the much more restless, critical and self-critical side of my father's nature.³

In *Border Country*, this results in a kind of doubling with, as several critics have suggested, Morgan Rosser acting as Harry's antithesis and as an alternative father to Will/Matthew.⁴ Although the novel underwent many revisions, with changes to structure, tone and even plot trajectory, the father-son relationship remained its emotional core. In this article, I will be looking at the two major forerunners to *Border Country* (hereafter referenced as *BC*),⁵ *Brynllwyd (B)* and *Border Village (BV)*, as these are the two novels that focus on a boy's development into manhood and the relationship the son has with his father.⁶ This article will set out to argue that *Border Country* is haunted by traces (or 'residues') from the earlier versions *Brynllwyd* and *Border Village*, and that these traces can be said to form the textual unconscious of *Border Country*.

In thinking about *Border Country* as a kind of textual crucible that contains traces or residues from earlier drafts, Williams's concept of the 'residual' proves illuminating. The residual, alongside categories he calls dominant and emergent, is one part of the tripartite structure that Williams uses to describe the process of cultural change: the residual is that 'which has been formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process.'⁷ Applying this concept to the process of writing, the residual can become a way to interrogate the novel's textual unconscious, as the novel contains many textual residues still active (albeit muted) that were formed in the earlier versions. Thus, *Border Country* can be said to be textually haunted by the earlier drafts which leave ghostly residues of unspoken themes that trouble the narrative, leaving uneasy silences and gaps within the novel. The most unsettling silence in *Border Country* relates to the issue of fatherhood. This article will explore the uncertainty that lingers over Will's paternity, using textual evidence from earlier drafts to illuminate the submerged silences in *Border Country*.

Proposing to read Williams's novels through a psychological lens may be at odds with Williams's own views on Freudian psychoanalysis, of which he expressed distrust in a number of his critical works.⁸ However, this is not to claim that Williams had no interest in certain ideas generated from the discourse of psychoanalysis. On the most simplistic level, the writings of Williams and Freud share a major concern: the position of the (usually male) individual within the structure of the family. Indeed, we could read Freud's assertion that

In the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology ... is at the same time social psychology as well.⁹

as a psychoanalytic parallel to Williams's famous passage in *Border Country*, where the father is clearly a 'model' for the son in both a personal and social sense:

A personal father, and that is one clear issue. But a father is more than a person, he's in fact a society, the thing you grow up into ... We've been moved and grown into a different society. We keep the relationship, but we don't take over the work. We have, you might say, a personal father but no social father. What they offer us, where we go, we reject. (*BC*, p. 351)

Furthermore, there is evidence of Williams's interest in psychoanalysis in the Raymond Williams Papers, housed in the Richard Burton Archives at Swansea University. In one of his most important notebooks, which features his notes on a 'theory of culture', we find notes that Williams made on the idea of 'good' and 'bad' fathers in the book *Hamlet and Oedipus*, a Freudian reading of literature by the Welsh psychoanalyst Ernest Jones.¹⁰ This suggests both a familiarity with and an interest in Jones's influential Freudian reading of *Hamlet*, which indicates that Williams wasn't always so hostile to psychoanalysis. Indeed, *Border Country* can be seen as a kind of Welsh *Hamlet*; both Matthew Price and Hamlet are haunted by the ghosts of their fathers, and this haunting threatens the stability of their own masculine identity. The father-son relationship haunts all Williams's fiction, so it is not surprising that the tension between fathers and sons that Ernest Jones comments on in his work would have struck a chord with Williams.

Using psychoanalytic theory can be a good way to explore ideas of textual haunting and unconscious residues. The concept of the phantom, theorised by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, seems especially pertinent, referring as it does to familial trauma and unspeakable secrets. In the words of Nicholas Abraham:

The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious – for good reason. It passes from the parent's

unconscious into the child's ... it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography ... the presence of the phantom indicates the effects, on the descendants, of something that had inflicted narcissistic injury or even catastrophe on the parents.¹¹

Abraham and Torok used the concept of the phantom to theorise how certain events outside an individual (especially within the context of the family) can nonetheless impact on the individual's psychological make-up. The origin of repressed trauma within an individual comes from a buried secret within the earlier generation of the family, usually the parents. This psychic inheritance is passed on silently, unconsciously, from one generation to the next: '*The phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other.*'¹² We can begin to apply this idea to *Border Country*. Before the birth of his son, the young signalman Harry Price, in an effort to establish a home for himself and his pregnant wife, moves out of lodgings and into his first family home. In the description of the house, Williams draws our attention to the presence of a curious 'non-room':

Downstairs, the living-room, with two windows, opened off the passage, and at the far end of the living-room (always called simply 'the room') was a dark pantry – at the extreme end of the cottage from the kitchen. The pantry was matched by another, extremely small room, which had a door to it from the living room. *Nothing could be done in so small a space, although it had a door to it and was a room in everything but size.* (*BC*, p. 59; emphasis added)

In one of the most sustained explorations of Williams's novels, Tony Pinkney argues that this 'non-room' seems to 'announce a perpetual secret possibility'.¹³ The fact that such a seemingly insignificant room appears in all three versions is striking. If we compare its description in *Border Country* with that in *Border Village*, we can see that the two are virtually identical:

Nothing could be done in so small a space, although it had a door to it and was a room in everything but size. (*BC*, p. 59)

Nothing could be done with this small space, although it had a door to it and *gave every appearance* of a room but for its size. (*BV*, p. 31; emphasis added)

