MINERS' AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, 1790-1945 : A STUDY OF LIFE ACCOUNTS BY ENGLISH MINERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Council for National Academic Awards for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 1991

Sunderland Polytechnic

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

William Stuart Howard: Miners' Autobiographies, 1790-1945: A Study of Life Accounts by English Miners and their families

The primary aim of this thesis is to examine and analyse the autobiographical production of English coal miners and their families during the period 1790-1945.

This work is of value not only because no sustained study of miners' autobiography exists, but more importantly because autobiographical texts yield valuable, but otherwise inaccessible, information concerning the group.

The coal miners' of England have played a key role in the history of modern Britain. During the period covered by this study coal lay at the heart of British economic development and power, and the industrial and political history of the English mining community reflects this fact.

However, in common with many other sections of the English working class, relatively little is known about the ways in which members of the mining community made sense of their lives. Yet such knowledge is of utmost importance if we are to explain the history and traditions of English mining society.

The Miners' life account provides us with a unique and valuable means by which to explore the nature of thought and feeling which has existed in the English mining communities and which has underpinned its cultural forms. In part this study attempts to analyse and draw together aspects of miners' autobiographical consciousness and their representations of self and society in order to create an impression of how mining lives were lived and appropriated in the period under consideration.

Because the nature of the autobiographical form is complex and its extensive use as a primary source material is

controversial, this thesis also addresses issues related to the nature of cultural production and the use of its products; in this case autobiographical testimonies, as a means to know the past. Consequently this study examines the ways in which the lived experience of coal miners' shapes the nature of their autobiographical texts as well as the ends to which their autobiographical production has been put. The work also offers analysis of the ways in which autobiographical information may be best understood and used as a means to explore and reveal the experience of the past.

STUART HOWARD, MAY 1991

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

More than four years have now passed since I first began to research this thesis and during that time I have incurred numerous debts of the kind which can only be repaid by acknowledgement.

I would particularly like to thank my supervisor and mentor Dr. Roy Sturgess, who has read and expertly criticized all of my drafts, always given freely of his time and consistently offered me superb advice. I would also like to acknowledge the advice I have received from Dr. M. Pickering and Dr. L. Anderson.

I am indebted to Dr. K. Wilson, Dr. W. Lancaster, Dr. R. Colls and Dr. J. Field who read various versions of my early drafts and returned them to me with extremely useful comments. I am also very grateful for the advice and guidance I received in the early stages of this project from Professor D. Vincent and Dr. A. Croft. Special thanks are also due to Professor J. Burnett whose advice I found useful and who allowed me to inspect the large collection of working class autobiographies which he has collected and lodged in Brunel University library. I would like to stress, however, that while the scholarly help I have received from the above named people has been invaluable to me in carrying out this research, any errors of fact or interpretation which remain in my text are my own.

Over the years I have also received support and encouragement of a different kind from colleagues and friends. I would therefore like to thank Professor M. Scott, Dr. A. Spector, Dr. M. Atack, Dr. P. Coss, Mr. D. Cavanagh and Dr. F. Mansaaker.

In my search for autobiographical material I have run up numerous debts and I wish to thank all the staff at libraries and other institutions who helped me to locate texts. I am also very grateful to Mr. A. Wooley, Mr. G. Winward and the splendid Mrs. Lottie Brennan for allowing me to use their life-accounts.

I would like to thank Sunderland Polytechnic who made it possible for me to undertake this research. Many thanks are also due to Lisa McGann who has expertly disentangled and typed my original manuscript and appears to be the only living person in Britain who finds no difficulty in comprehending my longhand!

Finally, I would especially like to thank my late father, my mother and my wife, Maureen, whose unflinching support and encouragement, forebearance and good sense has not only sustained, but astonished and moved me during the past four and a half years.

STUART HOWARD, MAY 1991

INTRODUCTION

> For some time I have wanted to write a journal of my life in the coal mines in the hope that it may be of interest to my grandchildren and others who may like to know what conditions were like in the home and at work.
>
> (Thomas Redfern, 1980)

The literary project of miner-autobiographer, Thomas Redfern, was perceived by its author as an uncomplicated act of self and social reportage for the benefit of others. Writing in an unpractised hand and unconscious of or unconcerned with the dilemmas of the 'autobiographer's art' or the 'problematics' of the form, Redfern predictably ordered his account of his 'life' chronologically, intermittently interlacing his text with the residium of wisdom that he felt his experience had wrought. His work represents an example of the way the vast majority of English coal miners have understood and used the form throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Aims and Objectives

The use(s) which writers make of the autobiographical form is a question of some importance because it is linked to their experience of life and thus their sense of themselves as people. The autobiography has been, and continues to be, the site of justification, apology, remonstration, vision and celebration for example.[1] Despite this fact as the critic Philippe Lejeune points out "one cannot write an autobiography without constructing and communicating a point of view towards oneself ... (because) ... one cannot really get outside oneself, ie represent on equal terms with one's own point of view an attitude different from one's own."[2] To this I would add nor can one write autobiography without constructing and communicating a point of view towards the social milieu from which one sprang or in which one lives nor can one somehow get 'outside' of it simply because society is the source of identity.

In the light of these conclusions it is surprising to find that critics and scholars have not been concerned to compare and analyse the nature of autobiographies written by social groups who share specific occupations or life styles or both,[3] as a means to generate insights into the relations between their author's life experience and thought and the object and nature of their representations of self and society.

A primary concern of this study has been to analyse these relations in respect of the autobiography of English coal miners in the context of time and in the light of concepts of and theories relating to social change, class, culture and literary production. By implication such an analysis raises a number of associated questions and problems concerning in particular i) the relations between occupation, class, culture, and identity, perception and self and social representation; ii) the relative impact of experience/ ideology on consciousness; iii) the effects of social change and perceptions of the past on consciousness, identity and modes of representation. I have addressed each of these key issues within the body of this analysis.

In the context of this work it has been my object to achieve a broad overview of the miners' autobiography and to suggest how autobiographical consciousness, by the agency of an interdisciplinary methodology, may be used to locate and illuminate aspects of miners' experience, culture and history. Thus the value of this study lies principally in its capacity to reveal and comprehend data of a subjective nature. The importance of experiential research has long been highlighted by those who have endeavoured to free the study of working class people from the crude economic reductionism which characterized many of the early and some later social and Labour Histories.[4] Their point is this, that even if it were possible to measure and weigh every ounce of 'objective data' (consumption of food, housing, life span etc) our grasp of working class 'life' would amount to little more than a empty statistical shell - a structure without life. Indeed it was precisely this kind of

dehumanized and "condescending" history and sociology of labour that had a structural notion - 'the masses' rather than thinking and active people as its subject, which spurred Edward Thompson to write (arguably) the finest social history of the post war era - The Making of the English Working Class and Raymond Williams the most influential piece of cultural analysis - Culture and Society.

Despite the considerable impact that the work of Thompson and Williams has made in reorientating the researches of students working within the field of Labour Studies, we still have little idea of what, as one research team put it "working class people thought about or how they felt or why?"[5] Yet as David Vincent has pointed out, "if we wish to understand the meaning of the past we must first discover the meaning the past held for those who made it or were made by it."[6] By examining, in the context of time, the ways in which miner-autobiographers have understood and responded to a number of key aspects of their social being, I hope to make a contribution to our knowledge of the meanings that at least one section of the English working class derived from their experience.

Autobiography as a Primary Source

As both a literary category and a source material, autobiography presents as complex and controversial. Perhaps the most obvious difficulty is definitional. Is autobiography the same as memoir or reminiscence? What form does it take? What does it attempt to achieve? Some literary critics, most influentially Roy Pascal, have addressed this problem by formulating criteria, which if met, 'establishes' texts as "true" or "proper" autobiography.[7] However, the arbitrary and prescriptive nature of such structures - "one must distinguish autobiography ... from philosophical reflection on the self, static analysis, and the self portrait,"[8] render the definitions they attempt to achieve insensitive to patterns of historical change and cultural difference. Consequently as one observer points

out, critics find themselves analysing not what autobiography is or has been but what it ought to be.[9] (As I show, measured against Pascalian standards many miners' life accounts would fail to achieve the status of autobiography)

A more incisive analysis is offered by Elizabeth Bruss[10] who points out that to comprehend what autobiography is we must first know what it does - its action. In general, it is argued, most readers instinctively know what this is as the "autobiographical act" has been "institutionalized", ie become an "agreed and known" form of communication between people who share the same culture. Any text said to be autobiographical thus raises "expectations" in the mind of readers, these may be summarized as follows:

1) The autobiographer is the source of the subject.

2) The author claims individual responsibility for the creation and arrangement of the text.

3) The writer of the text must share the identity of the individual who appears in it.

4) The existence of the writer must be subject to public verification.

5) Information and events reported are true or believed by the author to be true.

6) The readership have the 'right' to dispute or verify these 'facts'.

These loose but convincing "rules of the act" (validation can be proved by attempting to break them) provide "a field within which the task of self-imaging and self evaluation is understood to take place, making whatever does take place recognizable as a form of self evaluation."[11]

Within this study any text I have referred to as an autobiography has satisfied these 'rules of the genre'.

There are, however, three other conditions which I have applied to accounts which have been the subject of analysis. They are as follows:

1) The author (with the exception of female writers) must have worked within the English mining industry (on the surface or subterraneously) in a manual/non-salaried capacity for some part of his life. I have, however, made one or two exceptions to this rule particularly when I felt that the accounts of miners who worked Scottish and Welsh pits would serve to extend knowledge and thus enrich my analysis.

2) Female writers must have been born into or lived within families which found subsistence by the agency of manual/non-salaried work within the coal trade.

3) All accounts must cover, at least in part, the period of time which elapsed between 1790 and 1945.

The problem of defining autobiography is but a first step in evaluating what one might expect to learn from it. Curiously historians and sociologists have shown little interest in the nature of the form but nevertheless have tended to harbour doubts about it as a useful category of evidence. As late as 1974, in an era in which labour history had emerged as an established sub-discipline, John Burnett could write:

> It remains true that the direct personal records of working people have not so far been regarded as a major historical source and that the whole area of such material remains largely unexplored territory.[12]

One reason which explains why autobiography has been under-valued and under-employed in Britain is the dominance of the empirical tradition of scholarship. Life accounts are difficult to validate and are unsuitable for quantative analysis. But the distortions of memory, perception, self interest and preoccupation, as well as the 'unrepresentative' nature of personal testimony have been seen as the major 'problems' of the source. Autobiography has assumed the

status of a subordinate category of evidence (often used merely to liven up a dull page) because it does not primarily deliver the kind of 'hard' information that is the bedrock of empirically based research.

Yet some of the problems of the autobiographical source are frequently shared by other categories of information which are deemed to be sound.[13] For example, reports and testimonies of all kinds, from the conclusions of Royal Commissioners to eye-witness accounts of journalists, are conditioned by subjective and social phenomena, as indeed is more postivistic evidence, for deciding what to count and how to count it is a human problem.

To engage in a debate about the relative objectivity of life accounts and other kinds of evidence is, however, to risk missing the point about autobiography. For the strength of autobiographical evidence is that it is in fact subjective. As Roy Pascal pointed out more than thirty years ago:

> Autobiographies offer an unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men. Even if what they tell us is not factually true, or only partly true, it is always true evidence of their personality.[14]

Considered in this context a number of the 'shortcomings' associated with autobiographical testimony turn out to be irrelevancies or indeed strengths.

Thus a primary problem - truth in autobiographical accounts, only arises if texts are used in their least effective way - as a source of 'hard facts', for "the autobiographer is not relating facts but experiences".[15] This is not to suggest that autobiographers are 'free' to 'invent' their lives with impunity, because authors are aware that what they say about themselves and others may be contested - at best in the streets, at worst in the courts!

Nevertheless autobiographical testimony is by its nature impressionistic, not only because 'totality' (of self in text) can not be achieved but because autobiographers explain

themselves by selecting and interpreting perceptions of past experience which they believe to be interesting or significant or both. Therefore autobiography is of greatest value as a means of analysing how people experienced and made sense of their lives, rather than what they did in them, which is not to say that we can not learn from this too.

Used as storehouses of consciousness, rather than facts, autobiographies do not present the student with the problems of verification, for the views of the authors have their own integrity and authenticity. No one knows more about the experience of being working class then the working class did themselves,[16] indeed they alone can tell us "what they thought about, how they felt and why".

The representative quality of individual experience is of course a problem especially if it is understood outside of the relationship which exists between individual and social being. Indubitably, autobiographers are unique individuals, but then, like all people, they are a social phenomenon - subjects in productive and social relations that are, in Karl Marx's words, "indispensable and independent of their will"[17] and which shape them and condition their experience. It is because individual and social being is indissoluble that autobiographers are quite unable to present an 'essence of self' within their texts, it is also for this reason that when the autobiographer speaks he becomes, like all other individuals "the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs".[18]

If on one level autobiographical consciousness is representative of the society in which it was formed, on another it is unique in that it is the thought of an individual. Individuals will invariably exhibit characteristics which are unique to themselves. These may take the form of psychological repressions, intensities of feeling towards one aspect of life or another or simply a desire to 'gild the lily'. Thus patterns of autobiographical selection and preoccupation or inflated, sentimentalized or mythologised representations for example, may be adjudged to

be the product of a particular mind. But if they are a recurrent feature across a sample of works, written by people who lived in the same era and shared the same productive and social relations, then they clearly constitute an index of shared consciousness and as such represent an important and instructive source of perceptive 'bias'.

This brings me to a final and different kind of objection to the reliability of the autobiographical source. It arises as a corollary of an epistemological theory proposed by the French 'structuralist' scholar Louis Althusser.[19] Briefly stated, it is that "reality can only be made sense of through language or other cultural meaning systems". Thus as people we are "subjects in" ie socially constituted by, a complex and all persuasive network of such structures of meaning. It is therefore through ideological structures that self and society are knowable. Consequently any gesture we may make to harness our experiences as a means to know ourselves 'objectively' ie outside of the realm of ideology, is at once hopeless and untenable.

Taken within these terms the value of autobiography is clearly negligible, since it constitutes merely a restatement of the ideological terrain within which the author resides. But as E.P. Thompson has shown the question of 'experience' is more complex than the Althussarians will allow.[20] In short Thompson argues that the experience of social being (lived experience) persistently contradicts that invested in social consciousness (perceived experience). In other words, ideological constructs are capable of being pierced and thus unfrocked by <u>what happens</u> on a material level. Thus, while "false descriptions of reality" undoubtedly pervade the consciousness of men their experience "cannot be indefinitely diverted, postponed, falsified or suppressed by ideology"[21] for in certain circumstances - trench warfare for example, men as it were, also know the tree by its fruit. This is an important point as it relates to the use of life accounts, because as a revelation of experience, autobiography provides us with insights into the "eternal friction" which exists between lived and perceived experience, and an indication of the impact of the one on the other.

Approach, Method and Organization

The points discussed above clearly hint at my approach to, and method of dealing with, my primary source. Miners' life accounts, like all autobiographies, are at once histories, historical and sociological documents, psychological case histories and works of art. To properly understand and thus get the best out of them we must not only recognize this but comprehend them on all of these levels. Yet, when the glare of scholarship has focused upon autobiography it has come from committed disciplinary positions, each with its own consciousness, methods and objectives, and this has tended to cause our comprehension of the form to be fragmented, and researchers to be, at times, disappointed, dissatisfied or perplexed with what they find. Autobiography nevertheless has been fought for as the proper subject of literary criticism, history, sociology and psycho-analysis.[22] Rarely it seems have students of the form been listening closely to each other, still less learning from each other, the cry, or perhaps more accurately, the hidden assumption seems always to have been: each to his own and never the twain shall meet.

In the field of knowledge, as in so many other areas of work, there is much to be said for the efficiency which comes from the division of Labour, but there is also a danger - that of reproducing in analysis the artificiality of that division. It is important for us not to lose sight of the inter-connectedness of different elements contained within the whole. It is not a question of giving up identity as this kind of academic or that, but of recognizing the ways in which knowledge drawn from different disciplines can be marshalled in such a way as to cast light from one to the other.

In a recent essay in historiography[23] Church, Outram and Smith argue precisely this point, noting the limitations that discipline-based research has manifested in the (perennial) quest to locate the reasons which explain the 'militancy' of the British miner. Their project is therefore informed by a methodology "which combines mechanism, mediation and

memory"[24] ie economics, culture and perceived experience of the past.

My work too shares these methodological objectives for I have attempted to set the thought of miners in the historical, economic and cultural context within which it was expressed. But I have also attempted to understand this consciousness in terms of the form within which it manifests itself ie autobiography.

My primary analytical technique has been comparative analysis. I have made detailed studies of the 70 texts which I have collected and I have attempted to identify trends, patterns, changes and continuities in autobiographical perception, selection, representation and style. I have then interpreted this data in the light of concepts and theories of cultural formation and production[25] in order to analyse the ways in which the miners' autobiography interacts with and represents other elements in the culture within which it was made.

The thesis is organized into six chapters. The first establishes a broad overview of the miners' autobiography and in particular attempts to interpret the relations between the lived experience of coal miners (1790-1945) and their autobiographical production. The five subsequent chapters are arranged thematically, each comprising of a detailed examination of the miner-autobiographers' understanding and representation of the following social and cultural phenomena - work, religion, politics, family and leisure. Taken together these themes constitute an impression of the ways life was perceived and experienced appropriated by the men and women who toiled in the English coal fields. My work therefore is not a history of the miners in the conventional sense; the particular features of particular communities must be left to their historians, but if, despite the inevitable distortions created by my own modus operandi I have put the reader more closely in touch with the 19th and early 20th century English pitman, by casting a light upon his sensibilities, I will be more than satisfied.

INTRODUCTION

NOTES

1) For an analysis of a variety of well-known autobiographies which have been used for the purposes cited see R. Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, (1960), Ch.7 and 8.

2) See P. Lejeune, "Autobiography in the Third Person", New Literary History, (1977), Vol.9, No.1, p.41.

3) David Vincent has produced a seminal study of 19th Century working class autobiography but the author does not attempt a comparative analysis of life accounts written by people who shared the same or similar occupations. See D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography, (1981). J.W. Blassingame has, however, produced much work based upon the life-histories of North American slaves. See for example The Slave Community, (Oxford, 1972; 1979).

4) The work of the early Labour Historians J.L. and B. Hammond is sensitive to questions of 'felt' experience, but it was not until the late 1950's and in the context of the 'Standard of living debate' that the question of the experiential quality of working class life began to be vigorously debated. For an incisive review of this debate see A.J. Taylor, "Progress and poverty in Britain, 1780-1850 : A Reappraisal", History, 1960, Vol.XLV, No.153, pp.16-31. Later works, notably E.P. Thompson's, Making of the English Working Class, (1963), are sensitive to the issue of 'Lived experience'. For mining see R. Colls, The Collier's Rant, (1977) and The Pitmen of the Northern Coal Field, (Manchester, 1987). For a recent 'structural' approach see J. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution, (1974).

5) Quoted by E.J. Hobsbawm in Worlds of Labour, (1984), p.12.

6) Vincent, op. cit., p.6.

7) See Roy Pascal, op. cit., passim.

8) Ibid., p.8.

9) See E.W. Bruss, Autobiographical Acts : The Changing Situation of Literary Genre., (1976) p.2.

10) Ibid., especially introduction.

11) Ibid., p.13.

12) J. Burnett, Useful Toil : Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820's to the 1920's, (1974), p.9.

13) Both Blassingame and Vincent make this point. See Blassingame op. cit., p.368, Vincent op. cit., p.4.

14) Pascal, op. cit., p.1.

15) Ibid., p.16.

16) John Blassingame makes this point in relation to slaves, see Blassingame, op. cit., p.368.

17) Quoted from K. Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, (1859), by T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel in, Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, (1956; 1979), p.67.

18) E.H. Carr, What is History?, (1961; 1984), p.35.

19) These positions are set out in Althusser's, For Marx, (1969), and 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus' in Lenin and Philosophy, and other Essays, (1971). In the interests of brevity I have quoted from John Fiske's useful synopsis of Althusser's work contained in "British Cultural Studies and Television". See J. Fiske, (ed.) British Cultural Studies, (1986), Ch.8.

20) See particularly "The Poverty of Theory : or an Orrery of Errors" in E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and other Essays, (1978). See also E.P. Thompson, "The Politics of Theory" in, R. Samuel, (ed.), Peoples' History and Socialist Theory, (1981), for a lively restatement of the case.

21) "The Politics of Theory", p.406.

22) For example, the philosopher William Dilthey stressed the importance of autobiography as a means to comprehend history. See H.P. Rickman (ed.), Meaning in History : William Dilthey's Thoughts on History and Society, (1961), Ch.1, for analysis of and extracts from Dilthey's work on autobiography.

Stephen A. Shapiro has argued a stout case for autobiography as imaginative literature, see S.A. Shapiro, "The Dark Continent of Literature : Autobiography", in Comparative Literature Studies, (1968), Vol.5, pp.421-454.

I.L. Horowitz sees only "a superficial contradiction between sociology and autobiography", for his argument see "Autobiography as the Presentation of Self for Social Immortality", New Literary History, (Autumn, 1977), Vol.1, No.1, pp.173-179.

John Sturrock has argued that autobiography "has everything to learn" from psycho-analysis. See "The New Model Autobiographer", New Literary History, (Autumn, 1977), Vol.1, No.1, pp.51-63.

23) See R. Church, Q. Outram and D.N. Smith, "Towards a History of British Miners' Militancy", Bulletin, British Society for the Study of Labour History, (Spring, 1989), Vol.34, No.1, pp.21-36.

24) Ibid., p.33.

25) In this I have relied substantially upon the theories of cultural production and cultural analysis evolved by E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams. It was they, as Stuart Hall points out, who "forced on their readers' attention the proposition that (in Williams' words) 'concentrated in the word culture are questions directly raised by the great historical changes which the changes in industry, democracy and class, in their own way, represent, and to which the changes in art are a closely related response'." Thus as Hall observes culture for Williams and Thompson was seen as "a site for convergent interest", (See S. Hall, "Two Paradigms in Cultural Studies", Media Culture and Society, Vol.2, No.1, 1980) and this is how I use and understand the term, for I see culture, not as a static element within an economically determined 'superstructure' but as a dynamic and multi-faceted process through which experience is handled and thus within which meaning is made and 'struggle' is articulated.

CHAPTER ONE

MINERS' AUTOBIOGRAPHY: SOCIAL BEING, SELF KNOWLEDGE, SELF REPRESENTATION AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FORM

> It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being determines their consciousness.[1]

Miners and mining communities have fascinated scholars and general public alike. Explanations (both mythologically and theoretically based) of the communities attitudes and practices abound. It is therefore all the more surprising to find that no general analysis of the miners' opinions of themselves, at least as such views are manifested in their autobiography, has been produced. Thus the aim of this chapter is to establish a general overview of the miners autobiography. In doing so I will approach a central question of this study by developing a general analysis of the relations between the ways in which mining people have lived their lives and the nature of the autobiography they have produced. By this I mean the kinds of issues which are raised in their accounts, the means by which such books are organized, the modes of expression which are employed and the kinds of representations which are attempted; in other words the internal landscape of the works.

Such matters are an important aspect of the autobiographical form as Life Histories are not what they are often perceived to be - the aggregate of their subjects' experiences and personality, for it is clearly impossible for the autobiographer to record his total experience or to "capture within the covers of this book the tenor of his entire personality."[2] Consequently, autobiographers tend to select particular aspects of their experience and personality to "stand for the complex whole."[3] As a result of this practice the selections they choose to make, the self representations which are attempted and the mode of literary organization which is applied are significant factors not only in

revealing how various authors understood and thus symbolized themselves and their lives, but how the cultural milieu within which they were born and socially formed influenced this process.

In order to analyse these various aspects of the miners autobiography I have divided this chapter into a number of sections. The first comprises a brief survey of work which has been focused upon mining culture,[4] this is included in order to contextualize the main body of the chapter. I then deal with autobiographical motivation as an initial means of evaluating the relations between autobiographical preoccupation and orientation and cultural phenomenon. Finally I focus upon aspects of the autobiographical form and autobiographical design in the Miners' Life Account. This larger section is divided into three areas of analysis comprising, autobiographical self analysis, selection and organizing purpose, by which I mean the end to which the work may be put or the purpose for which it was written. In a number of ways the distinctions I make between the various aspects of the autobiographical process are artificial and consequently in certain areas (most notably motivation and organizing purpose) the areas of analysis are difficult to separate and persistently refer back to each other. Despite this problem I felt that it was necessary to make such distinctions in order to highlight certain important aspects of the study.

Culture and the Mining Community

> Miners live a very communal life. All live in the same colliery village, and all work at the same colliery; when not at work they are always 'at home' to one another. The doors are always open. Therefore they know each other intimately.
>
> (Jack Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.116.)

Anyone who has read more than a single autobiography will not need to be reminded that the individual autobiographer's comprehension of the external world is not universally shared by his fellows. For personal experience is mediated through,

and shaped by various psychological, social and thus cultural conditions and perspectives. As B.J. Mandel has noted the autobiographer "can not help creating his autobiographical world ... as he understands it."[5] Therefore an analysis of various models of pit culture will be useful in bringing to light significant cultural traits which may be seen in a general sense to influence the miners' 'world view', and thus point out, or indeed point to, various aspects not only of the miners' motivation to record the events of their lives, but the kind of internal form or landscape this work may take. Coalminers, as a section of the industrial working class, are notable for a number of characteristics which appear to separate them from their class peers. This factor has stimulated a great deal of research, generally related to the miners' perceived propensity to be industrially militant, with the result that a number of social scientists have chosen to see mine workers and their families as 'archetypal proletarians'.[6]

This notion was informed by the social relations of production in mining which, it is argued,[7] exposes the collier to the experience of exploitation in "an extreme form", principally as a result of three major factors. First, the physical isolation of many mining settlements, and the non-transferable speciality of the miners' skill which precipitates their "absolute dependence" upon their employers, whose relationship to the workforce is essentially exploitive. Second, the miner and his community are also dependent upon the state of (often volatile) national and global markets, as the settlement is very often constructed for the sole purpose of providing labour with which to win coal and therefore offers little alternative employment. Thirdly, miners' work in extremely dangerous conditions and are aware that they receive only a small proportion of the value of the product they produce, despite the fact that they risk life and limb to produce it. Thus it is argued that 'raw' exploitation in a volatile economic environment, compounded by dangerous working conditions provokes mutual defence by way of group solidarity which inevitably manifests itself in industrial militancy.

Although this notion of miners as the archetypal 'wage slaves' of the capitalistic system has proved to be useful, its potential as an explanatory principle for the comprehension of the entire panoply of behavioural patterns and attitudes exhibited in the coal-fields has been found by some researchers to be at once limited and unsatisfactory. (The variations to be found in political militancy and tradition among the mining population are for example difficult to explain in terms of 'crude' structural models.) Thus the idea that exploitation was not the sole determinant of attitudes and behaviours associated with the mining communities, which was highlighted by Ker and Siegel in the 1950's, represented a major breakthrough.[8] This key work, with its central concept of 'isolated mass' attempted to demonstrate the sense of apartness - of difference which is experienced by social groups such as the mining community as a result of their particular industrial environment. Factors related to the commonality of experience (common danger, grievance, expectations, associations) are posited as an explanation for group cohesion and separateness, and consequently, as Bulmer points out, gives rise to a society which is "not simply subject to the push and pull of exogeneous forces ... (but) ... develops dynamics of its own which result in a degree of local autonomy and indeed conscious apartness from wider society."[9]

This relationship between commonality of experience and community dynamics has important implications for the ways in which members of mining communities relate to each other and the 'outside' world. For the very homogeneity of community life in many ways inhibits the possibility of individual community members acquiring or aspiring to personal distinction or 'special' status, a factor which tends to encourage, in general terms, individual members of such society to behave and think collectively. This point is made by Mark Benney, he writes:

> The income of every mining family, insofar as it was derived from the mine, was known to everybody. The pretensions of urban living were impossible here. No family could assume higher standards than its income warranted without incurring ridicule. Here, perhaps, lay part of the reason why miners made their demands on life as a community, not as individuals.[10]

Yet while the general logic behind the concept of the homogeneous 'isolated mass' has largely been retained, more recent research has attempted to evolve models of mining culture which are more sensitive to variations in community reactions. Ringlinger's notion of 'separatist group'[11] for example, while stressing that psychological factors related to 'common fate' (the danger and arduous nature of the work and its economic uncertainty for example) lead to "tension and discontentment" among miners, has pointed out that this can not always be vented via "normal outlets" as a result of managerial manipulation, often in the form of paternalist regimés or racial or religious sectionalism for example. Thus Ringlinger's hypothesis not only lends itself to a comprehension of some of the extremities of individual community reaction to pit life which one encounters in the story of mining settlements, but points to the ways in which it is possible for tension and discontentment to be mediated through non-conventional channels.

While Ringlinger's notion of 'separatist group' is useful for describing the similarities and variations in behaviour patterns as they are related to the social structure of mining communities, it fails to adequately deal with the way in which actors within these communities <u>interpret</u> that experience and lend meaning to it in terms of themselves and their society.

Blauner, to some extent, provides a remedy to this problem[12] by pointing out how the social relations of work in such communities 'carry over' into non work activity and consequently tend to colour the whole of community life. For example leisure is spent in the company of others involved in the same work. Occupational language is used to some extent in non occupational situations. Community members tend to

'talk shop' in their spare time. Moreover, the strength of these ties between work and non work activity are further reinforced by other functions related to work itself, such as mutual dependence. Thus work relations provide points of reference or meanings outside the workplace for those who work together. As a result of this members of 'occupational communities', not only derive group standards, values and meanings in terms of their interactions with their occupational peers, they, as Martin Bulmer points out, "construct their self image in terms of their occupational experience." The notion of occupational self image is of crucial importance in any analysis of the consciousness of members of occupational groups such as coal miners, for the value systems implied by the term have a relevance in explaining the individual actor's 'world view'.

While all cultural and structural models of mining communities may be seen to have some significance in our comprehension of the ways in which the miners' perception of life may be coloured, they in general lack an important dimension which bears down upon all people - the dynamic of change. Change impinges upon the lives of men and women in various and often interconnected ways. Political, economic or technical change for example frequently fuels social change. For groups dependent upon a single economic activity, such as coal miners, reorientation of political, economic or technical conditions and practices can have a profound influence on community life. On the most basic level demand for the product can spell strength or weakness - survival or extinction. Technical advance and organizational change can have a similar effect. But more problematically, such change can have an effect on how communities see themselves. For on the one hand, crisis can induce not only resentment and hostility but introspection. While, on the other, prosperity can forge new aspirations and desires. For the miners such subtle change was to be born out of events such as the first World War, which for example convinced the colliers of the advantages of nationalization, the General Strike of 1926 which dashed their hopes, and the inter-war years which brought unemployment and increasing mechanization. Such events eroded old ideas and forged new

ones, brought new despair as well as hope, influencing as it did so the miner's perception of himself and the wider society.[13]

Autobiographical Motivation

In common with other working class groups comparatively few pitmen have written life-histories, a fact which bears testament to the ways in which the experience of social class influences the perceived worth of individual experience. There is much truth in Bill Williamson's observation of the Throckley mining community;

> They conceived of themselves very much in the terms that society conceived of them - namely as just ordinary people. Being like everybody else they were never disposed to see their own lives, particularly their own history as being of interest to anyone.[14]

Yet there are ways in which the autobiography of coal miners contradicts this notion. For the pitmen autobiographers frequently seem to have seen their own lives as a group of men, and their families lives as a community of people, as in many ways unique and extraordinary (a trait which separates most miners' autobiography from the long tradition of life history which celebrates the extraordinary and unique experience of an individual actor's life). And it is this factor, more than any other, which appears to have driven them, albeit in small numbers, to pick up their pens. The opening passage of the autobiography by the Lancashire pitman Fredrick Holme to some extent demonstrates this point, he writes:

> It was a rainy morning, and as I watched the rain lashing down the window my mind drifted back to the forty years I had spent in the coal industry, the characters I had known, and the situations I had been in - some comical, some tragic, and some which the ordinary mortal who worked above ground would never believe. I am sure that anyone who has worked down a coal mine could tell the same stories, just as I am sure that the same people would say that they have had a brush with death, or a serious accident.
>
> (Holme, P.1.)

Holme, as we can see, is clearly concerned to stamp his work from the very beginning with the sense of extraordinaryness which he appears to feel in some way symbolizes his experience, experience which, at least to 'ordinary' people, at times may seem to be 'unbelieveable'. Moreover, Holme, unlike the majority of autobiographers, is keen to stress the commonality of this experience among his fellow workmen, at once protecting himself from accusations of pretence to 'specialness' from within the mining community, while signalling the unique nature of pit life to the 'strangers' of the outside world.

The tendency to focus upon the uniqueness of the mining community and pit life rather than the individual pitman frequently runs through Miners' Autobiography. This may be seen to be a paradoxical practice since, in the strictest sense, it breeches the primary convention of the form (that the author of the book should be its subject) and contests the related assumption that there exists an essential character or 'specific personality' independent of material conditions or social environment.[15]

Despite the fact that this 'individualist aesthetic' was and is part of a larger and dominant ideological trend[16] it had historically found little favour among proletarian life historians.[17] This is nowhere more true than in the mining villages and communities of Great Britain where; for reasons which I have already sketched out and others I shall later develop, the notion of 'communal self' is highly developed as a result of the complex of social practices and shared assumptions which taken together protect and sustain members of mining society. However, it is worth noting now the particular relevance of the widely and passionately held concept of equality of status in mining culture. As Benney has noted and Williamson has demonstrated,[18] this notion is rooted in the logic of shared or common fate and frequently has the effect of causing those who are perceived to 'have got above themselves' to be structured, generally by sarcasm or mild ostracism,[19] by other community members. Thus the

idea of the 'tall poppy' or the actor more worthy of attention than others; the raison d'etre behind much autobiography, is an unattractive or even unsuitable presentational motif for the mining subject (Parfitt admitted it was "difficult to write about himself" as "some would consider ... (he) was blowing his own trumpet," p.20), and consequently the majority of miners' autobiography focuses upon the community and the communal self as I show and as is signified by many of the titles of these books which include inter alia; Most Splendid of Men, A Man's Life, Black Diamonds, My Life among the Miners, Miner and The Martydom of the Mine.

All of this is not to suggest that the pitman's autobiography is in any sense formulaic. For the writer's general motivation has often been tempered by other influences and consequently pitmen autobiographers have utilized many different approaches, and for various reasons which will later be discussed, placed greater or lesser emphasis on different aspects of the miner's life.[20]

Yet, it is as witnesses of the subterranean world and its wider culture that autobiographers separated by time or divided by political or religious perception found a common motivation. All experienced not only the extraordinaryness of working 'deep in the bowels of the earth', but the effects of living in communities which were permeated by a singular and potent work culture, factors which tended at once to separate them from, and at times disadvantage them in relation to, other men.

What precisely is it about the nature of the mine and the mining community which appears to prompt the would-be autobiographer to write? There seems to be four major yet closely related answers to this question.

