



a Pelican Book

6/-

The Long Revolution

Raymond Williams

the author of 'Culture and Society'



PELICAN BOOKS

A762

THE LONG REVOLUTION

Raymond Williams was born in 1921 at the Welsh border village of Pandy, where his father was a railway signalman. He was educated at the village school, at Abergavenny Grammar School, and at Trinity College, Cambridge. After the war, in which he served as an anti-tank captain in the Guards Armoured Division, he became an adult education tutor in the Oxford University Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies until 1961, when he was elected Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, where he is a university lecturer in English. In 1947 he was an editor of *Politics and Letters*, and is now General Editor of the *New Thinker's Library*. He has published a number of essays in literary journals and is well known as a book-reviewer for the *Guardian*. His books include *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (in Penguins), *Drama in Performance* (1954), *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, *The Long Revolution* (1961), *Communications* (1962), *Modern Tragedy* (1965) and two novels, *Border Country* (in Penguins) and *Second Generation*. Raymond Williams is married and has three children.

THE LONG REVOLUTION

Raymond Williams



PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth Middlesex, England
Penguin Books Pty Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

First published by Chatto & Windus 1961
Published in Pelican Books 1965

Copyright © Raymond Williams, 1961

Made and Printed in Great Britain
by Cox & Wyman Ltd,
London, Reading, and Fakenham
Set in Monotype Baskerville

This book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade, be lent,
re-sold, hired out, or otherwise disposed
of without the publisher's consent
in any form of binding or cover
other than that in which
it is published

CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Foreword to the Pelican Edition	8
Introduction	9

PART ONE

1	The Creative Mind	19
2	The Analysis of Culture	57
3	Individuals and Societies	89
4	Images of Society	120

PART TWO

1	Education and British Society	145
2	The Growth of the Reading Public	177
3	The Growth of the Popular Press	195
4	The Growth of 'Standard English'	237
5	The Social History of English Writers	254
6	The Social History of Dramatic Forms	271
7	Realism and the Contemporary Novel	300

PART THREE

Britain in the 1960s	319
Notes to the Pelican Edition	385
Index	391

FOREWORD

I HAVE been helped by many people in writing this book, and wish to record my thanks. I am especially grateful to my wife, not only for much general help with the whole text, but for her detailed work in relation to Part Two, Chapter 5. I was greatly helped by my colleague Michael Carritt in discussion of the problems of what we mean by creativity, and for a time the discussion was so close and continuous that it became difficult to separate his ideas from my own; I am sure, in any case, that my account as it stands owes much to him, though I cannot involve him in my errors. I was also helped by Edward Thompson's criticism of an earlier draft of my history of the popular press, and am grateful to him for this as for much else. Other friends, especially Stuart Hall and H. P. Smith, have helped perhaps more than they know. I would also record my general indebtedness to the published works which I list at the end.

Parts of the book have previously appeared in *Partisan Review* (New York), *Nuova Corrente* (Milan), *Monthly Review* (New York), *Universities and Left Review*, and *New Left Review*.

R. W.

FOREWORD TO THE PELICAN EDITION

For this edition, I have made a few revisions and amendments, and added some notes, which are indicated by asterisks. These are mainly for clarification or to bring some point up to date.

I must thank all those who have written to me about the book, and those who have taken part in the public argument and discussion about it, which has been even more extensive than in the case of *Culture and Society*. The point was reached, quite early, when I could not do much more than listen, but I have at least done that.

The book is, of course, still controversial and difficult: more so, for many reasons, than *Culture and Society*. The earlier book gathered and tried to restate an existing tradition, whereas this book is an attempt to reach new ground. Its method is then much harder to grasp, for the method is in this sense the substance. If readers have found parts of the book useful, as many have said, that in its own way is welcome. But also, if the connexions I make and try to describe are not seen or not accepted, the book as a whole is bound to be difficult to bring into focus, and then its local difficulties are exaggerated. The many kinds of analysis which are necessary to the essential case carry their own additional problems. I do not want to argue any of the difficulties away, but most of them belong, as I see it, to the intention, and I am especially grateful to those who, realizing this, have met me on that ground. Even where this, as in some cases, was the true source of the controversy, I found the recognition deeply encouraging.

R. W.

INTRODUCTION

THIS book has been planned and written as a continuation of the work begun in my *Culture and Society*, 1780–1950. I described that book as ‘an account and an interpretation of our responses in thought and feeling to changes in English society since the late eighteenth century’, and this, of course, was its main function, a critical history of ideas and values in this period of decisive change. Yet the method of the book, and in particular its concluding chapter, led to a further intention: from analysing and interpreting the ideas and values I moved to an attempt to reinterpret and extend them, in terms of a still changing society and of my own experience in it.