In *Border Village* this room seems to have its own energy (giving ‘every appearance of a room’), while in the earliest version, *Brynnlwyd*, we are told explicitly that it only has one use: ‘Walled off by the pantry was a small space, entered by a door, which might optimistically have been invented for another room, but which in fact could only be used for storage’ (*B*, p. 48). As we can see from this brief example, using archival material to re-read a novel is itself a rather uncanny experience: we read unpublished versions of a novel that is familiar to us, but these unpublished versions are both familiar and strange in their subtle differences, and contribute to making strange the published version.¹⁴ If we align Pinkney’s suggestion that the room announces a ‘perpetual secret possibility’ with Abraham and Torok’s theory of the phantom, then what is being stored in this ‘non-room’ are family secrets. Unspeakable family secrets function as phantoms in what Esther Rashkin calls ‘transgenerational haunting’, where the secrets of others are transmitted unconsciously to the next generation of a family.¹⁵ The phantom can also shed new light on the idea of the uncanny; the secret is both known within the family home (*Heimlich*) and unknown by the subject to whom it has been transmitted (*unheimlich*).¹⁶ In *Border Country*, these ‘phantoms’ – recurring, partly submerged textual secrets – form the unconscious of the text, paradoxically giving the text its meaning. As Pierre Macherey writes:

The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus, the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist ... for in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said ... To reach utterance, all speech envelops itself in the unspoken.¹⁷

There are things that cannot be said in *Border Country* that nonetheless reveal themselves through subtle yet persistent hints. Secrets dominate Williams’s fiction, but unlike his later novel *Loyalties* (which is about

Cold War espionage), the secrets in *Border Country* are the unconscious (or the 'unspoken') of the text.

Uncertain Paternity

He did not know why he should feel this extra-ordinary tension. It seemed that something was trying to get through to him, some strange pressure that was not even a voice yet that carried an unmistakable attention and warning. He saw Morgan and his father sitting side by side, looking across at him. How would it have been, he thought suddenly, if Morgan had been my father? He immediately looked away, as if the thought had been spoken. (*BC*, p. 309)

This passage, from a quietly climactic scene in *Border Country* in which Will is essentially forced to choose between Harry and Morgan, can be seen to encapsulate the text's concern with uncertain paternity. Will's feeling of unease and anxiety, coupled with a sense that some 'strange pressure' is trying to tell him something he is only partially conscious of, can be read as a kind of 'phantom' that I referenced above. This voiceless warning seems to come from within Will, in a kind of unconscious ventriloquism that gestures to the unspeakable. He wonders what life would have been if Morgan was his father, but the thought shames him, causing him to look away, even though this has all being going on silently within Will's own mind. An unsettling scene with regards to the father-son relationship, this passage hints at the novel's dark concerns over Will's paternity. If we trace this theme back, we can see that the anxiety of uncertain paternity has been haunting the novel from its very beginnings.

The father in *Border Country*, Harry Price, is a complex, almost tragic man. Eerily quiet, the surface text only hints at what is behind his sad silence. From his very first appearance, he unnerves the reader with the striking description of 'the distance and withdrawal in the very deep blue eyes' (*BC*, p. 28). Ironically, given his unsettling presence, his driving force in life is to 'settle' and on moving to the village of Glynmawr, he and his wife Ellen lodge with fellow railway signalman Morgan Rosser. If Harry's silence and aloofness is strangely sinister, it is matched by the equally disturbing figure of Morgan Rosser. He is

presented to us as a 'black figure' above Harry and Ellen in the signal box (*BC*, p. 30) and although Morgan is recently widowed, he is friendly and flirtatious with Ellen (*BC*, p. 32). He is constructed as Harry's polar opposite in both temperament and appearance. Whereas Harry is reserved and awkward, Morgan is 'easy, alert, confident'; Harry's facial features are strong and prominent, while Morgan's face is 'small, with neat, regular features' (*BC*, p. 31). Harry and Ellen make up a kind of quasi-familial household with Morgan, his baby daughter Eira and housekeeper Mrs Lucas. With these two separate families coming together as one – that is, the Prices and the Rossers, if we read Mrs Lucas as being part of the Rosser family in her role as housekeeper/surrogate mother to Eira – it is the women who 'provided the real continuity': 'the three unconnected generations – Mrs Lucas, Ellen and the baby Eira – would have seemed, to a stranger, a single family' (*BC*, p. 39). Harry is closely connected to the domestic sphere at first, spending time with Eira, more so than he will do when his own son is born. It is Morgan who raises the issue of uncertain paternity. He spends more time out of the home, taking a 'reserved' interest in baby Eira, telling Harry: 'To lose a wife and get a baby strands you really; you have to remind yourself it's yours' (*BC*, p. 40).

Harry grows even more silent and withdrawn around the time Ellen falls pregnant, and Ellen turns to Morgan's baby daughter for comfort. Here we begin to see the closeness of these two families becoming dangerously intertwined: Mrs Lucas tells Ellen that 'It's lovely to see you with that little baby ... It's just as if it was your own. I think sometimes like it is' (*BC*, p. 41). Mrs Lucas then goes on to voice her concerns that Morgan may not have been good enough for the late Mrs Rosser, and when Ellen describes him as 'nice, and good-looking', Mrs Lucas retorts that 'girls look for that' (*BC*, pp. 41–2). This brief tension between these two women over Morgan's character seems to be directed at Ellen, who enjoys flirting with Rosser (*BC*, p. 45) and is often lonely at nights when Harry is at work. Given that water is such a prominent metaphor in Williams's work,¹⁸ it may be significant that at this moment the tap Mrs Lucas turns on lets out a spurt of murky brown water (*BC*, p. 42), almost as if this relationship has muddied the waters. Harry desires to move out of Morgan's house, as if to assert his own authority over his emerging family, and he begins to look 'away' when Morgan speaks to him. Morgan is keen for them to stay living together, arguing that they 'live more like a family' (*BC*, p. 44).