The first is that the underground world is an essentially secret place, literally hidden from the view of the 'ordinary man in the street'. This on the one hand stimulates the curiosity of people in the outside world and thus generates a

demand for information, while on the other engenders a sense of social isolation and difference in the collier who works, in George Cocking's words, "forgotten by those who tread the greensward above his head." (Cocking, p.43.) Consequently, autobiographers have been motivated to use the form in order to expose to the outside world the nature of subterranean conditions, a practice which both satisfies a demand, as well as the collier's desire to forge a relationship with the general public and thereby make known what many refer to as "the price of coal". A.J. Parfitt's autobiography for example My Life as a Somerset Miner is 'designed' to draw public attention to conditions in the Somerset pits in an attempt to dispel public misunderstanding of the miner's political and economic demands. In prefacing this book Frederick Smith, the Somerset miners' official noted:

> ... there is still a wide-spread lack of knowledge and understanding of the miners lot among the general public ... This autobiography in which A.J. Parfitt records with a human touch and with easy language this day by day experience as a Somerset miner, should help to reveal the causes that create 'wishful thinking' and generates agitation for improved conditions among British miners. It has, as it were, taken the lid off the underground workings and exposed to view the daily round and common task of those whose labour is and has been the foundation of British Industry.
>
> (Parfitt, Preface.)

The second major motivating factor is associated with the very strangeness of that secret subterranean world, not only in terms of its physical peculiarity but its cultural idiosyncrasy.

The environment of the pit is almost always represented as being so odd and strange that it "defies description" or is quite simply "unbelieveable" (Passim, sees for example Coombes, pp.34-38), where it is likened to anything within the imagination of ordinary men it is generally compared to some form of Hell. Cocking for example recalled the mine as something like "Dante's vision of the infernal regions" (Cocking, p.49), while the narrowness of the galleries, the heat and sometimes dampness of working places and the oddness of the strata formations are often seen as key parts of this

"hellish" environment, more than any other factor the dense darkness of the underground caverns appears to have symbolized for the autobiographers the 'unworldlyness' of their subterranean surroundings, frequently leading them to compare the pit to the grave. (Smillie, p.22; Cocking, p.31 for example.) Moreover, the sounds of the mine in the inpenetrable gloom were often seen to take on a weird or supernatural aspect. Robert Smillie notes;

> A fall of stones makes a terrifying noise in the awful hush and grave like gloom; the constant drip of water in a shallow damp mine ... produces an eerie effect. I look back with a shudder to the frightful waking nightmares of those double shifts - my fortnightly entombments.
>
> (Smillie, p.21.)

Such accounts of the 'oddness' of the subterranean environment litter this group of autobiographies and are only paralleled by descriptions of the 'oddness' of the pitmen's culture, particularly the language of the pit, which is often identified by the writers as being very different from that spoken on the surface. (See Rymer, p.3 and Hitchin, p.70.) Moreover, the colliers' attire, or lack of it, (pitmen often worked naked), their food, the amount of water they drank, the absence of women and the nature of the talk or 'crack' (often shot through with humour as a result of the strangeness of the environment) are stressed in many of these accounts and serve to depict to the reader the differences which lay between the secret and strange society of the pit and the familiar social world of the surface.

The third motivating force is the danger associated with mining. Many thousands of miners have died (between 1850-1914 more than 1,000 pitmen were killed every year)[21] and many hundreds of thousands more have suffered serious injury or disease in the winning of coal.[22]

Their sacrifice was of course vital to the domestic comfort and economic well-being of the British people and the autobiographers frequently use their accounts to underscore this point. This is clearly because many of the authors felt that the mining community was being taken for granted by an "unfair", "ungrateful" but more importantly "safe" government and public. B.H. Coombes for example expresses a desire in his autobiography to hurl lumps of coal from a bridge upon the cars of "unsuspecting strangers" that they "might discover some of the misery that is caused by that black mineral which comforts them with its heat." (Coombes, p.230.) However, such overtly belligerent sentiments are rare,[23] the majority of the autobiographers are merely keen to contextualize for their readers their grievance and resentment by describing, often in great detail, their own "miraculous" escapes from death as well as injuries and diseases they have suffered and fatalities they have witnessed. From one point of view the number and nature of these accounts could be seen as gratuitous, for example in their relatively brief life histories Wooley and Holme include no fewer than 38 such descriptions. Yet their purpose seems clear, a point perhaps best demonstrated by Holme's explicit explanation of why he included such material;

> I am not trying to draw horrific pictures of pit accidents, but I am merely trying to show that however much safety drill is preached, and how many safety precautions are taken, mining is, and always will be a dangerous occupation. Anyone who has never worked down a mine has no right to criticize miners when they try to improve their pay and conditions.
>
> (Holme, p.10.)

Such expressions of resentment and criticism are not only linked to pay and conditions but to a wide range of grievances some of which particular autobiographers are more interested in than others, as I show. Nevertheless, what is important to note here is the central motivating role that is played by danger in these complaints and the way it is used to contextualize them.

The final motivating force I have been able to identify concerns the autobiographers' desire to project an endogenous response to the publics' perception of miners as a social group. The popular view of miners and mining society is closely associated with the isolation of mining communities and what is often seen as the 'unnaturalness' and consequent brutilizing effect of working underground.

As a result of these impressions a number of myths have emerged which feed into various sterotypical representations of miners as a group. While these myths were mutated in a number of ways in the period covered by this study (for example the notion of miners as being excessively brutal, in a period when they had no political rights, giving way to them being seen as excessively 'militant' in a period when they had) the central idea that miners are reprehensively excessive as a result of, on the one hand, ignorance born of isolation and, on the other, the effect of working in 'degrading' conditions persists. Take for example the description of early nineteenth century coal miners provided by the eminent social and economic Historian Élie Halévy in his celebrated work of 1924 A History of the English People.

> The miners lived like utter savages absolutely cut off not merely from the middle class, but also from other sections of the labouring classes. Their underground labour was unlike any other; it was hard, gloomy and exceedingly dangerous. After many unsuccessful experiments the Society for Preventing Accidents in coal mines which had been founded in 1813 ... succeeded in obtaining the Davey Lamp. But it required constant effort to overcome the obstinate carelessness of the miners. Savages are always careless, and the miners lived, as we said before, like absolute savages both in dirty ruined villages in which they spent the night and in the subterranean galleries where there was less supervision than in the workshops or factories.[24]

Halévy's representation of miners as "savages" bears all the hallmarks of the early myths which were frequently influenced by the 'investigations' of Victorian middle class philanthropists and evangelists. The development and

expansion of the popular press during the last quarter of the nineteenth century served to foster, if in amended form, largely similar views among large sections of the population. Writing in 1930 Fred Swift, observed "the miners are subjected to harsh criticism, with a few exceptions, by the press and public." (Parfitt, Preface.) The miners, as a number of autobiographers saw it, had undeservedly 'got a bad name'. (See for example Parfitt, p.23; Smillie, p.45 and 124; Bullock, 1976, p.171-172.) And it is this factor which motivates many miner-autobiographers to use their life histories as a means of disputing widely held notions of the miner as degraded, ignorant, brutal and rebellious.

The self educated and well travelled Durham pitman George Parkinson for example, recalling a trip he made to London in the 1840's, satirizes the Southerners' view of the Northern pitmen by including an account of a conversation he had with a "well dressed gentleman" in Hampton Court who, unaware that Parkinson was a collier, expressed this 'ludicrous' view of the Northern miner:

> ... the miners of the North are a strange class of people - rough, uncultivated, with a good deal of the savage about them. They are great eaters and drinkers and gamblers ... The women are to be seen on the baking day with their short sleeved dresses showing their brawny arms, as at the public ovens they pass in and out loaves of a size that would satisfy a man's appetite for a week.
>
> (Parkinson, p.77.)

A.J. Parfitt, writing in the late 1920's, uses this anecdote to expose the way in which myth and prejudice, concerning the nature of the miner, was perpetuated by the National press:

> During the strike (1926) a representative from one of the morning pictorials came from London to take a photo of strikers. A number of us had just come from the committee room. The representative above referred to accosted us with this query "Could you tell us where I could get a photo of the - strikers?" We told him "You can take one at once." He laughed and said "You are not miners." Assuring him that we

> were, he again replied "What with collars and ties?" "Why shouldn't we wear collars and ties?" we replied, "Oh" he said "I was informed you were a hooligan set of men, I will take a snap now I am here." The men waited eagerly for the papers the next morning but no photo appeared-it was too respectable.
>
> (Parfitt, p.24.)

Anecdotes and accounts such as those quoted above are not uncommon in the miner's autobiography and represent a clear indication of the pitmens' sense of the outside worlds' attitude towards them. Such attitudes have played an important part in the pitman's desire to write life history. In this context the form may be understood as a means by which writers have entered into a ideological 'struggle' in order to establish more positive representations of themselves and the mining community.[25] In this sense at least the autobiographers may be said to have been politically motivated.[26]

While a general analysis of motivating factors cannot hope to precisely account for the complex and multiple deliberations which prompt the particular individual to produce an account of their life experience it can at least indicate the kinds of broad social and cultural forces which most frequently stimulate autobiographical preoccupation and activity in groups of people who were conditioned by the same social experience. In the case of the miner-autobiographer it seems clear that two trends figure prominently in the tangle of motives which draw the collier to his table. First is the desire to 'take off the lid' of the essentially secret and strange world of the mine in order to educate the general public and celebrate the pitman as he 'really is'. The second is to make known to as wide a public as possible the miners' grievances in the light of their working and living conditions not only in order to induce sympathy, understanding and recognition but in some cases, change. We now move on to discuss other factors related to the construction and design of the miners' autobiography, within the context of this discussion I will show how motivation plays an important part in shaping a particular kind of internal landscape in the miners' autobiography.

The Methodology of Life Recording

As one student of working class autobiography has recently pointed out "there is a sense in which all men and women are autobiographers."[27] All people think about changes which have occurred in their lives and attach meaning to them. However, those who are motivated to communicate these meanings within the framework of their life experience are faced with the substantial problem of finding a means by which this can be achieved.

The oral mode of self expression, generally in the form of a tale or story, has historically been the means favoured by labouring men and women. Yet this method of communicating information frequently blurs the distinction between "real and imaginery worlds" as a number of early working class autobiographers were to note.[28] Moreover, it is a system which is best suited to conveying the fragment of experience rather than the 'totality' of it, while it does not easily facilitate either permanency of record or wide access to the given information. Story telling and indeed other conversational forms are then in many ways deeply unsatisfactory ways of attempting to communicate the whole of one's life experience simply because they lack the inherent capacity to unify and preserve the record of that experience in a single, fixed and cohesive entity.

Conversely, autobiography is one of the few ways in which one can describe and preserve the perceived history and meaning of the individual life, and one of the few socially acceptable ways of exclusively discussing that experience without recourse to time, place, or social restraint. The fact that autobiography has filled this function in modern western culture has had a number of repercussions for would-be working class self expressionists, for while the classical autobiographical form has provided the vehicle by which to liberate and unify life experience, the fact that the form is a literary and consequently highly conventionalized system has often posed problems for the proletarian writer.

The lives of most working people are not dependent upon the acquisition and deployment of highly developed literary skills. Indeed, writing for the vast majority of the working class during the period covered by this study was in many ways an alien form of expression. Lacking the high levels of linguistic 'redundancy' inherent in oral communication (books are meant to be studied rather than immediately absorbed) and the ability to provide immediate 'feedback' to the reader the literary form denied to the proletarian self expressionist access to more familiar means of expressing and clarifying meaning. For example while gesticulation is impossible, literary convention militates against other popular forms of expression such as the expletive, (Dallinson for example notes at one point in his narrative "Yer can't cuss in print and there's nowt that will go in print that fits me at that minute", p.135) as well as specialized occupational language and highly localized colloquial language which was frequently employed by the working class in order to produce meaning.[29] Moreover, the absence of eye contact between 'speaker and listener' and the impossibility of rephrasing a statement diminished on the one hand the possibility of recognizing incomprehension and on the other the ability to clarify meaning in a culture which relied upon a 'restricted' linguistic code. Finally, writing to a greater extent than talking demands a shape and structure which must be more consciously developed before communication can begin.

Thus deprived of many of the traditional and familiar modes of self expression and, unlike many middle class autobiographers, lacking experience in the deployment of word and structure, many of the less self consciously literary miner-autobiographers frequently faced considerable problems in the writing of their life histories.

Mr. A. Wooley drew his readers' attention to the problem by suggesting that the literary mode prevented him from expressing himself adequately. Discussing the complicated

ventilation systems in use during the 1930's he notes at one point "I hope I have given you a rough idea of what I mean but writing about it is more difficult than talking about it." (Wooley, p.16.)

This difference between writing and speaking which autobiographers such as Mr. Wooley identify, also hints at other implications that writing brings to expression. For the process of writing and indeed the autobiographical form have an effect upon the reconstruction of experience. For example written more than oral forms tend to more rigidly structure notions of the past in one ideological direction (generally based upon concepts such as good/bad days, progress/decline) in order to cohesively connect past and present. Indeed, David Vincent has alerted us to the effects of this phenomenon by arguing that the switch from oral to written forms of life recording, made by some working class figures during the nineteenth century, served to change the "function" of such knowledge as in a formal written form it could be used to create alternative versions of history and thus reality.[30] Without further research it is impossible to say what other kinds of effects writing has upon perceptions of the past, however, it is clear that the miner autobiographers frequently use the written version of their life experience, as Vincent suggests, to a particular end which I identify in a later section.

Form

While it is important to recognize the differences which exist between writing and talking it is also necessary to be aware of the distinctions which exist between history and the past. For history is not the past but an attempt to give a cohesive account of it, and therefore is a product of creative imagination - a construction.[31] Autobiography being the history of a life shares the same characteristic, a factor not always appreciated by critics who, as J.B. Mandel has pointed out, tend to "confuse autobiography with life itself."[32] The autobiographical form then, like the

history, merely lends to past experience that artistic unity which it does not inherently contain.

The kind of unity or form which autobiography brings to past experience is controlled by three crucial and inter-related autobiographical activities. These are a premeditated life review, selection of experience to be recorded, and the actual shaping of the material itself. Each of these activities I shall deal with in turn.

Autobiographical Self Analysis

As David Vincent has noted, autobiographical self analysis usually originates as a result of the "author turning over the events of his life in a moment of quiet and realizing that it was possible to link fragments of memory into a continuous narrative."[33] What differentiates this activity from general self meditation is the fact that the meaning of a life-time of experience must be assessed in relation to the development of the personality, values and beliefs of the autobiographer.

This has a number of important implications in terms of some of the ways the autobiography is constructed and used. For in attempting to comprehend his life the autobiographer must also consider the "historical identity of the section of society in which (his) personality was formed."[34] In other words the autobiographical act implies a consideration not only of the subject but his antecedence and culture, a point which has led writers such as Bernard Sharnet and David Vincent to link autobiographical self analysis to class consciousness.[35]

The work of the pitmen autobiographers frequently demonstrates the ways in which their self reflection had the effect of inducing or highlighting consciousness of their position as a class of men in society, as a result of their analysis of their own experience and that of their ancestors, a factor which often feeds into the shaping of their work. Many include detailed descriptions of the hardships and

deprivations suffered by previous generations of coal miners and their families, frequently commenting how such experience feeds into their own beliefs and attitudes. Chester Armstrong for example, after discussing in great detail the hardships endured by his father, notes "for the purpose of this review, by way of getting back to the things that work to shape the course of my own outlook on life, he afforded me an emphatic example of the fate that was meated out to humble folk." (Armstrong, p.30) While Robert Smillie in common with a great number of other self historians in the group (for example Lawson, Mountjoy, Burt, Wilson and Rymer) link their own experience of the recent past, and the experience of their ancestors in the distant part, to the necessity for establishing and reinforcing mutual defence organizations such as Trade Unions and Friendly Societies in the present, Smillie writes:

> Fifty years ago, when I first went down the mine, it was like a sanatorium - a veritable pleasure resort - compared with the inferno of still earlier years! The mind hardly dare picture these horrible conditions; yet nothing but combination among the workers has had power to mitigate them. And when I hear men who have hardly suffered a hardship in all their sheltered lives inveighing against the tyranny and power of the trade unions, about the folly of strikes, and the danger of setting class against class, I can hardly be angry with them, because I know that their ignorance of the evolution of those very unions of which they complain is as deep as the sea.
>
> (Smillie, P.12.)

Yet for others reflection upon the past symbolized not the necessity to take action but merely a strong sense of their own social impotency. George Holme's grasp of his powerlessness, as a result of the miners and thus his own historically defined class position, is exposed in his assessment of the coal mines nationalization programme. "To ordinary blokes like me" he writes "it made no difference we would have new bosses, but as <u>always</u> we would have to do as we were told, no questions asked." (Holme, p.16.)

This kind of fatalism is just one example of the many attitudes which, if not born of historical self analysis, then are frequently clarified and evolved as a result of it. Such attitudes orientate the direction in which the auto-

biography moves by conditioning the selective and expressing processes, and thus influence the way the past is represented in print.

The process of autobiographical self analysis then, may be considered to be the most crucial factor in the evolution of the autobiography, for not only does it separate autobiographical activity from other forms of life recording such as diary keeping, but serves to generate the generalized insights and perspectives which will underpin the shaping and organizing purpose of the work as a whole.

Selection

As readers of autobiography will be aware, the fragments of life experience which constitute the body of the life account frequently betray, in a multiplicity of ways, the subjective prejudices and preoccupations of its author. For as I have noted, the autobiography, like the history, is an artificially engendered construct, and as such will be organized in accordance with the authors assumptions about the nature of the society that he moves within. Such assumptions feed into the autobiographical selective process. Thus by examining the nature of such selections as they are related to an occupationally related group of autobiographers (coal miners) an attempt can be made to identify links between occupational life experience, attendant forms of consciousness or mentality and autobiographical production.

While all the authors of the work considered here shared a common occupation, in many ways their lives are not easily comparable. Time and geographical location often separated them as did their political and religious views, while all did not enjoy the same access to, or share the same desire for, knowledge. Moreover, many performed quite different underground rolés and laboured under distinct organizational and management systems. Yet when one considers the areas of their life experience which most often

interested and preoccupied them, and the kinds of views they express in relation to these subjects, one is struck by the fact that their attitudes and choice of material frequently bears a number of striking similiarities, similarities which I will argue can only be explained in terms of the occupational culture associated with coal mining.

By far the most common preoccupation of the autobiographers concerns the inherent dangers of underground working. This theme permeates, to a greater or lesser degree, all of the accounts with the exception of one, Chester Armstrong's Pilgrimage to Nenthead. Moreover danger, as we shall see, often seems to organize the accounts, and almost without exception is depicted via a common structure of expression.

Danger is generally dealt with in two distinct ways, the general and the personal. The general accounts are a form of survey of the kinds of working conditions and landscapes found in the pit, the psychological impact of them and the dangers associated with them. The phenomena of utter darkness for example is commonly described, Parkinson notes that so deep was the gloom that it might "almost be felt." (Parkinson, 23.) The often "terrifying" sounds heard in the galleries are a similar source of autobiographical preoccupation, as is the fetid and dank atmosphere created by various combinations of water and heat. The 'weird' landscapes of the mine are often depicted by way of descriptions of various inclines or particular places which were perceived to be particularly dangerous or strange. (See Hitchin for a good example on "Ruddy's Drift" and the "Polka Bottom", Ch.5.) Travelling and working in such conditions is frequently depicted. Holme for example describes how he and his "mate", "slipped and slithered" through one particularly unpleasant inclined tunnel, his friend swearing "some good Scottish oaths" as they went. (Holme, p.2.) While Parfitt opined that "Those who work above ground would do well to consider what it would be like to get under the chair at home and work with a shovel and pick." (Parfitt, p.12.) It would be impracticable if not impossible to record the multiplicity of generic descriptions of the underground environment found

in this group of autobiographers. However, George Cocking's brief description of conditions in the subterranean world and the sentiment which underpins it perhaps best represents them. "Deep down in the dark caverns" he writes "breathing a damp close atmosphere, suffering from intense heat, drenched with pouring water, exposed to a thousand dangers, labouring from morn till night, or from night till morn, with hammer and drill, pick and shovel, truly it can be said that the miner has no enviable lot." (Cocking, p.43.)

These general accounts are commonly supplemented by numerous descriptions of accidents which befell, or fatalities which were witnessed by, individual autobiographers. This factor reflects the extraordinary levels of industrial injury suffered by miners. Consequently the 'near run thing' or the 'close shave' are a persistent feature of the miners' autobiography. Accounts of escape from rockfalls (Smillie), explosion (Parkinson), runaway trains of tubs (Hitchin, Lawson, 1932), drowning (Mountjoy), the failure of mechanical safety devices (Holme), represent only a few of the different kinds of narrow escapes which autobiographers experienced and recorded in their life histories. Such "Experiences and tragedies", Fred Holme notes "stay in the mind forever." (Holme, 9.)

These accounts unambiguously point to occupational danger as the single most significant factor in the selective process adopted by the group of miner autobiographers and consequently this phenomenon plays a major rolé in the kind of autobiographies they produced. This is not perhaps surprising, for underground danger, precisely because it is a constant in the lived experience of <u>every pitman</u>, because it has a powerful psychological impact on those subjected to it, because it is a unique experience to miners, and because it in part at least, generates grievances and attitudes which can only be understood in relation to it, represents for the collier one of the most obvious, simple and yet effective ways of liberating attitude and experience while bringing unity to the life account as a whole.

Within the landscape of danger which the autobiographers present to their readers lie a number of other common landmarks of selection and similar orientations of view, very often allied to the danger paradigm. These themes further expose the close links which exist between the internal landscape of the colliers' autobiographies and the nature of their lives as miners. Frequently for example we find, calls for greater regulation of the mining industry, discussions concerning nature and effect of safety legislation, examples of the owner's failure to enforce it, and suggestions for its improvement. (See Rymer, Mountjoy and Parfitt (passim) for example.) Moreover some autobiographers, notably Parfitt, Lawson, Smillie and Wooley, link their calls for nationalization of the industry, in part, to the desire to improve the safety record of the coal trade. Similarly, arguments for the development of stronger and more effective unions are often linked to the high levels of serious injury which were associated with the industry. Indeed, Neddy Rymer designed his book in order to "call attention to the horrible martydom of the mine" and to "show why every miner is bound by duty and necessity to form part of the Trade Union organization." (Rymer, p.1.)

Danger also colours a further common theme in the miners' autobiography which concerns the collier's status as a workman and his wider social relations. For invariably, albeit in different ways, the writers of these texts attempt to depict the collier as a skilled craftsman (the ability to survive and work in hazardous conditions being seen as a substantial part of this skill) while, at times, paradoxically seeing themselves as a race of 'degraded slaves', as a result of their working conditions.[36] Further, the miner autobiographers often discuss their relationship to wider society in terms of the dangers they face and the service they provide. A.J. Parfitt's implied criticism of the 'safe' consumer of coal is typical of the way the writers saw and related to the 'strangers' of the outside world, "How many," he writes, "think when sitting by the blazing fire in the winter, that men give their lives every day to provide them with the comfort of coal fires." (Parfitt, p.19-20.)

The process of winning the coal which warmed the 'safe' consumer is yet another point of common focus. Numerous autobiographers describe the multifarious (often regionally variable) techniques which were employed in the coal fields and the changes, especially of a technical nature, which they had seen. Consequently change in the labour process appears to have represented a significant landmark in their lives. This is not surprising when we consider the wider context of the pitman's life, for change in this respect had important implications not only in terms of the pitman's status as a skilled worker but also in terms of his health and safety. Mr. A. Wooley for example saw the introduction of electrical power into the labour process as the "biggest move forward in the history of mining" (Wooley, p.14), noting that although he did not realize it at the time the "slow methodical" techniques which were employed in his youth were giving way in the face of mechanization, and "speed" was becoming "the all important factor." (Wooley, p.15.) Speed implied the development of new machinery and stricter supervision of its operation, developments which effectively de-skilled the collier while eroding his traditional independence in terms of his control over the work process. Moreover, speed brought with it new dangers. Wooley points to the most common of these when he notes "with this haste came the dreaded disease (Phnumoconiosis) caused by the incredible amounts of dust which filled the air" as a result of the action of coal cutting machines. (Wooley, p.15.)

Change in the work process, then, held a number of important meanings for the collier, for it threatened not only his livelihood and his status as a workman but his life. Consequently its impact is frequently discussed and debated by miner-autobiographers reflecting the ways in which the entire fabric of their lives was linked to the method by which coal was extracted from the earth.

The process of winning coal and the inherent changes associated with this activity plays into a final common selective practice found in this group of life accounts - the way the author chooses to depict himself. 'Self imaging' is

a crucial and revealing aspect of the autobiography, for it demonstrates not so much what a particular actor is, but what kind of person he understands himself to be, in the light of various personal qualities which the author himself identifies to the reader. In terms of the miner autobiographer these qualities are almost inevitably linked to the subject's occupational culture. Almost without exception the miners' represent themselves as overtly masculine, fatalistic, and as individual members of an occupational group - special. Such qualities and attitudes are essential if the difficult and dangerous work of mining is to be undertaken,as I show in later chapters of this work.[37]

Masculinity is represented in a number of ways, ranging from representations of 'toughness' and mastery over women (often negatively depicted by showing social 'superiors', usually non manual workers, as 'weak' and subordinated by women, see for example Holme, p.15), through descriptions of individual acts of belligerence towards or defiance of groups or individuals with some power or advantage (see for example Wooley, p.24-25, Vernon, p.6-7, Rymer, p.8), to anecdotes which depict the colliers 'herculean' ability as a workman and his 'reckless' regard for his personal safety in the face of extreme danger. (See Lawson, Ch.9, Passim, and Parkinson, p.55 for example.)

Fatalistic attitudes are frequently related to occupational danger, but extend in other areas of the pitman's life such as employment expectations, housing conditions, and general health. Indeed the majority of the autobiographies took the view that ipso facto a mining life is in many ways a hard and brutal one, but like Fred Holme believed that "(one) could get used to anything." (Holme, p.9.) Hardly surprisingly, some author's point out that they intensely disliked mining, Hitchin notes that most young men "dreamed of getting out." (Hitchin, p.113, see also Tomlinson, p.103.) Yet few ever did so and less provide an explanation of why they made no attempt, except to express opinions similar to

Mr. A. Wooley's that from their point of view the gruelling work of the mine "has to be gone through." (Wooley, p.6.)

Despite their fatalism the authors frequently represent themselves as in a way special or extraordinary people (often referring to themselves as 'black diamonds' or the 'salt of the earth') in so much as they belong to a group or 'breed' of men and women who manifest special qualities which somehow separate them from others. Their courage, ability to work hard, and their cohesion and resilience in the face of danger, poverty, and what some see as oppression, as well as their sense of humour in the light of difficult working and living conditions are all seen as part of this uniqueness. In part Fred Holme reflects this view of the colliers, and thus himself, in this tribute to his ex-workmates:

> I found the miners a grand lot. I still think that, working in the bowels of the earth as they do faced with continual danger as they are, yet still able to retain a sense of humour they certainly must be special people.
>
> (Holme, p.9.)

The persistent attempts of the miner autobiographers to depict themselves as men who possess common personal qualities with other members of their occupational group appears to demonstrate the close links which exist between the colliers occupational culture and their self image. Unlike many other occupationally related groups of autobiographers - diplomats for example, the miner autobiographer seems to have assumed his autobiographical identity largely in terms of his work. Moreover, men such as Jack Lawson and George Smillie represent themselves as 'miners' despite the fact that they spent the greatest part of their working lives above ground performing quite different rolés to the 'hewer' or the 'putter'.[38] Their early experience of mining it seems provided them not only with a livelihood but an identity.

In conclusion it is necessary to underline three major points which emerge from this study. Firstly, the majority of the accounts contain a number of similar seminal issues. Of these the theme of underground danger is of the greatest

significance, as it often acts as the catalyst for the discussion of other areas of the autobiographers life experience. Secondly, the effects of technical change in the work place often generate autobiographical preoccupation and similar attitudinal orientations among the pitmen writers. Thirdly, while the culture and social relations of the coal fields represent substantial area of interest to the autobiographers these factors also influence the authors in the crucial autobiographical process of self imaging.

Thus while it is accepted that no 'hard and fast' rules or laws can be posited in relation to autobiographical selection, these books demonstrate how factors related to pit culture, the nature of coal field social relations and the impact of technology on a occupationally homogeneous group render the pitman's autobiography likely if not inevitably to be underpinned by a number of common themes, attitudinal orientations, and self representations.

Shape and Purpose

While the autobiographical selective process employed by coal miners may be seen to be crucially influenced by the singularity of their life style and culture, leading to the emergence of common landmarks of selection, this does not imply that the complexion of individual autobiographies will necessarily be similar. For the organization and creative shaping of the material - the kind of expression and emphasis various areas of discussion are given and the kind of structure they are hung upon, will lend to the work its own particular characteristics. But perhaps more importantly than this, the general purpose or intent which underpins the author's motivation to write the book will deeply colour its final form.

In terms of shape and structure the miner's autobiography is remarkable in two ways. First it is possible to identify a distinct structure of expression which cuts across the group of books as a whole. Almost without exception the under-ground world is depicted in the imagery and language of the

diabolical, frequently seen as like the "grave" (Smillie, p.22), a "hellish nightmare" (Holme, p.8), a "Dante's inferno" (Cocking, p.49), a "living nightmare" (Wooley, p.12), a place "pregnant with the pent-up forces of death and destruction" (Parkinson, p.46), of simply a place "beyond belief" or "description." (Passim.) This kind of structure is common to some other forms of working class writing, the miner's novel for example, and has been defined by Raymond Williams as the "diabolic panorama."[39] Structurally, many of the autobiographies, especially the early works, rely upon danger for their organization. An escape from 'certain death', a 'deliverance' from some accident (see Mountjoy for example) or the dangers implied by new work practices (see Wooley for example) are frequently used as structural mile stones and are employed to move the narrative on from one period of the life to another. This form of structuring seems to be a secularized adaption of the spiritual autobiography which used the escape from sin as an organizational fulcrum point.

Thus in terms of style and structure a large number of these works share a loose similarity which springs from a Biblical form of expressionism and the non-conformist tradition of life recording, factors which lead to them a particular kind of atmosphere.

Yet, as I have noted, perhaps the most crucial influence in the design of the autobiography is the purpose or end to which the book is being put. For the autobiography "like every other consciously wrought man made thing", as J.B. Mandel points out, "takes shape to accomplish <u>some end</u>."[40] This governing purpose as Mandel shows, is linked to the writer's initial motivation to write (despite the fact that the writer may not realize precisely what his real motivation is) and in the end will determine "the particular self view which emerges."[41]

As Mandel, and Pascal have shown, governing purpose can vary considerably.[42] For example, autobiographers have used their work in order to justify their actions, confess to misdeeds,

or to set an example to others. In some ways the work of the miner-autobiographers reflects these wide ranging approaches. A number state quite clearly their reasons for describing their lives. These include a means to see a way "more clearly through the tangle of the years." (Lee, p.13.) A desire to demonstrate that mining life is not just the "drab, dull (and) at times tragic" existence that some (politically motivated) writers have shown it to be. (Dallison, 1939, p.7.) A means to "enlighten the non-mining areas of the conditions under which miners work" and to "show that Nationalization is the solution of many of the ills which miners suffer." (Parfitt, p.50.) "For the encouragement of the unfortunate." (Cocking, p.3.) To encourage "young colliers" to go "and tell of a saviour's love to perishing sinners." (Mountjoy, Preface.) In response to "friends'" demands to outline the subject's "valid experiences" (Parkinson, Foreword) and to "show why every miner is bound by duty and necessity to form part of the Trade Union organization." (Rymer, p.1.)

However, while these stated objectives are fulfilled, to a greater or less extent, it is invariably within a wider and frequently unstated overriding organizing purpose, which is the plotting of the miners' position in the cultural mileau. Such aims as "enlightening the non-mining areas of the conditions under which miners work" are clear reflections of this practice. While other stated aims such as giving inspiration and encouragement to the "unfortunate" and "demonstrating" why every miner is bound by "duty and necessity" to join a union are determined by way of it. Indeed the authors of spiritual autobiographies such as Mountjoy make their point by way of describing the kinds of conditions and special dangers, political, moral, and occupational, which face, not the men in the street, but the "young collier." Moreover, autobiographers such as Tomlinson and Dallison, whose object is to contradict the idea that the miner is somewhat different or disadvantaged in relation to other men, paradoxically spend a great deal of time discussing various grievances which the miners hold as a result of what they see as a lack of concern for them or

appreciation of them by members of wider society. (See Dallinson, 1939, Chapter 5, Tomlinson, Chapter 9, esp. p.104 for example.)

In attempting to comprehend this consistency of approach in the miners' autobiography it is important to stress the close relationship which exists between that which fuels the autobiographers' motivation to write and the purpose or meaning the completed work may have. As I have argued, the miners' motivation to write is strongly influenced by a sense of difference or specialness they appear to feel as a result of their life style, the notion that at best they are not understood and at worst are the objects of various kinds of abuse and unfounded prejudice, and a consequent desire to reveal to as wider public as possible the collier as he "really is." Such factors do not necessarily contradict the stated aims of the autobiographers but are very often the reason for them and this in turn influences the general underlying orientations of intent or purpose we find in these books.

Some General Conclusions

Autobiography has always been a notoriously difficult area of literary production from which to draw generalizations, and those are reasonable grounds to support the view that life histories cannot really be understood collectively, but only as individual units.[43] Yet in looking at a group of auto-biographies which were written by men who shared not only the same social class but occupation and occupationally defined life style it became apparent that certain common patterns of selection, construction and style could be identified in the individual works. The central point of my argument has been that this phenomenon is best explained in terms of a complex of occupationally-derived attitudes and feelings which orientate the author's perspective - what Raymond Williams has described as a "structure of feeling."[44]

In attempting to analyse the close links which exist between coal field culture and the form of the miners' autobiography

I have stressed for example how the miners' life history is, paradoxically, likely to be as much a history of selves than of self, as a result of the occupationally-based life style of the mining settlement which binds its inhabitants together into a tight homogeneous group, fostering as it does so a collective mentality. Further I have attempted to show how the unique nature of mining as an occupation and the public's perception of miners as a group fuels the autobiographers' motivation to record his life experience and how in turn this motivation influences the writers (consciously or unconsciously) to orientate their work towards a particular end, which frequently is the plotting of their position as 'miners' in the cultural milieu.

Moreover, I have argued that in terms of two crucial areas of the autobiographical process, self analysis and selection, the experiences of coal miners, historically and lived, tends to lead individual authors, on the one hand, to find common autobiographical preoccupations with their fellows (the most significant of these being danger which often acts as the catalyst for other topics which are discussed such as social relations and technical change) and, on the other, to represent themselves as people who possess and exhibit overtly 'masculine' qualities.

Finally, I have indicated a number of similarities in the organization of these works and a particular mode of expression which is used within them, and I have concluded that occupational danger and a literary/religious tradition are crucial factors in the evolution of both.

