Chinese immigration "head tax"—as the general social understandings within which they all function have changed.

One might say that the "prestige" of equality has risen in the past decades in Canada, particularly within the classes that have access to institutional influence, even while distressing and often racially based inequalities have continued to be tolerated within public view. Most questions of equality have practical stakes in terms of such things as quality of housing, nutrition, social benefits, educational opportunities; others, however, have been mainly symbolic, such as the same-sex "marriage" question, or the question of whether Quebec's assembly should be called "provincial" or "national." The curricular and research choices open to college and university teachers are also mainly symbolic, although for living writers they can have some material effect on that person's grant applications and royalty income. As Bourdieu's research has indicated, symbolic capital is not equally available nor in infinite supply. From a Bourdieuian perspective, canon-related arguments that appear based on fairness or equality may also be the familiar gambits for competitive positioning that occur whenever there are new entrants to a cultural field. However, symbolism can have important social and psychological consequences; equality and status are as much unlegislatable matters of respect and acceptance as they are ones of statute and regulation.

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Experience

The entry "experience" in *Keywords* seems to me one of the more cryptic, even obscure ones in the collection. Williams's technique of sketching an often confused word-history with just a few strokes is only partly responsible for the impression this entry gives of shedding as much shadow as light on its topic. Nor is it just that Williams's writing shows here and there too little concern for the reader's comfort by setting several demonstrative pronouns afloat in a small sea of possible antecedents, with the result that one is often left puzzling out exactly which "this," literally, he is talking about. All of the entries are potentially affected by these same limitations, but few come out of the experience as badly as "experience."

Perhaps the simple wordplay just indulged in can give a hint as to why this should be the case. Differently from the examination of other terms, the

effort to present the history of "experience" is hampered almost to the point of incoherence by the abstraction from any history of experience—that is, from shifts not only in the uses or meanings of this term, but in the very "thing" that it could be taken to name. To see how this might be a problem specific to "experience," consider a contrast with the entry on "work," a term that names a certain kind of experience. Here, Williams has little difficulty conveying, in a briefer essay concerned with a more ancient word, how the changing fortunes of the term index a change in material conditions and thus in the very experience so-named: work. When it comes to the more general and inclusive term, however, it is as if experience itself, the possibilities or impossibilities of experience, had no history to speak of. Unlike "work," a word whose vagaries are shown to track the history happening to the thing, "experience" seems essentially, in Williams's account, to have named the same experience since the late eighteenth century when it entered the language in its modern sense.

To be more precise, things are not quite so simply described, of course. In fact, they are double. There are two modern senses of "experience" that, according to Williams, "from [the late eighteenth century], have in practice moved together, within a common historical situation" (127). Despite this allusion to movement, Williams draws the picture of a more or less stable context of use for the two senses. To refer to these two uses, he adopts the somewhat confusing shorthand of "experience past" and "experience present." It is confusing because one might understand that a past meaning will be displaced by a present one, which is the sort of dynamic most of the other entries are concerned to display. In "experience," however, Williams dispenses quickly, in the first sentence, with the now-obsolete past of the topic word so as to devote the entire entry to its current senses: "The old association between **experience** and *experiment* can seem, in some of the most important modern uses, merely obsolete. (The relations between the two words, until [the late eighteenth century], are described under EMPIRICAL.) The problem now is to consider the relations between two main senses which have been important since [the late eighteenth century]" (126). So, then, what are these two senses?

By "experience past," Williams will understand the gathering of lessons of the past, all that can have gone before to guide action or decision, the "lessons of experience," whereas "experience present" is shorthand for the sense of a kind of individual consciousness, indeed "the fullest, most open, most active kind of consciousness" (127). He points out that this latter use moved into the general language from a specialized religious use. Curiously, Williams, the cultural and social historian, finds no difference between

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the term's uses based on a distinction between individual and collective experience. In this account, even "experience past" is explained solely in terms of individual experience, rather than that of any collective tradition that could be handed down, orally or in writing. "Experience past," in other words, remains the past of an individual subject and is experienced by a self-present consciousness, no less than "experience present."