It could be argued that the text unconsciously suggests that Morgan is Will's father, rather than Harry. As I have mentioned, Williams acknowledged that he split his own father into Morgan and Harry when writing the novel and, on an admittedly speculative (though suggestive) level, Dai Smith revealed that Williams's mother gave birth to an illegitimate child before her marriage to Harry Williams, which could potentially offer a biographical basis for this theme of uncertain paternity that haunts the novel.¹⁹ The text has enough uneasy gaps in it to suggest that Morgan is not simply an alternative father-figure to Will, but could actually be his biological father. For instance, when Ellen is in labour, Morgan turns up at Harry's house uninvited and Harry 'saw suddenly how tense Morgan was' (*BC*, p. 62). When the child is born, it is not Harry but Morgan who asks after Ellen (*BC*, p. 63). However, it is to *Border Village* that we must go for further evidence as it contains a number of suggestive sentences that don't make it into *Border Country*. For example, in *Border Village* we are told that when Ellen falls pregnant Harry 'found himself looking at the so readily acceptable yet still strange household ... It was as if, still, it would not be his own family' (*BV*, p. 15). This highlights the potential for uncertainty and therefore invalidity in Harry's role as a father. *Border Village* also includes more explicit comments from both Morgan and Harry about each other. Morgan says of Harry that he is 'a glutton for work', adding that 'there's something in Harry, after, you never can quite get it' (*BV*, p. 40). Harry, for his part, is uncharacteristically vocal about Morgan, saying that 'Not that now I know quite where I am with him' (*BV*, p. 49). Both men seem to construct each other as somehow unknowable, suggesting there is a sense of mistrust and unease felt on both sides.

Morgan is seen to come between husband and wife in both *Border* versions, through his attraction to Ellen: 'Since they had first met, they had liked each other, but now, under pressure, the pattern of feeling was shifting. They were both very conscious of Harry, as they might be of a parent' (*BC*, p. 159). During Will's adolescence, after Morgan has taken Harry and his family for a tour of his new factory, the subconscious theme that has up until now only been hinted at is brought into the open. Will, Morgan and Harry sit in the living room of Harry's house and it is this room, we remember, that has a door that leads to the non-room, a space that Harry had previously argued with Mrs Hybart 'should never have been walled-off at all, but left with the living

room' (BC, p. 59). In this scene, it would appear that this space has been opened up for all sorts of skeletons to emerge. Morgan offers Will a job in his new factory in front of Harry, who noticed 'how nervous he [Morgan] seemed' (BC, p. 309). The text explicitly represents Harry and Morgan as potential fathers to the confused Will: 'Harry was sitting on the sofa in the middle of the room. After taking a few paces with no obvious purpose, Morgan sat beside him. Will, in a chair by the window, looked across at them as they sat together' (BC, p. 309). Freud argued that children often have fantasies of alternative parents, but here it is less a fantasy than a potential reality that Morgan is Will's actual father.²⁰ It is at this moment that he is visited by the 'strange pressure that was not even a voice'. The suspicion that Morgan, not Harry, could be Will's biological father is something that Harry has repressed but has unconsciously passed on to Will, haunting his unconscious. Here, in the living room which leads off to the sinister non-room, this dark thought is forced into Will's consciousness, only for Will to then repress it. As Abraham writes, 'what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others'.²¹ It is worth adding here that in *Border Village*, the final sentence of this passage is slightly different: 'The thought immediately embarrassed him, as if it had been spoken. He had to look away: the feeling was too strong to be contained' (BV, p. 277). This is typical of *Border Village*, where scenes are just that little bit more revealing than *Border Country*. Will is faced with two very different men: Harry, the man who has raised him and guided his life, still, settled, subdued, and Morgan, presented to us as an alternative father-figure as well as Harry's antithesis, dominant, restless, achieving. But Will feels that he is in the same position with both men: 'Arguing with Morgan was like arguing with his father. He never seemed to know what the real argument was' (BC, p. 310). The language Morgan uses is careful yet suggestive, especially given Abraham's claim that 'the phantom is sustained by secreted words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc, from within the unconscious':²² 'But look, Will, I've known you since – before you was born I was almost saying. I've known your Dad and I've worked with him, and it's been always to me like my own family. You as much as Eira' (BC, p. 312). Morgan values Will: 'You've got the education and you know the people here. And you're your Dad's son' (BC, p. 312). It is at this ambiguous comment that 'Harry moved suddenly, and walked across to sit by the window' (BC, p. 312). This sudden movement suggests how painful it is for Harry to

hear this exchange in which he has no say, until Will asks for his opinion. Will rejects Morgan's offer, leaving Morgan angry. Things are resolved, but there is something that remains repressed here, 'kept under', in the novel's own words (*BC*, p. 299):

The quarrel had been only superficially about the job. The real substance, and its roots, seemed to lie far back. This was a border defined, a border crossed ... Only Harry did not seem conscious of the change, perhaps because he had reached it before the others, and had been living with it, already, for many years. (*BC*, p. 317)