In doing so, it has not been my intention to move towards a rigid and reductive determinism by suggesting that the miners' autobiography is formulaic. For clearly differences do exist between these books as differences existed between the experience, abilities and interests of their authors. Yet, as I have attempted to show, it is not so much the autobiographer's <u>particular</u> experience, or the elegance of his expression which lends an inherent unity to these works but the way the authors' experiences were 'seen', prioritized,

and acted upon in an autobiographical sense - for, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapters, it is the pit and its culture which lends to miners' autobiography its often cohesive singularity of form.

CHAPTER ONE

NOTES

1. Karl Marx, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Quoted in T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, (eds.), Karl Marx : Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, (1956; 1979), p.67.

2. B.J. Mandel, "The Autobiographer's Art", Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, (Winter, 1968), Vol.27, pp.215-226.

3. Ibid., p.223. In my view this is, by necessity, a technique employed by all autobiographers although it is executed with varying degrees of success. (See Lawson, for a superb example and Vernon for a less inspired attempt), however, Mandel argues that only autobiographers with "great ability" effect this technique, see p.223.

4) For this work I have relied heavily upon M.I.A. Bulmer's "Sociological Models of the Mining Community", Sociological Review, (1975), No.23, pp.61-92, and Bill Williamson's Class, Culture and Community, (1982). Taken together, these works represent the most comprehensive survey and anlysis of mining culture available to date.

5) Mandel, op. cit., p.219.

6) See inter alia, M.I.A. Bulmer, op. cit., and R. Harrison, (ed.), The Independent Collier : The Coal Miner as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered, (Sussex, 1978), esp. introduction, for a general discussion of this position, and N. Dennis, F. Hendriques, and C. Slaughter, Coal is Our Life, (1956), for a case study informed by it.

7) See Bulmer, op. cit., p.63-67.

8) C. Kerr, and A. Siegel, "The Inter-Industrial Propensity to Strike : an International Comparison", in A. Kornhauser, (ed.), Industrial Conflict, (New York, 1954).

9) Bulmer, op. cit., p.69.

10) M. Benney, Charity Main, (1946), p.24, quoted by Williamson op. cit., p.68.

11) G.V. Rimlinger, "International Differences in the Strike-Propensity of Coal Miners.", Industrial and Labour Relations Review, (1959), Vol.12, No.3, pp.389-405. My critique of this work is largely based upon that found in Bulmer, op. cit., pp.70-76.

12) R. Blauner, "Work Satisfaction and Industrial Trends in Modern Society", in W. Galenson and M.S. Lipset, (eds.), Labour and Trade Unionism, (New York, 1960). My critique of this work is largely based upon that found in Bulmer, op. cit., pp.78-84.

13) Besides the dozens of learned articles dedicated to the analysis of various aspects of the changing fortunes and circumstances of British coal miners and their Trade Unions, there exists a wide range of, generally regionalized, histories of coal miners and their social and political institutions. It would clearly be impractical to list all of these volumes here but I note a few particularly useful studies. See R. Page-Arnot, The Miners : A History of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain 1889-1910, (1949), R. Gregory, The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914, (Oxford, 1968) for analysis of a key period of political development in the history of Mining Labour and R.J. Waller, The Dukeries Transformed : the Social and Political Development of a Twentieth Century Coal-field, (1983), for a superb case study of social and political change. For regional studies see inter alia, J. Wilson, History of the Durham Miners' Association, (Durham, 1907). W.R. Garside, The Durham Miners 1919-1960, (1971). A.R. Griffin, Mining

in the East Midlands 1550-1947, (1971). F. Machin, The Yorkshire Miners : A History, (Barnsley, 1958). D. Francis and S. Smith, The Fed., (1980). A.B. Campbell, The Lanarkshire Miners : A Social History of their Trade Unions, 1775-1874, (Edinburgh, 1979).

14. Williamson, op. cit., p.10.

15. There has been much debate concerning the conventions of the form which essentially turns on the seminal question of how the self is knowable. Among literary critics the dominant approach is exemplified by Roy Pascal who formulated a rigid definitional criteria based upon the (hidden) assumption that the self is knowable outside of its material condition and social environment. Pascal concludes that writing which fails to meet his rules of the genre does not constitute "autobiography proper" or "fails" or is "bad" autobiography. See R. Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, (Cambridge, 1960), Chapter 1. See also E.W. Bruss, Autobiographical Acts : The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre, (1976), esp. Ch. 1 and Ch. 6, for an important discussion of the conventions of the form. For my position see introduction.

16. See R. Gagnier, "The Literary Standard, Working-class lifewriting and Gender", Textual Practice, vol. 3, part 1, (Spring 1989) p. 736-55 for a lively critique of the cult of borgeouis subjectivity within dominant literary forms.

17. See R. Gagnier, "Social Atoms : Working Class Autobiography, Subjectivity and Gender", Victorian Studies, (Spring 1987), Vol.30, No.3, p.335-63, for an analysis of this phenomenon based upon a very large sample of titles contained in J. Burnett, D. Vincent, and J. Mayall, The Autobiography of the Working Class, (1984).

18. Williamson, op. cit., pp.68-69.

19. Coombes for example associated social aspiration with blacklegging, see (Coombes, 1939, p. 183). See also Williamson, op. cit., p.69.

20. Distinct vairations in style, for example, are apparent between the work produced by autodidacts, such as Chester Armstrong who were self-conscious literary men with access to a wide range of conceptual tools, and other less 'academic' authors such as George Windward. Similarly, clear differences of emphasis and construction exist in accounts which are informed by varying political and religious ideologies, see Chapters 3 and 4.

21. J. Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century : A Social History., (Dublin, 1980), p.37.

22. For example, between 1879 and 1890 between a fifth and a sixth of all underground workers sustained an industrial injury. See Benson, op. cit., p.41.

23. See Cocking, p.43 for a more typical exposition of this point.

24. E. Halévy, A History of the English People, (1924; 1937), Book II, p.87.

25. The theory of the dynamics of ideological supremacy, often referred to as Hegemony Theory, was evolved by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. This work has provided the basis for a vast array of analysis spread across many fields of study. For a good analysis of Gramsci's work as it relates to cultural production see R. Williams, Marxism and Literature, (Oxford, 1977), Ch.6.

26. For a good overview of the debate surrounding the relations between contemporary working class autobiography and politics see S. Dentith, "Contemporary Working Class Autobiography: Politics of form, politics and context", (unpublished essay). See also J. White, "Beyond Autobiography" and S. Yeo, "The Politics of Community Publications" in R. Samuel, (ed.) People's History and Socialist Theory, (1981).

27. D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, (1981), p.7.

28. Ibid., p.21.

29. For an interesting discussion of subterranean language in the Durham Coalfield see D. Douglass, "Pit talk in County Durham" in R. Samuel, Miners, Quarrymen and Saltworkers, (1977). Dialect did find literary expression in popular comic songs and monologues especially during the first half of the nineteenth century and interestingly the only autobiography written entirely in dialect is comic in style, see Dallison. For a superb discussion of the nature and role of dialect literature during the era of this study see M. Vicinus, The Industrial Muse, (1974), Ch.5.

30. See Vincent, op. cit., pp.22-29.

31. See E.H. Carr, What is History, (1961; 1984), Ch.1, for a lively discussion of this point.

32. Mandel, op. cit., p.216.

33. Vincent, op. cit., p.14.

34. Vincent, op. cit., p.36.

35. See B. Sharrett, Autobiography and Class Consciousness: An Attempt to Characterise Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography in the Light of the Writers Class, Unpublished University of Cambridge PH.D. Thesis, (1973).

Vincent, op. cit., introduction pp.10-11 and Chapter 2.

36. See Chapter 2, p.70 for evidence of this phenomenon.

37. See Chapter 2 esp. pp.55-57 and Chapter 5 esp. pp.192-198.

38. Lawson became mens' checkweighman at the Alma Colliery, Chester-le-Street in December 1910, he was then 28 years old, nine years later he became M.P. for Chester-le-Street and was still sitting during the Second World War, he thus spent 16 years of his working life as a pitman 'proper'. Smillie seems only to have spent six years as a subterranean worker, he became men's checkweighman in 1880 age 23 and president of the M.F.G.B. in 1912, he later sat on Labours Parliamentary benches.

39. R. Williams, "The Welsh Industrial Novel", in Problems in Materialism and Culture, (1980).

40. Mandel, op. cit., p.220.

41. Ibid.

42. See Mandel, op. cit., pp.220-221. Pascal, op.cit., passim, esp. p.112.

43. See Vincent, op. cit., p.10, for a discussion of this view.

44. Williams first discussed this concept in The Long Revolution, (1961), he notes:

> The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular time and place: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living. .... The term I would suggest to describe (this) is structure of feeling; it is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in

the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. (p.48). A further and extended discussion appears in Williams' Marxism and Literature, Ch.9. See also Ch.5, and note 25.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ENGLISH COAL MINER AT WORK: PERCEPTIONS OF SUBTERRANEAN LIFE AND LABOUR

The work of the miner is in some respects well documented.[1] Since the end of the Second World War historians and sociologists of mining have drawn our attention to important links between the process of coal mining and the culture of mining communities.[2] While this work has represented a welcome departure from the 'union' based histories and sociological surveys of the past, little research has been orientated towards the ways in which the mining community 'saw' itself.[3]

This chapter seeks, by way of autobiographical testimonies, to explore the work of the miner from his own point of view. It attempts to link this evidence of 'lived' experience to the findings of other kinds of mining research and to employ it in order to convey the 'feel' of subterranean work as it was represented by miner autobiographers. It is intended that this analysis will illuminate existing assumptions about the miners' responses to and comprehension of their work, and provide the context for further chapters contained in this study.

Catching Them Early

In the first decade of the twentieth century, after a life time spent among the Durham pitmen George Parkinson observed that the nature of mining life "all combined to produce a special type of character." (Parkinson, p.30.) Indeed the often colourful and idiosyncratic nature of the pitman (frequently celebrated by the colliers themselves)[4] bears testament to a form of socialization which is geared to make the highly dangerous and onerous work of mining possible. In this respect Bill Williamson has shown how the pit village acted as an agent of socialization, preparing the children of the settlement for the rolés they would play as adults.[5] In terms of male children, the practice which Williamson has

described as "pit hardening" was a crucial part of the socializing process. He has defined it as:

> The assimilation of attitudes and dispositions (in young males) towards work which mould the character of miners, setting them apart from others and without which it would be impossible to work underground.[6]

These attitudes were associated with a particular sense of masculinity at the centre of which lay notions of "toughness", a fatalistic "could not care less" attitude towards danger, and the idea that "hard graft" was inevitable and could only be performed by "real men."[7] Frequently as we look at these autobiographies, these self same attitudes emerge time and time again in various forms and in various contexts.[8]

While the pitmen - autobiographers in general do not probe their attitudes in the context of their childhood and work experiences they are by no means oblivious to the meaning and implications of their 'class' position. Almost all the authors point out that, as a result of their family backgrounds, pit work was inevitable. Jim Bullock notes for example that "all children knew only too well what their future occupation would be. For the boys it was the pit." (Bullock, 1976, p.109.) Many of the victorian autobiographers began work as infants and although the children of miners had more time at school and marginally better educational opportunities towards the end of the period, deeply held assumptions about the status and rolé of miners as 'workers', often reinforced by parents and the educational process itself,[9] frequently led them to become indifferent to formal scholarship. Joseph Halliday's experience, for example, is similar to that of many of the later autobiographers. He writes:

> About the second week in September (1924) the beginning of the school-year, no decision had been made whether (sic) or no I should go back. I did not press to do so, many scholars don't usually. Neither did my parents prompt me to return ... within a fortnight I was interviewed in the South Hetton colliery office.
>
> (Halliday, p.62-63.)

The demands of the family economy also coerced youngsters to abandon scholastic ambitions. In 1840, for example, the Yorkshire miner, George Marsh, began work at the age of six in order to relieve the abject poverty that his ten brothers and sisters endured. (Marsh, p.1-2.) While in 1926 at the age of fourteen Mr. A. Wooley found himself "the only wage earner in a family of nine." (Wooley, p.3.)

Other less obvious, but equally potent, forces bore down upon the children of the colliery villages. As these autobiographers show, boys and girls were subsumed in the business of the pit from the earliest age. In the coal mining communities, as in all occupational communities, work was the common denominator of life. Consequently family life was organized round underground toil. Father's meal, bath time, the drying of pit clothes, and the endless cleaning (Lawson notes that "when the pit worked, the cleaning started again as soon as it ended" Lawson, p.30.). Thus in many ways the pit regulated the child's existence and produced many of the meanings which gave shape to its life. Such meanings were not only powerful but lasting, and for most children provided an important aspect of their self image; which by the fact could not be entirely realized outside of the mining community. Thus, as most of the autobiographers testify, the boys, in general, went willingly, if a little apprehensively, into the pit knowing that the work would be hard and dangerous yet reassured that the prize was not only money but social status. As Jack Lawson noted of his first ten hour shift, (worked at the tender age of 12 for 2d) "still I was a man, and I knew it." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.46.)

Getting Ready

The ritual of getting ready for work is often described in the group of autobiographies under study, and represents an important way of grasping how the men felt about their work.

Frequently these accounts are associated with larger descriptions of the 'first day' (at work) - an event which not only is often seen as a key marker in the miner-

autobiographers 'progress' but one which is frequently used as a structural or organizing device. For the 'first day' paradigm allows or leads many of the writers to begin to engage with the realities of pit life, and the various grievances they associated with the pitman's lot.

Certainly, the changes in the work process which began to manifest themselves, in many regions, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were ~~to~~ a point of resentment among the miner-autobiographers, as such reorganization was seen by them as a further extension of work-discipline and thus a threat to their independence as workman.[10] One important aspect of this was the introduction, or in some cases extension of, the shift system, which had the effect of more intensively regulating the miners' life style. In his description of the early shift 'caller' Jack Lawson reveals the feeling of being woken by this, in many ways, unwelcome visitor. He notes:

> As I lay half asleep, listening to his call, it sounded like some continuous chant in that early morning hour and the tattoo beating on the doors all along the street was like some weird, mournful kind of music.
> (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.43.)

In his work Just Ordinary but an Autobiography the 20th century Durham pitman Joe Halliday makes a bitter attack upon this practice, suggesting that being woken from "deep sleep" at "ungodly" and "unseemly" hours is not only "unnatural" and disorientating for the men who are subjected to it, but disruptive of family life, one example being the problems it posed for women who had to "get food ready at non meal times." (Halliday, p.63-64.)

Indeed it is in the ritual of preparation for work that we begin to see the importance of women as part of the mechanism of the mining family.[11] As Jenny Lee was to note of her mother and herself "we were caught up and completely absorbed in my father's life, which was entirely that of the mining community." (Lee, p.27.)

The autobiographical evidence is that during the late 19th and 20th Centuries, and most likely before this time, the wife and very often adolescent female children rose some time before the men were due to go on shift. Their duties were to lay out pit clothes, prepare food and simply say goodbye. (See for example Parkinson, p.16, 53; Bullock, 1976, Ch.1; Hodges, 1975, Ch.4; Brennan, Ch.3, p.87.) This work was vitally important to the survival of the family unit. Without the facility of pit head bathes and drying rooms the often wet and always dirty pit garments needed somewhere to be dried and at least shaken, for failure to maintain work clothes would have left the men open to illness and the family susceptible to destitution. A number of the early 20th Century autobiographers dwell on this subject and link it to calls for pithead bathes. (See Smillie, p.150-152 for example.)

The preparation of food was of course of primary importance to men who as Adaline Hodges points out "slept and worked all week." In the context of the shift system, good preparation was also a task that, literally, kept the women "on the go day and night." (Hodges, 1975, p.9.) Interestingly the pit-men-autobiographers often noted what they ate before leaving for work and what was 'made up' for their "bait", "poke" or "snap" (lunch). See (Pud. Anon., 1920, p.152; Hitchin, p.62; Parkinson, p.16, for example.) That they should have done so alerts us to the heightened consciousness pitmen exhibit in respect of their own physicality and its linkage to almost obsessive autobiographical preoccupations with good food, good health, strength and stamina. Thus like almost all other things food was understood occupationally in the village, for if the pitman was not adequately fed and physically strong then his "earnings were small and his means were scanty." (Parkinson, p.35.)

The final 'duty' of the miner's wife was to 'see the men off' (to work). This practice was part of a larger psychological defence system, in part manifested in the relations between men and women,[12] which reflected the communities' experience of the sudden and violent death of loved ones. Many a young

pitman must have been at once as comforted and moved as the 19th Century Durham pitman George Parkinson was when, on leaving his home for the pit in the depressing gloom of the early morning, his mother would call "be very careful hinney, and mind what tha farther says." (Parkinson, p.16.)

The walk or sometimes cycle ride to the pit head was often long, and undertaken at various times of the day and night. Frequently as Parkinson and Lawson describe, father and son or brothers would make the journey together. (Parkinson, p.16-17; Lawson, p.44.) On the early shift, as Joe Halliday notes, the men were "silent" and meditative. For many of the flegling colliers, as the Somerset miner A.J. Parfitt has pointed out, a feeling of "excitement turned into one of fear." (Parfitt, p.8.) As one autobiographer observes the young men were an "unknown quantity" and were "to be tested." (Holme, p.1.)

Going Down

For the majority of the pitmen-autobiographers the experience of descent to the pit bottom represented an important means by which they understood and measured their lives, for leaving the surface of the earth for the depths below heightened their perception of themselves as a 'race of men' who lived hand in hand with danger and in the clutches of chance and thus descent symbolized for them the difference which they felt lay between them and other 'classes' of men. This no doubt explains why descriptions of the 'first descent' are such a common feature of these texts.

Over the 150 year period covered by this study modes of vertical transportation changed considerably[13] and, while the safety record of the equipment slowly improved, there was always the threat of it failing, a factor which etched a deep and immutable groove into the consciousness of a number of the writers in the group. The Nineteenth Century collier Timothy Mountjoy for example described in his autobiography the psychological impact that such experience can impart, and

which fuels, as we can see, wider feelings of anger and grievance:

> When I went up or down on the flat iron chain at Crumpenmeadow big pit it had a great effect on my poor nervous system. A boy in my teens, I used to pray as I went down the pit and up the pit, and wished in my young heart it was taken off and melted up. At that time there were lots of iron joints in the hemp ropes that precious lives were let down on and drawn up on. I have known these ropes bring up a living freight of men to bank, and break, going down again; but now we have better ropes ... but there is room for our forest (of Dean) managers to make great improvements ...
>
> (Mountjoy, p.27.)

While descriptions such as this are important in drawing our attention to the fact that the miner's work experience, as least as much as their earnings, feeds into their tradition of militancy and protest, they are perhaps most significant in allowing us a rare opportunity to grasp how the men <u>felt</u> when they descended the pit. George Cocking, for example, provides a superbly evocative description of the 'feel' of descent, by means of perhaps the most primitive form of downward transport - the ladder. His experience relates to the 1870's, a period when many miners enjoyed the relative safety of the cage and winding gear. He notes:

> Shall I ever forget that morning? Never! The mode of descending was by ladders. ... A large group of men and boys had gathered around the mouth of the dark shaft, drinking in the glorious sunshine as it came streaming over the eastern hills. Finally one by one they began to disappear down the black hole. I was behind William Terril, who had instructed me to follow him down the ladder which I began to do as soon as his head was below the surface. At the bottom of the first ladder a short halt was made and light produced. After receiving my first lesson in adjusting the candle on the front of my hat, we continued our descent. Down, down we went, using the utmost care, for one mis-step would have hurled us into the yawning depths and to certain death.

> I am frank to confess that fear crept into my young heart as we continued to go down into the bowels of the earth. The water was dripping from the slimy walls, which looked like the sides of a huge grave, into which we were descending. The sound of our feet reverberated through the dark caverns like the booming of distant cannons ... The sensation produced by the gloomy surroundings, and the flickering lights so far below revealing the awful emptiness beneath one's feet and the terrible consequences awaiting even one mis-step ... Once I stood still for a moment and thought of retracing my steps, and forever renouncing mining as a calling. But my companions would have considered that cowardly; so, in spite of my fears, I continued to descend.
>
> (Cocking, p.30-32.)

As Cocking later recalls, it took thirty minutes to reach the pit bottom, only to be followed by a lengthy and uncomfortable journey to his "place" (of work). Consequently the advantages of a speedier, if equally dangerous, form of transport, for both owners and men, are not hard to imagine. Such devices had been employed in many of the increasingly deep mines in the English coal fields for more than 100 years when Cocking make his first descent. Early examples were generally operated manually by way of various forms of rope and winch, later being mechanized by gearing to steam power. The contrivances which were deployed to convey the coal as well as the human cargo up and down the shaft varied considerably. Often a hemp-rope and wicker basket was employed; in the mid Nineteenth Century chains and baskets were frequently used, later giving way to the familiar 'cage'. The Leicestershire pitman John Dunn describes in his autobiography his first descent by 'chains', undertaken when he was a child of ten in the 1840's. We can take his experiences to be similar to those of other men and boys who toiled in the English coal field in the middle of the Nineteenth Century:

> After the pit's company had all assembled at the 'bank', candles and other equipment having been served out, the descent began. As a rule the boys were sent down first - not in "cages" as is the case in these days, but swinging in chains, a certain number descending at one time. A number of chains were attached to a

large ring at the top end, and at the end of a single chain several feet long a double chain forming a loop finishing it. Into one of these loops each person put his legs, and gathering the chain up round his thighs passed it over his left arm, the little company standing in a circle, the left arm with the chain over it in the centre, and the right on the outside free. As the engine lifted them up off the bridge, the chains being of equal lengths, they formed a ring, sitting almost in each others laps, and the left arm being round the chain on the inside made it very difficult, if not altogether impossible for any one person to fall out.

I can never forget that first morning, as I was shown how to place myself in the chain, and the awful suspense of waiting - only a few seconds - to be drawn up, so that the bridge could be slid from over the shaft, and the descent began. As I went down into the darkness I closed my eyes for very fear, and I think if ever a lad prayed in earnest, I did so during that, my first descent to the bowels of the earth. I thought of my little home, my poor mother, my Sunday School, wondering if I should be permitted to see them again, and asked God to protect me from accident and death.

(Dunn, p.8-9.)

For those generations of pitmen who were to follow men like Dunn "down into the darkness" the journey was in general made by means of a cage. This form of transport was in many ways safer than ladder or winding chain, but was certainly not fool-proof. The cage travelled downwards at high speed, and relied on a braking system operated by a 'banksman', to arrest its progress towards the bottom of the shaft. Human error and mechanical failure often led to appalling accidents, as unrestrained cages smashed onto the pit bottom. Thus feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and fear were shared by descending pitmen throughout the period covered by this work. The Durham miner George Hitchin's description of descent by 'cage' in the 1930's may help to illustrate the 'feel' of downward travel and the psychological effect that this form of transport had upon the colliers. After describing how he placed his identity disc round his neck, noting that to him "the grim purpose of this was too obvious" he goes on:

> I stepped over the shaft. Through a narrow aperture over which hung a notice 'No cigarettes or tobacco pipes are allowed down the pit. I could see the winding-engine man, his hands and feet on levers and brakes, his eyes on the indicators showing the position of the cages in the shaft, and above all the huge drums round which the steel ropes were wound. The cage came to the surface; the banksman put in his 'keps' and as the cage rested on these iron protusions, the chains that suspended it went black. We got in. Eight men in each of the three decks. The gates closed. Bells rang, and the banksman grasped his 'keps' lever. I heard the chains above my head clanking as they lifted slowly to take the weight. The cage lifted a few feet and I found I was looking over the banksman's head. Then as the cage dropped, he seemed to shoot upwards; his face, his midrift and finally his feet, in that order, shot past my eyes. We plunged downwards into the darkness, the wind whistled past as the cage gathered speed. I closed my eyes and gripped my lamp. My stomach seemed to have been left behind. ... I plucked up enough courage to glance down between the metal laths which formed the floor of the cage. Deep down there I could see faint lights, rapidly becoming brighter. We were approaching the passing point, half way down, ... down and ever down we went, until I thought we must surely be close to Hell itself. Then the cage began to slow down, and gently we came to a halt.
>
> (Hitchin, p.63-64.)

These descriptions of various means of descent serve only as examples of the plethora of similar representations which exist in the cannon of miners' autobiography. They are important not only in highlighting the importance miners have attached to the experience of 'going down', but the ways in which such kinds of unquantifiable 'felt' experience can illuminate accounts of mining life which attempt to explain the miners' 'world view.'

Learning the Trade

> I graduated from childhood to manhood through the ordinary curriculum of the northern pit boys' lot. I graduated successively from the

> starting-point of a door-keeper in the mine at nine years of age, through all the stages of a miner's toil and its dangers, till at twenty one years of age I took my degree as a coal-hewer, this being the highest unofficial position attainable at the cost of the hardest form of mining-labour known. Like an apprentice completing his 'time', so the 'putter', or conveyor of coal, becoming a hewer, has reached his highest level, and in the old pit phrase 'He's now a man for hissel'. He may be only a pitman; but, in taking stock of human nature, men have learned that in the pit, or at the plough, or any other form of honourable labour a man's a man for a' that.
>
> (Parkinson, p.1.)

George Parkinson's description of his progress from trapper to hewer reflects the experience of many thousands of colliers who worked the mines of the English coal field during the 150 years preceeding the Second World War. The vast majority of the miner-autobiographers covered by this study, to a greater or lesser extent, describe this process.

Mining was undoubtedly a highly structured form of employment. Yet mining has never had an apprenticeship system, nor any other formal means of differentiating a mine worker, no matter what his status, from a common labourer. In this light Parkinson's perception of himself as having completed his "time" in a form of "honourable labour" takes on significance which cannot be ignored in any study of mining labour. Indeed the question of the skill and 'independence' of mine workers underpins perhaps the most important debate of recent years concerning the nature of miners as workmen. For traditionally miners have been seen as the "original and quintessential proletarians"[14] - architypal wage slaves, lacking the skill and control over the work process which was so highly prized by 'honourable' and 'independent artizans' such as printers, carpenters, or masons.

However, in the last few years this view has been seriously challenged by writers such as Roydon Harrison and Alan

Campbell, who have argued that in many ways the pitman was indeed a skilled and independent artizan.[15]

Clearly, it is proper but more importantly expedient to draw into this debate the views of the pitmen themselves, the pitman-autobiographers provide us with such an opportunity as I show below.

For many of the writers who were born in the first half of the nineteenth century the first experience of underground labour was as small children. Bill Williamson has suggested that this practice was part of the socializing experience itself, one might say a form of early industrial training,[16] a view supported by John Benson who suggests that children were of little use in the mine until they were eight or nine years of age. William Boxdale, for example, went underground at the age of four years, but was "only allowed to knock about as an errand boy for a time to get him used to the pit."[17]

In general, however, slightly older children were employed as 'trapper boys' - opening and closing ventilation doors for passing traffic, or in some areas, Somerset, Leicestershire, and Yorkshire for example, as a form of transport worker, pulling tubs by 'guss and tugger' (harness and chain) through the narrow galleries.

As a number of the autobiographers note, for these child labourers life was exceedingly brutal, monotonous, and frightening, and frequently described by the autobiographers as "slavery." (See Dunn, p.9; Smillie, p.12-13 for example.) Dunn describes the kind of cruelty which was often practiced by miners on their infant charges. Recalling his childhood he remarks "It was not long before my poor little body was sore with the belt, as also from the stripes laid on the naked back by the hardened cruel miner." (Dunn, p.9.) Parkinson remembered how on his first day as a trapper his candle went out "and all alone in the darkness which might almost be felt, I sat in my hole afraid to breathe." (Parkinson, p.23.)

However, the work of the older children, especially the trappers, was also very important. A.J. Parfitt notes that door opening "was such a responsible position I had to receive a week's tuition from the boy whose place I had to take." (Parfitt, p.8.) In this way he saw himself as an "apprentice." (Parfitt, p.9.) This is not surprising for failure to open the doors skilfully led to hazards of varying magnitude, from gas explosion to collision. Parfitt's description of the duties of a 'trapper boy' helps to highlight the grave responsibilities which fell onto the shoulders of children engaged in coal mining:

> The doors were placed about a 100 yards from the pit shaft. Through these doors, which were about 50 yards apart, a pony was employed to take trams into No. 1 seam; also a trammer had to push trams into No. 2 seam. Now these doors had to be kept shut as much as possible for ventilation purposes, and the reader can picture me trotting to and fro all day long shutting and opening the doors. Further, outside of the doors there was an incline, and the three lots of trams had to come the first 100 yards on a simple road until it reached the doors, one lot to the incline outside the doors, one lot to the left, and the other to the right inside the doors. Now the difficulty was this: when the pony was at pit bottom, and the other trammers were ready to take out the loads to the shaft, in the event of the pony starting away into the single tunnel, there was the possibility of the trammers going out, which would have meant a collision, killing or injuring horse and driver.
>
> Now I was held responsible, and when either of the three wanted to enter the single road I had to shout "look out" sufficiently loud to make those at the other end hear, so that they should remain there, thus avoiding a collision. It was a lung trier, and for that responsible position I received the magnificent sum of 8d per day.
>
> (Parfitt, p.8-9.)

Beside a quick wit, child labourers required judgment, knowledge and skill if they were successful to execute their duties. The attributes were gained by their own experiences but also by learning from the example of other workers. This phaze of the learning process 'aclimatized' the youngsters to

the often frightening and always dangerous environment of the pit, facilitating the building of confidence and strength while helping the boys to come to terms with darkness and the sounds of the mine as well as developing their awareness of the responsibility each man had for the others safety.

These early experiences also served to lend to the adolescent boys the culture of the pitman, in the same way that all apprenticeships serve to pass on the 'work culture' of the particular trade with which they are associated. As P.E.H. Hair has noted of adolescent labour in the pit "this experience at a most formative stage of life shaped the miner's entire physical and emotional development. By the time he began hewing the miner was likely to be strong, aggressive, suspicious, obdurate and obsessed with his job."[18]

In these senses it is difficult to argue with the auto-biographers who saw their first few years in the pit as the primary stages of an 'apprenticeship', except to note that unlike other forms of apprenticeship, it was training for a whole way of living, rather than just a trade.

For most colliers the second phaze of the learning period was undertaken in the form of pony driving. This job could be undertaken after a matter of months or years depending on the age and experience of the boy and the nature of the pit in which he worked. (Rymer spent a number of years trapping, p.4; Lawson a matter of months, 1932; 1946, p.47.) The work involved driving a pony and tubs up and down the main road ways in order to transport full tubs to the shaft bottom and the empty ones to the 'flats' on the outlying districts of the pit - as Bullock notes pit workings were very often "planned like a huge spider's web, with main roads going two or three miles to the north, south, east, or west." (Bullock, 1976, p.188-189.)

A number of the autobiographers described their satisfaction in having been elevated to a new status. Jack Lawson for example, notes of his own promotion; "that was a great event,

I was very proud to possess a pony." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.47.) However, this work required the boy-pitman to learn new skills one of which was the ability to control and manoeuvre the pony and tubs in hazardous conditions. This required the development of a close working relationship between pony and driver; which as these accounts show, often evolved into a mutual affection. (See Hitchin, p.71-72; Tomlinson, p.137-138, for example.) Jim Bullock exposes just one aspect of the importance of such a working partnership in this extract from Bowers Row:

> The pony-driver often rode on top of the tubs. If the tubs started going fast you said, 'steady, steady, steady', the pony would do what we called breech. That is, he would go so steadily that he would let the tubs start bumping into him. Setting his forelegs on the floor he would hold back like a really good brake. Another time you were really dependent on your pony was when you were hanging the tubs out. You would hang them on the pony's chain and when you told him to stand up a bit, he would stand up about two or three inches. Then the driver put his hand in between one tub and the next, to link the two tubs together. If the pony set off without being told while the driver was doing this, he would probably have cut his fingers off. So all the time there had to be this close bond between the boys and the pit ponies.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.198.)

Yet handling and controlling horses was only one aspect of the driver's ability, they also needed 'pit sense'. For if one is moving large and heavy objects in a dark and unpredictable environment, then it is necessary to develop a heightened sense of awareness in relation to the sounds and 'feel' of the mine, if one is to survive. Hitchin describes this quality:

> When one is in such an unnatural environment ... one is instinctively alert. This alertness might, as in my case, be blunted by the lack of sleep ... but one's senses become sharpened - especially hearing, for life itself may depend on it.
>
> (Hitchin, p.72.)

Thus the drivers learnt how to 'gauge' the mine, by being aware of such factors as the creaking of timber, movement in the air, dust in the atmosphere, and the response of their ponies to the environment. (See Hitchin, p.72 and Bullock, 1976, p.93-204, for example.)

Most of the autobiographers spent between one and two years as drivers, and in general appear to have approved of this new learning experience. As Neddy Rymer was to note,"I was brought into contact with all classes of workmen and soon began to learn coal pit geography and the heart of coal hewing." (Rymer, p.4.)

A plethora of new rolés awaited the boys who had 'outgrown' pony driving. As John Benson has noted,"A good half of the underground labour force was employed not to cut coal but to service those who did."[19] Many of these jobs were associated with pit development and pit maintenance, road driving and building, safety, coal transport and loading for example. Frequently there were 'specialized' jobs associated with the qualities, or lack of them, of particular pits - a wet pit needed pump operators and a particularly gaseous pit fire damp men.

It is not within the compass of this work to describe each of these jobs; however, what is important to note is that, for both 19th and 20th century autobiographers, these aspects of the work process were frequently perceived, on the one hand, as forms of "slavery" or "penal servitude" or at best "donkey work" (see Rymer, p.11; Smillie, p.12-13; Parfitt, p.14, for example), and on the other as 'honourable' occupations which required varying amounts of skill and pit-craft. Buck Dallison, for example, dedicates a whole chapter to the skill of the miner (Dallinson, Ch.5) while describing himself as a "slave." (Dallison, p.259; see also Rymer and Parfitt, passim.) However, Jack Lawson's account of what he calls "off-hand work" to some extent captures this perceptual paradox of the miner as over-worked slave and skilled workman. Lawson writes:

> A year or two of driving brought me to off-hand work - braking inclines and attending to the signalling bells which controlled the long "sets" of tubs ... These were jobs requiring some skill and sense of responsibility. All the time my working hours were ten; sometimes I did two shifts running, and occasionally three shifts ... all this hardened my body and developed it, bringing experience and soaking me in the ways of the mine.
>
> (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.47.)

Between the age of 18 and 20, the young men found themselves on the road to the coal face. Much experience had been gained and many skills developed during the hard years they had spent as haulage and 'on-cast' workers. However, there was, at least until the end of the Second World War and in some areas for many years after, one job which lay between on-cast working and hewing, this was 'putting'.

The social historian, John Benson, is right when he notes that "the putter's work was hard, probably the hardest done by any miner except the hewer himself."[20] However, he is mistaken in his belief that putting proceeded pony driving, for as these autobiographies and other sources show, it was putting and not the relatively low status work of driving which was "the next best thing to being a hewer."[21]

Putting involved moving tubs along tiny side galleries which connected the 'main road' via a 'flat' (a point of juncture generally worked out to allow movement) to the various parts of the 'face' where the hewers cut the coal. Each putter was responsible for supplying a man or team of men, depending on which cutting technique was being used,[22] with empty tubs and taking full tubs away. Where it was possible he was sometimes aided by a pony, often however this work was done by hand.

