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People of the Black Mountains 2: The eggs of the eagle

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Chapter Six : People of the Black Mountains 2: The Eggs of the Eagle

The second volume of *People of the Black Mountains* takes the reader from the days of Roman occupation in the first century A.D. through to the time of the battle of Agincourt, a symbol of both English and British national pride, due in no small part to the dramatisation of the victory in Shakespeare's *Henry V,* to which Williams's novel makes oblique reference. One of the ways in which the second volume is distinguishable from the first is that it negotiates a history recorded and interpreted to a much greater degree than that covered in the first volume. Williams spends more time discussing and contesting versions of history in relation to the area and providing dramatisations which challenge more accepted and traditional perspectives. The novel takes its subtitle from a story itself concerned with a debate over the possible significance of a dream which is taken to symbolise the future course of history, indicating a greater focus on the significance of the history of an area as constructed narrative rather than objective fact.

The first sequence continues to explore the experience of life under slavery. De Certeau's characterisation of people operating on a territory or place they cannot regard as belonging to them is especially applicable to the second volume. The first story explores the experience of slavery of the hitherto aristocratic Berin. Berin's sudden fall into slavery allows Williams to present the nature of servitude in a more emphatic fashion than hitherto:

> There was now an endless waiting under orders and for orders, a slow aching realisation that for the rest of his life he would be no more than an object, an available body for others to dispose. (9).

Wrestling with this condition and finding ways to escape from or cope with it is a major feature of the second volume. Berin's experience includes observation of the Roman 'enclosure' in which he is held, the types and names of building and the way of life they embody: headquarters, barracks, granaries, stables and latrines — plus the routine nature of his work in a lead mine. The combined description of everyday activity and its interaction with elements of spatial organisation is reminiscent of Lefebvre's approach to space and his notion of spatial practice, as well as being suggestive of later, nineteenth and twentieth century, developments when mining and related industries would become the centre of a way of life. Many of the characteristics Lefebvre sees as typically Roman — the enclosed fortification, the move towards property as principle and 'the space of power' represented by the buildings of a violently appropriative military order — have already been presented by Williams as part of a longer process, going back to at least 2,000 B.C. Similarities can be observed between Lefebvre's characterisation of a significant point in the transition

from ancient, absolute space to a more, modern abstract space in the way that the Roman mine, and the society which organises its working, hints at developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Williams presents Berin as having become less fixed in his attitude to those who are deemed slaves as a result of his own experience, an attitude which distinguishes him from his father and an earlier generation.

Lefebvre focuses on the villa and its related socio-spatial practices as particularly significant in the later Roman era and it is in this kind of space that the two later stories of the first sequence are set. Lefebvre notes of the villa that:

> (…) it was the concretization within agro-pastoral space of a codified aw-bound spatial practice, namely private ownership of the land. The villa thus combined in a single unit of material production the general traits of Roman society (an order grounded in juridical principles), a refined — albeit not very creative, aesthetic taste and a search for the comforts of life. (Lefebvre 1991:252)

The second story, set over a hundred years later than the first, presents its principal character, Gwenliana, as quite at home in such surroundings. Like Berin in the mine, she finds it comparable to arriving in another world, but whereas Berin is simultaneously impressed by Roman efficiency and horrified by the curtailment of his freedom, Gwenliana is attracted by the 'fine' life of the Roman villa and the possibility of marriage to a Roman legionary, an attitude encouraged by her father. Becoming Roman presents a more desirable alternative than remaining British and she has to be forcibly wrenched out of her position by Gwydir and the forces of local, native rebellion against a violently imposed and unjust social order. In the depiction of Gwenliana's attitude towards Roman culture, presented in the first part of the story, there is a hint of the state of enchantment characterised by Benjamin as typical of the consciousness of the consumer wandering among the commodified 'second nature' of commercial capitalism:

> It had been like arriving in the other world: the big courtyard house, the orchard and garden, the mosaic floors and piped water, the shops in the town. And the ancillulae were treated kindly: as children they were almost like pets. (21)