If the quarrel was only 'superficially about the job' we are left to wonder what was really going on below the surface. Its 'roots' stem from the past; so perhaps Morgan is the dark secret that haunts the novel, the secret locked in the non-room, the source of Harry's sad silence. An acknowledged border has been crossed, one that Harry has been silently and perhaps only semi-consciously living with for many years. We are used to the borders in the novel being articulated as national or class-based categories, but here the border seems to be between truth and secret, between the said and the not-said.²³ We could read this hint of Harry not really being Will's father as the secret that has been passed down silently through the family, only to be resolved by Will rejecting Morgan for Harry. Later on in the novel, the adult Matthew is discussing his academic work with Morgan, in a conversation that circles obsessively around Harry. Matthew defiantly tells Morgan that Harry has been his source of identity and strength: 'Every value I have Morgan, and I mean this, comes from him. Comes only from him' (*BC*, p. 356). Far more is hinted at than uttered in *Border Country*, and Morgan enigmatically ends the conversation with the words 'We shan't finish this, Will. It's a lifetime' (*BC*, p. 359).

Fatherhood in *Border Village* and *Brynllwyd*

The unpublished manuscript of *Border Village* features a number of scenes that are omitted entirely from *Border Country* that can tell us a great deal about Williams's concerns over the issues of paternity and masculinity. Two of these revolve around Mrs Powell, who in *Border Country* is merely the 'widowed schoolmistress' (*BC*, p. 125), a

relatively marginal figure who challenges Harry on his strike action (*BC*, p. 127). In *Border Village*, however, she is at the centre of two very curious incidents. The first involves her young son Cemlyn, who is involved in a fight with Will's friend Brychan and is then paraded around the village in a wheelchair by his mother, although he can walk (*BV*, pp. 137–8). Cemlyn is awkwardly introduced as the 'son of the schoolmistress who lived with her husband, a traveller' (*BV*, p. 80). Mr Powell is a shady figure, one who is not seen as belonging to the community, and the imprecise use of language could imply that Mrs Powell's husband is not Cemlyn's father. The scene in question is baffling: Harry is taking a bath, haunted by memories of his mother's death, when a frantic Mrs Powell knocks the door:

'He said he would kill the boy' ...
'Who?' ...
'My boy's father' ...
'Your husband?' ...
'My boy's father' (*BV*, pp. 155–6)

The text repeatedly suggests that Mrs Powell's husband and Cemlyn's father are not the same man. Harry knows little of Powell, other than that he is 'consumptive and frail, and he 'could not really associate Powell with that kind of violence; it was Mrs Powell whose stability, on past experience, he questioned' (*BV*, p. 157). Harry, after the incident of Cemlyn's faked illness, is suspicious of Mrs Powell, and his suspicions are reinforced when he goes to see Mr Powell. He claims it is Mrs Powell who is trying to kill her son; Powell's masculine identity here is in crisis and, increasingly hysterical, he calls for his mother. Harry thinks to himself: 'This happened, didn't it, this kind of breakdown, when men were not strong enough. You could only be as you were' (*BV*, p. 163). The text hints at the pressures put on men in the construction of their masculine identity. But it is the issue of fatherhood that remains centre-stage. Mr Powell, clearly distressed, says to Harry: 'You wouldn't want the boy hurt, Harry. You've got a boy of your own,' and Harry replies enigmatically, 'I don't want anybody hurt. There's things I can't stop' (*BV*, p. 163). Harry seems to undermine his own status as a father, and deliberately distances himself from this distressing scene:

For an instant, even while the struggle was on, Harry seemed, in his mind, to hesitate: to see the whole event from far outside, its absurdity and its pain. He saw, quite clearly, his own father, standing at the head of the table, weeping ... He went down, shielding his face with his arm, and got a hold on Powell's legs. He pulled back, suddenly, and Powell went down ... There was a quick cry, and then silence. Harry stood up ... it had all changed now, in Harry's mind. He did not want to talk. His eyes, again, were dark and withdrawn. (*BV*, p. 165)

This scene seems to have been inspired by Williams's knowledge of European naturalist drama, as it follows the action of Swedish playwright August Strindberg's play *The Father*.²⁴ In this play, the titular father (known as 'The Captain') is driven to madness by his scheming wife who calls his status as a father into question in order to have full control over their daughter.²⁵ Harry, much like the doctor in Strindberg's play, is torn between two conflicting arguments and his natural sympathy seems to go with Mr Powell. He goes back to his house and confronts Mrs Powell, who he still doesn't believe. He points out that in both their stories Mr Powell makes no attempt to harm the boy.

'Could I live with him, could I trust my boy with him ...'

'He's your husband,' Harry said, looking around at her. Mrs Powell jerked her head, and looked quickly away.

'He's ill in his mind ... It's not for you to say.'

'I'll say what I've seen, at least,' Harry said, after a pause. (*BV*, p. 167)

The community act with great speed to cover things up the next day (there is a sense that this is not an isolated incident) and Mr Powell is taken to a mental hospital. Morgan blames the nature of community life when discussing the event with Harry, and even warns Harry to leave the close-knit village before Harry breaks down like Powell (*BV*, p. 169). But Harry 'was thinking about himself and Powell. Which way round would Powell have put it, if he'd been telling the story?' (*BV*, p. 172). We might want to consider why Harry aligns himself with the doomed Powell in this case: it is possible that Harry feels his sense of self both as a father and as a man to be in crisis in *Border Village*.