Putters needed to be strong, athletic, assertive, persistent and knowledgeable in general mining technique. As one autobiographer notes, "A putter is an eel, a lifting crane, and a racehorse all in one." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.60.)

Their work was incredibly demanding. Working in some of the lowest roads (in some pits three or four feet was not unusual) often in poorly supported galleries, and with little light (a candle or small oil lamp) the putters sweated out their days driving the unwieldy and heavy tubs back and forth. Obstructions often de-railed the waggons and it was the putter's job to correct them. With little room for manoeuvre the men had to call upon all the techniques they had learned as they wrestled with the load,often addressing the tub with "unspeakable language" and sometimes "throwing things at it." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.60.) Moreover, these pressures were compounded by the hewers' seemingly insatiable demand for empty tubs - for hewers made their money by the 'price' and not by the 'hour', thus a slow or poor putter was often the object of abuse. Neddy Rymer, sixty years a pitman, had this to say of putting:

> I found putting by the score with a pony much harder work than driving ... of all kinds of work in a mine putting is the hardest. It is surrounded by more dangers and difficulties than can be conceived by those unaquainted with the labour of the miner. Every other man's living depends on those employed to push and drag the tubs from coal face to the 'flats'.
> (Rymer, p.5.)

Putters as a group were generally regarded as reckless, impudent, independent, and ungovernable. (See Lawson, 1932; 1946, Ch.9), and it seems probable that they were closely connected with the phenomenon of 'pit lad militancy' which M.J. Daunton has recently drawn attention to.[23] Although not highly paid; George Winward notes that the putters did the work "and the colliers got the money" (Winward, p.10), and not of the very highest status, they represented a section of the workforce which was seen to be imbued with all the qualities associated with the pitman's notion of masculinity. The sentiment underlying Jack Lawson's description of his days as a putter demonstrates this point:

> And now I was a putter, the key man in the mine - next to the coal hewer, as far as the big colleries are concerned. Those in authority wanted me to travel other roads, but I would putt in spite of authority. The miner, like many other workmen, will sometimes speak with an air of detachment concerning his work; he

> will even say rude things about it at times. But wait a little, and the pride of his calling will out. To become a putter in a colliery like Boldon was to rank as a man. Not everyone desired to become a putter; some returned after a test. Why does anyone really want to follow this risky, exhausting body testing calling? Every putter will tell you it is because they are "daft" but there is a secret sense of swank in their "daftness" ... When one considers the risks, it looks "daft" but the young men line up and jostle each other to get there. Hard fact; one must live and grim things are done to live.
>
> (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.59.)

The close working relationship which existed between putter and hewer, often a father and son relationship (See Bullock, 1976, p.167, for example), helped to ease the transition from one job to the other. Putters were often keen to 'have a go' at hewing, and by way of these sorties pick up a little knowledge and skill, A.J. Parfitt described this process:

> As often as possible, while sorting, I would take hold of the pick, when the men were doing other work, and the experience gained by so doing, fited me to become a hewer ...
>
> (Parfitt, p.17.)

Such youthful attempts to practice one's art without supervision are common place among young men nearing the end of their apprenticeships. The term frequently used to describe them is 'improver'. For the 'improved' pit lad the pick and the face awaited.

The hewer was regarded as the most skilful man in the mine and most were intensely proud of their status. Their feats of endurance, strength, bravery, and skill were frequently celebrated by the mining community, spawning legends and myths such as those associated with the mythical Durham collier, 'Bob Crankey' the 'big hewer'.[24]

Hewers generally worked alone in the 'pillar and stall' system of mining or in teams or 'marra groups' when practicing the 'long wall' technique.[25] Systems differed from area to area and pit to pit as many of the autobiographies show, however, as John Benson has argued,

until the introduction of mechanization, which did not occur until after the Second World War in many cases, no matter which technique was being used "the actual job of hewing changed very little"[26], even if the hewers traditional freedom from supervision did.

Until the passing of the 8 hours Bill in 1908, the hewers worked between six and ten hours per day, depending upon the region in which they toiled, Durham for example was between six and seven hours, Yorkshire and Somerset between ten and twelve. (See Rymer, Passim, for comparisons.) The careers of the hewers' were frequently short, often prematurely curtailed by serious injury or disease, as were those of Rymer and Wooley.[27] In the nineteenth century their tools and source of light were paid for and maintained at their own expense. (See Parfitt, p.17, and Bullock, 1967, p.191.)

The principle job of the hewer was to cut the coal. This was generally done by undercutting or 'holing' the seam, and placing small wooden chocks in the gap to support the face until it was ready to be brought down.[28] 'Rendering' the strata in this way was not only hard work but a real skill, Jim Bullock notes that his father "used to glory in swanking about how hard he could work and the beautiful straight wall he would cut with his pick." (Bullock, 1976, p.167.)

Another job was drilling. This was sometimes used to bring down obstinate blocks of coal or so help raise the level of the roof, a practice known as 'ripping'. The instrument used to bore into the coal or stone was not the familiar twist drill but something resembling a huge chisel. As Dallison notes "one man held and turned the drill with his hands over the top of his head while the other man drove it with a hammer." This was one of the many practices which required some competence and concentration, for as Dallison recalls of the times he and his father used this technique "one faulty stroke, even a glancin' stroke, an should bash mi farther's brains out." (Dallison, 1939, p.47.)

Undercutting, ripping and drilling were only a few of the techniques used by face workers. Others such as 'wedging', 'timbering' and 'packing' as well as blasting preparation, required not only a good knowledge of geology but real practical skill. As Wooley points out, the execution of many of these jobs was "quite an art". (Wooley, p.19.)

The hewers were proud of their ability, and appear to have developed a similar occupational consciousness to other groups of skilled and 'honourable' workers. A.J. Parfitt for example evaluated the collier by such criteria as how well he "timbers his place" and how "clean and large" he cut the coal rather than how much he cut. (Parfitt, p.18.) Hewing then was seen as more than just a pick and shovel business, more than just sweat and slog, but an occupation which required a great deal of skill in order to execute an art of which the practitioner could be proud.

In describing their work the miner autobiographers draw the reader's attention to scores of skills and techniques practiced by miners in the various English coal fields. The examples noted above are merely representative of these. One cannot help but conclude that these accounts of 'skill' are included, at least in part, in order to draw the attention of what is seen by the writers as, at best, an "ignorant" and, at worst, "a prejudiced" readership to the craft which is demanded in the winning of coal. These accounts demonstrate that colliers saw mining in general and hewing in particular as a skilled occupation, and were concerned by way of their autobiographies to destroy the myth of the collier as a simple minded labourer. Buck Dallison's resentment at being thought of as a common labourer perhaps best sums up this point. In an imaginary conversation with a skilled worker - a plumber, he notes:

> Supposin' that tha's tackeled every sort o' busted tank and leakin' pipe, and fit houses and public works and everything within the scope o' thy craft with good material and first class workmanship and supposin' tha's been

> doin' that for nigh on forty year and tha' knows every trick and wrinkle in the trade, what should tha' say if in spite of thy skill and efficiency, tha' was looked upon and classed as an unskilled labour?
>
> (Dallinson, 1939, p.50-51.)

Conditions of Work

The record left by the miner autobiographers provides a detailed picture of underground conditions in the English coal field. For most, the subterranean world was seen as a kind of secret 'hell' that in Fred Holme's words "the ordinary mortal who worked above ground would never believe." (Holme, p.1.)

As the sole inhabitants of this harsh and hostile environment the miners' often experienced a sense of being quite different or separate from other men. As A.J. Parfitt points out "it goes without saying miners work in the dark and little is known of their lives." (Parfitt, p.35.) The miners' leader Robert Smillie, recalled that he often "sat in the dense darkness, and wondered how many up in the sunshine going quickly to church, or setting out for a day in the country" knew of his "presence in the pit." (Smillie, p.21.)

As many of the autobiographers point out, to be in the pit was more than anything to be in the darkness. Jack Wooley notes that he had "never seen blackness as it is below ground." (Wooley, p.7.) Candles and oil lamps gave very limited light (two-four yards around a lamp less around a candle) and were libel to be extinguished by the air flow or by being knocked over. They could not easily be relit as, in gaseous mines in the 19th Century and generally in the 20th, miners were not allowed to carry matches or flints as a safety precaution. This situation, the 20th century pitman George Wooley points out, "meant that you were working with your heart in your mouth." (Wooley, p.7.)

A number of the autobiographers experienced the disorientating effects of being alone in total darkness.

All, not surprisingly, were profoundly afraid, for as George Cocking points out it was little short of "foolishness" to attempt to grope one's way to the pit bottom, yet to sit it out "meant to remain in the cold damp atmosphere perhaps for hours." (Cocking, p.38.) Consequently many colliers like Wooley were "relieved" when the electric hand lamp was introduced after the First World War. (Wooley, p.9.)

However welcome improvements in lamp technology may have been they did not eradicate the problem of darkness for the light source was still localized. Consequently much of the miner's work was undertaken in varying degrees of semidarkness, a dangerous situation which demanded a high level of alertness. George Hitchin notes "the distant rumbling of a runaway tub, the slightest change in the movement of the air, a dustiness in the atmosphere, the mighty belch as the floor heaves upwards, or a trickle of stones from the roof; each will bring a miner's senses to concert pitch." (Hitchin, p.72.)

As we have seen, the miners learnt how to distinguish between those movements, smells and noises which spelt danger and those that did not as part of their 'apprenticeship'. Yet a heightened sensory awareness, a high level of skill and a wealth of experience never adequately protected the collier from danger. For as many of the autobiographers are keen to stress the pit is a constantly changing environment, as a result of natural movement, and the strata being disturbed by working as A.J. Parfitt testifies, "There is no regularity about it. The place that is normal one week is abnormal the next" (Parfitt, p.18), consequently as Parkinson, for example, points out "The miner is often surrounded by dangers of which he is quite unaware." (Parkinson, p.26.)

The psychological effects on men working in such an environment can not be over emphasized, and indeed are mirrored in the autobiographical constructions, selections and attitudes which appear in these works. The 20th century pitman George Wooley for example thought about his working

life as an ordeal, noting that he was "glad that it was all over" (Wooley, p.47), while Tim Mountjoy, a 19th century figure, felt it important to advise every miner to "seek mercy and pardon through Jesus before it be too late" as a result of some sudden and violent accident. (Mountjoy, p.50.)

Every collier-autobiographer in the group was involved in accidents which threatened their lives and witnessed others that often had very serious or fatal results for their workmates. Anecdotes based upon such incidents are frequently used to structure the autobiographies as a whole, as I point out in an earlier chapter. However, my purpose for the moment is to illustrate the nature and effect of 'hidden danger' as it is represented by the pitmen - autobiographers by means of two anecdotes which I consider to be representative of such accounts. The first is taken from Mountjoy's work Life Labour And Deliverances a nineteenth century text. The second from a twentieth century autobiography by the Lancashire pitman George Holme.

> I had three great deliverances in Lightmore pit, but the same Deliverer came to the rescue, and I am still alive to tell of his goodness. He was also with me in Prospect pit when water broke in from the Regulator old workings. There were two of us together and the water carried me fourteen yards; the difficulty I found was raising to my feet in the darkness, and the roar of the current of water. I found a prop, and with the aid of the prop I got on my feet, and thus was saved from being drowned. In 1875 or thereabouts, I was coming up from Lydney, walking up the line just above Whillcroft ... when I got into the tunnel 150 yards I saw the engine come in at the top. I knew it was no use to run, so I put my walking stick against the wall to the rails, and thought there was plenty of room, but as it came near, I thought I must be crushed, but in another moment it went by me, and I stood a few minutes to breathe out my thanks for this preserving power.
>
> (Mountjoy, p.87-88.)

> I was walking down an inclined part of the tunnel, and in this section, for a distance of one hundred yards or more it had a solid slate

> roof, and it was so low that you could only walk bent double. The slate roof was polished to a mirrored finish by men's backs rubbing along it as they made their way downhill ... In the light of my lamp I saw a train of full tubs of coal coming towards me, they were being dragged along by the endless rope. Suddenly the rope on the other side of the road gave a violent kick, and I heard a roar that grew louder every second. 'Good God' I thought, my nightmare has become reality. Sure enough ... a set of empty tubs has broken away and were now thundering down towards me. I was petrified, trapped in the middle with no place to go. I knew that if the empty tubs jumped the rails ... that would be the end of me. It was impossible to crouch near the outside walls of the tunnel as the walls were too near the track. In the few seconds I had I lay down in the middle of the two tracks with my arms clasped over my head, and I prayed. I heard the roar of the runaways coming louder and louder. The full tubs were now rumbling passed me, and with a scream of wheels the runaways flashed past and miraculously stayed on the track. It was my lucky day! I was safe.
>
> (Holme, p.4.)

Yet, as these autobiographies show, miraculous escape from sudden physical injury did not guarantee survival, for as Cocking points out "should the miner avoid the thousand dangers which threaten him he rarely escapes the dreadful disease known as miner's consumption." (Cocking, p.44.) This debilitating affliction was caused as a result of the inhalation of coal dust, which was driven round the mine by the ventilation system. The incidence of silicosis (stone dust on the lungs) and phnumoconesis (coal dust on the lungs) has been said to have increased towards the end of the period covered by these autobiographies as a result of the employment of mechanical coal cutting machines, and this is reflected in the life histories. Mr. A. Wooley points out for example that after 1914 "Speed became the all important factor ... and ... in this haste came the dreaded disease." (Wooley, p.15.)

However, Mr. Wooley goes on to describe a further, industrial disease which was suffered by miners throughout the period. This was nystagmus:

> This was the scourge of those brave pitmen who in trying to earn a living were struck down. Working 8 hours a day, being only able to see less than five yards at a time, they would ascend in the cage to the surface and face the brightness of the day, and had to shield the sun from their eyes until they go accustomed to it, this caused head pains and short sightedness and the eyeballs would occilate causing great pain to such an extent they died with it.
>
> (Wooley, p.21.)

Industrial injury and disease then were part of the miner's life - a condition of their work. (Parfitt notes that his pit was known to the local hospital as the "slaughter house!" Parfitt, p.21.) Yet the colliers' sense of their own masculinity on the one hand and economic pressure on the other helped them, or perhaps forced them, to come to terms with it. As Jim Bullock recalled, many "miners worked when they were not really fit." (Bullock, 1976, p.219.) However, despite the fatalism exhibited by many of the autobiographers towards these hazardous working conditions, others expressed their resentment, "He may be forgotten by those who tread the greensward above his head bathing in the glorious sunshine which he rarely ever sees, and breathing the pure breath of heaven, for the lack of which the poor miners' lungs are being choked and shrivelled", wrote George Cocking, "Yet all men profit by his industry." (Cocking, p.43.)

Systems of Work

Despite the physical environment and dangers of the pit, work had to go on. Its organization was complex and differed widely not only from region to region but from pit to pit and even seam to seam.[29] The Durham pitman Neddy Rymer for example notes that when he entered the collieries in the Lancashire field during the late 1860's he was brought into

contact "with many things of which (he) had not the faintest conception." (Rymer, p.13.)

Such differences in organization of work, especially the division of labour, hours of work, and the payment of wages affected the social relationships between colliers in the various regions and even in different pits within regions lending to them particular characteristics. For example the 'militant' South Wales field had a less differentiated work force than that in the 'moderate' North East, which had a finely tuned hierarchy.[30]

Many of these differences emanated from the particular systems used in order to win the coal. In general, up until the last quarter of the nineteenth century variations on the 'pillar and board' system were widely used in the English regions these often giving way to the 'longwall' mode of production towards the end of the century especially in the larger mines. However, it must be stressed that development was quite uneven, again from region to region from pit to pit and even from seam to seam. For example, George Hitchin describes how he worked the 'pillar and board' system in Seaham pit during the inter war years, a period long after 'longwall' extraction and mechanical cutting had been introduced in the Durham field. He notes:

> Coal was won by driving narrow galleries called pillars and boards: as far in-bye as one could safely go. This limit was called the boundary. Then began the process of coming 'back broken' which meant taking successive slices off the sides of the pillars and boards until all the coal had been extracted, and only a forest of props supported the roof over a wide area. Consequently, the roof in such broken districts was often unsound, and the men hewed coal with hand-picks. Machines were seldom used, as the violence and vibrations would have set the place groaning and grumbling ... Mining in these circumstances demanded all the skill of which a man was capable.
>
> (Hitchin, p.105.)

Working the pillar and board system gave the pitman a certain autonomy which was eroded when the longwall system was introduced, for the collier who worked his own 'place' was entirely responsible for the coal he won and the techniques he used to win it; supervision was thus at a minimum. Jim Bullock notes "the only chap the colliers saw at all during the whole day - besides two visits from their deputy and occasional ones from the under manager or, rarely, the manager - was the pony driver." (Bullock, 1976, p.190.)

The introduction of machinery towards the end of the First World War did not suit the pillar and board process, as Hitchin notes, and was better fitted to the longwall system which had been developed as a result of demands for higher production.

In this technique various tunnels were driven to the coal face and <u>teams</u> of men assulted the strata of coal across a wide area, each having a section to bring down. In this system all the coal was extracted - no pillar of coal supported the roof, this being replaced by more props, iron rings or beams. The longwall system, but more importantly the mechanization of the longwall system, was felt to have had four major implications for the collier. First it brought with it new dangers, second it de-skilled the hewer, third it spelt greater levels of supervision and finally it geared the pace of work more to the machine than the man.[31]

George Wooley describes some of the changes which were heralded by the introduction of machinery into the Lancashire pits in the 1920's and 30's in his autobiography <u>Black Diamonds</u>:

> It seemed that every week something fresh used to be sent to the pits. Men had to be taught how to handle all the new fangled machinery, such as conveyors, power drills, coal cutting machines and the like. Of course they would not work without some kind of power and as electric was ... thought to be dangerous, with always a certain amount of gas about it was decided to use compressed air so pipe ranges

> had to be connected ... (to) ... special compression hoses ... The coal face conveyors, made of steel, were in 6' lengths, coupled together with a stationary engine to work them. These were dismantled each shift and moved to the next track ... Later on, in the mid 1930's, saw the breakthrough to electric power ... This was the biggest move forward, I would think, in the history of mining. The basic (difference) between the two was that the power of electricity would keep the machines going, where the air ones would stall. The new found power meant that more coal was being mined, and faster, so the owners were reaping more profits than ever. But this was only the beginning although we did not realize it at the time. Speed became an all important factor.
>
> (Wooley, p.13-15.)

The demands for greater speed of production were also responsible for the introduction of changes to the shift system. As we have seen, some of the autobiographers expressed their disapproval of these new working practices. This is understandable, for the new working patterns meant that traditional working practices and relationships were changed. In mechanized longwall production the autonomy of the collier was breeched in two ways, by the introduction of team working and rotation of 'place' and shift and by a further division of labour in the form of a maintenance shift.

However, coal hewers in England traditionally asserted who they would and who they would not work with. Longwall teams (often known in the North East by the archaic term 'marra groups') were thus frequently related through family or were men well known to each other. In this way the pitmen may be seen to have attempted to keep some control over their working relationships and their levels of wages, for the entire group was paid a fixed sum which had to be divided between them, thus 'slackers' or disruptive workers would not be tolerated. Consequently entry into such society was, as Jim Bullock explains, not at all easy:

> Any new arrival who got a job at the pit as a collier was placed on what was called the 'market' - a panel of men who were not quite as good as the others and whom nobody wanted as regular mates. The newcomer waited at the pit bottom to see if he could fill the place of any absentee, and if he was a good worker he soon found a regular place. If there was no vacancy at the coal face, they would be sent cleaning up somewhere, or doing odd jobs. Failing that, they were sent back home and told to report the next day.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.191.)

As a result of differences in the quality of working conditions and the amounts of coal which could be extracted on each shift hewers, individually or in teams depending on the system being used, were switched from place to place at regular intervals. This practice was known as 'cavilling'. George Hitchin explains how this system worked:

> Piece-workers changed their working area every three months. This was to give each man the chance to move from a district where coal was hard, output low and wages at the minimum to another place where, if the work was no easier, the wages were higher. The moves were based on a lottery, called 'cavills'. Lots were cast, and upon this depended a piece-worker's income for the next quarter.
>
> (Hitchin, p.105.)

'Cavilling' by lottery was not practiced in all the regions of the British coal field. In Wales for example rotation was decided by the pit manager. Such differences in mine organization, as Martin Daunton has shown, had important effects upon the character of particular fields,[32] for sub-contracting by the group, if not properly and fairly regulated, could have important implications in terms of the kind of union and political activity which was manifested in the pit.

Yet sub-contracting was not a new phenomenon in the mining industry. In many regions work had been 'let off' by owners and viewers for decades. This practice was known as the 'Butty System'. J. Dunn describes this form of organization,

and the brutality associated with it, in his description of the system as it operated in Leicestershire in the 1840's:

> These mines (?) were owned by a nobleman, who also owned the land and several villages around. The coal was worked out by a few expert miners - who were termed 'Butties' - at so much a ton, the same being weighed as the waggons were sent off by rail, or by the many kinds of conveyances (by what was termed "land-sale") ... the 'Butties' sublet most of the working out of the coal to other miners - such as the 'holing', or undermining of the coal-seam, which was paid for at so much a 'stint' this being two yards in length on the coal face, and one yard underneath. They also sublet to the latter the bringing out of the coal from the face of the seam to the pit-bank, at so much per ton, and it was these latter miners who employed the boys, and upon whom they so frequently seemed to delight in displaying their brutal ferocity.
>
> (Dunn, p.10.)

Many 'Butties' became wealthy men and gained some influence. Mountjoy for example complains in his autobiography that the rights of the 'free miners of the Forest of Dean' had been largely lost as a result of "gales" or "pit rights" falling into "the hands of a few individuals" - the Butties. (Mountjoy, p.48.)

Sub-contracting of all kinds was a source of friction in the pit. Prices for particular work were often haggled over and many a serious disputation was generated from disagreements over 'prices'. Frequently the pitmen-autobiographers point out that certain jobs provided only "starvation wages" because conditions or "favouritism" prevented maximizing wages. (See for example Parfitt, p.15 and 25 for favouratism; Rymer, p.7 for conditions.) Indeed, as A.J. Parfitt's account shows, the nature and regulation of sub-contracting in some of the English fields influenced the colliers' political views, and contributed to calls first for the minimum wage and then for nationalization of the industry. (See Parfitt, Ch.5.)

The implications of differing working practices and systems of work within the English coal fields needs greater research. However, what is clear is that while isolation, darkness, danger and exploitation represent powerful shaping experiences which bore down upon all pitmen, the individual collier's experience of the work process was not necessarily similar to his fellows' and consequently simplistic characterisations of miners' as an utterly undifferentiated mass or group are in need of some revision.

The Crack-Subterranean Culture and Discourse

The underground world, like all places which are in some way dislocated from wider society had its own cultural forms. For example the pitmen had a language of their own which was specially adapted to the strange environment of the pit and the techniques and tools which were used to win the coal. Neddy Rymer notes that it was "with great difficulty" that he "got acquainted with the nomenclature of the mine" when he entered the Durham pits as a young boy. (Rymer, p.3.) A later Durham miner, George Hitchin, described in more detail the nature of Durham "pitmatic".

> I was acquiring a new language. This was pitmatic. It was a mixture of the broadest dialect of Durham and a number of words (often of foreign origin) used exclusively by pitmen when below ground. A 'kist' was a tool-chest used by the deputy, 'tyum' meant empty; and a pony became a 'gallowa'. One spoke not of hooks and nooks but 'yuks' and 'nuks'. These terms and other obscurities of a technical nature, such as 'cat', 'con', 'ack' and 'traddish' made conversation between pitmen unintelligible to anyone except another pitman. Only pit-yackers spoke the pit-yackers' language.
>
> (Hitchin, p.70.)

The insights miner's autobiography can generate into the functions of 'in group' language and the differences between community and subterranean culture are important and deserve much greater research than is possible here. However, it is enough to note that certain distinctions did exist between

underground culture and community culture in the mining districts.

The underground talk frequently centred around 'prices' or the 'place' the collier was working in, although as Fred Holme points out, "ribald jokes and comments about the previous nights happenings" (Holme, p.1) was often made a point of conversation. Much of the talk was shot through with humour. Many of the autobiographers note how they were "had on", especially when they were youngsters, by more experienced men. Jim Bullock for example notes that "a kid" would be sent "to fetch a leather faced hammer or for the shy hooks, or else be asked if he had cleaned the windows yet." (Bullock, 1976, p.215.) While A.J. Parfitt records how "revenge" would be exacted by the pit-lads. In this case by greasing the "donkey rail" - a donkey being a sledge-like device used for travelling down inclines. He notes:

> Now some mischievous lads working by night, would come up to this incline in the morning, grease the rail, and then would get into the refuge hole, extinguishing their lights, and await the riders. Unsuspectingly the men coming down on their donkeys, would come to this greased place, and shoot away, often tumbling into the dust. The peal of laughter from those in the refuge hole, would often add insult to injury.
>
> (Parfitt, p.19.)

As Parfitt observes, the mine would have been "a sorry place without a bit of fun" and there is perhaps a parallel here with the miners' autobiography. For although almost all the writers are concerned with depicting the 'diabolical' nature of the pit, they frequently balance such material with the humorous anecdote. Humour and danger it seems are natural bedfellows and consequently are major influences not only on the miners' culture but the miners' autobiography.

While, as one autobiographer notes, life underground was far from being "all beer and skittles" (Holme, p.14) there were often 'quiet periods' generally due to disruptions in

production or statutory breaks. Unlike the factory where observation of the process is constantly overlooked by supervisory staff, the pitmen had an opportunity in these moments to rest for a while and perhaps indulge in a 'bit o' crack' with a workmate. A number of autobiographers relate how on these occasions they would make their way to some nearby underground structure in order to pass the time of day. Holme for example notes how he found "an ideal spot" an engine house which was "warm and comfortable" and where "no one troubled us." (Holme, p.5.) Others went to such places in order to meet particular 'characters' who were noted for their humour, skill, knowledge or other special qualities. Men, on the one hand, such as 'Owd Jack' who "took out his false teeth and did his impression of Popeye" (Holme, p.5) or on the other colliers such as the "softly spoken" Charlie Harlow "one of nature's gentlemen" who talked of "books, music and mathematics." (Hitchin, p.74.)

Indeed as these autobiographies show some of the pitmen used any 'quiet moment' they had during the shift to educate themselves. Many like Harlow reached quite a high standard of education in a number of subjects, while others were 'specialists' in particular subjects, poetry being a favourite, and like George Hitchin's "mate" Billy Revelly could quote (in this case Burns) "at the drop of a hat." (Hitchin, p.74.) A number of the writers note how they would go to these men for advice, or else "pick their brains" if they found they were working with them. Jack Lawson, for example, was taught by a Welsh pitman called George Barrow, while both hewed coal. "There stood" notes Lawson "the poet and painter in soggy shoes and stockings, with dust caked naked body, conjuring up wild Wales in a densely dusty cavern in the bowels of the earth." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.94.)

It would be wrong to over emphasize the amount of autodidactism which went on underground, for most of the talk must have been of work or sport or 'life' in general. And if a number of autobiographers are sometimes guilty of inflating the scholastic achievements of their comrades, it is often as a result of their desire to represent the pitman more

accurately, for many colliers were, as these works show, scholars of some ability, and not as George Cocking points out the "low and degraded men" the public so often are apt to label the "ignorant" and the "dirty miner." (Cocking, p.43.)

Summary

The miners autobiography clearly provides rare and valuable insights into the working life of the English collier during a crucial period of British industrial history. By way of describing their occupational experience the pitmen frequently expose information which places in tension some of the conclusions of academic research based upon other forms of methodological approach. Perhaps more importantly these testimonies represent a means by which we may better understand how the miners thought and felt about their productive relations, working practices and conditions. This information is vital in the study of occupational communities since attitudes to work orientate and shape other aspects of the cultural fabric as we shall see in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

NOTES

1. Analysis of the miners' work often acts as the context for other areas of study such as Trade Unionism, see for example A. B. Cambell, Lanarkshire Miners: A Social History of their Trade Unions 1775-1974, (Edinburgh 1979). Moreover, studies of the Miners' work vary widely in the quality of their scholarship, compare Williamson (see below) with M. Pollard, The Hardest Work under Heaven; the Life and Death of the British Coalminer, (1984) Ch.3, for example. For focused and sustained analysis see,inter alia,J. Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History, (1980 Dublin), Ch. 2. B. Williamson, Class Culture and Community: A Biographical Study of Social Change in Mining, (1982), Ch. 5. D. Douglass, "The Durham Pitman", in R. Samuel, (ed.), Miners, Quarrymen and Saltworkers, (1977), Part 4. For Pictorial data see, inter alia, A. Burton, The Miners, (1977), pp.48-65.

2. See R. Colls, The Pitmen of the Norhern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest, 1790-1850, (Manchester, 1987), Part Two, for an historical analysis and M.I.A. Bulmer, "Sociological Models of the Mining Community", Sociological Review, (1975), No. 2, pp. 61-92, for a review of sociological research. See B. Williamson, op.cit., for an interdisciplinary approach.

3. For a notable exception see R. Colls, The Collier's Rant: Song and Culture in the Industrial Village, (1977).

4. At celebratory meetings such as that which takes place in Durham City each year and very often in song and verse conveyed by figures such as Joe Skipsey and Tommy Armstrong - Pitman's Poets'. For analysis of early North eastern celebratory song see Colls, (1977), op. cit., and for Methodological insight see D. Harker, "The Original Bob Cranky?" Folk Music Journal, (1985) Vol. 5., No.1. For general cultural analysis of miners' song

and verse see M. Vicinus, The Industrial Muse, (1974), passim.

5. Williamson, op. cit., pp.26-36. For further and more sustained analysis of both male and female socialization in the pit-village see Chapter 5, pp.192-201.

6. Williamson, op. cit., p.29.

7. Ibid.

8. I can quote but a few examples here, others however are manifest throughout this study. Jim Bullock notes that in his village cat lovers were regarded as "cissieys" (Bullock, 1976, p.25) an appellation, as the work of these writers shows, which was liberally extended to any male whose behaviour was in conflict with the perceived notion of masculinity. Thus being "henpecked" or failing to "hold ones own" in a fight seem to have attracted sarcasm and at times abuse (see Dallison, 1939, p.200, Holme, p.15. Lawson, (1932; 1946), p.13). On the other hand, example played an important role in the perpetuation of the 'manlyness cult'. George Parkinson not only closely associated with his father's exhibitions of "reckless courage" but was proud enough to describe one of them. He notes, (without the slightest hint of self irony) "no reporter expatiated in those days on such feats and no medals were awarded for what was regarded as a man's plain every day duty, a thing not to be skirted or neglected, at the peril of bitter self comtempt (Parkinson, p.5). In the context of leisure, Rolf Porter was impressed enough to remember how, when playing handball, the local miners' hands "seemed to be all split right across one palm and they used to put cobblers wax in and still keep playing" (Porter, p.8).

9. See Chapter 5, pp.192-198.

10. From the last quarter of the 19th century to the end of the period under study the general trend in mining was towards corporate ownership, scientific management and technical innovation. However, it is both easy and dangerous to over generalize the nature and extent of organization and technical change in the mining industry. Wide variations of scale and organization can be shown to have existed between and within the various regions during the period 1875-1945, as Raphael Samuel has pointed out; "A coal mine could vary in size from a day-hole pit, worked by a pair of men, to a multi-recessed catacomb". R. Samuel, (ed.), Miners, Quarrymen and Saltworkers, (1977), p.3. For a discussion of the economic development of the coal trade in Britain see J. Benson, op. cit., Ch.1. For a general but perceptive view of the industry during the 19th century with an interesting section on work discipline see R. Samuel, op. cit., Ch.1. esp. sections 2 and 5. For a discussion of one miner as "independent artizan" rather than "archetypal proletarian" see R. Harrison, (ed.), The Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered, (Sussex, 1978).

11. For an extended analysis of the role of women in the mining family see Ch.5.

12. See also Chapter 5, p.182.

13. See A. Burton, op. cit., pp.14-25, for pictorial information and light analysis on a variety of winding gear used between the medieval and modern periods. See F. Atkinson, The Northern Coalfield, 1700-1900, (Newcastle, 1966), pp.11-30, for analysis of technical matter in the Northumberland and Durham fields.

14. Adam Smith appears to have been among the first to make this distinction, see Harrison, op. cit., introduction.

15. See Harrison, op. cit., and A.B. Campbell, op.cit.

16. See Williamson, op. cit., p.36.

17. Quoted by Benson, op. cit., p.48.

18. P.E.H. Hair, "The Social History of British Coalminers 1800-1845", (1955), unpublished Oxford D. Phil thesis. quoted in Benson, op. cit., p.9.

19. Benson, op cit., p.47.

20. Ibid., p.49.

21. Ibid., p.52. Benson uses Rymer as his source and seems to have mis-read or misunderstood the text, for, as I show, Rymer is keen to make a distinction between the role of pony driver and putter in the hierarchy of work. See inter alia (Lawson, 1932, 1946, Ch.15 & 17), (Parfitt, Ch.1), (Hitchin. Ch.4 and 6) for evidence of the heirarchy of the work process.

22. See pp.81-82 for descriptions of cutting techniques. See Atkinson, op. cit., pp.11-12 for analysis of pillar and board and related systems.

23. See M. J. Daunton, "The Export Coalfields: South Wales and North East England, 1879-1917", pp.146-149, in R.W. Sturgess, (ed.) Pitmen, Viewers and Coalmaters: Essays on North East Coalmining in the Nineteenth Century, (Newcastle, 1986).

24. See Colls, (1977), op. cit., for analysis of this mythical figure.

25. See pp.80-86 for analysis of systems of work.

26. Benson, op. cit., p.54.

27. In 1885 for example, 46,800 miners in English pits were officially injured; see Benson, op. cit., p.218 for numbers killed in the English coalfields 1865-95. For analysis of death by violence in the British coalminers 1800-60 see P.E.H. Hair, "Mortality from violence in British Coalmines 1800-1850", Economic History Review, (1968), Vol.3, No.21, pp.539-561.

28. There were variations on this general technique due, as Frank Atkinson points out, "to variations in thickness and quality of seam and hardness or softness of the roof and the floor".Atkinson, op. cit., p.13.

29. See Atkinson, op. cit., p.13.

30. See Dautnon, op. cit.

31. See J. Field, "British Coalminers as Writers", (unpublished essay), pp.13-14, for further evidence of this view.

32. Daunton, op. cit., pp.139-150.

CHAPTER THREE

DEATH, RELIGION AND HEDONISM: PERCEPTIONS OF 'DELIVERANCE' IN THE ENGLISH PIT VILLAGE

> Of all folly that is the greatest to stand between Christ and the world, enjoying neither.
> (T. Mountjoy, p.70.)