A different but related perspective to that of Berin is presented in this geography with the final comments indicating the limitations of ancient Roman suburbia for the native population. The negative aspects of this condition are more forcibly represented in the third story, set a further hundred years later. This focuses on an older servant, Bibra, who has a hideous facial disfiguration. Bibra's growing up and the problems she suffers develop in parallel with the more attractive socio-commercial development of Roman Britain, but the injustice of dealings with lower social classes causes a rebellious rupturing of an apparently stable situation and Bibra is killed in the panic. She is buried with a minimum of dignity. Tony Pinkney notes the resemblance of Bibra's facial disfiguration to that of Bert in *Loyalties* and the relation of that figure to the face of Dorian's picture in Oscar Wilde's novel (Pinkney 1991: 117). Bibra's life and fate present the grotesque alternative face of an abundant commer-

cial culture, a figure which again relates as much to conditions under contemporary capitalism as those under Roman imperialism. Roman culture is not dismissed as simply or solely exploitative by Williams' narrative, any more than modern capitalism is in his earlier novels, but the strain of the servitude embodied in such dispensations is expressed in novels like *Second Generation* and in Bibra's fate, from which, in contrast to the main characters of the first two stories, she has no obvious means of escape other than death.

The stories in the first sequence portray the development of a powerful and successful system of social relations but we are reminded that there is an outside to this enclosure. Two or more social groupings live in an uneasy relation because of the imposition of an unjust social order by which one kind of space dominates another, even if living inside the luxuries of the dominant space makes such injustice easy to forget by those who benefit from it. The challenges from the outside come from different social groupings, both the leaders of the Silures and the local 'slaves' of Menhebog. The novel is attentive to the urgency of both claims and to the success of developments on the inside, but the underlying concern, as with Benjamin, Lefebvre, and Deleuze and Guattari, is with how the apparent peace and prosperity of a successful regime can organise and mask complex forms of social repression and oppression, and with the need to find a way out of such limitations.

Glyn to Elis 9 also reflects on the relation of Roman to more recent developments, again using the concept of 'modernity' to make the connection, as Glyn reflects on the significance of the Grywne Fawr reservoir:

> Empty hills. Empty valley. The penetration of modernity (...) The building of the dam was forced by the mining to the south. In that sense it was like the drive of the Roman project, piping resources from periphery to a centre. The self-described civilisation was incidental. (63)

This more directly antagonistic note towards the dominant culture is extended later in the section where the reader is told that those who mourned the waning of Roman power were 'of a distinct class: the gentry and merchants of the cities' and that 'Less is heard from those who rejoiced in the departure of an occupying power.' (64).

The second sequence, which moves into the post-Roman period and the arrival of the Saxons, is more directly concerned with questions of narrative and orientation. Both David Harvey and Arran Gare present cases for the need to develop a strong, if flexible, form of meta-narrative to challenge the fragmenting and nihilistic tendencies they perceive in late twentieth century culture. *People of the Black Mountains* consists of a multiplicitous structure of interconnected stories, a feature it shares with Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and Sinclair's *Downriver,* but it also interweaves and critically juxtaposes various forms of narrative representation in relation to the events they cover. This is particularly the case in the title story, *The Eggs of the Eagle,* where the five kings of the area meet to discuss their interpretations of the vision of the bard, Mabon. The vision is first related by Mabon and then followed by discussion. A central element here is the multiplicity of as-

pects of the vision itself and of perspectives on it. The metafictional aspect of the novel is focused on by Pinkney who contrasts the responsibly historical element in Williams' approach with tendencies in both twentieth century fiction and theory to produce formally self-enclosed systems. These, he argues, tend to support rather than challenge the universalising tendencies of regimes keen to erase the injustices and violence, recorded in some histories, of the social order they promote (Pinkney 1991: 130–141). This view is a variation on a theme elaborated by both Lefebvre and Harvey. Pinkney seeks to explore ways in which Williams's novel combines the critical aspects of a metafictional approach that is sceptical of the ability of narratives to help people forget what needs to be remembered. A contributory factor here is the powerful mapping of time and space embodied in the combination of its unusually ambitious historical scope and geographical focus.