I did not foresee, when I was working on *Culture and Society*, that by the time it was published an important part of our general social thinking would have developed along lines which included my own themes. The result of this development was not only that the book was very extensively discussed – I have read more than fifty thousand words of comment on it, and taken part in very many verbal discussions – but also that the lines of argument opened up went in many cases considerably beyond the scope of the book itself. I had planned and drafted much of the present book before *Culture and Society* was published, but I have now considerably revised it to take account of the discussion. I have kept, however, to my own ideas of the further work that was necessary, and have limited this book to what in any case I should have written about: questions in the theory of culture, historical analysis of certain cultural institutions and forms, and problems of meaning and action in our contemporary cultural situation. I can work in these general fields only to the limit of my own interests, and do not suppose these to be ideally complete. Indeed I have already risked an extension and

variety of themes well beyond the limits of any kind of academic prudence, for what seems to me the good reason that there is no academic subject within which the questions I am interested in can be followed through; I hope one day there might be, for it was quite obvious from the discussion of *Culture and Society* that the pressure of these questions was not only personal but general.

My title is taken from a sentence in *Culture and Society*, but a further note on it might be useful. It seems to me that we are living through a long revolution, which our best descriptions only in part interpret. It is a genuine revolution, transforming men and institutions; continually extended and deepened by the actions of millions, continually and variously opposed by explicit reaction and by the pressure of habitual forms and ideas. Yet it is a difficult revolution to define, and its uneven action is taking place over so long a period that it is almost impossible not to get lost in its exceptionally complicated process.

The democratic revolution commands our political attention. Here the conflicts are most explicit, and the questions of power involved make it very uneven and confused. Yet in any general view it is impossible to mistake the rising determination, almost everywhere, that people should govern themselves, and make their own decisions, without concession of this right to any particular group, nationality or class. In sixty years of this century the politics of the world have already been changed beyond recognition in any earlier terms. Whether in popular revolution, in the liberation movements of colonial peoples, or in the extension of parliamentary suffrage, the same basic demand is evident. Yet the demand has been and is being very powerfully resisted, not only by the weight of other traditions, but by violence and fraud. If we take the criterion that people should govern themselves (the methods by which they do so being less important than this central fact) it is evident that the democratic revolution is still at a very early stage.

The industrial revolution, backed by immense scientific development, commands our economic attention. Its rate of

expansion, in the world as a whole, is already greater than anyone had foreseen, and is indeed too rapid to be easily interpreted. Yet, while its aims and methods have been almost universally accepted, most of the world is still far behind the stage actually reached in the advanced countries, while in the advanced countries the sense of possibility in the transformation of nature is being continually and rapidly extended. Thus the industrial revolution, in its broad sense, is also at a comparatively early stage. Moreover, it is evident that its correlation with the growth of democracy is by no means simple. On the one hand it seems clear that industrial development is a powerful incentive to new kinds of democratic organization. On the other hand the apparent needs of industrial organization, at many levels from the process of accumulating capital to the status of the worker in a very extensive and divided technical system, sometimes delay, sometimes frustrate the aspiration to share in the making of decisions. The complex interaction between the democratic and industrial revolutions is at the centre of our most difficult social thinking.

Yet there remains a third revolution, perhaps the most difficult of all to interpret. We speak of a cultural revolution, and we must certainly see the aspiration to extend the active process of learning, with the skills of literacy and other advanced communication, to all people rather than to limited groups, as comparable in importance to the growth of democracy and the rise of scientific industry. This aspiration has been and is being resisted, sometimes openly, sometimes subtly, but as an aim it has been formally acknowledged, almost universally. Of course, this revolution is at a very early stage. Bare literacy is still unattained by hundreds of millions, while in the advanced countries the sense of possibility, in expanding education and in developing new means of communication, is being revised and extended. Here, as in democracy and industry, what we have done seems little compared with what we are certain to try to do.

Yet at this point it is particularly evident that we cannot understand the process of change in which we are involved if

we limit ourselves to thinking of the democratic, industrial, and cultural revolutions as separate processes. Our whole way of life, from the shape of our communities to the organization and content of education, and from the structure of the family to the status of art and entertainment, is being profoundly affected by the progress and interaction of democracy and industry, and by the extension of communications. This deeper cultural revolution is a large part of our most significant living experience, and is being interpreted and indeed fought out, in very complex ways, in the world of art and ideas. It is when we try to correlate change of this kind with the changes covered by the disciplines of politics, economics, and communications that we discover some of the most difficult but also some of the most human questions.