In the context of his life, Timothy Mountjoy's words are both paradoxical and revealing. Paradoxical, because Mountjoy had dedicated fifty of his sixty four years of life to fervent evangelistic activity in the cause of Wesleyan Methodism. Revealing, because they illuminate the shaping influence of a sharply defined ideological pluralism manifest in the colliery districts of 19th and 20th century England.

This dichotomy is often characterized by the institutions which were associated most closely with the two 'ways of seeing' - the Public House and the Methodist Chapel. Until the early 19th Century "pub culture" (which I shall refer to as pit village hedonism) represented the dominant 'way of living' in pit village society, but the rise, and more importantly, the growth in the influence of, Methodism in the first half of the 19th century eroded the pub based cultural hegenomy and thus is central to any analysis of the evolution of pit village culture.

In this chapter, in the light of autobiographical testimony, I will examine the impact of Methodism upon pit village culture. I will focus upon the key question of the relations between Methodism and the endogenous culture it encountered analysing in particular the ways in which occupationally induced forms of trauma and alienation have been mediated in the various cultural forms and the relations between these articulations and the evolution of a class based and institutionally mediated ideology in the colliery districts of England.

Because of the centrality of the conceptualization of religion to my argument, I have included an early section which briefly deals with important aspects of the social theory of religion. I then move on to the analysis proper.

Religion and Social Analysis

The social theory of religion has since the time of Feuerback and Marx been influenced by the associated concepts of alienation and ideology. The emergence of religious cults and their historically defined mutations are seen broadly as humanity's bewildered response to its own material condition at various points in history. In the German Ideology for example Marx was to note that "the phantoms formed in the human brain are sublimates of their life processes."[1] Moreover, it is argued that the various religious forms which are created in response to 'alienated self-consciousness' have a social and ideological function, in as much as they may be seen to legitimize, explain, or compensate for social inequalities and iniquities. Such logic informs Marx's famous dictum "religion is the opium of the people" as well as Durkheim's slightly different notion of religion as "social cement."[2]

This body of theory forms the basis of some more particular studies of religious movements, especially those which manifested themselves just before, and during, the industrial revolution. E.P. Thompson, for example, has characterised the rise of Methodism among the English working class as the "Chiliasm of Despair"[3] while other researchers have begun to see the patterns of secular hedonism, in the same period, as merely the obverse of religious practice.[4]

While we might accept one of the major propositions of this work - that alienation as a consequence of the organization of the means of production, at least among the working class, represents a primary cause of ritualistic religious and hedonistic behaviours - a contradiction appears to exist in the way commentators from Marx to Thompson have understood the ideological function of such movements and cults. This

is nowhere more apparent than in the case of mainstream religion. For 'dominant ideology' theory cannot explain the existence of conflict among groups who share in the same religion. In this sense Thompson's view of Methodism is, with certain reservations, contradictory.[5] In the case of Marx the problem is more complex. For within the canon of his work two critiques of religion exist which, as B.S. Turner notes, "are in tension." The first is the social opiate theory, which has been discussed. The second, contained in the preface to the Critique of Political Economy, implies that:

> Each distinctive class will possess an ideology which directly gives expression to class interest. Each mode of production will give rise to at least two significantly separate ideologies corresponding to the class position of subordinate and superordinate classes ... (thus) ... where the first theory argues that religion forms the basis of social integration as ... social opium, the second theory points to religion as the principal source ... of class solidarity.[6]

This 'class theoretical' view of religion was developed by Frederick Engels, who characterized religion as the "outer garment" of social conflict, noting, for example, in the context of the German peasant wars that "opposition to feudalism appeared only as opposition to religious feudalism."[7]

Despite the fact that the Engelian notion of religion as mediator of class ideology has found little support among analysts of the socially turbulent years of the nineteenth century, in the light of autobiographical and other evidence it has clear explanatory potential, especially in terms of the growth and nature of popular nonconformist movements and sects during the period.

The correspondence between the growth of nonconformity and the restructuring of English society during the 18th and 19th centuries, has been well recorded.[8] Since the publication of E.P. Thompson's epic work The Making of the English Working

class, the success of nonconformist groups, especially the Methodists, has frequently been attributed to their ability to serve "simultaneously as the religion of the (emerging) industrial bourgeoisie ... and ... wide sections of the (new) proletariat."[9] In this interpretation methodism was principally the vehicle of a new and cohesive mentality which addressed itself to the needs of the emergent age of industrial capitalism. By way of its power "the character structure of the rebellious pre-industrial labourer was violently re-cast into that of the submissive industrial worker."[10] While the new master-manufacturers and their satellites were provided with the "ideological self-justification" for their activities.[11] Methodist entrepreneurs were involved in almost every aspect of nineteenth century England's industrial base, not least the English coal fields. Moreover, while weavers, potters and factory workers were among the first working class groups to embrace Methodism (especially in its 'primitive' form), no group did so with greater fervour, or in greater numbers, than the English pitmen.[12]

The English pitmen of the first half of the nineteenth century were among the first to feel the chilly breeze of socio-economic structural change. The nation's erratic but, in times of boom, insatiable demand for coal had heralded new capital investment, the expansion of the fields and the consequent sinking of deeper and more dangerous pits.[13] The emergence of employers' cartels such as the Vend and the re-negotiation of traditional contracts of work between capital and labour such as the Bond (key instruments in the working of the Great Northern coal field) characterized a transformation of productive and industrial relations which tended to erode the miners' independence at work and their strength in wage bargaining.[14] In general, mining for the pitman was becoming at once more dangerous, less or at least no more economically remunerative, more rigorously managed and less secure as an occupation. It is in this period of crisis during the first half of the 19th century that we not only see the emergence of some of the first 'county' or 'field' based colliers' unions, but also the growth of Methodism, especially Primitive Methodism, in the English mining districts.[15]

As Robert Colls has pointed out, there is a kind of paradox in this, for no section of the English working class "was more conscious of social conflict than the miners" and yet no religious movement denied the "significance of (harsh social) conditions more" than the Primitive Methodists.[16] To comprehend this paradox is to comprehend some of the more complex meanings which Methodism seems to have held for the mining community, not only in this period of social crisis, but in the more stable years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

"Industrial Compression"

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, in a period he describes as his "formative years", the Durham pitman Chester Armstrong began to comtemplate the nature of his own and his fellow workers' lives. He was, he claimed, "beginning at that time to realize more fully the inner meaning of (his) immediate environment." "Most in evidence", he wrote, "was the tragic adequacy of an industrial compression." He continues, "inured to the master and servant conception of human relationship and bound to adapt his character to those conditions by which he secured a meagre livelihood" the pitman was exposed to powerful "prohibitive" and "stultifying" intellectual and moral forces. (Armstrong, p.98.)

The collier's response to the effects of "industrial compression" is the stuff of many miners' autobiographies. Refracted through the pages of such works we can catch a glimpse of the ways in which the mining community thought about and dealt with the traumatic and alienating forces inherent in their life style.

Of these, exposure to physical danger must rank as the most persistently destructive and debilitating. The miner's autobiography illustrates that pitmen found greater difficulty than has been generally recognized in coping with the massive psychological pressures which were a by-product of their work.[17] Jim Bullock reported that "mental break-downs

were a common occurrence in mining villages. No doubt these were caused by the mental stress of financial difficulties, and the constant threat of unemployment plus the sheer worry about pit accidents." (Bullock, 1976, p.88.) Many autobiographers describe how such occupationally related stress blighted their entire lives. Here, for example, Roger Dataller describes how the experience of "working with a million tons of muck above (his) head instead of beneath (his) feet" had the effect of traumatizing the collier both by day and by night:

> You have this uncomfortable knack of remembering that the chair fell like a stone some fifty feet of yesterday's descent and that you raised your voice to scream, ere the reassuring resistance made by pressure in your clogs below. Or then a dream asserts itself. The ordinary mortal takes but little stock of this colourful, but unsubstantial phenomena. He leaves it to psychologists and ageing ladies, and as a city clerk you may impersonate Samson with impunity - bringing whatever heathen temples crashing disastrously around your ears. The dream is wiped out for you immediately upon awakening, and remains (if it remains at all) as the frailest of fantasies. But with many an underground worker, such a subconscious adventure would be much more closely allied with the world of living reality - the workaday world of mornings at four.
>
> (Dataller, p.104.)

The problem of coming to terms with the alienating reality of "mornings at four" implied, as George Cocking was to note, "the great necessity of being ready at any moment to meet death ..." (Cocking, p.34.) Within the possibilities of 'readyness' lay the plethora of psycho-defensive and compensatory attitudes and behaviours, frequently ritualized in form and often extended to extra-occupational life, which as I show, have been exhibited by generations of pitmen and in terms of which aspects of the collier's character and culture have been evolved.

The social alienation experienced by pitmen represents a further key area of interest. Robert Colls has rightly noted

that "the pit village was an overwhelmingly proletarian place based upon the glaring division of Labour and Capital."[18] Nowhere can insights into the psychological effects of this arrangement be better generated than by way of the collier's life account. Writers often depict themselves as "degraded" or "helpless" victims of exploitation. With one voice, pitmen who were separated by over one hundred years of history register the same sense of outrage in relation to the treatment meeted out to them by their respective employers (compare Rymer, b.1835, with Vernon, b.1922, for example).

Moveover, the often brutalizing conditions under which the collier worked, described by George Hitchin as the "harshness and obscenities of the pit" (Hitchin, p.118) frequently led the autobiographers to characterize themselves as "human donkeys" (Parfitt, p.14), criminals enduring "penal servitude" (Rymer, p.11; Coombes, p.193), or more frequently a "race of slaves." (Holme, p.8; Armstrong, p.78; Dallison, p.262; Parfitt, p.50; Rymer, 14, and 30.) Indeed Coombes likens the miner's life to that of the American Negro slave. After quoting Paul Robeson's song 'Old Man River', Coombes observes "he is singing of a distant ruler and of slaves, but he might almost be singing of the mountains here and of us." (Coombes, p.259.)

The preoccupation of the pitman autobiographers with the status of the collier hints at those feelings of social rejection and humiliation which have attended much working class experience. As Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb have shown, "social position" is frequently taken by working class people as a "reflection" of the "feebleness of (their) talents."[19] A number of autobiographers, like many of Sennet's and Cobb's interviewees, appear 'injured' by the miner's social status. They were merely the human tools of a society which existed literally and socially above their heads. The Victorian pitman Neddy Rymer argues that the "rights of free citizenship" will only come to the miner when he is regarded as a "man" and not as a "machine" (Rymer, p.1), while George Hitchin reported that as late as the 1920's and 30's, he was unable to get any other work but

mining as a result of "the barrier of prejudice and ignominy that surrounded (him)" as a one time member of the colliery community. (Hitchin, p.89, see also p.126-127.)

Thus these testaments indicate that physical toil in a hostile environment, consequent psychological tension, gross exploitation and the absence of social recognition must rank high in any assessment of traumatic and alienating experiences which were endured by miners and their families during the one hundred and fifty year period covered by this study.

Responses to the effect of such phenomena appear to have taken many forms. Idiosyncratic reactions seem to have been quite common. This may account, to some extent, for the plethora of eccentrics or 'characters' who, writers claim, populated the coal fields. Dataller, for example, describes one Wilson Tonks, "a monument of integrity" who, despite being fit and well, refused to work on Thursdays. (Dataller, p.105.) Coombes records that William Hutchinson refused to go underground under any circumstances when he heard "bells a-ringing" in his head. (Coombes, p.258.) Frank Vernon alerts us to Harry Fountain's humorous, but culturally characteristic, practice of ironically "abandoning" his and his "mates" fate to the vagaries of chance. On reaching the pit-head Fountain was heard to call out "A'm gonna chuck mi hat in the air and if it comes down we're going home!" (Vernon, p.19.)[20] Other autobiographers such as George Hitchin literally attempted to escape from the "economic and social claustrophobia" (Hitchin, p.89) which blighted their lives by seeking employment in other industries, removing to labour colleges or joining the armed services.[21] However, such opportunities were limited and, significantly, foreign to the culture of the coal field.[22] In general, most colliers in the period appear to have countered feelings of industrial and social dislocation by conforming to deep seated cultural motifs. Most in evidence is the propensity of the pitmen to affect ambivalent attitudes towards their fate. As Coombes explains, what use to harbour fears or to superstitiously "stay away one shift when the next is

essentially the same, and the next?" (Coombes, p.258-259.) The equation of manhood with the endurance, strength and toughness required to hew coal, is a striking example of such occupationally derived attitudes.[23]

'Positive' attitudinal orientations such as these were frequently paralleled by compensatory patterns of behaviour. Relief or escape from social, economic and psychological pressure was sought in the various delights of the hedonistic pastime. The alehouse, the gambling school and the sports field provided the setting within which frustration, anger and fear could be ritualistically purged.[24]

Nevertheless, in the period after 1825, the increasing impact of Methodism in the coal fields had the effect of at once mutating certain deep seated cultural patterns, while creating an ideological pluralism in the mining communities.[25] For the majority, hedonistic distractions and practices remained the norm.[26] But for those among the generations of pitmen who held what Jack Lawson was to describe as a "passion for a better life..." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.69.) Methodism promised the possibility of a new kind of status and the certainty of 'deliverance' from the industrial Babylon in which the collier was required to toil.

Escape and Deliverance

Pit village Methodism, like pit village hedonism, held meaning and was understood by the pitmen almost exclusively in terms of their occupation. Its character was moulded by their life style and their attitudes. In this way the relationship between the colliery community and Methodism was dialectical.

The life accounts of nonconformist pitmen powerfully illustrate the nature of this process. In the highly charged psychological atmosphere of the colliery village, the promise of 'escape' from the hideous agencies of the 'bottomless pit' could easily take on a worldly and entirely concrete

meaning. In just one of the many dozens of similar anecdotes to be found in the pitman's autobiography, the pitman-preacher Timothy Mountjoy interprets the validity of the "master's promise" to the "poor collier" in purely practical (occupational) terms.

> Edward Kear wanted to go a little way on the great master's business, and went to the pit at five in the morning so as to leave earlier. The engine-man thought he had put all right for Kear and the hosler to descend and shouted "get in", but the moment they got in they began to descend at a rapid pace, the engine-man had forgot to put the winding barrel in gear, they were at the bottom - over one hundred yards - in a twink, and all the rope of the barrel went down after them, all on the top. (I?) thought that Kear and Morgan were smashed up, but the Lord saved them in his own way; when they reached the bottom they were thrown out under the heading, the rope and chain did not hurt them. The promise still stands today, "I will never leave thee or forsake thee".
>
> (Mountjoy, p.12.)

Later pitmen-autobiographers, many of them Methodists such as James Bullock, found no difficulty in identifying 'functional' parallels between pit village Methodism and pit village hedonism. Recalling the different ways in which the two halves of the community would vent "pent up emotion", Bullock notes that the hedonists

> used to sing songs like 'Eskimo Nell' with great gusto. They would beat time to it and sing with feeling as if they had been there. The members of the pub got rid of pent up emotions and feelings this way, just as the Chapel people got rid of their feelings by singing hymns and praying.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.153.)

Similarly it is clear from these accounts that pit village Methodism evolved structures sensitive to the special needs of the colliery community, and through them could compete with many of the 'services' and 'attractions' provided by, or based around, the public house. Not least among these was the chapel's capacity to provide forms of entertainment. Many Methodist autobiographers show how the pitman's 'week' could

be filled by chapel based activities. James Bullock listed and described the options open to the Methodist community in the small Yorkshire colliery village of Bowers Row in the early decades of this century, they were as follows; Monday Christian Endeavour. Tuesday chapel class. Wednesday mothers' night. Thursday Band of Hope. Friday mens' Bible class and Saturday Chapel Social. (Bullock, 1976, p.136-141.)

Chapel services themselves, as one commentator has pointed out, were not "unentertaining".[27] Just as in the pub, emotions frequently ran high (especially among 'ranting' sects such as the Primitives) and participants would be encouraged to 'let go'.[28] Armstrong recalled that his father's prayers on such occasions "were simply gushing torrents of tempestuous ovation." (Armstrong, p.24.) In times of 'revival', the drama was intense. 'Backsliders' and those who had yet to be 'liberated' or 'saved' were pressed to remove to the penitent bench. A number of autobiographers made the journey, Bullock describes the scene:

> He (the preacher) would start by saying "you are miners, brothers, you work in a dangerous calling, you know not at what moment you might be called to face your maker on the dreaded judgement day. So listen carefully to the second verse of this beautiful hymn, for it must have been written by the author, having miners in mind, for its says:
>
> Art thou waiting till tomorrow
> Thou may never see its light
> Come at once accept his money
> He is waiting come! tonight!
>
> All he wanted was for one person, either man, woman or child to go out to the front, to break the ice as it were. The atmosphere was tense, the people who were saved were singing, shouting, praying and groaning in such a frenzy that, as a child, I could not tell whether they were suffering from some acute physical pain or some hysterical mental agony. Once there was a person there, in a flash they (the Elders) would be beside him on their knees, literally praying him over the river and establishing him on his new journey to eternal life.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.127.)

The dramatic spectacle of conversion was part of Methodist theatre. Like so many other aspects of the service its success depended upon the ability of the evangelist to stimulate his audience. The Methodist autobiographers were acutely aware of the relationship between large congregations and entertaining preachers. Their work is littered with accounts of such men, no doubt for exemplary reasons.

Parkinson dedicates an entire chapter to the Wesleyan 'hellfire' pitman-preacher Newark Fentonby, who was active during the second half of the 19th century. His account suggests that the kinds of qualities exhibited by at least this kind of "rousing preacher" were not unknown in the Victorian music hall artiste. Parkinson recalls that Fentonby was a "<u>local man</u> (Parkinson's italics) ... having a good vocabulary, into which he often threw the northern pit man's vernacular with effect." Having the ability to change the tone of his sermons at will, Fentonby could effect "a strange mixture of graphic descriptions, bristling points, and beautiful conceptions, sometimes finishing with a comical climax of which he had never thought." (Parkinson, p.108.) The humour, sentimentality, pathos and, in a world of keenly felt class divisions, comic impudence, characteristic of Fentonby's sermons is illustrated in an extract quoted by Parkinson.

> 'Ye mothers' said he, 'listen. When aw was a very little boy - and ye can see for yersels that aw never was a big un - aw used to go to the pit at two o'clock in the morning, and for sixteen dreary hours aw was knocked about, frae wig to wag, sometimes scrapin' a big patch of skin off my shins and then in the gloomy light of a farthing candle, running my head against the props, till the little brains aw had seen to have been joggled so loose that ye dinnat need to wonder aw should be so scattered in my preaching and not able to talk "consecutively", as the big folks say; ye see, that word is a cramper to us plain people, but it sets them off a bit, and they are welcome to it. Well aw wanted to tell ye that when aw used to waddle home at nights frae the pit, tired and weary, and as hungry as if aw'd been fasting forty days and nights in the wilderness, and as black as a nigger, but without the polish, the comely face of my good, canny mother was to me the

> brightest thing in creation, and her smile was the very sunshine of my life, and after the din and discordant noise in the pit, her gentle voice fell upon my ears in sounds a sweet as ever fell from David's harp. When the dinner was over, and the washing was done, and a little bit of family talk, aw knelt at her feet and laid my head on her knee "to say my prayers."
>
> (Quoted by Parkinson, p.100-101.)

Entertainment apart, the chapel like the pub also functioned as a kind of community centre, providing facilities and services for its members, and in this way filled some of the considerable gaps in the fabric of the Victorian and early Edwardian 'minimum state'. A number of accounts illustrate the way, for example, both institutions attempted, in their different ways, to alleviate the distress of the poor, especially widows and those suffering the consequences of pit-accidents. Bullock recalled that "most of the village charities used to start in the pub" and that in this respect "the pub ... played nearly as important a part as the chapel." (Bullock, 1976, p.149.)

Similarly the chapel, or more frequently chapel members' homes, were used like pubs as 'open' centres for general social interaction. This was especially true in the early part of our period[29] yet, as Jack Lawson's account suggests, this practice appears to have persisted into the early 20th century. Lawson recalled that in 'Methodist' Boldon:

> Every house was an 'open' house. There were spontaneous suppers, when a lot of us drifted in by chance. We were not invited, we invited ourselves. We talked pit work, ideas, the Bible, literature, or union business. The piano rattled, the choir was in action, and we sang with more abandon than any gang who has learned to sing the latest film song ... We were a merry lot.
>
> (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.71.)

Thus, as these accounts clearly indicate, as social institutions the pit village pub and the colliery chapel had

much in common. Most importantly both offered forms of escape, or means of coping with the heightened psychological tensions experienced by pitmen, and both provided facilities and services which met the special needs of the colliery community.

The Ideology of Pit Village Methodism

Yet ideologically the pub was to the chapel as night is to day. The careless and often lawless hedonism of pub society found its counterpoint in the controlled, moderate and eminently 'respectable' behaviour of the chapel folk. Alcoholic bluster, reckless violence, and general disregard for law and order was paralleled by the Methodist's propensity to be sober, introspective, pacifist and law abiding.

Here lies one of the two most significant aspects of the Methodists' impact on the nineteenth century coal fields. For, because it accommodated much of Victorian bourgeois society's obsession with self discipline and public order, and because, as we have seen, it successfully adapted locally to the community's experience and special needs, pit village Methodism had the long term aspect of diluting 'irrational' pre-industrial perspectives and practices in a thoroughly 'modern' ideological solution of personal restraint and respectability, and in this way mutated the nature of pit village culture.

Late nineteenth century autobiographers were frequently struck by the 'moral' improvements they had seen in the people of the English coal fields. The Somerset pitman, Moses Horler, recalled that local colliers often engaged in vicious fighting and rioting in the period between 1830 and 1850, and attributed the more moderate behaviour patterns of 'contemporary' miners to the "light of education" and the influence of Wesleyan Methodism. (Horler, p.2-3.)

The Gloucestershire pitman-preacher, Timothy Mountjoy, described, with some disgust, the intemperance and lawlessness of the 'free' colliers in the Forest of Dean in the 1840's and 1850's:

> Some forty-five or fifty years ago, many of the Foresters acted as though there was no law to be respected; they got it into their heads that the office of woods and forests had no right to enclose the forest lands and plant trees thereon, and, under this belief they banded themselves together, under the leadership of one called Warry Williams to pull down and throw open again Her Majesty's enclosures. They did a great deal of mischief, and I do not know where the mischief would have ended, had not a cavalry regiment come on the scene ... Sometimes these lawless creatures would wreak wrath, or vengeance, on their neighbours' gates, or hurdles, stiles, or fences, and take them a long way off, and throw them into some pond or deep ditch. About seventeen of these young men got together one Sunday, and went from one public house to another, ordering and drinking but not paying. They went down to Little Dean, there they did a lot of mischief, had all the drink they liked, or punched the landlord if he refused.
>
> (Mountjoy, p.10-11.)

As Mountjoy notes, rebelliousness and lawless behaviour of this magnitude was much diminished if not unheard of in the last decades of the nineteenth century.[30] And while during this period the development and influence of external forces of social control such as the police force must not be underestimated, it seems clear that the 'rationalization' of behaviour was promoted and justified, ideologically, inside the isolated mining communities by means of Methodism.

The revolutionary changes effected by Methodism in the character of a minority of colliers, and the more modest, but significant effect it had in diminishing the excesses of the majority, has informed the reasoning of those who have seen Methodism as a form of social opium. In this way Thompson's analysis infers that the collier's traditionally violent, rebellious, and presumably revolutionary response to industrial and social dislocation was arrested. Methodism,

in this interpretation, provided the new mechanism through which "energies and emotions which were dangerous to social order, or which were merely unproductive ... were released in the harmless form of sporadic love feasts, watch nights, band meetings or revivalist campaigns."[31] Moreover, the "methodical", "disciplined" and "repressed" Methodist character was accommodative to the acceptance of work discipline and tolerant of authority. Thompson notes that "they (the Methodists) weakened the poor from within by adding to them the active ingredient of submission ... (which was) ... most suited to make up the psychic component of the work discipline of which the manufacturers stood in most need."[32]

John Wilson's assessment of the changing nature of industrial relations during the nineteenth century appears to articulate nothing which contradicts Thompson's analysis. "I have lived", he writes, "in different periods, and in different economic and social conditions. I have seen the great revolution in the relations between employer and employed, and a great mitigation, if not complete destruction of the animus and antagonism which existed." (Wilson, p.21.) The paradox of course is that Wilson spent more than fifty years of his life locked in industrial and political class conflict. His life, as he was to note, had been one "constant struggle." (Wilson, p.17.)

To comprehend how Methodist miners such as Wilson could be on the one hand accommodative of new ideological forces, and on the other be fiercely oppositional to many of the implications of them, is in many ways to understand the nature of pit village Methodism itself. It is undoubtedly true that Methodist culture induced forms of quietism in those it touched, but this is to see the movement from only one perspective. As Jack Lawson was keen to assert, "their hymns and sermons may have been of another world, but the first fighters and speakers for unions, co-op societies, political freedom and improved conditions were Methodist preachers." (Lawson, p.69.) Methodism was clearly a movement through which miners gave direct and concrete

expression to their class interest. As we shall see, its theology justified the communities' grievances, and its discipline gave their struggle bite.

The pitman's autobiography is testimony to the ways in which the unwordly metaphysics that was Methodist theology not only found secular meaning, but promoted industrial and political action among many sections of the English mining community during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In death and in life, Methodism had something to offer the collier, and not least among this was self confidence. The Methodist 'soul', like the miner himself, was "perpetually on the brink of death."[33] But the quest for 'liberty' and 'salvation' in the frenzied environment of the chapel promised a new inner calm and a new guarantee for body and soul. George Parkinson's account of the conversion of a Durham pitman on the 1860's illustrates the way in which the miners' obsession with their own safety fed into the proceedings. He writes:

> As Joe was returning (to a house to which he had been invited) a little after seven o'clock, 'he heard the singing and turned in. Finding a vacant spot under the ladder behind the door, he took his seat on the good man's pit clothes and thought he was comfortably out of the way.
>
> The leader of the meeting, in this opening prayer after thanking God for safety and for his watchful providence over them during the week, prayed earnestly for a blessing for all present, mentioning one after another by their names, and then prayed "O Lord save Joe H- ; save him now, Lord, save Joe tonight. Thoo'll find him sittin' upon ma pit claes under the lather aback o' the door". And Joe - as he used to tell the story - felt himself face to face with his maker, asked to be saved, and was quietly and gently led to peace with God through Christ.
>
> (Parkinson, p.34-35.)

As a number of autobiographers recall, it was not unusual for Methodists to read or 'talk' theology in the pit or to sing

hymns in moments of stress such as descent (see Burt, p.105; Cocking, p.52; Parkinson, p.24 and 53) and it seems clear that these practices reinforced their sense of confidence in the power of God's grace literally in a place in which they were in most need of it.

The manifestation of a new kind of confidence in facing the danger of the miner's calling was not the only benefit of conversion. Methodism lent to its adherents a new kind of self confidence that fostered a new self respect.

Methodism was an 'open' and, in spiritual terms at least, 'levelling' religion. Its egalitarian nature was rooted deep in Lutheran notions of the 'universality of God's grace'. As E.P. Thompson points out:

> If grace was universal, sin was universal too. Any man who came to a conviction of sin might be visited by grace and know himself to be ransomed by Christ's blood ... And as a religion of 'the heart' rather than of the intellect, the simplest and least educated might hope to attain grace. In this sense Methodism dropped all doctrinal and social barriers and opened its doors wide to the working class.[34]

The grass roots organization of Methodism actively reflected the theological egalitarianism on which it was based. The road to the pulpit lay open for any male member of the society.[35] No hurdle of social or intellectual or institutional qualification barred the way. For the Methodist preacher, unlike for example the Catholic priest, did not mediate between the individual and God, but merely conducted the service. In this way every adult member had the potential to become a preacher.

Similarly, control of the chapel, and the activities which were organized around it, lay principally in the hands of the membership.[36] Not of least significance among the local society's powers was its ability to control its own 'pulpit'. As a result of this autonomy, Methodist chapels tended to reflect the preoccupations and concerns of the

communities they served, and this was nowhere more true than in the occupationally homogenous world of the pit village. The unsympathetic or 'boring' professional minister was simply not invited to preach, while the popular evangelist, frequently local 'lay' preachers, persistently found a platform and a cordial welcome.[37] Thus in working class communities at least, it was the popular control of chapel business which allowed, for the first time, the voice of the poor to be heard in the cradle of nineteenth century power - the pulpit.

It is clearly evident from these accounts that the egalitarian ethos inherent in Methodist practice had a transforming effect upon attitudes concerning self and community in the nineteenth century colliery village. And that this phenomenon had in turn significant political implications, as it represented an important ideological seed bed from which new forms of class - consciousness, and class based organization and representation could spring.

The first and most crucial stage of the change which Methodism effected in the consciousness of its adherents in the colliery village concerned their self image. For Methodism, as Lawson notes, "took the 'nobodies' and made the most humble 'somebody'." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.70.) The widely held and confidence sapping notion of the collier as a 'social outcast' or 'degraded slave' found strong resistance inside the colliery chapel. For in God's sight were not all men equal? Was not the "bairn on the (pitman's) knees ... as interesting and beautiful a sight to the angels and to Jesus as George the Third was, kneeling on a velvet cushion ... at Windsor?" (Parkinson, p.102.)

Thus, ideologically, Methodism registered the worth and potential of the people who embraced it. As Parkinson recalled, children in the first half or the nineteenth century "received all the education they ever had in the Methodist Sunday school." (Parkinson, p.65.) Moreover, anniversaries and religious festivals offered the entire community an opportunity to display their often prodigious

artistic talents. Bullock recalled that at Christmas in Bowers Row an entire orchestra was assembled to accompany the chapel choir in a rendition of Handel's 'Messiah'. (Bullock, 1976, p.145.)

In a different way men like Mountjoy could find a new self respect in their rolé as Sunday school teacher, chapel elder and lay preacher. Others, autodidacts such as Armstrong, Bullock and Lawson, recall that they were "encouraged", "stimulated" and "given opportunity" for development in the warm atmosphere of the 'associational' meeting room. (See Bullock, 1976, p.136, Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.71, Armstrong, pp.110-118.)

'Well regulated', 'self improving' and 'morally uplifting' activities such as these no doubt found approval among those who found the miner's propensity for other kinds of stimulation not a little unnerving. Yet undoubtedly such experience bolstered the pitman's self esteem and lent to the community a new self respect. Such change is not without political significance. Jack Lawson remarks that "the new life deepened conviction of the worker's value and added zeal to conviction ...", linking this sense of pride to the work ethic Lawson goes on "... A good worker neither whines nor wilts before the capitalist. He looks him straight in the face, for he is conscious of his worth; and he knows he is no less a man of worth and perhaps better than he whom he faces." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.72-73.) While Methodism fostered self confidence, it demanded self discipline. The reasons for this are entirely bound up in Methodist theology.[38]

Doctrine taught that the 'sanctity of the soul' was of paramount importance, a literal barometer of grace. Thus, having been cleansed of sin in conversion, the Methodist 'soul' needed to be rigorously protected from it until the day of Judgement came. As Armstrong states, for the 'saved' the "world and the flesh were synonymous with the devil, and extremely narrow was the avenue to divine approval and everlasting bliss." (Armstrong, p.7.) Withdrawal from the influence of worldly sin followed. Lawson's reaction is

typical. "I withdrew into myself", he notes, "until the old life was gone." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.65.) Once so dislocated from temptation, the convert began a life long surveillance of the soul in order to identify, and then root out, any blemish of sin that might remain. As Colls has pointed out, "no detail was too small and no second was too short for (this) searching self discipline."[39] In this way, Methodism "constrained the temperament" and encouraged "attendance and punctuality" in all things.[40]

Such behaviour was not unattractive to capital. Parkinson was not the only autobiographer to draw attention to the value placed by Methodism on the work ethic. "Converted men," he recalled, "were punctually at the pit on Monday morning instead of lounging in the public house." (Parkinson, p.13.)

Yet 'improvements' in work discipline did not imply 'improvements' in industrial relations. For, as we have seen, pit village Methodism evolved precisely in response to the social needs of the occupational community it served. In this way, most significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century, industrial conflict in the colliery settlement was absorbed into the fabric of Methodist life. At the point which they touched, the spiritual and the secular fused into a gritty oppositional doctrine of industrial relations which was mediated through both the early coal field unions and the chapel.

Victorian Methodist ascetics appeared to have found no paradox in this process. Mountjoy clearly did not see any contradiction in the fact that, in his dual rolé as Methodist preacher and miner's agent, he simultaneously implored the community to seek salvation in both heaven and the miners' union. Similarly, Bullock recalls that his father and other early Methodist union organizers in the Yorkshire field "saw nothing wrong with working for their fellow men all through the week, quarrelling with the boss, and then kneeling humbly before God on the Sabbath." (Bullock, 1976, p.122.)

Thus, odd though it may seem, pit village Methodism simultaneously encouraged both withdrawal from, and engagement with, the secular world. Consequently the minute attention to detail and method which characterized the Methodists' approach to the soul characterized their approach to the friendly society and the trade union. (Mountjoy actually provides an outline of how best to set up a mutual benefit society, see p.38-40.) Similarly, the Methodists' talent for public speaking, frequently developed from childhood in the various structures of the chapel, was pressed into secular service to the advantage of the union. Bullock recalls that preaching gave trade union leaders, such as his father, "the ability and skill to put into words the feelings and aspirations of all other miners." (Bullock, 1976, p.144.) The content and quality of the autobiographies written by Victorian pitmen-preachers such as Mountjoy and Cocking underline this point.

More important than all of this was Holy Scripture. It was scripture which had led them to the ascetic life style, and thus it was scripture which validated their lives and their struggles. The Bible was scrutinized and contemplated until every ounce of meaning had been extracted. Bullock notes that his father had "read every word in the Bible several times ... and could quote it by the yard, he seemed to have a Biblical saying to explain every emotion, doubt, fear and success that took place." (Bullock, 1976, p.128.)

Thus the material substance of mining life was analyzed and understood in the light of Biblical teaching. A consequence of this was that social, political and economic theory was both extracted from, and woven into, the fabric of the Testaments (miner's leader Frank Hodges claimed his "first sermon was also (his) first speech", p.19). This process was what Lawson was to euphemistically describe as the "Gospel expressed in social terms ..." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.70.)

Such doctrine or teaching appears to have been little more than a form of Christian or moral socialism. It permeated many Methodist hymns and, particularly in times of industrial or social crisis, was articulated in prayers and sermons.

Bullock records the words of one such hymn and gives an account of the kind of prayers that were heard in Bowers Row chapel during the Edwardian era. 'Dare to be a Daniel' ("a rousing hymn") typifies the way 'oppositional' forms of Methodist ideology could be mediated through the hymn:

> Dare to be a Daniel.
> Dare to stand alone,
> Dare to have a purpose firm'
> And dare to make it known.
>
> (chorus) Dare to say 'No',
> Dare to be true.
>
> (Quoted by Bullock, 1976, p.138.)