Pinkney's account might be supplemented by reference to Brecht and Benjamin as well as to modern Irish literature. Brecht's mode of defamiliarisation in presenting the spectator with a less emotive form of narrative was noted earlier. Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* challenges the form of the novel as a conveyor of information to be passively consumed by the reader, in contrast to the story, which demands active interpretation (Benjamin 1992: 83–107). A connected observation appears in Declan Kiberd's approach to Joyce's writing and its relation to the growth of Irish national identity. Appropriating Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of minoritarian writing and lines of flight and aspects of Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1982), Kiberd suggests a predominantly political motivation for the exceptional inventiveness and iconoclasm of Joyce's writing in relation to the novel as a literary form (Kiberd 1996: 115–129; 330–349). What are, by comparison with *Ulysses,* limited forms of departure from the conventions of the modern novel in *People of the Black Mountains* might also partly be accounted for by political considerations. The epic aspect of Williams' novel indicates kinship with forms of modern epic poetry that support a more independent national or regional identity. Its relatively accessible, if austerely didactic, style of writing indicates a solidarity with popular fiction in the service of critical, egalitarian objectives and a socialist politics. This is evident in Williams' willingness to experiment, in earlier novels, with forms of popular genre fiction. An open, relational form of socialist nationalism or regionalism is an element common to the approaches of Joyce, Gare and Williams, though this can involve a dangerous proximity to more dubious forms of political orientation. The problematic element of relations between reality and fiction in the interpretation of the past and future of an area continues in the second story in which the once and future king of T.H. White's earlier novel of that name, Arthur, appears as a far from straightforwardly admirable presence. The problem of disease as an aspect of the natural environment, suggested by the yellow mist in Mabon's dream, occurs in combination with a visit from representatives of the local warlords in search of tribute. Morudd, the chief representative tells tales of a variety of peoples, indicating the cultural multiplicity of this period. His comments end with an introduction to Arthur, but as the story progresses it becomes increasingly unclear whether Arthur

is a reality or a myth to support the interests of the class fraction referred to in *Glyn to Elis 9*. In contrast to the popularising of old mythical forms represented by writers, such as Tolkien, who also employ an epic form, a sceptical approach is adopted towards the notion of Arthur as either historical or mythical figure. He is presented as little more than a form of propaganda for purposes of exploitation by the local warlords.

The production and interpretation of narratives in relation to historical events and processes is also present in the final story of the sequence where disease recurs. As in the previous story, details of local culture are included in the framework of the narrative. The appearance of the 'Yellow Death', which occurs at the time of the old Celtic, heathen festival of Samhain, sparks a debate between the newly Christianised Nyr, a disciple of Gildas, the Christian historian, and the older, less fashionable beliefs of old Glesni. As in earlier stories there is an element which might be compared to both Brecht and Habermas in the way in which the story contrives to have issues presented almost as if in a court of law, so that the reader can judge for themselves, but at the same time the background and historical context of each speaker's predispositions is presented, as is the impression that we are dealing with a debate between positions of which one is new and increasingly dominant, universalising and relatively intolerant, while the other is in quiet decline and relatively local. Nyr wants to blame the disease on the sins of humanity but Glesni again appeals to the earth and notions of its sweetness, a position which finds him siding with Pelagius against Augustine. When Nyr suggests that Glesni is in danger of supporting paganism in the form of an image of Sulis, he is told that: '(…) that is a word of the Romani, to mean the country people. People like us of this land.' (92)

As with Lefebvre's approach to universalizing verbal discourses, physical relations to place are invoked as ultimately more meaningful by Williams' narrative. This is achieved not in any straightforwardly assertive fashion but through a competitive dialogue where the view supported is that of the relatively powerless local. Figures such as old Glesni and old Karan are comparable with Carter's evocation of the combination of a more tolerant attitude to strangers and a reverent attitude to the importance of the land. Williams' strategy of presenting confrontations between the insensitively universalizing, (as with Carter's modern European colonisers) often violently paranoid tendencies of new cultural formations and those of older, gentler and more tolerant cultures also focuses on the question of justice and communication and the grounds, or the lack of them, for the successful fostering of either. These are preoccupations he shares with Carter, in terms of the latter's concern to look back in history for possible avenues of communication through the underrated attempts of sympathetic European immigrants, but also with Arran Gare in his attempt to provide the grounds for a multi-levelled approach to justice and communication for ecological reasons.