Whereas the later drafts of the novel are concerned with the issue of uncertain paternity, the earliest completed version, *Bryllwyd*, is dominated by a broader concern with masculinity. This is evident from the dark and disturbing opening, which is tinged with gothic melodrama and male angst. While the novel in its *Bryllwyd* form will become a more anguished *Bildungsroman* than the two *Border* versions, this version begins with the psychological turmoil of a father at the birth of his son. The dramatic and even destructive landscape takes centre-stage and the crisis of masculinity felt by this young man about to be a father is evident. Nature is seen as a destructively feminine force that overwhelms man, while the violence of the storm is a metaphor for the violence of labour: 'At the dim, hollowing centre the struggle issued and widened in violence' (*B*, p. 9). We do not learn the man's name for several pages; we sense threat and foreboding, and see the man's feelings of alienation, as he 'winc'd from the separation which had been imposed and nourished by the slow months during which his wife had tuned her responses inward to the quickening child' (*B*, p. 9). He doesn't seem ready for fatherhood, suffering a 'boyish embarrassment at parenthood' (*B*, p. 11), and his unstable masculinity is symbolised in a comically Freudian moment where, while outside in the storm while his wife is giving birth to his son, he tries to grab hold of a (glaringly symbolic) tree that has been uprooted by gushing water (*B*, p. 10).

The novel then goes on to chart Martin/Jim's childhood and adolescence, and the tempestuous and at times violent relationship he has with his parents (something that is considerably toned down in the later versions).²⁶ For a time, the father is absent from the text and the narrative loses focus and coherence in following Martin to Cambridge (in sections that are wholly omitted from both *Border Village* and *Border Country*). However, George (the father in this version of the novel) returns in the closing part of the novel for Martin's confrontation with his past demons; here George is eager to know his son's degree result, but Martin is reluctant to tell him that he achieved a First. It would seem that paternal pressure to achieve has always been a source of great strain in their relationship (*B*, p. 650). Martin is keen to assert himself as a man in the eyes of his father, rather than a 'boy' and argues that the differences in the father-son dynamic have to be 'learned' by the now less powerful father (*B*, p. 650). After this, in an ending that tips into a kind of interior monologue, Martin, on top of Holy Mountain (Ysgyryd Fawr or 'The Skirrid' near Abergavenny), has a vision of his

father ‘waiting to congratulate me, wanting to be in a position to welcome me, and myself turning from him to lecture him *as if he had not been my father*’ (*B*, p. 694; emphasis added). Coming right at the end of the novel where Martin’s identity fragments before being tentatively re-stitched, this provides us with the most explicit rejection of the father that we see, while also highlighting the inherent unknowability of the father that has troubled all three texts. Martin comes to reject all ties of family and community at the close of *Brynnlwyd*, believing ‘That no sane man believes himself independent; that no man alive is self-sufficient, that no good man wishes to be free. All that a man can be, if he wishes to respect himself, is autonomous’ (*B*, p. 566). While we may consider Williams to be something of a champion of the idea of community, his early work features a character who is conflicted between loyalty to self and loyalty to others, and deeply resentful of communal constraints.

Incestuous Haunting

If Morgan Rosser can be interpreted as Will’s father in *Border Country*, then this clearly impacts on the way we read Will’s relationship with his childhood sweetheart Eira, Morgan’s daughter. Reconsidering their relationship as a potentially incestuous one helps to explore some of the unease and tension that exists between them, both as young adults and upon Matthew’s return to the village when they are both grown-up and married. The threat of incest can be seen to haunt their relationship unconsciously, leaving both feeling guilt-ridden. Take, for instance, this fascinatingly symbolic episode from *Border Country*, where Eira and Will, on the brink of adulthood, sense their long-standing relationship with each other to be changing in ways they can feel but not articulate:

Every weekend, now, they went out somewhere together ... Eira sat spreading her legs, her hands cupped in the billow of her wide yellow skirt. Will looked down at her and then walked a little away. A stream was trickling from a small outcrop of rock just above them. At a black ledge, it fell in a white jet of water, and then spread again into a dark, shallow pool. Will went to the ledge and lay beside it ... The water came in ice-cold spurts against his teeth, and

splashed over his face and neck ... He went back on his knees, and she lay beside him. She cupped her hands as he had done, then reached forward and turned her head. He put his hands on her shoulders, and held her as she strained down. As the water touched her face she cried out, shocked by the cold, and jerked back her head ... Her hair fell loose as she strained to the sharp white water. Will felt under his hands her quick breath, and saw the water splashing her on her face and hair. Widening her mouth, she drank quickly, feeling the cold of the water back through her body. Will felt the movement of her shoulders under his hands, and his fingers tightened as he drew her up. (*BC*, pp. 282–3)

The relationship between these two young adults is developing into something that unsettles them both, despite their familiarity with each other. Suggesting as it does the more taboo and relatively unspoken act of oral sex (the suggestive references to her widened mouth, the spurts of water on her face), it is fascinating that Williams uses this as the key moment of sexual awakening for the two of them, especially if we think that their relationship itself is potentially taboo. Indeed, their behaviour after this activity suggests more than simply a naive embarrassment at sex. Their relationship is tinged with guilt, with things that are unspeakable. Perhaps it is simply their familiarity with each other that is holding them back from fully consummating their relationship. But there is something here that is not said: it is one of the unfathomable depths of Williams's novel that hints at something much darker beneath the surface. In a novel famed for its realism, this deeply symbolic scene stands out and unsettles the narrative with its slightly gothic hint of unspeakable and forbidden incestuous desires.²⁷