Williams insists throughout that these two uses remain equally available to the modern speaker up to the present; no conflict or history is played out between them. Indeed he concludes the piece by appearing to assert that each sense of experience implies or includes the other. Although he does so in, for me, the most cryptic sentences of the entry's three pages, what appears to happen in these concluding lines is a virtual cancellation not only of any possible history between these two extensions of the word, but also of their very division. It is certain, however, that the last sentence speaks, quite inexplicably, of "the deepest sense of experience" and leaves one to wonder in the end for which third, undefined sense of the term Williams reserves this superlative designation: "It is then not that such kinds [of consideration, reflection and analysis] should not be tested, but that in the deepest sense of **experience** all kinds of evidence and its consideration should be tried" (129). If Williams knew and had experience of the deepest sense of experience, one can only regret he chose to keep it to himself.

But it is not altogether correct to say that the entry betrays no sign of conflict. It marks, if not a conflict between the two senses outlined, then at least a tension within, so to speak, the use of "experience present." The entry speaks of the controversy and even the "immense argument" set off by the claim that subjective (q.v.) experiences could be "offered not only as truths, but as the most authentic kind of truths" (128). In Williams's account, this controversy spilled over into general discourse from eighteenth-century theology (Jonathan Edwards is cited pouring scorn on the idea). In the twentieth century, however, "both the claim and the doubts and objections have moved into a much wider field" (ibid.). Williams takes the measure of this wider contemporary field by situating its two extremes: "At one extreme **experience** (present) is offered as the necessary (immediate and authentic) ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis. At the other extreme, **experience** ... is seen as the product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception, and thus not as material for truths but as evidence of conditions or systems which by definition it cannot itself explain" (ibid.).

It is this passage that, despite its abstraction, seems to me the most pertinent of the essay, today, for literary/cultural studies in the English-lan-

guage academy. Were he writing now, almost 30 years after the first edition of Keywords, Williams would probably feel obliged to note how claims for the authenticity of first-person experience as "ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis" have taken over an ever-growing portion of the field of truth claims. After tracing the claim back to its religious, above all Protestant origins, he would recognize it in all the varieties of current discourse that cede authority (i.e., truth) to some marker of subjective "experience"—all that which may be indexed more readily today under the term "identity." What is more, in the third edition of Keywords, Williams would doubtless add an entry for the now prominent, indeed omnipresent use of "identity," and cross-reference it to "experience."

But what about the other extreme within "experience present" to which Williams alludes above, that is, "experience ... seen as the product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception, etc."? That he seems to be talking here about ideology but prefers this wordy circumlocution is likely a consequence of the recursiveness of this critical, historical glossary in which "ideology" figures as one of the marked words, which is thereby rendered a little suspect and put out of use. But Williams seems to resist here not just the word but the very idea of "ideology," that is, of that which bids to understand "experience" (always an individual's, according to Williams) not as "material for truths," in his wording, but as "evidence of conditions or systems which by definition it cannot itself explain." Once again, the trace of resistance to supra-individual, collective, or social conditions on the shape of "individual," conscious experience (past or present) seems, well, suprising in the work of one who has played such a prominent part in the invention of contemporary English cultural history even, quite literally, cultural studies. And yet the resistance to thinking experience as a collective and therefore largely unconscious formation will be voiced before the end of the essay. It can be heard in Williams's effort to moderate between the two mentioned extremes, which leads him to pose so mysteriously, in the final sentence, the "deepest sense of experience" that overrides the division between all the senses he has been intent to trace up until then.