All of these elements are present in the opening story of the next sequence, *The Death of Clydawg*. *Glyn to Elis 10* prefaces this story with a review of incursions into the area by various Saxon leaders but insists, in its closing paragraph, on the

significance of a deeper 'inscription' of identity which stems from a long relation-ship with the land rather than relatively temporary cultural orders.

> Much of the history was disputed. Much of the topography was overlaid by late and arbitrary names. Yet a structure of feeling was still tangible: the body of a land and of a people. It was an invaded land and a mixed people, but it inscribed an identity, or offered to inscribe it. His immediate search for Elis came through as this inscription. (100)

The beginning of the paragraph finds Glyn touching a boundary stone. It is as if the older, Arnoldian notion of literary touchstones, the best of what has been thought and said, is replaced or deepened by a more local and literal appeal to that notion, where the grounding of an adequate cultural identity is one which takes place in relation to the earth, or a part of it. The 'mixed' and 'invaded' aspects of local in-habitants seem to be accepted, distancing the position taken from one of paranoid purification. Again the appeal is to touch and the body and to that which lies beneath the surface. All of these characteristics offer a poetics and politics of place compa-rable to that of Lefebvre in his insistence on something deeper than discourse and to de Certeau in his championing of a tactics of relative invisibility by the substantially dispossessed. On the other hand, there is also a stubborn insistence on the specific-ity of a particular region which connects Williams' approach more closely to that of Carter or Gare.

The Death of Clydawg portrays the effects of an early Saxon wave of invasion. As in some of the previous stories, the reader is reminded of the rarity of the phenom-enon of invasion seen from the perspective of a single lifetime:

> There had been no fighting in this valley through more than four lifetimes. The sudden invasion and devastation dislocated their peaceful sense of life. While they stayed on the mountain, they appealed to Olen Cyfarwyd, the storyteller, for stories that would begin to makes sense of these terrible events. But he was unable to offer them any. His preferred stories were of older times. (103)

The possibility of a comparison with the treasured and untroubled 'shire' of Tolkien's hobbits again arises here. There is, however, no question of a Merlin-like Gandalf or a great king coming to save the local inhabitants. Olen, the storyteller, is initially presented as an apparently impotent figure, but as the men of power appear and de-bate the precise nature of new territorial dispensations they again support their ar-guments with the various truths of multiple stories concerning the death of Prince Clydawg. It is Olen's story that closes the narrative and begins to indicate his power. Like other figures discussed, Olen quietly represents an older, less flamboyant cul-ture, closely related to the earth and the local people rather than the powerful ideolo-gies of the military aristocracy and Christian church whose views occupy the central part of the story. In a fashion comparable to the closing paragraph of *Glyn to Elis 10,* we are thus presented with another instance of the gentle but stubbornly resolute survival of an older identity whose primary affiliations are to place in the form of land and locality.

The other stories in the sequence bear a closer resemblance to de Certeau's notions of tactics in relation to space and place. In the second story, 'The Gift of Acha', we are reminded that Britons as well as Saxons or Romans impose slavery. The story opens with an evocation of Acha's and her daughter's mixed cultural identities. Acha is a Saxon by origin and now a British slave, but her daughter, bilingual like her mother, only uses English when they are alone. Rather like Gwenliana in the earlier story, Hilda is eventually pushed into returning to her own people as her mother makes deft use of the help she provides for a wounded Saxon soldier trapped in the area. The soldier uses the term 'Welsh' for the people of the area and reminds Acha of the considerable mixing between the two peoples that has taken place. While Acha is insistent on the physical aspects of her daughter's cultural identity, the main issue is the freedom from slavery that Hilda will gain. The close of the story relates the successful conclusion to Acha's secret tactics in terms of their apparent flouting of notions of cultural exclusivity:

> She was never suspected of complicity in her daughter's disappearance, since it was obvious to everyone that she would never willingly have let her daughter leave her: she was a Saxon caeth and an alien, who had only her daughter, of her own blood to live for. (137)