Prayers frequently lacked any of the ambiguity that this form of lyrical 'propaganda' may have held. At Sunday service, and in the presence of colliery officials, Bullock recalls that his father and other miners "used to shout out":

> We know, Lord, there's no need to tell thee anything, thou knows it all. Thou knows our difficulties but they don't. Thou knows what we have to put up with at work and thou knows their tactics. But we thank thee tonight, Lord, that tha can see through 'em and thou has promised that thou will punish the wicked. We also know, Lord, that "what must I do to be saved?" Jesus replied - "Go and sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor". We are poor, Lord. Thou knows we are poor, Lord, but do they know we are poor, Lord? ... But we be thankful tonight, Lord, if thou in thy wisdom would point out to them the error of their ways.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.123.)

Thus, draped in the fabric of the Testaments, the politics of the coal field entered the chapels. Scripture underwrote the 'righteousness' of the struggle, theology taught how best to conduct it, and self confidence, born of religious egalitarianism, inspired it to begin.

Methodism, Socialism, Materialism

There is little doubt that the moral asceticism provoked by the Methodist life style accommodated many of the values held by the Victorian bourgeoisie. And this factor was significant in inducing forms of social and political quietism in the coal fields. Indeed 'labour aristocrats' such as Tom Burt and John Wilson, who had seen how the collier benefited from conducting a 'respectable fight', clung tenaciously to Gladstonian liberalism until the end of their lives. Such beliefs and actions have led commentators (most recently Robert Moore) to suggest that organized religion in the coal fields had the effect of "reducing class consciosuness and class conflict"[41] because the miner shared his religious beliefs and instiutions with members of the ruling elite, and consequently adopted accommodative attitudes. Moreover, Methodism itself is characterized as an individualistic ideology. Moor argues that:

> Methodism was concerned with a new man, not a new society, and offered personal ethics, not a political programme. In this particular form Protestantism is more congruent with individualism than collectivism and class action.[42]

Yet, as we have seen, all of this is contradicted by the perceptions and accounts of Methodism contained in the pitman's autobiography which, in common with other evidence cited here, suggests that as a result of its ethos and organization, pit village Methodism reflected and responded to the material existence of the people who embraced it, and as a result of this it tended to at once highlight class differences and stimulate a collectivist response. It was the eminently respectable pitman-preacher George Cocking who summarized the world's response to the miner as "unfair and ungrateful" (Cocking, p.43) and the 'moderate' John Wilson who pointed out that the collier had been degraded because he was "prevented from working collectively and on equal terms before the law." (Wilson, p.21.)

Moreover, it seems clear that pit village Methodism both fostered and articulated a crude oppositional and collectivist 'class ideology', but this was cloaked in the language and imagery and the ethereal. It is in this way that Methodism can be said to be the "outer garment" of social conflict.

Indeed later Methodist autobiographers grasped the ideological significance of the movement quite clearly. Lawson saw Methodism as one of the stepping stones to socialism. He argued that it had been "more of a driving force in northern mining circles than all economic theory put together", adding that those who saw it as "reactionary"[43] knew "as much about the real living history of these islands as pigs know of aeroplanes ... (for if Britain held) ... a comparatively advanced position in her social movements ... it was largely because the eighteenth century revival saturated the industrial masses with a passion for a better life, personal, moral, mental and social." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.66.)

Moreover, Chester Armstrong's account demonstrates the way in which the ascetic Methodist life style was capable of setting in motion intellectual lines of enquiry which, if taken to their logical conclusion, served to breach the metaphysical cocoon within which Methodist 'class ideology' was contained. Armstrong claims he was "stirred" into philosophical speculation by "the nonconformist demand for freedom of conscience." He continues:

> What could be grander, I thought, than to seek to know on my own account the credentials of what I was with so much assurance asked to believe? What could be more noble than to rely on my own authority for what I might accept or reject? ... I did not fully realize in taking this decision that I was beginning to grasp a vital principle, namely intellectual integrity, a principal which is basic to enlightenment and cultural progress. Nor was I aware till later that in demanding the right of free enquiry I was but extending the

> nonconformist mandate of freedom of conscience to its logical issue.
>
> (Armstrong, p.95.)

Having acquired "intellectual integrity" it was not impossible to re-orientate the substance of one's thought from the ideal to the material as Armstrong was to do. As this account shows, the shift was neither easy nor painless, and few can have gone as far as Armstrong, who over a thirty year period of contemplation and study literally 'thought' himself from the metaphysical to the materialist position. But many went some way along the road. R.J. Campbell's The New Theology signalled the beginning of this movement, and economic and social crisis in the first three decades of the twentieth century spurred it on. In this respect it is instructive to note that Jack Lawson, unlike Burt and Wilson, but in common with most Methodist pitmen of his era, was not a liberal but a socialist.

Summary: Decline and Culture Change

In the period just preceding the Second World War, Methodism began its decline as a power in the English coal field. Symptomatic of decline was the decision to merge the various factions in 1932. In the coal fields at least, growing secularisation of the functions which Methodism had performed signficantly contributed to its decline. State provision for education, pensions and unemployment insurance undercut the influence and importance of Sunday schools and mutual benefit societies. The M.F.G.B. and the broad labour movement had eclipsed the pit village chapel as the focus for class and personal advancement. The cinema and the radio provided new distractions and permeated new ideas. Social, political and economic crisis bred a new and stubborn disillusionment. Now it was as likely to be the communist as the nonconformist who would be elected as mens' checkweigher or lodge official.

As the Methodist rump staggered on, its pulpit became increasingly de-politicised and its organization more

centralised, in an attempt to preserve itself from further collapse. Such measures merely contributed to decline, for Methodism's strength had always been in direct relation to its ability to reflect the experience and provide for the special needs of the communities it served.

This chapter has been based almost entirely upon this premise. I have argued that Methodism had a major cultural impact in the coal fields of 19th century Britain because, in this crucial period of their development, it addressed itself to the political and socio-industrial problems that faced the people who lived and laboured in them. As I have shown, the struggle for economic and social recognition undertaken by the working people of the colliery settlements and described by pitmen-autobiographers was organizationally enriched and often ideologically mediated through the rational and essentially egalitarian ethos of the Methodist creed. Moreover, the formidable psycho-industrial problems inherent to subsistence by the winning of coal, such as the fear of death by violence, were lightened if not resolved by Methodism's ability to engender in its adherents a self confidence which countered the vicissitudes of subterranean life.

For votaries such as John Wilson, Thomas Burt and Jack Lawson, Methodism seemed to have had an influence in the coal field greater than the sum total of its adherents may have indicated. Comparing past and present they perceived what they took to be an improvement in the moral and social condition of their fellows during the second half of the 19th century and attributed it to the workings of Methodism, it was clear to them that 'Bob Cranky' was mending his ways. No doubt like others they underestimated the power of other forces of social change but the narrowing of the ideological fissure between hedonistic and rationalistic life styles (signified by class based institutions and the respectability cult) which they experienced in the coal fields during the second half of the 19th century is a clear indication that new cultural ground had been established between the time Methodism entered the fields and the era of its decline. As

I show in the following chapters, 'trace elements' of both hedonistic and rationalistic traditions are manifest in the social and political culture of the late 19th and 20th century pit village for, as I have stressed, Methodism changed pit village culture not by conquering an older 'way of life' but by interacting with it.

CHAPTER THREE

NOTES

1. K. Marx, The German Ideology, quoted in S.K. Padoner, (ed.) The Essential Marx, (New York, 1978), p.295.

2. See B.S. Turner, Religion and Social Theory: A Materialist Perspective, (1983), pp.56-60, for a discussion of this point.

3. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (1963; 1982), Ch.11, part 2, p.411.

4. See for example, B. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperence Question in England, 1815-72, (1971), esp. Ch.16.

5. See Thompson, op. cit., pp.411-441, for a resume of this argument see infra.

6. Turner, op. cit., p.78.

7. Quoted in Turner, op. cit., p.73, from F. Engels, The Peasant War in Germany, (1955). A very similar notion of religion as a potential site and medium of political and cultural conflict or struggle is implied by Williams idea of the 'residual', see R. Williams, Marxism and Literture, (Oxford, 1977), Ch.8, "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent".

8. The classical studies of these relations are generally regarded to be M. Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, (1904) and E. Halévy, A History of the English People in 1815, (1924).

9. Thompson, op. cit., p.391.

10. Ibid., p.404.

11. Ibid.

12. See Thompson, op. cit., Ch.11 and R. Colls, The Pitman of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest, 1790-1850, (Manchester, 1987) Ch.9 and 10. The 'primitive' methodists (a fundamentalist 'ranting' sect) were particularly successful among the English pitmen not least because the movement was rooted in and addressed the needs of working class society. Indeed, founding father Hugh Bourne worked as a mill-wright in the Staffordshire colleries and would have been keenly aware of pit village culture, see Thompson, op. cit. p.436, and Colls, op. cit., pp.146-162, see also J.T. Wilkinson, Hugh Bourne 1772-1852, (1952). See R. Colls, The Collier's Rant: Song and Culture in the Industrial Village, (1977), p.101 for statistics of the 1851 census which show that in the mining districts of Chester-le-Street, Castle Ward, Easington, and Houghton of the 24% of people who attended services on the day 13% attended Methodist Services.

13. See J. Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century, (Dublin, 1980), Ch.1 for a good survey of expansion in the fields and Chapter 2, pp.36-47 for a discussion of danger in the context of expansion and fatalities. See also P.E.H. Hair, "Morality from violence in British coal mines 1800-1850", Economic History Review, (1968), Vol.3, No.21.

14. See Colls, op. cit., (1987) Ch.4, 5, 6, for a superb discussion of this phenomenon in the Great Northern field; Colls notes at one point "the function of the Bond changed from contract to control" p.73. See also C.L. Jones, Industrial Relations in the Northerumberland and Durham Coal Industry 1825-1845, (1985), Unpublished Sunderland Polytechnic Ph.D. thesis, for a very vigorous analysis of changing industrial relationships in the northern fields.

15. See H. Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, (1963; 1971), pp.44-46, and R, Challinor, and B. Ripley, The Miners' Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists, (1968), for analysis of early coalfield unions, see also Chapter 2, note 2. For the expansion of Methodism in the Northern coalfields see Colls, op. cit., (1987), Ch.9.

16. Colls, op. cit., (1987), p.178.

17. It seems probable that this is a result of commentators preoccupation with statistical evidence which is of course largely insensitive to psychological and cultural phenomena.

18. Colls, op. cit., (1987), p.306.

19. R. Sennett and J. Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class, (Cambridge, 1972), p.72.

20. These accounts illuminate John Benson's suggestion that large scale voluntary absenteeism among miners, and especially among hewers, is derived from an "unconscious desire to prolong (their) underground life" but suggest that fear of serious unjury or violent death rather than longevity of career lay at the root of the "problem". See Benson op cit., p.59.

21. A number of autobiographers attempted to forge new careers in these ways. However some returned to the collieries after a brief interlude. Wooley moved to an aluminium plant for a short spell before returning to Bickershaw Colliery, Lawson and Hitchin attended labour colleges, returned to the pit, and then subsequently took up new occupational roles. Bullock and Holme became colliery managers. Wilson joined the Merchant Navy and after four years returned to the pits. Dunn and Lovejoy joined the army never to return underground. Cocking became a Methodist Minister after emigrating to North America. Parkinson took up some form of retailing after a serious accident.

22. The almost mono-occupational nature of many mining villages and the kinds of non transferable skills which are associated with the mining of coal, certainly in the period covered by this study, limited opportunity. Formal educational opportunities in Labour Colleges were of course restricted to pitmen who lived towards the end of the period. In cultural terms, the phenomenon of occupational identity - a product of socialization and life in the occupational community (see Chapter 1) may explain the apparant reluctance of pitmen to leave the mines and could also account for the often heard claim in mining society of people being 'drawn back to the pit'.

23. Jack Lawson, in common with other autobiographers persistently equates his standing as a "man" with his status as a hewer, noting at one point for example, "a man is not really a man in Durham until he goes to the coal-face" (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.75).

24. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of leisure in the mining community.

25. During the period 1825-50 the social manifestation of this ideological dichotomy was quite marked as Robert Colls has shown in his studies of the Great Northern Fields, see Colls, op cit., (1987), Ch.7 and op. cit., (1977), part II, Ch.3. However as Colls argues, the Methodist 'message' also interacted with popular cultural forms and as I show, the ideological residue of this interaction permeated the coalfields, during the late 19th and 20th centuries effecting a blurring of the ideological fissure in response to cultural change. For a different view see Jones, op. cit., Ch.4, pp.90-103, who argues that for the period 1825-45 Colls "over-estimates" (p.90) the influence of Methodism on the Northern pitman.

26. The extent and nature of such hedonism, like the extent and nature of ideological pluralism, for the period 1875-1945 can easily be exaggerated and indeed

mythologised. Hedonistic excess and religious extremism were undoubtedly features of mining society during this period but we must not lose sight of the pitman who having been to a football match, took four or five pints of beer at his club and attended to his garden or the training of his dog during one week. Nor indeed his wife who in the best traditions of the 'respectability cult' kept a clean house and sent her children to Chapel despite the fact that she and her husband would attend religious services only for births, deaths, and marriages. See Williams, op. cit., passim, and E.P. Thompson, "On history, sociology and historical relevance", British Journal of Sociology, (1976), Vol.27, No.3, pp.387-402.

27. Colls, (1987), op. cit., p.171. It seems clear that Methodist 'theatre' extended into the period of 'Mahogany' Methodism which developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centures as Bullock's and Armstrong's accounts show.

28. This was especialy true in 'ranting' sects such as the Primitive Methodists Robert Moore's respondents could remember 'ranting' and recall that it did not die out until the end of the Second World War - the hammering on the pews could be heard in the streets outside! See R. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics; The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community, (1974), p.117.

29. Before chapels were built on a large scale (1860-1890) the church was located wherever it met. (See Parkinson, Ch.1 & 3, for important descriptions of early Methodist organisation in Durham pit-villages).

30. See also (Parkinson, p.10), (Rymer, pp.5-6), (Dunn, p.14), (Burt, Ch.2, passim) for insights into 'irrationality' in the early 19th century pit-village.

31. Thompson, op. cit., (1963; 1982), p.405.

32. Thompson, op. cit., (1963; 1982), p.390.

33. Colls, op. cit., (1987) p.154.

34. Thompson, op. cit., (1963; 1982), p.399.

35. In some sects such as the Bible Christians and the Primitives women were able to preach, see O.A. Beckerlegge, The United Methodist Free Churches, (1957), Ch.1, esp. pp.26-27.

36. This was more true of Primitivism than of Wesleyanism. However by the late 19th century women were taking part in the national organisation of the Methodist movement, see M. Edwards, Methodism and England, (1943), Ch.13.

37. See (Bullock, 1976, pp.128-129) for an account of the control of professional ministers, and (pp.142-143) for training and the nature of 'popularity' among Methodist lay clergy.

38. This section is largely based on Colls' analysis of Methodist theology. See op. cit., (1987), Ch.11.

39. Ibid., p.181.

40. Ibid., p.180.

41. Moore, op. cit., p.224.

42. Ibid., p.223.

43. Presumably Lawson is referring to the 'New Left' of the inter-war period, a group who were persistently hostile to all forms of 'false consciousness' (sic).

CHAPTER FOUR

UNION, POLITICS, LIVES AND LETTERS: THE REPRESENTATION OF CLASS, PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS AND CLASS STRUGGLE IN AND BY MEANS OF THE MINERS' AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The coal miners of England, Scotland and Wales boast a formidable political history. No other industrial group has become more closely associated with politically informed Trade Union activity or indeed has contributed more to Labour representation. It is hardly surprising therefore to find that entire libraries could be filled with commentaries on, and analysis of, the mining community's political institutions, and the struggles it has articulated through them.

In this chapter, it is not my intention to review this work but to locate with an important strand of the political culture of the coal fields' in the period 1790-1945 by means of the miner's autobiography.

I will initially draw attention to the relations between mining culture and formal combination and then consider the place and impact of the written word as it related to political thought and organization in the English coal fields. I then move on to discuss the miner's autobiography in the context of these developments and identify and discuss three seminal autobiographical preoccupations of miner-life-historians which connect with them. In doing so attention is drawn to change and continuities in approach which reflect shifting patterns of self and group perception.

Coming Together

> Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.[1]

Common experiences and common interests identified the coal miners of England as a distinctive social group. In the first quarter of the 19th century individual miners began formally to combine with one another, on a local level, in order to promote their interests. These early associations developed unevenly and were rarely successful ("fitful and spasmodic, seldom continuing longer than a few weeks or a few months" noted Burt, p.129) but they indicate an important moment in the process of group recognition and in the existence and articulation of a new form of awareness which was permeating the English coal fields.[2]

The practice of unionism among mine workers sprang from the way mining communities historically handled their experience. And while it has often been understood in isolation from this wider cultural context (in purely economic terms) unionism was in fact just one of many (in this case emergent) practices which found a place in a tangled web of other (historically evolved) shared practices, which formed a complex structure through which miners and their families lived their lives and found meaning.[3]

As previous chapters indicate, the culture of the coal fields' emerged primarily as an active and historically evolved response by mining communities to the nature and productive organization of coal mining in England. Working conditions and the work process led miners to become dependent upon one another in order to win coal and survive in the face of the considerable dangers associated with the practice of coal mining, and as I show in the following chapter, coal miners as an industrial group depended upon their families to provide them with crucial services which allowed them to function effectively at the coal face. Thus many of the distinctive patterns and traditions of social and familial co-operation manifested in the coal fields found their genesis in work.

Because all cultural practices exist within "dynamic" and "interrelated" processes of cultural production,[4] formal patterns of social cohesion and co-operation can not easily

be separated from practices which were, primarily, evolved as a response to work. But the emergence and nature of such formations and traditions were clearly influenced by historically driven shifts in the mining community's consciousness (at any given point in time) of the position it held in the relations of production within the industry.

Thus the familiar concept of miners as quintessential proletarians should not be confused with the actual consciousness of self which existed, historically, in the English coal fields. In practice, the mining community became aware of, and defined, itself and its productive relations over time and in the context of industrial and social change. Consequently formal responses to new industrial structures and practices and their associated social definitions took various and interactive cultural forms over time. The emergence and practice of trade unionism, co-operative retailing and forms of non-conformist evangelism, for example, emerged roughly in the same era (1825-75), while more overtly political activity, characterized by the rise of 'scientific' socialism, burgeoned in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

All such practices were, however, fuelled by a crucial shift in mining culture which was the gradual eclipse of some oral forms of communications by the literary mode. It is difficult to assess precisely when this process began, but by 1860 reading and writing had become the dominant organizing mechanism of almost all formal collective practices.[5]

It is impossible to associate the rise and permeation of the written word in mining society with any single practice or tradition. Clearly the dramatic expansion in the practice of Methodism, in the period after 1825, influenced literary levels.[6] But patterns of autodidactism, while often triggered off in the Sunday school or chapel, also took root in the pub and indeed the pit. Thus the attraction and influence of the cult of 'useful knowledge' and the 'Secular Movement' in the early to mid Victorian era must not be understated.[7] Nevertheless, in the period before the

emergence of mass education the hub of literacy was established among at least an elite group within mining society and was projecting spokes into many areas of mining life.

The interaction of literary communication with established traditions and practices and social and industrial change is complex, but many of the interrelations between social, religious, Trade Union and political forms in the coal fields after 1825 had literacy as a common thread.

Reading and writing suggested and made possible new forms of group recognition, evaluation and definition. For example group association with the egalitarian sentiment contained in Biblical texts often fuelled and served to justify secular actions, most notably in the areas of Trade Unionism and later in politics as we have seen.[8] A common interest in letters brought together ideologically disparate sections of the settlements around a common focus, which almost invariably was linked to a group progress.[9] Literacy enabled complex formal structures such as Trade Unions and Co-Operative Societies to be launched on the back of older collective traditions. And perhaps most importantly, the ability to record in writing the experiences of the past and indeed those of the present allowed the communities, for the first time, not only to make their own (albeit primitive) histories and sociologies but to communicate this information to exogenous groups in periods of class tension. As David Vincent has pointed out, during the first half of the 19th century working-class people became increasingly convinced of the relations between "knowledge and freedom", and thus understanding the self and the society within which the self was formed and existed became a key issue in the struggle for liberty.[10]

Literacy and Political Tradition

In the history of the interrelations between letters, mining society, and its political traditions, the autobiography

plays an important and illuminating rolé. The history of the form may be traced back to the 5th century[11], but its emergence as a distinct and accepted form in dominant literary culture began sometime in the middle of the 17th century.[12] During this period and indeed throughout the 18th century, a number of 'spiritual' autobiographies appeared which had been written by plebian authors.[13] However, it seems clear that very few miners penned life accounts before 1850.[14] After this time, an era when the tradition of working men's autobiography had become secularised, there emerged a steadily increasing number of titles by miner authors.

The chronology is interesting, for this first stimulation of interest in recording the history of self and of course, by inference, those social processes which create the identity of self, occur precisely in an era of profound economic, social and cultural change within the mining industry. Between 1840 and 1880 coal production in Britain increased five fold (from 30 to 150 million tons per year). During the same period the workforce more than trebled as new and deeper pits were sunk and collieries expanded in size and manpower.[15] Paralleling this process of economic change were moments of social change. We have seen how the rise and consequent influence of Methodism had profound cultural repercussions in the coal fields during the era, not least in respect of self discipline and introspection, self respect and self development. Moreover, the third quarter of the 19th century witnessed a general 'settling' of the colliery communities. The massive influxes of labour, drawn from diverse occupational groups and from all parts of the British Isles, began to get together into local and regional communities and to establish distinctive occupational identities. While practices such as the yearly or monthly 'bonding', which had the effect of keeping the workforce geographically mobile (generally on a regional level), fell into decline. Finally it was in the 30 year period after 1850 that mining Trade Unions began slowly to re-establish themselves, on a more solid foundation, after the defeat and collapse of earlier combinations.[16]

The early miner-autobiographers' were largely Durham and Northumberland pitmen who were born before and had lived through the processes of change described above. Almost all of them were either noted Methodist lay preachers or union activists or both. They were the children of a generation of mine workers who had first grasped the torch of formal knowledge as an aid in the struggle to ameliorate their condition. In its glow they had seen themselves, and their position in society, a little more clearly. Rationality was their key word and through the conduit of their leadership they endeavoured to build rational organizations and to find and promote rational explanations for their condition. The new mentality was thus 'educationalist' and through the limited channels of communication which were available to them; the broadsheet, the newspaper, the union gathering and the prayer meeting, they attempted not only to promote 'philosophic' forms of 'useful knowledge' - labour value theory and the rights of man, but to stimulate an interest in self-education and those associated analytical faculties.[17]

The political and educational schemes of these early literary pioneers' were to come crashing down with the collapse of their unions and the appropriation of their system of popular education by the colliery and National school system (as Robert Colls has shown the treatises of Hodgskin and Pain being replaced by "object lessons" On Autumn and A Tree, and morality lessons on "carelessness and industry").[18] But their politico-literary inheritance was passed on to their children, and political and religious activists such as Thomas Burt, John Wilson, Edward Rymer, Timothy Mountjoy and George Parkinson were to use it by describing themselves, their past and their society in the autobiographical form.

The early life-historians were often quite open in stating their autobiographical "objectives". Frequently urged on by their friends and colleagues, they were intent on publically exhibiting their experience in order to advise, inspire and educate their fellows and any one else who was prepared to listen. In this endeavour there were of course dangers to be

guarded against. "The autobiographer is almost perforce an egotist", noted Burt, p.20, "there is in us all a desire to show ourselves off as well as we can", warned Wilson, p.18. But then if the "personal element" could be kept in "moderate bounds" and the writer could "deliver a round unvarnished tale of life" (Wilson, p.19) then the autobiographical form could properly be used as yet another way of serving the collier and his interests. Consider the opening passages of autobiographies penned by three Durham miners who were born before 1850 (Burt, Wilson and Rymer) for evidence of autobiographical intent.

> More than once it has been suggested to me that the history of my own life might be useful, and not without interest to others. Especially has it occurred to me that boy pit life in the first half of the nineteenth century, depicted from within, may interest the miners of today; that my long and close connection with the Trade Union movement may enable me to say something helpful to those who are grappling with present day labour problems and that my striving to acquire knowledge and self-discipline under extreme difficulties may encourage youths of the working class, with better opportunities than mine, to put forth their utmost efforts in the same direction. These considerations, rather than anything of a more strictly personal nature have determined me, not without hesitation, to write the following pages.
>
> (Burt, p.20.)

> I have been often urged by friends to place on record an outline of my life. These kind people believe that some good influence might accrue from it, especially to our young men, who might learn how to appreciate the blessings of a good home, and kind parents anxious for their good; to be careful not to waste their early youthful days in evil ... and to inspire them with the thought that there are possibilities of usefulness within them if they will but use the opportunities which are lying around them, and which are amplifying every day ... In this reasoning lies my whole justification for placing on record this outline of what has been a life of struggle.
>
> (Wilson, p.17.)

> I have chosen the present year as a most fitting time in which to call the serious attention of miners to many of the vast and vital questions which have affected the life and labours of the whole of the mining population of this country during this century, and to point out many of the difficulties, struggles and dangers that have been met and overcome in the past 60 years, in order that the British miner should become a man and not a machine, and enjoy all the natural rights of free-born citizenship. I feel it to be my duty in relating the story of my life for 60 years to call attention to the horrible "Martyrdom of the Mine" that has shocked the nation and disgraced the annals of British History for hundreds of years.
>
> (Rymer, p.1.)

As these brief introductory passages suggest, underpinning the design of these books were three common and broadly distinct aims, all of which may be said to be linked to the processes of change noted above and which also can be said to be politically inspired. They were: to convey to the reader what could be achieved by the 'ignorant and brutal' (sic) working man by way of the power of knowledge, self discipline and union; to popularise the miners' history (generally on a local level) and thus to make comparisons possible with contemporary lived experience; to establish new definitions and representations of the miner and the mining community by exposing the 'day to day' life of the miner to the outside world by way of autobiographical analysis. In these senses the books do not strictly conform to the bourgeois or 'classical' definition of the autobiographical form with its insistence upon 'specific personality'. They are more a renegotiation of it, for they aim at collective and cultural representation as much as personal analysis and in this can be seen as being influenced by the collectivist mentality inherent in mining culture.[19]

Taking into account time-driven variations in literary style and, more crucially, shifting internal and exogenous perceptions of miners as an occupational and social group (which had the effect of heightening or diminishing one or another of these elements), this pattern of autobiographical design was to remain the dominant form until the end of our

period and these three autobiographical preoccupations were to inform what may be seen as the various categories of miners' autobiographies from the inspirational 'pitman to Parliament' type to the documentary 'a typical miner' form, as I show, generally according to the author's place in time, fame, status or state of political consciousness.

Inspiration

The desire to inspire fellow miners to 'improve themselves' was a cornerstone of this tripartite approach. The authors' lives were to stand as symbols of this process, although this was not necessarily as 'successful self improver' but also as 'victims'. The difference is typically related to the era in which the larger part of adult life was lived.

For those who had lived through, or were the product of, the second part of the 19th century, that great era of activity and progress, anything seemed possible.[20] Their lives represented that possibility. They were living models of what could be done. They had lived through an industrial as well as a cultural revolution and had been born again in the ideology of hard work and self discipline. They firmly believed self help, in the form of a combination of collective and intellectual agency, to be the great flywheel of personal, sectional, class and indeed national advancement.[21]

Burt, Wilson and Rymer are representative of such autobiographers. Their calls to union, but more importantly their insistance upon the pursuit of knowledge and self discipline, as agents of some kind of gradual linear advancement betray their experience and their cultural origins. For ease of identification I shall refer to this group of autobiographers as the 'Victorian optimists'. Their work is complemented by a second tier of autobiographers - men such as Robert Smillie (b.1857), Chester Armstrong (b.1868), Jack Lawson (b.1882) and Frank Hodges (b.1887) who, in their early lives were influenced by the same ideological and cultural forces but who, in the prime of

their lives, had witnessed the growth of socialism and the mass labour movement, and whose 'Victorian' belief in 'progress' had been tempered, but not it seems absolutely destroyed, by the cataclysmic impact of the First World War. This group I shall refer to as 'Transitionalists', because their accounts manifest influences drawn from two distinct ideologies - Victorian liberalism and Edwardian socialism. Despite these differences, it is appropriate to consider these groups together, for as I show, in the generality of their approach the Transitionalists reflected the optimism of the Victorians and like them aimed their work primarily at their class peers.

Members of these groups had enjoyed little formal education. George Parkinson pointed out that in his youth (1840's) "the provision for education was of the scantest amount, and of a very inferior kind." (Parkinson, p.65.) Often, like Rymer, the early autobiographers' experienced a "short spell" in Dame School before the pressures of familial poverty had driven them to work (Rymer, p.3, Dunn, p.6, Horler, p.2), in Smillie's case, before he had got "little beyond the alphabet." (Smillie, p.4.) Thus as a result of scanty educational provision, economic restraint and in a number of cases, a youthful ambivalence to formal learning, described by the puritanical Wilson as "Neglect in youth and early manhood" (Wilson, p.17) they came to serious book learning relatively late in life. Yet study was to be the key to their lives, for it was to change and absorb them.

> Few men probably owe less to living teachers, and few certainly owe more to books, than I. [noted Burt] My school days added together would barely total two years. I would be about seventeen when I realized how utterly ignorant I was and when I was seized with an eager desire for knowledge and improvement. For the next four or five years I read and studied with intense earnestness.
>
> (Burt, p.113.)

Once begun, their autodidactism directed and drove them; it became compulsive;

> Didn't I follow the literary trail once I found it [noted Lawson] like a Fenimore Cooper Indian, I was tireless and silent once I started.
>
> (Lawson, p.47.)

And it was in this rolē as 'ordinary' but educated men that they wished to inspire and encourage their fellows.

They did this by retracing their intellectual development. The tool of literacy and the power of knowledge was thus promoted by being squarely located in an unfolding picture of personal and sectional struggle and advancement. Edward Rymer recalled that his remarkable and truly prodigous career as a trade union activist and political correspondent began as a result of his acquaintance with a Durham Union radical, "one of the leaders of 44", and a primitive Methodist lay preacher. In the passage, produced below, Rymer discusses the relations between political consciousness and the diffusion of knowledge by way of the written word:

> I made the acquaintance of many of the best people at Thursley, including Bill Norman one of the leaders in the strike of 44 and William Beeney the noted schoolmaster and P.M. local preacher. From both of these men I received many valuable lessons and much advice. Norman put me in the way of writing the first letter I ever sent to the press, and recommended me to a few good books, which I needed in my after struggle ... The 'Miner's Advocate' published by W. Whitehorn, London appeared about this time. The tremendous articles by John Towers opened mens' eyes to see the grave error of non-unionism. A flood of correspondence set in from all the mining districts and soon the spirit of combination was manifested. I put my whole soul into the struggle. This awakening brought all the best at Thursley to the front eager to form a union of miners.
>
> (Rymer, p.8-9.)

In this anecdote Rymer's promotion of the written word, as the key factor in a process of personal and sectional transformation, typifies one of the ways in which the idea of progress through literacy and knowledge was 'sold' by the optimistic school of autobiographers to their readership.

Such autobiographical anecdotes, based on the idea of "awakening" or the "opening of eyes" and often inflected with Biblical language - "the spirit of combinations was manifest" was, it seems, particularly appropriate and effective as it interacted with the evangelical tradition of revival and conversion which had deep cultural roots in the 19th and early 20th Century mining communities.

Once stimulated by, or awakened to, the 'power of knowledge', the writers hoped that the readership would be inspired to embark upon an unending educational journey of discovery and progress similar to that undertaken by the autobiographers themselves. "Rest not in the darkness - a clod" quoted Cocking (Cocking, p.17), in an attempt to inspire his peers to action. But the autobiographers were not naive, they were acutely aware of the difficulties which faced the autodidact. How can a working man study? What should the aspirant autodidact read? Where does one begin? Consequently a number of the autobiographers used their own experiences not only to reassure the readership that the severest practical problems of study; absence of a quiet place to read, lack of time and money, intellectual isolation, could be overcome by the dedicated student ("study is a hammering process" noted Cocking, p.153) but to advise the nascent autodidact in matters educational.[22]

The pitman-intellectual, Chester Armstrong for example, included in his life history a remarkable study guide. For reasons of space only fragments of this chapter can be reproduced. Nevertheless I believe they catch the general quality of Armstrong's tutorage. After noting his pedagogical qualifications, half a century in the "companionship of books", he went on:

> If they do not teach us the greatest of all arts, to think freely for ourselves, they may easily become an encumberance. Book culture is distinctly a matter of mutuality. This being so it is necessary that we should consult the best thought of the ages if we are to cultivate our own standards of judgement and to subject these standards to constant re-examination in

the light of new material in knowledge and ideas.

(p. 261.)

However substantial are the advantages gained in a haphazard choice of books, there is a much greater utility attached to some system and order in reading. Here rests the distinction between reader and the student of books.

(p. 267.)

It is the relation of facts that matters in culture, and to cultivate the aptitude of sensing the necessary relations of knowledge is the condition of forming a real companionship with books. No hard and fast rule can be applied in this respect, it all depends on the quality possessed by the reader. It is possible so to absorb the particular that it will afford many avenues to the general. If a knowledge of the general does not bring us to the significance of the particular, it is in vain. It has been said 'never begin with the horizon, or you will stare at random and see nothing'. This is good advice to those who have met those companions in books that are especially illuminating and have so acquired a due sense of values.

(p. 271.)

Towards the end of this chapter Armstrong claimed that it would be "folly" for him to attempt to "prescribe" reading matter for his readers, claiming, "this is best effected or discovered by the person concerned". Yet in common with a number of other autobiographers he critiqued much of what he had read, seemingly for the benefit of his readers. In some cases, including Armstrong's, complete chapters with titles such as 'Extended Reading', 'Food for the Idealist' and 'Harmony' were dedicated to this purpose (Armstrong, Burt, Cocking). Indeed, the range of world literature which is quoted from, commented on or evaluated in these books, considered in the light of the educational opportunities open to their authors, is simply staggering. Burt, for example, mentions the work, among others, of Bunyan, Milton, Gibbons, Cowper, Homboldt, Longfellow, Pope, Wordsworth, Twain, Shakespeare, Carlysle, Tennyson, Dickens, Thackeray, Elliot, Holyoak, Pain and Ruskin!

Perhaps not surprisingly, in many cases the work of philosophers and political economists such as Holyoak, Pain and Ruskin attracted greater analytical attention than that of the novelists and poets, as the ideas of these theorists provided a rational justification for class advancement. In this sense the power of knowledge could be shown to have the potential to provide material benefits for the readership. In the passage below we find the problem of the 'iron law of wages' being discussed by Burt in the light of Ruskin's work.

> In newspaper articles of the period - the early sixties - trade unionists were often assailed on the grounds that their ideas were fundamentally inconsistent with the teaching of political economy ... It was laid down as an axiom - almost self evident and wholly incontestable - that wages were absolutely fixed by the laws of demand and supply ... [but] ... Ruskin knew better than to call in question demand and supply as a governing element in determining wages; but he showed that there were other factors which, when dealing with human labour, must be taken into account, and which the political economist or his journalistic exponent too often ignored. Morality, justice, emotion, the temper - in a word, the soul of the worker came into effective play as well as the laws of supply and demand.
>
> (Burt, pp.145-146.)