This is even more explicit in *Border Village*. The scene discussed above also takes place in this version, but a later scene, omitted from *Border Country*, adds further to the incestuous tinge of Will and Eira's relationship. Eira is among a group of village girls taking part in a baptismal service in the river Honddu. Will, observing the service, is plagued with complicated feelings over his attraction to her, a mixture of 'desire and distance' (*BV*, p. 259), of love mixed with guilt. After she has been baptised he feels she has been in some way transfigured before him, 'made sacred' (*BV*, p. 259), and in this way she is almost untouchable. But Will's guilty feelings towards Eira are contradictory: although she now appears 'sacred' to him, he feels that she now has 'a woman's

face, more definite, more experienced, less (was this fair?) innocent' (BV, p. 283). Tied up with the guilt over his feelings for Eira, which 'were confused and partly ashamed, and he did not know what he could do to put them right' (BV, p. 285), Will also seems anxious of Eira's sexuality, and fearful of her power over his feelings. In an act that runs counter to the aim of baptism, Eira seems born anew to be viewed as a wholly sexualised creature ('eira' is Welsh for 'snow', which has clear connotations of purity). What is fascinating about this scene is that it occurs just before Morgan takes them to his factory and Will is forced to choose between his two fathers (discussed above). The fact that this scene, exploring the guilt and confusion Will feels toward Eira – who could potentially be his half-sister, or at least viewed as too close for comfort – is then cut from the final version is a startling omission. When we consider the etymological relationship between chastity and incest (incest is that which is literally 'not chaste'²⁸) then we could read Will's vision of Eira's lost innocence here as tied up with his incestuous feelings towards her.

Eira's baptism in *Border Village* marks the beginning of Will's voyage out of the community. Morgan, in a jibe to Harry that could reveal his distress at losing his influence on Will, says, 'Pity we got to separate these two young people though ... I thought you were keen on families' (BV, p. 265). Morgan unconsciously encourages the relationship between Will and Eira (he, just like Harry and Will, cannot know for sure if Will is his son or not). This act could have two potential motives: on the one hand, it could be a way of denying his paternity of Will, of denying his indiscretion and betrayal. On the other hand, it could be the only way to keep him close: having Will as a potential son-in-law and working in his factory could be the only way to acknowledge his paternity and keep things in the family.²⁹ This would strengthen his position as head of the family. Eira and Will's incestuous union would therefore not be a revolutionary act that disobeys the law of the father, but a threat to the individual and a deconstruction and perversion of the family.³⁰ Will rejects both Eira and Morgan's job offer, therefore denying Morgan the chance to control him. Morgan's factory can also be read as a perversion of the working-class values Harry embodies for Will; the failure of the General Strike sees the former socialist Morgan adopt a kind of capitalist individualism.

Will's rejection of Morgan reverberates later in the novel. The adult Matthew, having abandoned his boyhood name Will, comes to be seen

as a stranger by both Morgan and Eira on his return (*BC*, pp. 341, 409). It is Morgan who encourages him to stay and work in the community, while Harry quietly guides him away, as if to avoid this unspoken incestuous and suffocating communal bond. Matthew/Will is seen as a stranger by the women in the community, and in this way is a threat to the self-contained border community, an almost abject figure.³¹ Matthew resents the close relationship that Ellen and Eira have, feeling that it is being conducted behind his back.³² Matthew feels betrayed by their façade of a false friendship; given the feeling of unease towards Morgan that Matthew seems to have inherited from Harry, and the possibility that they have been withholding the secret of his paternity, it is not surprising that he behaves in this way. He is resentful of the exchange of secrets that seems to be going on out of his sight. He tells Eira:

The fact is that for years you've been keeping up a completely false relationship with my mother. False on both sides ... I can't stand you meeting and talking about me, exchanging your photographs. I find it disgusting. (*BC*, p. 339)

In her seminal work on photography, Susan Sontag calls photographs 'ghostly traces' of the past, supplying 'the token presence of the dispersed relatives' and encouraging the 'imaginary possession of a past that is unreal'.³³ Matthew has left, but still exists for his mother and ex-girlfriend in photograph form, and this is viewed by Matthew as a threat of female possession. Not only that, but the nature of the photograph – potentially superficial, artificial, ghostly and unreal – is used as a means to keep up a surface appearance without acknowledging the depths of what has really gone on in these two closely linked families. If Morgan can be read as Will's father then Eira would be his half-sister, in which case the façade of Eira and Ellen being merely friends is 'disgusting.' Matthew, rejecting both Eira and Ellen, cannot be incorporated back into the place he was known. 'It hurts, now, when you come back as a stranger' (*BC*, p. 341), Eira tells him sadly during their repressed exchange. Constructing him as a stranger not only makes him a potentially threatening 'other', but also can deny any hint of incest between these two families. But Matthew, or Will, not only has two names but two potential paternal origins; therefore he has only

ever been a stranger, not only to the women who loved him but to himself.