Issues of cultural mixing and their relations to those of cultural domination and exploitation are prominent in this sequence. Notions of cultural hybridity have become increasingly accepted in the later twentieth century Western European context but cultural paranoia persists in terms of hostility to substantial ethnic minorities perceived as outsiders. Deleuze and Guattari's relative lack of oppositional hostility to capitalism due to their perception of the positive aspect of its socially liberating qualities is distinguishable from Heidegger's tendency to figure people and land in a tight cultural equation. In *Glyn to Elis 10* Williams' comments go some way to acceptance of cultural hybridity with questions of social justice and attachment to locality transcending more dogmatic notions of identity and belief. Williams' long, developmental history has a degree of affinity with Deleuze and Guattari's Bergsonian approach to a cultural evolution determined by processes of 'double articulation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:40–45). New forms emerge from contacts between different types; difference produces difference rather than, or prior to, the survival of the fittest. Williams' position in these stories perhaps lies between these perspectives. His interest is not so much in the survival of the fittest as in the continuity and development of the local and the just. One can refer the interested reader to his essay on 'Social Darwinism' for a discussion of Spencer's and other interpretations of Darwin's original conceptualisation of 'natural selection' (Williams 1980: 96–102). Williams' presentation of forms of hybrid specificity coincides with some aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's more unrestrained support for elements of productive and combinatory difference at every level of creation. His connecting of a politics of place with one of social justice is closer to that of de Certeau in terms of the way in which the latter occasionally appeals to nature for examples of 'tactics' or '*metis*'. At the

same time, Williams can be regarded as supportive of a politics of difference, in an approach comparable to that of David Harvey, in that his stories indicate resistance to systems of thought and cultural practice which fail to take sufficient account of questions of cultural specificity, while holding on to a strong narrative of progressive social emancipation. Williams' novel does not support a politics or poetics which favours unlimited specificity. The mixing of identities presented in his stories is shown to be a long, slow and often very painful process that takes place over centuries rather than suddenly in significant moments, even though such moments may be taken as dramatically indicative of that process.

The final story in the sequence provides another comparison of cultures. There is the culture of honour of the military aristocracy of the Welsh Britons, the more cunningly pragmatic culture of the latest wave of invaders, the Vikings, and a final, reluctant display of military effectiveness by Caran, the local shepherd, as, like Derco earlier, he operates in guerilla fashion, shooting arrows from the trees in order to protect his land and his people rather than notions of military honour and prowess. As with Deleuze and Guattari's war machine, Caran is forced into an effective mode of violence while pursuing a necessary line of flight. He is barely aware of what he is doing as he escapes as an outlaw on his own, native territory.

The thematics of this perspective are extended in *Glyn to El is 11*. The multiplicities and complexities of history are emphasized and 'the crowded history of unrecorded men and women' is preferred to 'the traditional resonant clash of unitary peoples' (159). Plurality and the ordinary are valued above powerful and glamorous individuals and 'unitary peoples' in a way which combines elements of Lefebvre's concern with a politics of everyday life and Deleuze and Guattari's with one of multiplicities. The eleventh sequence takes the area's history to eleven years before the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest. Recognisable historical figures appear in the first story, but only as fleeting presences. These include Welsh, Saxon, Viking and Norman troops and individuals such as Grufydd ap Llwellyn and Harold Godwinsson. The local people are presented as viewing these figures only as elements of devastation they must negotiate with and tactically aid or avoid in order to survive. Only minimal comments are made on such figures but it is in the second story, *Signs of a Vengeance,* set some eighty years later, that such figures are further discussed in another round of storytelling and interpretations of the significance of past events, real or imagined.

The first signs are those of the coincidence of the death of King Henry of England and heavy rains and flooding which are taken as a cue for rebellion in Wales. Iorwerth, a military commander, one of the main Welsh characters in the story, then discusses the question of the power and reliability of signs and tales with the other, Gwelchmai, his bard, a figure comparable to Olen in 'The Death of Clydawg'. Gwelchmai responds to the question as to whether where they are is 'a place for signs' by telling a tale in which Grufydd ap Llewellyn demands reparation for an offence against him committed in a dream. Cynan, 'skilled above all others in the great laws of the Hywel Da' provides a judgement agreeing that reparation must be given at a rate of one hundred cattle for each cantref. However, as the offence was