In discussions of political economy such as that produced above, as in their often ostentatious displays of literary knowledge, the optimistic school of miner autobiographers reflected what they saw as the foundation of their and their class' progress. If display or ego at times got the better of them it was only because of their conviction that what they had become was linked, by the umbilical cord of knowledge, to what their class could be. They whole heartedly believed that the 'intelligent', 'informed' and therefore 'reasonable' pitman would be, or would have to be, trusted and listened to by industrial capital[23] - accepted as thinking and feeling men rather than exploited as "machines". Thus they hoped not for greater conflict but for greater collaboration in what they saw as the 'common

interest' of employer and worker. For them, partnership was the end of progress.[24]

The pitmen-autobiographers who followed the Victorians and their (ideological) fellow travellers the Transitionalists did not in general share their 'word view'.[25] This was because since their early youth they had been caught up in the powerful currents of pre-war socialism (precipitated in part by the emergence of a more nakedly exploitative 'corporate' capitalistic trend) and because the credibility of Victorian notions of 'linear progress' came to an abrupt, indeed cataclysmic end in June 1914.[26] It is not my intention here to analyse the re-emergence of English socialism in the period 1880-1914 or to trace the relations between war and socialism in any detail, but to chart how the idea of socialism and the event of war mutated autobiographical perception in accounts written by authors who experienced these phenomena in youth or early manhood and to show how it caused, in their work, a shift in approach and emphasis in relation to the three seminal autobiographical preoccupations found in the pitman's life-history.

The major re-orientations found in these accounts turn on the way autobiographers understood their relationship to their employer's and consequently the way they perceived themselves and their interest. Here lies the sea-change in opinion for optimistic ideas of collaboration and common interest give way, in all but two cases, to essentially conflictual positions based along class lines. But while this shift in consciousness is general, the form of its expression is by no means even. There exists a difference in the authors' literary response which relates to the period of time when the texts were written and published. Consequently the writers of these accounts fall into two distinct groups which I shall refer to as 'political documentaryists' and 'modern optimists'.

The 'political documentaryists' were writing in the 1920's and 30's. Their work reflects the era of its execution and is split on ideological grounds. Such books were written as

much to inspire and influence a presumed middle class readership as the miners and thus break with the earlier tradition. The authors were keen to present themselves as 'typical miner' rather than 'intellectual and miner', a shift which registers changing perceptions of what a miner could be and which signals an important movement in the inspirational objectives of these books. For the idea of group and self improvement or 'progress through knowledge' is almost entirely abandoned and gives way to ideologically orientated 'explanations' and images of the miner "as he really is".

What the miner "was", though they often denied it, depended upon the political convictions of the autobiographers and their middle class patrons. As I subsequently show, for the communists or left wing sympathisers - Coombes, Dattler and Parfitt, he was 'degraded victim', for the 'Tory' documentaryists - Tomlinson and Dallinson, 'loyal retainer'. But here I wished only to demonstate the change in the way these authors appealed to their audience.

The preface of Roger Dataller's account From a Pitman's Notebook typifies the shift to the documentary approach.

> This work, [he informs his readership], is not a scientific treatise on the art of coal mining ... [it is] ... if anything - a human plea resolved mainly by a life long acquaintance with the mining community, and an active participation in the working of a Yorkshire colliery.
>
> (Dataller, Preface.)

It was a plea made by revolutionary and reactionary alike. A plea based upon the idea of exposing the 'truth' of a 'typical' miner's everyday experience by autobiographical means in order to influence a middle class audience. It was thus a struggle to frame and capture 'reality'.

> My idea of writing this [account] in the first place was to enlighten the non-mining areas of the conditions under which the miners work

noted one of the communists (Parfitt, p.50.)

> The place to learn the truth about the mining industry is where the sick and crippled miners struggle along the rough roadways in the hope of finding a little coal to warm their bodies, and where the haggard mothers watch their children go to school and hope they will grow quick, but not get very hungary.

snapped another, having taken his readership to such a place. (Coombes, 1939, p.135.)

> I have not written with the intention of converting anyone to my way of thinking. I have simply tried to tell the story of one miner's life without bias or prejudice and if by doing so I have helped anyone to understand that section of the community to which I am proud to belong, then I shall be more than happy

commented a 'Tory'. (Tomlinson, p.239.)

> Ah've done a bit o' what ah set out to do - to show yer that fellers who can write only tells yer the hard and miserable bits about mining life.

concluded an ideological sympathiser. (Dallinson, p.320.)

Thus the advocates of the two realities entered their pleas in the court of public opinion, unlike their predecessors, searching for an external response to an internal problem. It was a sign of the times, for the ideas and traumas of the post war era had shattered many of the self confidently gradualist notions of the old world and thus placed reality in flux.

Yet in a number of ways the work of the documentaryists may be seen as a kind of interregnum in the nature of the miners' autobiography. For later miners were to take an approach more akin to the Victorians. While the notion of 'common interest' was never to return (a concept which lost all credibility in the aftermath of the Sankey Report)[27] the idea of class advancement by sectional agency was. And this led writers once again to attempt to inspire their peers and thus

to address their texts primarily to a working class audience and particularly to the young Trade Union activist, a figure who replaces the autodidact or 'pitman intellectual' as the symbol of progress. Here we find Abe Moffit introducing his life history, a work published in 1965.

> When I decided to write this book it was not my intention to write solely about myself. I have tried to relate my experiences with the miners and my work in the Trade Union and Labour Movement in such a way that it could be of some value to young Trade Unionists. I hope it will assist them to maintain and develop a strong Trade Union movement and that working class unity which, in my opinion, is the real key to victory in the struggles that lie ahead. If it achieves this purpose I shall be well rewarded.
> (Moffit, Preface.)

Other, albeit renegotiated, similarities between the work of the Moderns and the Victorians are apparent, such as the claim that the function or object of the text is 'use' - inspirational and practical, rather than gratuitous self congratulation, as the extract above demonstrates. Further, the autobiographical persona of the Moderns was generally that of 'Labour leader' and like the early writers, their accounts frequently chart their progress through the ranks of the Trade Union movement, the problems they faced as officials, and in a number of cases, their careers as Parliamentarians. Moreover, if <u>like</u> many of the Document-aryists, the Moderns had lived through the Great War (as children) and experienced the ideological tumult of the middle 1920's and 30's in their formative years, <u>unlike</u> them they wrote and published their accounts late in life and in an era when the power of organized labour had reached its peak - 1950's, 60's and 70's. This factor goes some way to explaining why accounts drawn from this group share the tone of optimism found in Victorian texts. However, it is a guarded optimism based upon a sense of recovery rather than destiny. For while, as they are at pains to show, substantial progress had been made on both industrial and political fronts, perhaps most clearly symbolised by the nationalisation of the mining industry,

the authors were keenly aware of the fact that capitalism had shown itself to be stubbornly durable and thus in many ways remained potentially dangerous to the pitman's interest. This is a phenomenon which it seems goaded the writers to evoke in the minds of their readers a sense of place and past.

> As I look back on the struggles that have been waged in my life time,

wrote veteran miners' leader, Arthur Horner

> I am certain of one thing; we can never go back. The forces which created the poverty, the desolation in the mining areas are still operating, but the miners have learned the lessons of the struggle, and they will never surrender the gains they have made. [sic]
>
> (Horner, p.227.)

In concluding his life-history Will Paynter widened this point by linking the purely sectional interest to the general and in doing so located with the fear and uncertainty inherent in a generation which had lived, and were living, through the most destructive, unstable and dangerous period (of time) in the history of modern Europe. He writes:

> We are living in a world of contradictions and contrasts. On the one side, miracles of scientific achievement; the discovery of new sources of energy and heat open before us new vistas of limitless progress and development toward human security and happiness, a million times more revolutionary than the discovery of fire was for primitive society. The release of human labour by automatic mechanical processes could offer men, with the prospect of more leisure, the opportunity to pursue higher forms of culture with the concept of a better life. But, although men can now scale the highest peaks and the poles of the earth and can travel into outerspace, we are living in a period when either a new species of man will evolve or where men and life on earth will be competely destroyed because, on the other side of the picture instead of increased security and

> happiness, we face increased redundancy and the spectre of unemployment; cuts in real wages and social services and of increased rents. In short, we face the prospect of greater poverty, instead of increased leisure for those who toil the prospect of harder work and more exploitation. The conquest of nature instead of creating greater freedom for man, enforces new enslavement where personal freedom for individuals and families is walled in by a secret terror masquerading as 'security' instead of offering a future of limitless progress, the new discoveries of heat and energy threaten civilization with universal disease and death.
>
> (Paynter, pp.171-172.)

Thus the twin spectres of persistant sectional vulnerability and global destruction temper the tone of general optimism found in these texts, but nevertheless the atmosphere of inertia which is the mark of the documentaryists is kept at bay. Taylor captures the 'modern' mood and its inspirational dynamic almost perfectly when he writes:

> Although not everything has turned out as we had hoped, we console ourselves with the thought that things are better now for the coal miners and the prospect better for our grandchildren, and in spite of the fears that haunt the world and the wars that still plague mankind our faith and our hope remain ...
>
> (Taylor, p.196.)

In common with all of the Moderns, Taylor's inspirational axis, his sense of 'hope and faith' was born of a tradition created in part by the autobiographers who preceeded him. It was the process of analysing, formally defining and communicating in writing the miners' position in society in order to provoke him and the general public to understand it and act to improve it. It was thus a tradition of formal self and group analysis which implied history and consequently it was articulated through it.

The Past

It was Dr. F. Zweig, in a much acclaimed work of 1947 who suggested that a "sort of mass psycho-analysis" was required

in order to release the "hidden forces" of the past from the miner's mind. For, as the learned professor explained, the miners' sense of their own history was a "stumbling block" in "dealing with them".[28] This latter view seems to have been shared by the pitmen-autobiographers, for by way of their life accounts they obsessively evoked or recorded what they knew or believed about the recent and distant history of the group.

That they should have done so is not surprising. Like every other member of an 'occupational community' their being and progress, their faith and hope, or lack of it, was inextricably bound up with the activities and the fortunes experienced by the industrial group to which they belonged and which had shaped them. As a consequence, their lives were only intelligible if viewed through the prism of the community's past.

For the early autobiographers, it was a past which had little or no formal record. Yet it was the key to their beliefs, hopes and indeed lives, for it 'demonstrated' that unity and knowledge begat progress. The Durham pitman, Methodist lay preacher and latterly Liberal Member of Parliament, John Wilson, was perhaps the most systematic historical contextualizer among the group. He begins his life history by pointing out that for him

> the most natural point to commence an autobiography is to describe the family whence the person sprang.
>
> (Wilson, p.22.)

After doing so, in characteristically understated but witty style,

> I can boast of no great [family] names ... except Adam and Noah ...

he moves on to dedicate a further chapter to "National conditions" at the time of his birth, arguing that it would not be "out of place" to do so because of the importance of the period "to families like ours". Wilson goes on:

> The period stands out prominently as being one of the most important in our history. It can with truth be described as transitional, a transition which presents a vastly different notion to this generation from that of 1837. The geographical construction of our country has altered very little by the encroachment and receding of the sea upon our coasts, but there have been many and marvellous changes in the condition of the life of the people. In every aspect is this change seen, and by way of describing the condition into which I was born, and indicating the progress made, I will outline a few of those changes.
>
> (Wilson, p.27.)

Such changes as Wilson "outlines" (sic) in this survey could easily serve as an agenda for a course in the study of labour history. Weighty topics such as 'the condition of the people 1800-1842', 'Franchise agitation and the Great Reform Bill' and 'Chartism' are covered. But it is the history of the coal miners' which occupies the greater part of Wilson's attention. Great stress is placed on the harrowing evidence given to, and the findings of, the Royal Commission into mines of 1842. Indeed an entire supplementary chapter is dedicated to this purpose. Throughout, Wilson is intent to point out that it was only through the struggles of the early Trade Union leaders and the "force of combination" that "progress", which he defined as the narrowing of "the gulf which separated the two sides of the industrial community", had been slowly but surely made. "That Egypt that was the past", he warns in his summing up, "must show brighter prospect before we retrace our steps toward it." (Wilson, p.43.)

While no other autobiographer from this group was quite as formally attentive to the historical co-ordinates of his being as Wilson, all in one way or another retraced important aspects of the miners' past and linked them to community and thus self advancement. By doing so they contributed to the establishment of a formal if often mythological historical tradition which found in different ways a resonance in the work of later writers who were also to use knowledge of the

miners' past as a 'resource'[29] in explaining their condition and being.

As the work of the political documentaryists shows, the miners' past, viewed from the promontory of the 20's and 30's, did not appear to be the 'Exodus' that the Victorian autobiographers had perceived. They were to represent it as a grey continuum - a reflection of the present, and in the context of social disorientation and sectional defeat, the future. Their work thus signals a movement away from the idea of the miner as agent of history to one of object of history. As a result of this shift in consciousness, the technique of comparing past with present in order to demonstate 'progress through action' gives way in general to a deeply pessimistic 'nothing has changed' mentality, based upon the evocation of a loosely defined and mythologised past symbolized by ongoing failure, degradation and slavery.

The Somerset miner, A.J. Parfitt, employed the emotive symbol of the 'Guss and Tugger' (a form of harness which was attached to women and children, generally in the period before 1840, to allow them to move coal tubs in underground workings) to suggest that the link between the pitman's past and his present was continuing ill use, by claiming that "kids", in the Somerset collieries, still "had to wear them upon their naked bodies." (Parfitt, p.47.) Even the Tory propagandists, whose work was designed to reassure an anxious middle class readership, failed to register any sense of sectional progress in their life-accounts. Tomlinson indeed, informed his readers that

> the miners were the most downtrodden and least understood of all the workers of Great Britain.
> (Tomlinson, p.90.)

It was a mood and an approach which reflected the ways in which the economic and social effects of the Great War and the Great Recession had asserted a deeply felt sense of impotency in the minds of the pitmen which in turn fuelled a process of re-evaluation of social place and future prospect.

As the Documentaryists were aware, the class based tensions of the 20's and 30's frequently had the British coal miner as their locus. Coal was Britain's primary industry and the post war debates over its future sparked off two of the most significant disputes in the entire history of British labour relations, the April 1921 miners' 'lock-out' and the related 9 day General Strike of May 1926.[30] Both conflicts were conducted as much along class as industrial lines. The defeat of both strikes, the collapse of the Triple Alliance in '21 and the miners' belief that they had been 'betrayed' by the General Council of the T.U.C. in 1926, created the sense of personal and sectional dislocation which the documentaryists were to articulate.

The Modern group of autobiographers were as much a product of this momentous complex of events as the Documentaryists and, like them, their sense of themselves and their sense of their relations to others found its genesis in the era. But they interpreted the turbulent 20's and 30's in their old age and in the light of later triumphs in which they, very often, had played a major rolé. They were thus acutely aware of themselves, not so much as pawns in, but makers of history.

Their work therefore marks a return to the practice of formally recording and analysing, within the autobiographical form, a generational experience, with the self as reference point. This approach was made explicit by Will Paynter in the introduction to his life account-My Generation.

> I am writing then, as a representative of my generation with a personal story to tell which may help to illustrate the problems faced, the actions undertaken and the results attained. In this context, my own development to a position of National leadership in the miners union is incidental to the story; what is more important is the progress made by the people as a whole towards a better and happier social existence. In this sense I became a self-appointed narrator of a period of history which I believed I helped in a small way to shape and which in the following pages is portrayed through my eyes and experiences.
>
> (Paynter, p.9.)

The question of "the problems faced, the actions undertaken and the results attained", while providing the substance of the majority of modern accounts, relates in every case to the impact that the 1921 and 1926 stoppages made on the mining areas. Indeed, the General Strike forms the most powerful reference point in the miners' understanding of their lives. Many had begun their Trade Union and political careers as a result of this instant of naked class antagonism and saw it, ~~in~~ like Paynter, as "baptism" or, like Moffit, as a moment of revelation "a great and magnificant experience". (Moffit, p.46.) Taylor sums up the general effect:

> The miners' stoppage of 1926 will be remembered by my generation while memory lasts. The struggle itself, and all the circumstances, made a deep and abiding impression. Today when you meet people who actively participated in the struggle, they will reminisce and say, although it was a long time go, 'I still remember'.
>
> (Taylor, p.38.)

No doubt as a result of the power of their impact on the consciousness of the miners, the events of 1926 form a symbolic dividing line in the author's comprehension of the miners' past. It is as if one phase of historical development was seen to have been 'ruled off' in the middle 20's and a new beginning made. This phenomenon accounts on the one hand for the hundreds of pages of autobiography which are dedicated by these authors to the description and analysis of (in the context of rich and varied lives) a relatively brief period of time, and on the other the scant attention which is given to industrial and political events which took place in their childhood and early youth.[31]

Thus the experience and consciousness of the mid twenties was to act for the Moderns as the rule against which later progress was to be measured. Consequently, with three or four notable exceptions (Hitchin, Bullock, Holme and Wooley) the authors were to use their texts, primarily to chart, often in tortuous detail, the part they had played in the post strike industrial and political struggles and negotiations,

struggles and negotiations which were to provide the basis for mining labour's remarkable post war recovery.

Taken together, these accounts of the 'great moments' of Trade Union and labour history since 1926 provide a rich and informative picture of the aspirations and strategies of the most powerful industrial combination of the pre-Thatcherite era. But this was not the primary purpose of the authors, for in common with their Victorian counterparts, these texts were written not so much for formal or scholarly use as to keep alive within mining communities lessons which had accrued from past experience and to engender, by the evocation of history, a sense of hope and pride in the minds of future activists. This point is perhaps best demonstrated by way of A. Horner's concluding comments, which could have been written by Thomas Burt or John Wilson.

> The struggles I have told about in this book, the record of sacrifice, or suffering and of victory will, I hope, serve as some inspiration to those who carry on with the battle, and will give them confidence that in their determination, and above all in their unity, lies the certainty that in the end they will win.
> (Horner, p.228.)

In evaluating the historical co-ordinates of their lives, the miner-autobiographers deliberately conjured up the 'hidden forces' of the past as a defence against the uncertainties of their present and their future and thereby contributed to the 'problems' faced by a system interested in the production of cheap coal. However, if post war professors of economics, such as Dr. Zweig, saw the miners' consciousness of their history as the major "stumbling block" to economic progress, they clearly underestimated the power of endogenously generated forms of self imagery and self representation.

Imagery and Self/Group Representation

> Mining people sank to the condition of animals so debased and tormented that they terrified other sorts of people.
> (Neil Ascherson 'The Observer', 26.3.89.)

> My novel tries in all sorts of ways to reoccupy negative images, to repossess perjorative language and to turn insults into strengths.
> (Salman Rushdie 'The Observer', 22.01.89.)

In a number of ways both of these statements have a relevance to the miners' autobiography. For the form has been persistently used in order to generate 'insider' images of mining, miners and the mining community as counters to 'outside' representations. The dominant form of endogenously generated autobiographical representations is nevertheless complex and often paradoxical, as it is used both to alarm and reassure audiences. The desire to re-orientate or demythologise perception of the pitmen, however, is central to this process of literary representation. Its purpose is thus to promote sectional interests.

The practice of at once alarming and reassuring the two readerships works in a number of ways and is further complicated by contextual imperatives. The Victorian autobiographers, for example, often used representations drawn from their childhood experience of life in the 1840's and 50's as a means of promoting and legitimising Trade Unions to the two audiences by pointing to the progress which had been made, in say a fifty year period of time. Here we find Thomas Burt concluding a long section in which he evokes images of "Trapper Boys" in the 1830's:

> Before I take final leave of my pit life as a boy, I say another word about the working hours. Cobbett, writing from the city of Durham in the year 1832 says: "Here is the most surprising thing - thousands of horses continually living underground; children born there and who sometimes, it is said, seldom see the surface at all, though they live to a considerable age." This statement is, of course, largely mythical, someone having grossly imposed upon the credulity of the sturdy Sussex yeoman. But, though children were not born in the mines - for there were no women there - and though they did not live underground continuously, the hours were exceedingly long. My own hours, as I have

> said, were on the average about thirteen a day from bank to bank. The hours were a matter of agreement between employers and workmen. By law there was no limit whatsoever to working hours, nor was such limit imposed until 1872. More than once I have myself, as a boy, in cases of emergency, stopped double shift, or twenty four hours at a stretch. The working time for pit boys is now seven a day from bank to bank.
>
> (Burt, p.109.)

While Burt's use of 'positive comparison' in order to demonstrate progress is of course clear in this passage, it will not have escaped the reader's attention that he is also intent to demythologise the past. This seemingly contradictory practice (in as much as it diminished the thrust of the 'bad old days' discourse) was in fact crucial to the author's political objectives. Authors felt it was necessary to counter popular 'outside' notions of the mining community as 'debased tribe' or 'society of savages' as they were extremely damaging to the interest of mining people because they worked, on the one hand, against the process of engendering a sense of dignity and pride within the communities (a process which was seen as a necessary adjunct to group progress); and on the other, coloured public opinion in Trade Union disputes and in contemporary debates concerning 'fitness' as it related to the extension of the franchise and Parliamentary representation by working men.

The problem of representing progress in the light of past hardship without implying debasement was further complicated by the autobiographer's desire to represent contemporary hardship. Although working and living conditions had improved, as the autobiographers frequently pointed out, they remained harsh and oppressive, and the authors were intent to enlist both internal and external support for reform. Thus within these texts we frequently find images of people facing a plethora of shocking and therefore potentially brutalizing social and industrial conditions, but presenting to the readership as 'respectable', 'moral' and perhaps most importantly 'intelligent' (a Victorian euphemism for moderation) in order to suggest, on the one hand, to the

external readership that these figures are 'wholesome' and 'trustworthy' and thus 'deserve' an improvement in their conditions, and on the other, to present to the internal audience an ennobling and inspirational model of self and community.

Such representations are rich and varied. The image of the stoic and proud pit village women is common, as is the austere and moral pitman preacher. But the 'heroic pitman' and the 'intelligent pitman' are the more frequently evoked images. Numerous examples of all of these representations appear throughout this research, thus for this reason and for reasons of space I include just one example to demonstrate this point. In the extract below we find George Cocking depicting the Victorian pitman.

> Deep down in the dark, dreary caverns of the mine, breathing a damp, close atmosphere, suffering from intense heat, drenched with pouring water, exposed to a thousand dangers, labouring from morn till night ... truly it can be said the miner has no enviable lot ... By some his calling has been considered low and degrading, and often he has been called "the dirty miner". This is both unfair and ungrateful. It is only right that his brave and arduous work should be generously recognised, and that he receive the sympathy of all men which he so worthily deserves. His is noble work, characterized by ingenuity and enterprise. No other calls for greater thought, effort and daring. The sinking of the shaft through the glistening granite, the tunneling through the heart of the solid earth, the blasting out of the huge galleries, can be accomplished only by the combined effort of science, philosophy and courage.
>
> (Cocking, p.43.)

With the exception of a small group of titles which I discuss later, the 'shock and reassure' style of self/group representation is manifested in every miner's autobiography which has been surveyed in this research. Difference is only apparent in the eras which are compared and the myths which are countered.

Comparative imagery almost always conforms to the endogenously defined sense of epoch which I have discussed. Thus the Transitionalists continued to conjure images drawn from the 1840's and 50's,despite the fact that they had no personal experience of the era. 'Modern' writers, however, although almost certainly aware of early Victorian working practices, nevertheless very rarely refer to them, preferring, without exception, to compare images of social conditions in the 1920's and 30's - "Empty bellies and worried faces" (Brown, p.98), to the relative prosperity of the post war world.

As I have suggested, comparative imagery in the miner's autobiography forms part of a larger pattern of self and group representation which is frequently intended to justify formal group practices such as trade unionism. Central to this process was the desire to represent the mining population as 'thinking', 'moral' and 'responsible', despite the fact that it faced considerable industrial and social hardship, in order to counter 'outside' accusations of 'baseness'. While such myths remained durable during the period of this study, their nature underwent change. During the first quarter of the twentieth century the eugenically informed notions of miner as 'inherently debased' gradually gave way to the idea of the miner as 'uncouth',[32] while more modern myths typically substituted brutishness for recalcitrance - 'wreckers'. In accordance with their position in history, autobiographers responded to particular shifts in the 'baseness' myth in appropriate ways. Jack Lawson, writing in the 1930's for example, was to challenge the accusation of cultural depravity:

> Some have written of characters in mining villages, unsavoury characters, as though that was the miner. Some have written of the sporting kind, as though that was the miner. These exceptions we have, just as other industries, professions and classes have them - but they are only exceptions, and rare ones too. Miners are clean, intelligent, orderly, home-loving men. Their depth of thought, expressed in simple language, sometimes backed

> by amazing reading, will challenge comparison with any class in Great Britain.
>
> (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.157.)

Joe Gormley, writing in the early 1980's, countered charges of national economic ruination as a result of the "inefficiency and restrictive practices" of the miners:

> Typical of some public thinking was a letter in The Times which declared; 'In the last decade the N.U.M. used its industrial muscle to push wages to a level where coal ceased to be priced competitively. As a result we were sucking in exports from Europe and elsewhere'. I'm afraid the lad who wrote that was typical of many in his sheer ignorance. The truth was - and here was the irony - we were actually producing the cheapest coal in Europe.
>
> (Gormley, p.174.)

While such responses are historically specific, it must be stressed that they nevertheless form part of a common representational framework found in the miners' autobiography which by the depiction of the miners' past and present, and the representation of the lives and the qualities of (contemporary) mining people, primarily seeks to promote the idea of 'nobility in hardship' in order to influence internal and external opinion. However, despite the continuity of this approach in the miners' autobiography, as I indicated earlier, a tiny group of writers stand outside of the tradition.

The 'Political Documentaryists' did not share, in a number of ways, the autobiographical objectives of their peers. Their work was intended primarily as a contribution to a wider ideological debate sparked by world crisis and articulated by political or politically affiliated organizations standing on opposite poles of the political divide. Writers were clearly influenced by the objectives of these organizations even if they did not, or did not claim to, belong to them.

Their life-accounts were presented to the public as 'empirical' studies of working class experience which would

demonstrate either the futility of capitalism or the bankruptcy of marxist 'literary propaganda'. To this end, writers adopted a contemporary stylistic vogue - Documentaryism, in order to give the impression of objectivity. The left wing writer, Roger Dataller, took the 'objective' perspective to the extreme in his almost cinematic representations of the mining village:

> The double arc of pulley wheels lifts into view. The wheels are turning silently; the strong steel rope that takes each rim seems little more than pack-thread strung through a Meccano toy, into the red brick playbox that is the Engine House.
>
> (Dataller, pp.13-14.)

However, the most common approach was to stess 'ordinaryness' and 'inside knowledge' and then represent aspects of day to day life in such a way as to support or undermine the contemporary political discourses of right or left. The 'Tory' autobiographer, Buck Dallinson for example, pointed out that he was inspired to write because the public had been misled and felt that,"everything associated with coal mining is hard, drab, dull and tragic", when in fact miners got,"as much fun out of life as anybody else". In order to 'prove' this point he enjoins his readers to,"come [with him] down the pit, into the pub and club, into the house and by all means into the chapel." (Dallinson, p.7.) As we can see in the extract below, the Trade Union activist and coal miner B.H. Coombes affects a similar approach, but implies a quite different political opinion. After informing his readers that he will 'take' them to a "hidden world",he goes on:

> Through it all I want you to remember that it is not a visiting journalist who is writing ... but a miner, or miner-writer, if you like, who knows the life backwards and is content to stay working with his mates. In some of these mates I have found natures of pure gold, yet I know well that the faults of humanity are present in them all to a greater or lesser degree. I have learnt, too, that managements

> who face us across the disputes table are sometimes composed of humane men, who try to be as generous as the system under which they work will allow.
>
> (Coombes, 1944, p.3.)

The Documentaryists' reportage of the "hidden world" predictably revealed on the one hand an impoverished and demoralised mass of 'victimised' miners and on the other a race of jovial English patriots','making the best of it'. Here we find Thomlinson calming middle class nerves by connecting the qualities of 'Englishness' to the British collier:

> The coal fields abound in interesting characters. During my life I have known many. Grave, gay, clever, stupid, but all without exception showing unmistakably their English origin - sometimes in a way that hurts the beholder. The Englishman's ability to poke fun out of his own mistakes and misfortunes has for many years been a fascinating thing to me. Miners have that ability to an astonishing degree.
>
> (Thomlinson, p.129.)

In contrast, Coombes presents to his readership a very different image of a coal field character 'putting up with it':

> A man came to see me today. He moved in a slow stagger and he spoke, but his speech was indistinct and he paused after every word that he gasped out so that he could gain energy and breath. His face was grey and the skin was so tightly stretched that every bone in his face forced a ridge. It seemed that someone had decided that it was not decent to allow a skeleton to wander about and so had covered the bones, but had been compelled to stint that covering ... Of course he wasn't dead, not quite, because there is usually a sort of resigned happiness about the expression of the dead if they have been poor, and the expression on the features of this shadow of a man was that of one who is tortured - so he was surely alive, very ill, very poor.
>
> (Coombes, Feb., 1939, p.67.)

Both of these views of mining life lacked the complexity, and, in a sense, the honesty, of the dominant pattern of representation, despite the fact that they manifested certain elements of it. For, during the 1920's and 30's, working class experience became more than ever an ideological football and the sense of endogenous pride and progress which underpins the 'nobility in hardship' syndrome momentarily lost its meaning "The modern young people of today seem to me to be floundering about amid a welter of ideas about none of which they can be certain", noted the Tory Thomlinson, without the slightest hint of self irony (Thomlinson, p.238), thus was the temper of the times.

Summary

> Perhaps at this point I should pause and recognize that to many, reading this, it may seem that the story of my life has become the story of the Union.
>
> (Gormley, p.153.)

One would have to search very hard indeed to find a miner's autobiography that in one way or another did not deal with Union and politics. Indeed it would be easy, if simple minded, to see the canon of miners' life accounts as inherently propagandist and thus, autobiographically spurious. But we should not be surprised to find that, in various ways, mining people have used their autobiographies to advise and represent their society and what they saw (at various points in history) as its best interests rather than themselves, for the occupational and social relations of the mining community and its cultural products reflect the nature and transparency of its productive relations. It is, in other words, the very experience of a mining life which suggests and promotes informal and formal notions of 'togetherness'. Such ideas in turn condition the way the self is understood and the way the world is 'seen' and responded to. In the following chapter I examine the social institution which lay at the centre of the webb of social unities, of which politics and trade unionism are only two, for in the mining community solidarity rather than charity began at home.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOTES

1. E.P. Thomspon, The Making of the English Working Class, (1963; 1982), preface p.8-9.

2. For general analysis of the early coalfield unions see H. Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, (1963; 1971), pp.44-46. S. and B. Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, 1666-1920, (1919), p.4 and pp.299-307. R. Challinor and B. Ripley, The Miners' Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists, (1968). K. Burgess, The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experiment, (1975), p.172. For analysis of early regional unions see R. Fynes (Sunderland 1873; 1971) The Miners of Northumberland and Durham: A History of their Social and Political Progress. J. Wilson, History of the Durham Miners Association, (Durham, 1907). R. Colls, The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest, 1790-1850, (Manchester, 1987), esp. Part 3. J.E. Williams, The Derbyshire Miners: A Study in Industrial and Social History, (1962). F. Machin, The Yorkshire Miners: A History, Vol.1, (Barnsley, 1958).

3. My understanding of the concept of culture and the working of the cultural process are largely based upon the work of Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson, see in particular, R. Williams, Culture and Society, (1958; New York, 1966), esp. introduction and part III, Ch.5. R. Williams, Marxism and Literature, (Oxford, 1977), Chp.8. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (1963, p.182), esp. preface pp.8-13.
For a more detailed analysis of my position on culture and my methodological approach see introduction.
For a critique of this kind of approach see S. Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms", Media, Culture and Society, (1980), Vol.2, No.1, pp.57-72.

4. See above esp. Williams, op. cit., (1977).

5. I am not aware of the existence of any detailed study of the relations between literacy and early popular movements. However, histories of the early Trade Unions, co-operative societies and early working-class reform movements, from the corresponding societies to Chartism, indicate the importance of reading and writing to the effacacy of their organisation and social impact. See for example R.D. Altick, The English Comman Reader, (Chicago, 1957; 1967), pp.69-77 for a discussion of the relations between reading and popular politics in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. See J.T. Ward, Chartism, (1973), passim, for an insight into the impact made by the 'Northern Star' and other Chartist Newspapers on the development of the movement. See R. Challinor and B. Ripley, op. cit., passim, for the rolé of newspapers, particularly the 'Pitman's Advocate', in this Organization. See also M. Vicinus, The Industrial Muse (1974), Ch.2, for a study of Literature as propaganda in the early miners' Unions.

6. See H.F. Mathews, Methodism and the Education of the People; 1791-171, (1949), for analysis of Methodism's place in early 19th century working class education.

7. A useful survey of the cult of 'Useful Knowledge' see D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, (1981), Chp.7. For secularism see E. Royle, The Infidel Tradition from Paine to Bradlaugh, (1976), and E. Royle, Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866-1915, esp. pp.64-68.

8. See Chapter 3.

9. For example, during the 1850's in the Northumberland village of Seaton Delaval, Burt noted that the 'active' cadre of pitmen intellectuals met in the home of George Gleghorn in order to discuss issues drawn from their reading, among the group were "many of the young local preachers and other Methodists, occasonally with a sprinkling of heretics, secularists, free-thinkers, and

followers of G.J. Holyoak" (Burt, 124). Moreover, Burt's workmate, intellectual mentor and close friend Joseph Fairbairn, "a staunch teetotaller, a keen Radical politician, and an ardent trade unionist" (Burt; p.147) was, "to the end of his life a warm admirer and a faithful follower of Charles Bradlaugh." (Burt, p.148).

10. See Vincent, op. cit., Ch.2.

11. Augustine's Confessions (c.400) is often taken to be a significant marker in the development of the genre, see R. Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography, (Cambridge, 1960), Ch.2 and 3 for a short history of the form.

12. Ibid.

13. These were often inspired by the autobiographical writing of John Bunyan, see Pascal, op. cit., Ch.II, pp.33-34, and Vincent, op. cit., Ch.2, esp. pp.15-19.

14. Only three accounts have been located which were penned in the first half of the 19th century, these are the autobiographies of David Love, Anthony Errington and William Huntington. Love and Huntingdon spent only a short period of their lives in the pits, the former joined the Army and the latter became a full-time Clergyman. Errington, a waggen way constructor, appears to have remained in the collieries, certainly up to the time of writing his account, however, in common with Huntington and Love, but unlike later writers, he has little to say about the pit or its occupational culture.

15. For these and other statistics and a useful survey of the development of the British coalfield in this period see J. Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History, (Dublin, 1980), Ch.1.

16. See S. & B. Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, 1666-1920, (Private Publication by the Webbs for the Students of the Workers Educational Association 1920), Ch.4, esp. pp. 299-307. See note 2 for studies of individual associations.