For an essay that I intimated bordered on incoherence, I seem to have met with little difficulty making sense of it, albeit doubtless not its "deepest sense." But I also suggested that the troubling impression of this entry's insufficiency might be traceable to the abstraction of the history of this word from the history of the "thing," experience, over the two-hundredyear span to which Williams assigns its modern uses in English. One may begin to see this by way of contrast to the work of another cultural historian, Walter Benjamin, whom Williams certainly could have read by 1976. Indeed, the select bibliography appended to *Keywords* lists *Aspects of Sociology* by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, the same collective that published some of Benjamin's most significant work. Moreover, a two-volume collection of translated essays by Benjamin appeared in 1968 and included much of his writing on the history of experience.

The issue of translation can take us quickly to the heart of the matter, and the difference marked by Benjamin's approach to cultural history, in general, and particularly a history of experience. For there are two German "keywords" in Benjamin's account, both of which are commonly translated by the English "experience," and they divide the semantic range more or less along the line that Williams discerns so awkwardly between "experience present" and "experience past": Erlebnis, conscious, lived experience of the individual, and *Erfahrung*, experience garnered from the past, including the past of a tradition into which the individual is unconsciously inserted. Benjamin's great late work of the 1930s is largely concerned with tracing the shift in the balance between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, which tips increasingly toward the former as the enormous wave of industrialization, urbanization, mass production, commodification, and technical reproduction washes over Western Europe. For Benjamin, a principal significance of this shift is the reinforcement of the individual's conscious defense against the experience of shock (*Chockerlebnis*) that assaults the senses of urban populations. There is, then, on Benjamin's account, a history of experience—indeed, there is a history of perception and of the very senses by which what Williams calls "experience present" is received and recorded—and one of its most dramatic, consequential chapters comes right in the middle of the period Williams manages to chronicle as essentially static, noting laconically only that "experience present" claims a much wider range in the twentieth century, but without giving any hint of historical, material undercurrents pulling things along (and, again, the entry "work" shows that such abstract dissociation is not dictated by the book's form). By contrast, although Benjamin certainly does not neglect the specificity of language (he draws principal evidence from Baudelaire's lyric poetry), one may easily judge the extent to which the new historical objects he uncovers—experience, perception, memory, and so forth—would have remained concealed had he limited his analyses to mere uses of the terms *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*.

It is just such a concealment of the forces of material historicity beneath the relatively tranquil perdurance of the lexicon of "experience" that strikes one today as a significant symptom of the limits of Williams's cultural history. That limit is even more or less directly indicated by Williams himself

when he tips the hand of his belief in the "deepest sense of experience," by which, since he glosses it no further, one must suppose that he supposes it just is every man and woman's common experience. An essential human experience, then, that lies beyond and limits the purview of the literary or cultural historian. It is this limiting belief in an ahistorical essence that closes down, as far as I can see, the perspective of a future in which "humanity" or "man" (not to mention "woman") could ever index as yet unknown "experiences," even if the same name will continue to be invoked, apparently without any disturbance of meaning.

To put in place one last trait of this contrast, here is Walter Benjamin writing to Adorno about the aim of the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility," which is one of his key works on the historicity of experience: "I am trying to direct my telescope, through the fog of blood, at an aerial view of the nineteenth century, which I am trying to paint in colors that will appear in a *future state* of the world, liberated from magic" (Geulen 139; emphasis added). A mere 30 years later, it is especially this remembering of future "experience" that one now misses in Williams's influential book, which, in this way, remains a work of the past.

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History

Few words better exemplify what Raymond Williams means by a keyword than history. It illustrates how "important social and historical processes occur within language" as opposed to being merely recorded or registered by it (22). But it does this now in more complex ways than Williams suggests in the 1970s. In fact, at the moment, history signifies two radically different, albeit interrelated, processes or responses to the past, one thriving in everyday speech and the other in certain forms of academic discourse.

In everyday speech, despite or perhaps because of its assumed transparency, history is both a "binding" and an "indicative" word of enormous power. It binds in the sense that other words draw authority from it—"social processes," in Williams's own phrase, for instance, become more grounded, more difficult to challenge once those processes can be described as "historical." History does this because it indicates a foundation or "transcendent signified" with which many people continue to feel secure. In quotidian