committed in a dream the king will be entitled only to the reflection of the cattle since 'a dream is but a reflection of the truth'. Gwelchmai is canny and sceptical in his attitude to dreams, signs, tales, and other 'reflections of the truth' — an attitude generally supported by the novel, and one which might be seen as combining elements of Lefebvre's preference for the truth of space over representations of space (Williams 1992(b) : 180–183). Here Gwalchmai expresses his scepticism towards the arrogance of either discourses or individuals that claim any privileged access to the truth, particularly if combined with claims to power. This scepticism is further expressed at the end of the story when Iorwerth gloats over the body of a Norman lord he has killed and Gwelchmai is more concerned with saving the life of his young minstrel. The sequence ends with a further story of more savage devastation and vengeance, 'The Abergavenny Murders', describing the murderous actions of William de Braose, whose descendant appears as one of the main characters in Williams's previous novel, *Loyalties*.

The penultimate sequence of the novel begins with a sustained historiographical meditation on the work of the great medieval historians of the region and its context and significance, observing that '[Walter] Map himself and Gerald the Welshman, and, in a different way, Geoffrey of Monmouth belong in their essence to this bitterly fought frontier.' (227) The narrative presents a critical approach to aspects of the bardic tradition: 'The poetry of the Welsh is honoured and long-standing. Yet in the wars of the independent kingdoms, against foreign invaders but also against each other, the verse of honour often becomes bombast.' (188) The slow translation of older, complex myth into propagandising forms of history is also commented on, as in the example of Arthur in the *Pedair Caincy Mabinogi:*' (...) the Artorius remembered in earlier Welsh reference as a tyrant and destroyer becomes, by mutation, the magical fighting hero. He will soon, to the world, be the King of Honour and Freedom.' (230). Geoffrey of Monmouth's fashioning of the story of Arthur is considered at some length and the narrative notes that: 'Honour is absolute, with this small land as its centre. Yet, as the story is told the land is known as lost.' The truth of space of the region, in Lefebvre's terms, disappears in a verbal fantasy of honour which, as the narrative again notes, ends with ' (...) Arthur as the once and future King of an enclosing and dominant England.' (231). The complexity and canniness, the 'double vision' (233) of Geraldus Cambriensis and Walter Map, with whose words *Glyn to El is 11* opens are commented upon at equal length. The narrative notes that' They are all writers of a border, who can move either way.' (233), and just prior to this depicts them in a fashion which virtually coincides with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the nomad, territorialising on deterritorialization:

> Gerald and Walter write a cool, observing prose, picked up in movement from place to place and story to retold story. Theirs is a detachment from attachments which are always newly perceived and negotiated. (233)

The attitude of Williams' narrative towards these historians is ambiguous, admiring of their skills but less so of their semi-detached attitude to the area, though even

here they seem to be valued for instinctively reproducing the character of the time of the area in their own ambivalence and fabulatory elaborations.There is perhaps an element of identification with as well as criticism of such writers. Williams himself attempts to produce a substantially historical narrative, combining aspects of fact and fiction on a comparably epic scale.

Problems of philosophical orientation and the intellectual as locally implicated historian are further dramatised in the first story of the twelfth sequence, *The Monk's History,* set at about the time of the Battle of Evesham in 1265. Conan, the main protagonist, is, like Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Breton by birth. The principal narrative concerns his choice about whether to let his son Rhodri fight, on the side of Llwellyn ap Grufydd and Simon de Montfort, in the coming campaign or to accede to his wife's desire to keep him away since he is not bound to fight. Conan allows the boy to go, on the principle that his son has the right to make his own choices in the way that way he himself did in leaving the church to take a wife, but he is deeply sceptical of the cause for which Rhodri is willing to risk his life. Rhodri is killed in the battle and Conan is left to reflect both on the nature of the times in which he lives and the burden of knowledge that he carries with him as an intellectual. *The Monk's History* is the last in *People of the Black Mountains* with an intellectual, like those portrayed in both earlier stories and in all of Williams' earlier novels, at the centre of its narrative. One of the interesting aspects of *People of the Black Mountains* is how the large historical sweep of the novel allows Williams to provide a number of variations on comparable figures in this respect. Conan shares with figures like Dal Mered and old Karan a fascination with knowledge and a love of and loyalty to the place in which he is situated. Like the bard, Mabon, in 'The Eggs of the Eagle' he has a vision of sorts which he relates to his sons. Unlike Mabon's vision it is more specifically and actually geographical and historical. He begins by telling his sons that: 'I looked at these mountains, and they seemed like walls to protect a sweet holiness settled among them.' (248). The motif of sweetness again appears, but after providing specific details of what lay within his field of vision, Conan goes on to contrast it with the bloodbath in the plains beyond: 'Out there were the castles, the armed troops, the killings and the treacheries. Out there the unending struggle for power.'(248–249). His vision leads him to history: 'What we see, if we choose, from this height, is neither an order nor a vision, but something more compelling. We see a history.' (249) He then proceeds to provide a military history of the events which preceded the present campaign. At the same time, he might be seen as providing a justification of the novel's own form as a combination of poetic vision and political history. Conan's lofty vantage point, at the time of his vision, and at the beginning of the story, might remind one of that presented in relation to intellectual figures who collude with processes of gaining and maintaining power in de Certeau's troubled examination of such problems in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. This is a feeling also present in Lefebvre's, Harvey's and Deleuze and Guattari's interpretations of relations between intellectuals and dominant power systems. Conan, while not physically disfigured, like most of his comparable predecessors in the novel, is mentally