The scale of the whole process – the struggle for democracy, the development of industry, the extension of communications, and the deep social and personal changes – is indeed too large to know or even imagine. In practice it is reduced to a series of disconnected or local changes, but while this is reasonable, in the ordinary sense, it seems to me that this scaling-down only disguises some of the deepest problems and tensions, which then appear only as scattered symptoms of restlessness and uncertainty. In a country like Britain, in which the long revolution is at a relatively advanced stage, it seems customary for each generation to announce the completion of the revolution, and to be bewildered and angry when the new young generation asserts that the revolution has after all not occurred. We are quite clearly in this situation in the 1960s, when the objectives for which many generations worked have been quite generally achieved, yet when the society has never been more radically criticized, not only by particular writers and thinkers, in articulate ways, but also more generally and in ways often so inarticulate and confused that old descriptions, such as cynicism, apathy, pointlessness, are usually the best we can find to acknowledge them. We seem severely hindered, in such a situation, by the very practice of scaling-down. Thus certain expectations are shaped and defined, as universal suffrage, a particular stand-

ard of living, a given school-leaving age and level of education. These are adequate as incentives to effort, and anyone who knows their history knows that their achievement did not simply evolve, but had to be worked and struggled for, over generations. But it is characteristic of the history of what I see as the long revolution that such aims, once achieved, are quite quickly absorbed, and either new expectations are commonly defined, or in their absence there is a mood of both stagnation and restlessness. For a long time now we have been hearing from every kind of ruling group that people are never satisfied, never even grateful. Indeed this thrust of demand has been so deeply learned, and is so deeply feared, that one can see, on all sides, a ruling philosophy of delayed and graded concessions, for, as has been said, today's concession is tomorrow's springboard. Ruling groups have their own reasons for not wishing to recognize the true scale of the revolution, but elsewhere it is a genuine crisis of consciousness, and anybody concerned with his own life and the life of his society, in this process of general change, must obviously do what he can to try to resolve and clarify. My own view is that we must keep trying to grasp the process as a whole, to see it in new ways as a long revolution, if we are to understand either the theoretical crisis, or our actual history, or the reality of our immediate condition and the terms of change.

A very large part of our intellectual life, to say nothing of our social practice, is, however, devoted to criticizing the long revolution, in this or that aspect, by many powerful selective techniques. But as the revolution itself extends, until nobody can escape it, this whole drift seems increasingly irrelevant. In naming the great process of change the long revolution, I am trying to learn assent to it, an adequate assent of mind and spirit. I find increasingly that the values and meanings I need are all in this process of change. If it is pointed out, in traditional terms, that democracy, industry, and extended communication are all means rather than ends, I reply that this, precisely, is their revolutionary character, and that to realize and accept this requires new ways of thinking and feeling, new conceptions of relationships, which we

must try to explore. This book is a record of such an attempt.

In my first part I begin from an examination of the nature of creative activity, which I see now as the necessary basis for extending the account of the relation between communication and community which I tried to establish in *Culture and Society*. I then go back to examining certain theoretical problems in the definition and analysis of culture, and work a practical example. Following a lead from the discussion of communication, I then try to analyse the concepts of 'the individual' and 'society' that we ordinarily use, and to describe certain typical relationships of this kind. I then extend this argument to a discussion of some of the existing concepts of our own society, and discuss some of the processes of social and cultural change.

My second part is an account and analysis of the development of certain of our major cultural institutions, from education to the press, and is completed by a series of essays on the relation between certain forms in art and the general development of the society. I think much of this is useful simply as information brought together in the light of a common process, though I do not doubt that my factual accounts will have to be revised as research continues. The critical essays are experimental and arguable, but attempt to develop the kind of inquiry represented by my chapter on 'The Industrial Novel' in *Culture and Society*.

My third and concluding part returns to the theme of the long revolution, which I have outlined in this introduction, by attempting a description of our contemporary culture and society in terms of what I see as a pattern of change. Briefly I attempt to assess the progress of the long revolution in Britain, and to consider its next stages. I do not confine myself to British society because of any lack of interest in what is happening elsewhere, but because the kind of evidence I am interested in is only really available where one lives. I think, however, that it could be added that Britain was very early in entering this revolution, and that our society consequently offers very rich material for the consideration of some of its general problems. It is true also that the present

crisis in British society is sufficiently interesting in itself, and of commanding importance to those of us involved in it, to make this attempt to take bearings useful.

With this book and *Culture and Society*, and with my novel *Border Country* which I believe to have, in its particular and quite different way, an essential relevance to the two general books, I have completed a body of work which I set myself to do ten years ago. Other work will necessarily follow from this, but it feels like the completion of a particular stage in one's life, and while this need not interest anybody else, it is perhaps worth recording.