The incest theme can be traced back to *Brynllwyd*, where it features more overtly. Towards the end of that version, while at university, Martin begins a relationship with Jane Calverley, whom he meets at a Communist party meeting. Despite both being from the same village, it is only while at Cambridge that the two become friends; her family feature in minor episodes in *Brynllwyd* as the village's resident aristocrats. It is highly significant that Jane is both a member of his community, and yet is separated from him in terms of class. In his study on incest in American literature, Marc Shell notes that a number of texts feature siblings who have been separated and then meet and fall in love unknowingly, one belonging to the upper class and one to the lower class. The act of marrying outside one's class (perhaps in recognition of what Shell calls 'universal siblinghood', where all men are figuratively brothers) leads to a marrying into your own family.³⁴ This possibility is explicitly highlighted in *Brynllwyd*, where Jane reveals that 'I was asked once if you were my brother' and, as they stand together before the mirror, we are told that 'the resemblance was certainly considerable, especially when their faces were set' (*B*, p. 614). It is at this moment that they agree to marry, though Martin feels a physical reluctance when he tells her he is 'afraid' to touch her (*B*, p. 615). But the scene ends on an ambiguous note, as Martin makes his new fiancée cry by telling her he doesn't like her father. Although they do consummate their union before marriage, it leaves Jane guilt-ridden and uneasy, appearing to regret the perceived 'sexual coarseness' of 'their full physical relationship before marriage' (*B*, p. 636). In *Brynllwyd*, Martin is destined to marry Jane who is *seen* to be his sister; he rejects the law of any father, but ultimately the text ends not with an image of fraternity but of autonomy. Martin's pseudo-incestuous relationship with the upper-class Jane causes him to reject all that is not self; as discussed above, the end of *Brynllwyd* sees Martin alone on Holy Mountain, trying to rid himself of any ties of allegiance.

Conclusion

The phantom of uncertain paternity that haunts the pages of *Border Country* is eventually confronted towards the novel's close. After his

father's death, Matthew has no time to feel any 'personal reaction' (*BC*, p. 402), having to undertake the usual tasks of preparing the funeral. It is only when he is alone, locked in the bathroom with the funeral flowers, that he is able to cry helplessly and uncontrollably like a child, before drying his eyes 'with a sudden angry roughness' (*BC*, p. 422). But back in bed, feeling the 'virgin pain' and 'loss of identity' (*BC*, p. 423) as a result of his father's death, he imagines seeing the face of his dead father:

The face was grey and clenched tight ... It seemed never to recede yet always to be driving down at him, as if coming from darkness and distance ... For it seemed no longer an image of memory, but actual and beyond him. He argued that he was watching his own mind, under a breaking tension; that the beat of the darkness was the pulse of his own body. But ... it was Harry's death he was experiencing, and the terror beyond it, the drive to darkness, with the mind still active but reduced to this single rhythm ... With his eyes wide open, he stared at this driving darkness. The death beat into him, without pity, without meaning, without pause ... The terrible mindless rhythm allowed nothing but itself, its own annihilating darkness. (*BC*, p. 424)

This uncanny moment sees the father come back as a kind of phantom that continues to haunt his son. But Matthew does not close his eyes to this almost monstrous vision: by keeping his eyes open, he refuses both to repress the father and to let himself be overpowered by him. By far the most gothic section in any of the three versions, this passage seems to embody Williams's anxiety over the father-son relationship: the domineering, phallic father's power threatens to overwhelm the son (the ghostly head is almost aggressively sexual with its incessant 'driving' movement and 'pulsing' beat). We could read this as the 'unconscious' (in the form of a ghost of the father) trying to penetrate his consciousness, as a way of making sure he doesn't forget his origins. But it isn't just the head of his father that Matthew sees in this ghostly vision:

Behind the head a different darkness was forming, and innumerable figures moved through it yet were part of the darkness. The figures streamed past him, moving without movement, and always

one face was nearest, in this procession of darkness, streaming across the dark empty pitch. (*BC*, p. 424)

These ‘innumerable figures’ correspond with the figures that Matthew says at an earlier point in the novel ‘got up and walked’ during his research into population movements in Wales. In discussion with Morgan, Matthew admits that he feels haunted by his work and unable to complete it. He feels he has become too closely involved in it; he claims that he ‘saw suddenly that it wasn’t a piece of research, but an emotional pattern. Emotional patterns are all very well, but they’re our own business. History is public or nothing’ (*BC*, p. 353). We could argue that Matthew’s research is his only remaining connection to the community he has left behind. But Matthew is reluctant to be dragged back into his traumatic and yet unspoken and unspeakable past. When he says to Morgan that ‘History is public or nothing’, he highlights the private nature of his own personal history. His intellectual work can be seen as his attempt to remain connected to his old world and its history, albeit in a loose and impersonal way, thus preventing the feelings he has for so long had to repress from forcing their way into the open.

In *Modern Tragedy*, as with much of his best critical writings, Williams uses his own feelings and lived experience to explore the idea of tragedy:

I have known what I believe to be tragedy, in several forms. It has not been the death of princes; it has been at once more personal and more general ... I have known tragedy in the life of a man driven back to silence, in an unregarded working life. In his ordinary and private death, I saw a terrifying loss of connection between men, and even between father and son: a loss of connection which was, however, a particular social and historical fact.³⁵

Modern Tragedy can be seen as Williams’s attempt to make tragedy, just like culture, ‘ordinary’. *Border Country* is an example of a tragedy that is ordinary and commonplace, the death of a father and the grief of a son. The ‘terrifying loss of connection’ between father and son is reflected in *Border Country*, and is something that Matthew tries hard to prevent. But the personal tragedy of the novel is also far darker: as I have demonstrated, the unconscious of the text, the ‘residual’ formed in earlier drafts, suggests that the relationship between Harry and

Matthew is complicated by the possibility that Morgan Rosser is Matthew's true father. *Border Country* is thus also the tragedy of one's own unknowability, of betrayal, of family secrets unable to be confronted. The phantom-like figures behind the ghostly head of Harry Price are dominated by 'one face [which] was nearest, in this procession of darkness.' Morgan Rosser, always near to the action of the novel, has also paradoxically been the novel's phantom lurking in the darkness. Harry's death leaves Matthew to face the 'annihilating darkness' that results from the loss of a father, with Harry's tragic resignation transmitted silently to Matthew. The novel ends with Mathew as a father himself, kissing his two small sons in their sleep (*BC*, p. 436). But this touching and hopeful ending, clearly a gesture of hope for the new generation, does little to eradicate the deep sense of despair and disenchantment that has hitherto dominated the novel.³⁶ The textual unconscious of *Border Country* has shown that the roots of that despair are as personal and psychological as they are social. While Williams's social criticism looks forward to revolutions, however long they may be, the characters in his fiction must work hard not to be dragged back into their traumatic pasts.