and emotionally tortured. Like Deleuze and Guattari's nomadic scientists he pursues a line of flight to escape the restrictions of a form of state institution, here the church. He thereby enters a less distanced world of touch and feeling in his decision to stay with Eirwen, his wife. This move is described in a way which connects notions of orientation with those of the body and its tactile and emotional feelings rather than its cognitive and visual aspects: 'It had been a slow redirection of his senses beyond himself where there had always been intensity, to a being so different, so apart, yet in the end so reachable, so touchable and so completing.' (243). The tension between the elevated, abstract and intellectual, on the one hand, and the grounded, everyday and emotional, on the other, is particularly strong in this story. It begins with Conan hearing a high, sharp call, that of Eirwen, which brings him down from the heights of a tower roof. The same call originally precipitates his leaving of the church for a more worldly and complete life with Eirwen. The relating of his vision to the boys is followed by a direct descent into the camp itself, where we are presented with the songs of the French minstrels and the figures of Llewellyn ap Grufydd and Simon de Montfort. The story comes close to implying that his decision and its consequences, and perhaps earlier decisions and their consequences, have destroyed any remaining hope and his relationship with his wife. Only at the very last moment are they allowed to embrace one another and renew the fullness of the connection celebrated earlier.

The remaining stories of this sequence, and those of the final sequence, chart an increasing tendency towards rebellion in the time surrounding the rise and fall of Owain Glyndwr. The final story provides an account of the last years and terrible death of John Oldcastle. Oldcastle is presented as a wanderer in the region, fleeing from persecution as a Lollard and explaining the motivations for his actions and beliefs. The story presents a slight but significant swerve from the famous encounter between Hal and Falstaff in Shakespeare's play. The new king does not simply dismiss Oldcastle but accuses him of heresy and has him sent to the Tower for 'examination'. (308–9). Oldcastle's prince is contrasted, a little later, with that of the Welsh prince, Glyndwr as Caradoc, Oldcastle's interlocutor in the story, observes that 'Our Prince is among his own people' (311). The story suggests both the beginnings of protestantism and socialism within the immediate region and further afield in terms of Oldcastle's connection with the Lollards. It also provides the novel with a final dissident figure, pursuing a Deleuzoguattarian line of flight and providing a radically different perspective on events from that provided by the currently most popular and influential dramatisation of them in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

A number of general points can be made in relation to *People of the Black Mountains* as a whole. It provides an alternative history and cultural mapping of a limited area. The nature of the alternative provided depends on the way in which the narrative centres itself in a specific region, outside the centre of dominance in the south-east. It focuses on the concerns of ordinary, unprivileged people, rather than exceptional and powerful figures, in a form which is dramatic and multiplicitous, mixing and challenging the boundaries between fact and fiction. The poetics and

politics of Williams's multiplicitous narrative combine elements of ecological and socialist politics in their interrelating of issues pertaining to place and to social class. The novel depicts the development of an interaction between people and natural environment, on the one hand, and between different social groupings, on the other. The latter development indicates positive forms of mixing resulting from the interactions between different groups but also the steady development of technical skills which, while having positive aspects, also tend to provide the opportunity for forms of social exploitation. The sweetness of the place to which numerous figures attest is soured by both natural and human forms of threat to its well-being.