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Notes

- ¹ All quotations from Raymond Williams's unpublished material and from the novel *Border Country* are reproduced by kind permission of the Estate of Raymond Williams and are © the Estate of Raymond Williams. Archival materials consulted for this paper are located in the Raymond Williams Papers, Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University: WWE/2/1/1/6 (*Border Village* materials), WWE/2/1/1/8 (*Brynnllwyd* materials) and WWE/2/1/12/2 ('B' Notebook).
- ² 'The Welsh Trilogy and *The Volunteers*', in Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, ed. Daniel Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 112–42; p. 120.
- ³ Williams, 'The Welsh Trilogy and *The Volunteers*', p. 122.
- ⁴ See Katie Gramich 'The Fiction of Raymond Williams in the 1960s: Fragments of an Analysis', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, 1 (1995), 62–74; Tony Pinkney, *Raymond Williams* (Bridgend: Seren, 1991); James A. Davies, "'Not going back, but ... exile ending": Raymond Williams's fictional Wales', in W. John Morgan and Peter Preston (eds), *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters* (London: St Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 189–210. Dai Smith's *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2008) is an essential text for any scholar of Williams's early work and a major influence on my own work here.
- ⁵ All references to *Border Country* are taken from Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2006).
- ⁶ In *Brynnllwyd*, the parents are George and Ellen Price, while the son is Martin George Price, though known as Jim (as was Raymond Williams at home). In both *Border Village* and *Border Country*, the parents are Harry and Ellen Price, with their son Matthew Henry being known as Will.
- ⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 122.
- ⁸ See Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 333.
- ⁹ *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 69–143; p. 69.
- ¹⁰ WWE/2/1/12/2; Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1947; New York: Norton, 1979), p. 122.
- ¹¹ Nicholas Abraham, 'Notes on the phantom: a complement to Freud's metapsychology', in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 171–6; pp. 173–4.
- ¹² Abraham, 'Notes on the phantom', p. 175; emphasis in original.
- ¹³ Pinkney, *Raymond Williams*, p. 31.
- ¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 124; Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 1–2.
- ¹⁵ Esther Rashkin, *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 30.
- ¹⁶ Rashkin, *Family Secrets*, p. 30.
- ¹⁷ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 85.
- ¹⁸ Dai Smith, 'From "Black Water" to *Border Country*: Sourcing the Textual Odyssey of Raymond Williams', *Almanac: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, 12 (2007–8), 169–91: 179.

- ¹⁹ Williams, 'The Welsh Trilogy and *The Volunteers*', p. 122; Smith, *Warrior's Tale*, p. 18.
- ²⁰ 'Family Romances' in Freud, *The Uncanny*, pp. 35–41: p. 37.
- ²¹ Abraham, 'Notes on the phantom', p. 171; Rashkin, *Family Secrets*, pp. 28–30.
- ²² Abraham, 'Notes on the phantom', p. 175.
- ²³ Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, pp. 85–9.
- ²⁴ *The Father* in August Strindberg, *Plays: One*, trans. Michael Mayer (London: Methuen Drama, 1990), pp. 25–77.
- ²⁵ Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), pp. 78–80.
- ²⁶ I do not have the space to explore them here, but in *Brynllywd* there are a number of episodes that alternatively present the father as a loved and feared figure in the young boy's life. There are also disturbing scenes of domestic violence that Williams would never include again. See WWE/2/1/1/8.
- ²⁷ Charles L. Crow, *American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 65.
- ²⁸ Marc Shell, *Children of the Earth: Literature, Politics and Nationhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 103.
- ²⁹ Tony Pinkney, 'Raymond Williams and the "two faces of Modernism"', in Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 12–33: p. 26. Pinkney refers to Morgan's 'compulsive, Mephistophelean but also vampiric need to feed off the energies of the Prices, father and son'. My reading complicates the separateness of the two families.
- ³⁰ Karl F. Zender, 'Faulkner and the Politics of Incest', *American Literature*, 70/4 (1998), 739–65: 740–5.
- ³¹ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Norma Claire Moruzzi, 'National objects: Julia Kristeva on the process of political self-identification', in Kelly Oliver (ed.), *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 135–49: pp. 144–5.
- ³² This has a biographical element: Williams's mother Gwen never liked Joy Williams, preferring a previous girlfriend of Raymond's she stayed friends with; see Smith, *Warrior's Tale*, p. 103.
- ³³ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 9.
- ³⁴ Shell, *Children of the Earth*, p. 16. An interesting example of this can be seen in Herman Melville's 1852 novel *Pierre; or The Ambiguities*, where the possibility that Pierre and Isabela are brother and sister remains ambiguous. The novel centres around the bizarre love triangle between Pierre, his fiancée Lucy and Isabela, a working-class girl claiming to be his sister. Pierre and Isabela pretend to be married in order for Isabela to have her share of the family wealth, but the novel ends, melodramatically, with the death of all three.
- ³⁵ Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (1966; London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 13.
- ³⁶ Cornel West, 'The Legacy of Raymond Williams', *Social Text*, 30 (1992), 6–8: 7.