The modality of Williams' narrative is complex: 'not history as narrative, but stories as lives' is how the novel's own words express its relation to, but simultaneous swerving from, what it characterises as more conventional and collaborative forms of history writing. In this respect, it comes close to supporting Olson's distinction between a more mythical, holistically pedagogical form of historiography represented by Herodotus, in contrast to the more technical and distanced version, 'logos', stripped of 'muthos', represented by Thucydides. As with Olson, poetics and science, the modern representatives of muthos and logos, are brought into a closer relation, as they are in many of the other theorists considered earlier, though perhaps most notably Deleuze and Guattari and Arran Gare. Williams presents us with a series of figures, from Glyn and Elis, through Dal Mered, Old Karan, Mabon, Olen, Conan and others, who, in different degrees and combinations, represent a passionately felt, as much as cognitively precise, relation to the place in which they are situated. The development of human knowledge and technical skill is not regarded in the light of a fall from grace from some sort of prelapsarian innocence but its combination with forms of exploitative power is always represented as a form of social pathology which sours the sweetness of the land. Figures such as Dal Mered and Conan are painfully divided in this respect, seeing the problem of their own complicity with the power side of knowledge.

As was observed, this is an approach which is also presented in most of the theorists discussed earlier and usually in connection with some form of close relation to a particular area or territory. Lefebvre and Harvey provide aggressive attacks on the complicity of intellectuals with exploitative power-systems, though they are also wary of essentialistic notions of place and identity. De Certeau and Deleuze and Guattari put more emphasis on the value of escape from and subversion of enclosing systems. This is an element represented in various ways in Williams's novel. Gare and Carter, as well as Olson and Heidegger, like Williams, focus more fully on the virtues of place but also provide, particularly in the case of Olson and Carter, examples of intellectuals or artists who are capable of challenging and evading the negatively colonising elements of Western thinking and technology without recourse to a nostalgic or reactionary view of change and progress.

The negative aspect of exploitative, as opposed to mutually beneficial, forms of social relation, is represented by numerous figures, often those of great historical renown, in *People of the Black Mountains.* This is not to say that all 'outsiders',

to use Relph's term again, are automatically treated negatively any more than all 'insiders' are treated as angels. Multiplicity and the breaking down of 'unitary' notions is an integral aspect of the novel's approach, something it shares, to a certain extent with Deleuze and Guattari's search for a micropolitics of human behaviour. This characteristic is also present in the pluralised title of the novel, and in its long series of stories in contrast to more conventionally unified forms of both novel and history writing. The retrospective historicising of people into the unified concept of 'a people' is one that the novel consistently challenges and one which can be related to its relevance to the development of a poetics and politics of place with respect to areas which are smaller and less powerful than that of the nation-state. As observed earlier, writers such as Neil Smith offer notions of a scaling of place, from the level of the body to the global, and Arran Gare's proposals for an ecologically sensitive regionalised global political order supported by narratives derived from a philsophy of process can be related to such notions. Williams's long, developmental history, which has been compared here to such philosophies, particularly in terms of comparisons with Bergson and Deleuze and Guattari, can be seen as a potentially significant contribution to a narrative poetic of this kind, one with a greater openness to the problem of popular accessibility than that of a more remorselessly arcane poet such as Olson.

At the same time, Williams's narrative, in terms of its considerably austere, didactic, often tragic and rarely light-hearted approach to the poetics and politics of place also opens itself to charges of inaccessibility. The positive side of this is the way in which it offers the possibility of a less obscure, but socially progressive rather than nostalgic or reactionary form of epic vision. However, one of the reasons for turning, in the next stage of this discussion, to a writer like Iain Sinclair, is to indicate some of the advantages, in an equally ambitious combination of 'muthos' and 'logos' with an alternative history of place, of presenting a more humorous and anarchic approach to comparable issues. This is not intended to suggest that Sinclair represents some form of advance on Williams's approach but rather that he indicates an alternative perspective which bears comparison with *People of the Black Mountains*.