17. See Vicinus, op. cit., pp.71-88, for an analysis of the relations between the diffusion of knowledge in the coalfields and the Miners Association 1842-4. See R. Colls, '"O Happy English Children!". Coal, Class and Education in the North East', Past and Present, (1976), No.73, pp.75-99, for an analysis of education in the 19th century Durham Coalfield. See also K. Wilson, "Chartism and the North East Miners: A Reappraisal", pp.89-91 in R. Sturgess, (ed.), Pitmen, Viewers and Coalmasters: Essays in North East Coalmining in The Nineteenth Century, (Newcastle, 1986).

18. Colls, op. cit., (1976), p.97.

19. See Chapter 1, pp.21-23 for a discussion of the 'collective autobiography'.

20. Much has been written on 'victorian optimism', for a recent and learned analysis see E.J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Empire, (1987), passim.

21. The early autobiographers work is a testamony to the impact that this form of Victorian bourgeois ideology had upon some sections of the English working class. See for example (Rymer, p.19-21) (Cocking, Preface) (Wilson, pp.310-320).

22. In various ways almost all of the autodidacts discuss the problems faced by the worker-student. Beside Armstrong's account which is discussed in some detail see (Parkinson, Ch.VII), (Lawson, pp.49-51) and (Burt, Ch.9, esp. p.121) for example.

23. The logic of this argument exploited the central contradiction in 19th century bourgeois political ideology which was that an insistance upon the political representation of the people could not be sustained if the 'people' were largely disenfranchised. See E.J. Hobsbaum, op. cit., Ch.4, for a superb discussion of this point.

24. See C.L. Jones, Industrial Relations in the Northumberland and Durham Coal Industry 1825-1845, (1985), (Unpublished Sunderland Polytechnic Ph.D. Thesis), for an important study of the evolution and nature of the 'Non Conflict Model' of Industrial relations acted upon by the leadership of the Northumberland and Durham Miners during the 19th century.

25. For a discussion of the notion of 'World View', by which is implied the view of "particular social groups whose consciousness, feelings and behaviour are taken up with some wholesale reconstitution of all kinds of relationships between men and relationships between men an nature, or else with maintaining the existing social structure in its entirety", see Lucien Goldmann, "'Genetic Structuralism' in the Sociology of Literature", in E. and T. Burns, Sociology of Literature and Drama, (1973), pp.109-123.

26. There is a vast array of analysis dealing with the socialist revival of the 1880's and 90's, for a well researched and scholarly example see H. Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, (Oxford, 1966; 1983), esp. Chs.1 and 2. For a local study of the relations between economic and political change in the Northumberland coalfield during the era see B. Williamson, Class, Culture and Community: A Biographical Study of Social Change in Mining, (1982), Introduction, Chs.1, 2, 4, 5 and 9. For a general analysis of the impact of the First World War on political thinking see E.J. Hobsbaum, op. cit., passim.

27. The failure of the post war Government to implement the recommendations of Lord Sanky, Chairman of the Coal Industry Commission 1919-1920, (a body set up by Lloyd George to investigate hours, wages and the ownership and control of the industry) angered the miners and played a substantial part in creating the preconditions for much of the industrial conflict in the coalfields in the years between the two World Wars. For a brief but learned account of the commission and its work see C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940, (1955), pp.30-36. For an 'inside view' see (Smillie, Ch.XXIV) and (Hodges, Ch.XI and XII) who with Herbert Smith sat on the commission for the miners.

28. F. Zweig, Men in the Pits, (1949), p.12.

29. By which is implied an often mythologised and "selective construction of the past which resonates with contemporary influences ... a charter for contemporary action whose legitimacy derives from its very association with the cultural past". See A.P. Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community, (Chichester, 1985), pp.98-104.

30. For a learned account of these events see C.L. Mowat, op. cit., Ch.6. For a more detailed study of the General Strike see inter alia, G.A. Phillips, The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict, (1976). For an 'inside view' of the events surrounding 'Black Friday' 1921 see (Hodges, Ch.XVII).

31. For example the rise of Syndicalism or Industrial Unionism and the associated strike wave of 1911-12 (which included the first National Strike by pitmen) is a clearly significant moment in the miners' history (I cannot recall ever having a reference to 'The Miners' Next Step' in a 'modern autobiography') but is rarely analysed in any depth. For an overview of syndicalist Movement and the miners part in it see inter alia, H. Pelling, op. cit., Ch.7. G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate,

The Common People 1746-1946, (1938, 1971 University Paperback), Ch. 39. S. and B. Webb, op. cit. pp.654-9. R. Gregory, Miners in British Politics 1906-1914, (Oxford, 1968). R. Holton, British Syndicalism, (1976).

32. For evidence and analysis of some early stereotypes see K. Wilson, op. cit., p.82. and, A.V. John, By The Sweat of their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines, (1980), p.26.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MINING FAMILY: WORK, GENDER RELATIONS AND DOMESTICITY

> One day we found our father reading a book called the Octopus. He explained, when we pestered him, what octopus meant. We promptly decided that the pit was an octopus. It's arms stretching in all directions. It sucked in everything around it.
>
> (Jenny Lee, p.32.)

In the history of British industrialization, nowhere is the relationship between work and culture quite so clearly visible than in the mining communities of Victorian and Edwardian England. Here, to borrow the symbolism adopted by Jenny Lee, was a people bound lightly together in the tentacles of a fearful but charismatic beast - the pit.

The place and meanings of the family in mining culture is testimony to the dialectical relationship which existed between the industrial and social worlds of the colliery settlement. This is not to imply that the mechanisms and meanings of family life were merely crude articulations of the economic forces which supported it, on the contrary, the mining family acted as the negotiator of both the economic and ideological forces which bore down upon it and as a consequence was both responsive and resistant to external pressures. The evolution and nature of family life in the mining districts thus exhibited that autonomy and multi-facedness that Raymond Williams has attributed to all cultural production.[1]

The mining family became increasingly central to the effective functioning of the coal mining industry during the second half of the 19th century as mining activity rapidly expanded in response to the almost continual growth of the British economy. This was not only because the family was the principal supplier of high quality labour. Attempts to intensify production; characterized by the sinking of larger and deeper pits, which imposed longer subterranean travelling distances on the pitmen, and the gradual rationalization of

work place organization, which implied the intensification of shift working and work place supervision,[2] were not paralleled by the provision of those ancillary services which were increasingly required to keep the work force in place, as Angela John points out, "the economic and work organization of the pit imposed a corresponding cycle of cooking, washing and household demands."[3]

Such demands or secondary labour services were provided by female members of the mining family. Thus after 1850 the gradual expansion and rationalization of the coal trade intensified the demands which were placed on both women and girls in coal mining districts. In this way the domestication of female members of the mining family may be seen as part of a crude process of labour division based upon an established cultural orthodoxy.

In this chapter I examine familial relations within the mining family in the contexts of economy and culture in the period 1850-1945. I begin by examining the family's place in the relations of production in the mining village, and then move on to the role of (the) miner's wife in the period when coal formed the basis of the British economy. A further section examines the way women understood and related to men during this period; this is followed by a discussion of the processes of primary and secondary socialization which were practiced in the mining village. This part of the study is intended to conceptualize and render more intelligible a further area of discussion which examines familial ideology within the mining family.

The 'Constructed Community'

Pit villages, unlike many other industrial settlements, rested firmly upon a single economic platform - the winning of coal. Many settlements, by necessity, were located in relation to the position of the mineral reserves, and therefore were frequently constructed (by colliery owners) in isolated areas and for the sole purpose of providing, and

housing, a work force which would service the industry. Village infrastructure was geared primarily to service the commercial interests of the coal producers.[4] Housing policy was of paramount importance in the design rationale of such 'constructed communities'.[5] The work force clearly needed to be sheltered, but housing was also an important way in which employers could exert some industrial and social control not only over their employees[6], but the families from which they sprang.

Family and Economic Structure

> My home was 12, Princess Street in Bowers Row. These houses were built in the middle of the nineteenth century by the coal owners for the use of their employees. When my father first came to work for the Bowers Company there were empty houses all over the village, because they were then recruiting men for new and deeper collieries.
>
> My father went to the colliery office to ask about a job and a house. He was given a key and told that he could go and pick any vacant house in the village and live in it. The manager told him that the rent would be 3s 5d per week, and that he would be allowed one ton of unscreened coal every month. I think that this was in the early 1870's, when my mother was about seventeen years of age, and my father twenty four.
>
> (Jim Bullock, 1976, p.1.)

In the context of the second half of the nineteenth century, the tiny Yorkshire mining village of Bowers Row was a most unremarkable place. The settlement, in common with thousands of others in the expanding deep seam fields, was constructed for the sole purpose of facilitating the exploitation of latent coal reserves for financial profit. Such places had no history, indeed had no intended future outside the coal trade. The nature of their architecture, frequently based upon the 'gridiron' system, must have served to remind the first inhabitants of the reality of their position in the enterprise. They were there to work and the newly

constructed settlement was nothing more than a means to that end. Doubtless it came as no surprise to young William and Nora Bullock to learn that the keys to "their" new house fitted every other door in the row. (Bullock, 1976, p.1.)

In common with the majority of their class, Jim Bullock's parents married when they were relatively young and reared a large family. There are cultural as well as economic and industrial reasons which explain why they should have done so.

The idea of 'manhood' for example held many complex meanings within the mining community. Many of these were associated with physical strength and an implied sexual vigour. Sexual experience acted as a measure of manhood. Fathering a child was its proof. Thus powerful cultural forces within the communities encouraged both early marriage and parenthood. Jim Bullock's account of the kinds of social pressure which faced the newly-wed illustrates this point very well.

> The first child was conceived as soon as was decently possible, for the young husband had to prove his manhood. If a year passed without a child - or the outward sign of one being on the way - this man was taunted by his mates both at work and on the street corner by cruel remarks as - Dust that want some help? - Dunt that know what to do? - Can't tha do it? - What sort o' man is tha? and so it went on. Reasons of economy, self control or whatever were soon abandoned in the necessity to prove his virility. When it became known that the wife was 'expecting', the skitting, sarcastic remarks would cease.
>
> (Jim Bullock, 1976, pp.62-63.)

A more formal indication of manhood in the colliery village was elevation to work at the coal face. As is discussed in Chapter 2, a 'lad' was considered to be a 'man' when he became a hewer. Promotion to this elite came relatively early in a miner's life between the ages of eighteen and twenty one. Moreover, hewer's wages, especially in the expanding fields of Northern England, compared favourably

with those of the skilled artisan. Thus marriage usually became economically feasible for the miner at a relatively early age. Further, in many communities, the young couple or family with young children, especially if they were boys, did not face the same difficulty as equivalent sections of the working population in finding accommodation[7] not only because housing had to be made available in isolated areas but because the villagers' reproductive dynamism was vital to the owners' demand for cheap, and perhaps more importantly, efficient labour. Housing policy was thus weighted in favour of potentially productive family groups as the agreement made between Union and employers at the Langley Park colliery in 1900 suggests:

> The following conditions must be observed in the filling up of vacant colliery houses:
>
> 1st. It is to be always understood that in the event of the manager being short of lads he to have the option of employing a strange family to fill the vacant house in preference to any work man then living on the place. (This rule has always been practiced since the commencement of the colliery.)
>
> 2nd. When a man is given work at the colliery with a family of six members, he to take preference for a colliery house over an existing work man whose family is less than six, but if their families are equal in numbers then the old work man to take preference for a colliery house over the new one.[8]

Thus the social policy of coal producers almost always favoured the young and sexually active over the single, the old or the widowed because their object was not only to house workers but to produce 'mining stock' (people who were fit for pit work and pit village life) as John Buddles communication to the coal master, Lord Londonderry, indicates. Writing in the context of impending regulatory mining legislation in 1842 he notes;

> What we have to guard against is any obnoxious (sic) legislative interference in the established customs of our peculiar race of pit-men. The stock can only be kept up by breeding it - it never could be recruited from the adult population.[9]

This view supports and illuminates Martin Daunton's suggestion (based on the Durham field during the 19th and 20th centuries) that housing policy was more important as a means to produce, attract and stabilize the work force than as an instrument of industrial control.[10]

This point is reinforced if we consider more carefully the rolé of the mining family in the light of Buddle's comprehension of it, for the mining communities not only 'breed' but trained the work force for pit village children were 'brought up to the pit'.

The socializing function performed by the mining family was crucial to the survival of both individual and community. From the earliest age girls and boys were taught to conform to, and identify with, rigid and clearly differentiated rolés largely based on the nature of the sexual division of labour in mining villages. Children were expected to exhibit qualities commensurate with their gender categories.[11] Girls were taught the specialized domestic skills required to keep a man or team of men at the coal face, and encouraged to exhibit an intellectual, moral and emotional sensitivity. Boys were taught to be mentally and physically tough, and were expected to demonstrate such qualities as resilience, strength and courage.[12]

The pre-occupational conditioning received by colliery children prepared them for the specialized work they would perform as adults, in their later rolés as miner and miner's wife. The qualities engendered in infancy would ensure that a new and efficient 'work team' would evolve within the family unit - a man who could work excessively hard in appalling conditions and a woman could attend to his auxiliary needs. The mining companies only paid one half of this team, yet it was always clear that it took more than skill and strength to keep a pick working at a coal face.

Without the vital auxiliary services the mining family provided for its underground workers, which were exclusively organized and rendered by women, coal production would certainly have ground to a halt[13] as mining capital offered few practical facilities for the work force. Neither food, washing or drying facilities for example, were available at the pit head, in the majority of cases, until after the Second World War. Perhaps more importantly, the miner's home rendered him a crucial but quite unquantifiable facility - relief from the physical discomfort and psychic trauma of the pit. Just how stable and indeed efficient the already edgy and volatile patriachal subterranean world would have been in the absence of the sanctuary of 'home' and its associated meanings (comfort, safety, validation, respect, love) is a question of some crucial importance, and one which should not be seen outside the raison d'etre of the social policy of mining companies.

In this section I have attempted to establish the relations of production which the mining family held in the winning of coal in the period after 1850. It is clear that the families integration into the economic structure of the industry which supported it was more complete than that of many other industrial groups. Nevertheless as autobiographical evidence shows, the tangle of motives and logics which for example, on the one hand, drove the pitmen to express his sexuality (and consequently support his family) as an aspect of 'manhood', and on the other, allowed coal capital to encourage and exploit this very practice as a means to reproduce and stabilize the work force, alerts us to the complexity of relations between economic and social spheres in mining society, and this stands as a warning to those who see mining culture as simply a crude reflexive response to the conditions of production.

The Miner's Wife 1850-1950

> In their bones they had always known they were exploited but they knew that at least their

> exploitation paralleled that of the men they shared their lives with. That is why miners' wives don't, on the whole, take their resentment of the past out on the miners of the present. They complain about their husbands' prejudices but they are setting out to change them - in between looking after the kids and getting the meals ready for the end of the shift.[14]
>
> (Joan Stead)

The functional rolé of the miner's wife changed little in the hundred year period between 1850 and 1950. It is probable that before this time pit village women were to a lesser extent associated with the home as a result of being directly linked to the industrial process. However, there is little evidence to suggest that such women performed radically different domestic rolés or enjoyed significantly different social relations with men within the family structure than subsequent women were to do.[15]

In the period after 1820, womens' power relations, as a group, were quite clearly diminished as a result of growing industrial[16] and ideological pressures,[17] which tended increasingly to isolate them in the home and thus exclude them from emergent networks of working class organization and communication characterized by trade unionism, co-operatism and the early proletarian political movements. Thus in the mid Victorian period women gradually lost the potential to transform their productive and social relations within the new industrial order.[18]

In the period after 1950 emergent industrial and ideological orientations tended to partially restore this potential. For as pit village women became increasingly dislocated from secondary aspects of the work process (washing and drying of pit clothes) as a result of industrial reorganization, their 'traditional' occupational role was to some extent mutated. Moreover, ideological change, signified by the growth of the womens' movement, has had the broad effect of very gradually encouraging working class women to enter into the male dominated social, political and economic power structures in the coal field communities. Evidence of this phenomenon was

made manifest during the 1984-85 miners' strike by way of the activities of the Womens' Support Groups.[19] Yet as Joan Stead's observations demonstrate, coalfield-feminism has manifested an ideocyncratic quality (one might say an authentic proletarian aspect) which reflects the specific historical experience of the mining community as a whole, a vital point which is frequently missed by academic commentators. This is just one of many reasons why the role of the miner's wife should be re-examined in the period when it was cast (1850-1950) and in the light of the colliery community's testimony.

The celebration of the miner's wife is without doubt one of the most striking and illuminating features of the pitman's autobiography. Consistently the women of the English coal fields are presented in the guise of 'heroic victim' - obscure and unrecognized yet tragically splendid in their endless struggle with various forms of material and moral deprivation. Thus cast, pit village women are shown to find a parallel with pit village men. For like the collier, life is perceived to demand of these women unique qualities which render them 'a set apart', 'a rare breed' - special people. Consider part of Chester Armstrong's description of his mother:

> It is my privilege to acknowledge the fact that my mother belonged to the sphere of noble service which does not meet the eye of the historian. Her whole life of sixty six years was one continuous act of heroism. Sacrifice is written on every page. I cannot remember her burden of cares ever being lifted from her shoulders in any perceptible degree. On the contrary, this burden increased as she advanced in years. Finally she broke under it to die a martyr to duty.
>
> (Armstrong, p.32.)

The kinds of qualities autobiographers attributed to their mothers, wives, daughters and indeed to women as a social group, tells us a great deal about the role of women in mining society. Almost always represented in idealized form, the women they describe are tirelessly hardworking,

unbendingly moral and endlessly sensitive. Such virtue reflects the central role of women in nineteenth century mining society as child rearers and providers of mental and physical comfort to men.

The physical comforts of the home were important to the miner. They represented a stark and pleasurable contrast to the abominable conditions they experienced underground, and were enjoyed without any effort being put into their creation. Thus where the pit was dirty, dark, dank and dangerous the home was perceived to be clean, light, dry and safe. In creating this part of the miner's home life, women compensated for the deprivations suffered by men in the subterranean darkness. As we shall see, the perceived success of the colliery-lass in performing this function flowed into the myth and folklore which surrounds the nineteenth century miner's wife and this is reflected in accounts of miners' wives in the pitman's autobiography. The northern pitmen Thomas Burt and Jack Lawson, both celebrated the miners' wife in this typically affectionate if inflated manner. Writing in 1924 Burt reported that:

> Nothing so much astonishes the observing visitor who comes fresh to the colliery districts of the North as the order and cleanliness, the tidiness and taste, with which the pitmens' wives, under very adverse circumstances, manage their housekeeping. Some years ago the late Mr Archibald Forbes, the distinguished war correspondent, came, as a representative of the Daily News, to see and describe the houses and home life of the northern pitman ... As Mr Forbes' time was limited, I accompanied him to two typical colliers, fairly representative of the old and the new, the worst and the best of our colliery villages. Mr Forbes saw much that interested him; but what amazed him most, and what he said he should never forget, was the skill and industry with which the pitmens' wives managed their housekeeping, and, above all, he was struck with the courage and cheerfulness with

> which they strove, without fuss or complaint to make the best of everything.
>
> (Burt, p.100.)

Lawson penned a similar eulogy in 1932:

> Time has taught me that the housewives of the two northern counties are the best in the world. Housewifery is such a great virtue with them that it has almost become a fault, for the woman will deny herself things to which she is entitled and will wear herself to the bone in order to make the house comfortable and shining. If cleanliness is next to godliness, then the women of Durham and Northumberland are close neighbours with the almighty. Long practice and tradition have made these women so perfect in the art of making a commonplace house beautiful that one must see it to believe what good taste and industry can accomplish.
>
> (Lawson, 1932; 1946, pp.37-38.)

While the qualities of "taste and industry" facilitated some of the comforts available in the miner's cottage, other talents manifested by the miner's wife ensured that the financial affairs of the often 'feckless' collier were well regulated. Thus, being able to manage the 'housekeeping' (by which is often meant the domestic finances) was a much valued quality in the pit village woman. A 'good manager' was invariably a women who possessed an entire panoply of practical skills. Among these, skills in preparing cheap but nourishing food - 'making something out of nothing', and needlecraft were perhaps the most important. The practice of such arts meant that money could be saved, or more frequently, more money could be spent on essentials such as footwear and household furniture.

In a life-account written in 1887, Timothy Mountjoy outlines to his readers the financial and practical advantages implied by marrying a local lass, while including a warning to those young colliers who may have been tempted to marry "dashing young ladies" who were unfitted, in Mountjoy's eyes, to the role of miner's wife. He begins by describing the qualities of his first wife:

> She had ... good qualities very essential in a good wife: she was a good needlewoman, she knew how to knit well, and cut out and make her husband's shirts well and make the children's garments, without putting out to be done. It would be well for the young men of Cinderford today to find out first what the good qualities of the young lady are before he puts the vital question; because I have known young men - colliers - marry dashing young ladies from squire parks and other places, and the first time his working trousers wanted a patch on the knee or behind, his ladies' maid got hold of them with fire tongs to see what could be done with them, her husband took the trousers from the tongs, and lapped them round his bride till she screamed at the horror and smell of them.
>
> (Mountjoy, p.15.)

To contemporary eyes, Mountjoy's advice and anecdotal warning, may seem to be brutal and cruel. But, in a world in which the division of labour was based entirely on gender lines, its harsh if not ugly humour registers the fact that, in the battle for survival, the practical skill of the miner's wife, and her willingness to perform unpleasant tasks, was highly prized by men, and, one can only conclude, was felt to be every bit as important to familial stability as the miner's prowess with the pick.

The virtues of taste, practicality and hard work were but half of the qualities embodied in the quintessential miner's wife, the remainder reflected the role of women as moralists, educationalists and general guardians of familial respectability.

As the principal child rearer, the miner's wife was expected to inculcate in her children the dominant religious and cultural values of mining society. Moreover, women were frequently seen as the reforming agent of men. Jack Lawson was to note that, the "wonderful standard of home life has played a very important part in the education of the northern miner as well as raising the general standard of character." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.38.) This statement reflects vividly the way in which mining society understood moral and corporal

spheres, seeing in the 'brutalized' man the degradation of the pit and locating in the woman the clean, light morality of the home.

The moral and educational virtue of the pitman's wife did not necessarily imply a grasp of formal knowledge, although this could be part of it, but more a sensibility of, and responsiveness to, those powerful but frequently suppressed emotions which sprang from the kinds of lives mining people lived. In this way, women relieved some of the massive, but hidden, psychological pressures which mining as an occupational life style placed upon the family unit.[20] Thus the constant fear of violent death, deliberately and necessarily suppressed by men, could be to some extent purged, within the family setting, by the cathartic rituals practiced by women. For example, powerful images of women 'waiting anxiously' to perform rituals of farewell or welcome are commonplace in these accounts. Here Neddy Rymer describes his mother's response to the danger he and his brother faced as pit-lads:

> I often heard my mother say that her sleepless nights brought visions of trials and impending danger to her helpless offspring, and she hailed our arrival each day with a mother's benediction. However, our tales of incidents and narrow escapes from personal injury frequently led her to make sacrifices such as a mother only can in such cases.
>
> (Rymer, p.3.)

If women were expected to worry openly, they were also expected to fuss, badger and advise. This function was a further counterweight to the 'pit hardening' process which demanded that men affect an outward emotional insensitivity. Thus the worst excesses of the seemingly 'happy-go-lucky' collier lad were checked, without any loss of face on his part and one suspects with some relief, by the 'undeniable righteousness' of his wife's or mother's moral strictures. The vital role which women played in neutralising the often self destructive excesses of the masculinity cult is precisely what Jack Lawson refers to when he speaks of women having "been powerful educational forces in the northern

counties", for in the colliery districts it was the job of women to save men not from themselves, but from their insatiable desire to demonstrate to their peers the potency of their 'manhood'.

In a section of his autobiography entitled "How to choose a good wife", Timothy Mountjoy neatly exposes the way in which pitmen looked for, and indeed expected, their wives to manifest those emotional, moral and intellectual sensibilities they denied in themselves, but which they undoubtedly associated with the pleasures, comforts and dignity of 'home'.

> When a man of sense marries it is a companion he wants, not merely a creature who can paint and play, and dress and dance; it is a being who can reason and reflect, and feel and judge, and act and recognize, and discriminate; one who can assist him in his affairs, lighten his cares, soothe his sorrows, gratify his joy, strengthen his principles, and educate his children.
>
> (Mountjoy, p.79.)

From the exertions and moral deliberations of women came familial respectability. The 'respectable' home was one in which the virtues of the archetypal miner's wife were manifested in concrete form. Thus, on the one hand, this would be a place in which the foul and ugly language and the degrading practices of the pit would be outlawed, while on the other hand, a place which was a testimony to the hard work and practical artistic enterprise of the women who dominated it.

While men enjoyed a deliberately understated form of social esteem which was associated with belonging to, or coming from, 'a good home', women found an acceptable means by which they could measure themselves, and thus a basis for their own self respect. Thomas Burt recalled that:

> At Seaton Delaval the good dames seemed to have entered into a wholesome rivalry as to who

> should have the best furnished and the best managed house. From top to bottom of the long Forman's Row every cottage bore unmistakable evidence, external, and internal, of the care, the industry, and the taste of the queen who ruled within. When it is remembered that there is but one room which had to do duty as kitchen, bedroom, scullery and parlour, the marvel is that there was either the desire or the ability to evoke order and beauty out of such unpromising material.
>
> (Burt, pp.100-101.)

Such competition among women was a common manifestation of the kind of social relations pit village society engendered, and found a parallel in the work-based competition practiced by men.[21] For, as previous commentators have argued,[22] it was inevitable in a world in which displays of, or claims to, individual speciality or superiority were frowned upon, that character should be measured in terms of the work which all performed. Thus, as Bill Williamson has shown in his perceptive observation of his grandmother, women found in their domestic routines a vital ingredient of their being - a point of separation and identity. He writes:

> My grandmother found (that) self respect in her diligent housework and the visible signs of that - the bright windows, the sanded steps, the line of white washing, the well turned out kids - each a simple yet powerful symbol of a personal dignity which much in her environment threatened to destroy, and each amply compensating in its symbolic force for the deficiencies in its material worth.[23]

The women of the 19th and 20th Century English coal fields, in common with their husband's and son's, were moulded by the work which the community as a whole performed and consequently their productive relations were, and could be seen to be, in every sense as vital as that of the men. The importance of the miner's wife as architect of the functions and meanings of the home, her influence over the development of children and her role as the guardian of the moral and intellectual conscience of her family lent to these women a responsibility which begat a powerful familial influence and

the general respect of the community as a whole, a point which is clearly signified by the work of the pitmen-autobiographers.

Thus if for no other reason, the recently popularized notion of the miner's wife as socially inert - "unnamed and unregistered",[24] slaving out her days in the shadow cast by an all-pervading patriachal tyranny, is unconvincing and at best represents a myopic impression of the social relations of the mining family.

In arguing this point it has not been my intention to negate the fact that outside of the domestic terrain women lacked authority and power. It is quite clear that women were denied, by the sexual division of labour, access to and influence in the highly developed formal networks of communication and power which allowed men to articulate their feelings and achieve degrees of influence and notoriety. Indeed this is certainly one of the two key reasons which explain why women have appeared to be socially invisible and why they rarely wrote autobiography. For thus isolated, women had little sense of themselves as formal powerbrokers and therefore little interest in describing the world in which they lived as an argument for changing it, or rendering it more intelligible to people, as it were, living on the 'outside', which, as I have argued, is a major motivating force in the miner's autobiography. The other reason concerns the mining family as heroic victims, for in a world in which 'widows, crutches and wooden legs' constituted the price to be paid for familial economic well being, the 'brave collier lad' was perceived to be the greatest victim of all.

The Pit Lasses Husband

Pit village women have left us very few accounts of their lives. Nevertheless the female voice is not entirely silent. Its perspective and its message enables us to probe, ever more deeply, into the social relations of the colliery settlement.

The pit lasses' life-account is not of least value as a medium through which we may grasp a better understanding of the way in which men were understood and defined by women in the colliery village. Their accounts lack the defensive machismoistic bluster often associated with male image making and thus reveal to us a slightly different, at once more vulnerable if no less heroic, kind of miner than the one we so frequently encounter in the pitman's autobiography and indeed in some socio-historic discourse. The pit village woman's autobiography reflects its author's close relationship with the means of production in the colliery settlement. The pitman's wife knew a great deal about the pit. While the rhythms of her life were shaped by the patterns of work which went on there, the colliery-lass was also acutely aware of the subterranean environment and the technical nature of the work. For not only was she exposed to the obsessively 'pit' orientated conversation of the settlement, but, like her husband, was interested in the technical problems and geological conditions associated with the various seams, simply because the life style and indeed survival of her family were dictated by them. Note the detailed knowledge which Adeline Hodges displays in her brief description of work place organization, her familiarity with local underground geography - the "plate end", and her lapses into subterranean idiom - "the tub before it went outbye" (to the main road or shaft end of the workings). Would the wife or daughter of a railwayman or steelworker be able to provide a similar account of the work place organization and process?

> The big days for the men were cavil days. This was the draw at the pit office to see where the putters and hewers were to work for an allotted time (usually a quarter). Some places were good and the money was good too, but other cavils were bad and hard and yielded little remuneration. On these days, all you could hear from the men was, "what's thee cavil, Dave?" This is how the miners spoke it. "Oh, in the watta," might be the reply. This meant that he worked in a wet seam, which brought out great boils on their backs and left permanent

> scars on the neck, shoulders and behind the ears. It was agonizing for the putters who had to give the tubs a push off the plate end and up an incline to get the ponies off. This had to be done with shoulders and buttocks ... The hewers hewed the coal and filled the tubs, the putters took the full tubs out and replaced them with empty ones. The hewers were paid by the ton, the putters by the score of tubs replaced. Each put a token onto the tub before it went outbye. There were sometimes men and lads called token slingers or changers. They were unscrupulous fellows looking for easy money by replacing tokens with their own. When they were caught they were severely dealt with, being heavily fined and usually dismissed but they were never forgiven by their mates and this was the cruellest part of their punishment.
>
> (Hodges, 1975, p.12.)

The village womens' familiarity with the environmental conditions and technical problems associated with the winning of coal, their own experience of struggle and a more general sense of familial exploitation, and of course, the constant spectre of violent death, seems to have aroused in them an odd mixture of admiration, sympathy, compassion and pity for their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. This attitude has none of the 'bleeding heart' about it but is more akin to those feelings which emanate from a deeply felt rapport. This framework of comprehension or more precisely 'structue of feeling'[25], which I shall refer to as 'pit empathy', led colliery women autobiographers, not so much, in this context, to celebrate themselves, as to express a kind of relief that they and their female offspring would not have to enter the pit as miners, despite the hardships which would face them as miners' wives. This is apparent, for example, in the accounts of two Durham women Adeline Hodges (b.1899) and Lottie Brennan (b.1907). Recalling her school days Mrs Hodges noted that:

> The boys could sit an examination at twelve or thirteen to leave school. It depended upon the state of the labour market as to their success.

> Poor things it was out of the frying pan into the fire, for many went to the pits, ...
> (Hodges, 1975, p.3.)

while Mrs Brennan, writing in the third person about the birth of her second child, informed her readers that:

> another lovely daughter was born to Lottie and Herbert on November 30th 1939. They were pleased it was another girl because pits were the only future for boys in those days.
> (Brennan, p.25.)

While it is accepted that my sample of womens' accounts is tiny, the fact remains that this attitude is manifested in them all, and moreover rings true to the sentiment of other literature produced by women from similar backgrounds such as Jean Stead. Further, this form of perception is expressed with that ease and self confidence which characterizes the familiar, all of which suggests that this way of seeing and feeling about men represents a general perceptive orientation among pit village women.

The subtlety of pit empathy is difficult to describe for it appears to have been hidden behind a wall of sensitized silence and subtle gestures. Jennie Lee's account, however, gives us an insight into its nature. In the following extract she describes her father's return to work after the 1926 lock out. Her account both describes and manifests pit empathy. Moreover, her perception of her father as a man of "delicate physique" typifies the way in which women auto-biographers felt no particular need to represent men in an overtly masculine pose (one cannot imagine Mr Lee describing himself in this way) and consequently this writing is an important indicator of the way in which women persistently understood men outside of their (men's) protective armour, which in the end was perhaps the greatest strength of the pit empathy syndrome.

> The lock out lasted from May until December. Four months after the resumption of work my father was still idle ... Then, at last, he was

sent for. But he was not reinstated as a fireman. He was told off to do casual labour.

After being idle so long, pit work would have been trying even to a muscular navvy. To a man of my father's delicate physique it was crucifixion.

We watched him every day trailing his limbs homeward at the end of the shift. Our mother was more than usually careful to see that hot water was ready for him to wash and that light milk pudding with the white of an egg whisked on top was waiting to tempt him to eat. He could not digest anything more solid until later in the evening after he had rested. And, even then, he ate very little.

No word of complaint was ever spoken and no word of sympathy ever offered. To have done either would have been a violation of my parents' ways. But I could see our mother's eyes follow his every move, ready to anticipate his slightest wish, and she, like me, knew that he was not able to walk upstairs to bed. He had to hold on to the banisters and drag himself up step by step.

(Lee, p.77.)

Lottie Brennan's account exposes the way in which this response to or feel for pitmen was appropriated by female children at an early age, and helps to explain the particularly temperate if not indulgent attitude that colliery women have frequently displayed, towards men. In this extract, Mrs Brennan recalls her impression of her little brother's first shift in the Waterhouses pit:

> Jimmy had always loved horses but had never known anything like this one. It was a demon from the hell that Jimmy had been warned about at the Sunday school.
>
> Mr Johnson the Superintendent at the Chapel had warned him. "Be good," he had said, "and you will reach the sky to be with God in heaven," "but if you be bad you will go down into the depths of the earth to hell to be with the devil." Jimmy thought "this is it - I have now gone to hell for all the bad things I have

done." The pony reared and kicked him as he tried to fasten him to the tub. This job kept him busy all through the long night and his childhood left him. This was reality. When home time came he again piled into the cage with the men and boys, but this time they seemed to be going slow as they went up and up and up. It was ten o'clock in the morning and the daylight nearly blinded him as he climbed out of the cage. He had been down in that hell for eight hours. He looked up at the bright blue sky and thanked God as he breathed fresh clear air into his lungs and tried to forget the dreadful thought that for another six nights he must get out of bed at one o'clock and again travel underground to work in hell.

Mother was waiting anxiously at the back door for him. Jimmy brightened up when the smell of dinner cooking met his nose as he came wearily through the yard and into the kitchen. A large coal fire was blazing and it held an iron pan with a meat pudding boiling with the potatoes in the steamer. The shiny blackleaded kettle with a brass handle was on the hob ready for Jimmy's bath.

Lottie, not six years old, was there waiting to shake the pit clothes outside as he took them off his back. She never forgot that first day when she saw her little brother come home from the pit. He was usually funny and made her laugh, but today as she saw him drop exhausted onto the mat and watched her mother bring in the tin bath from the yard she found that he had changed and he wasn't a little boy any longer, the agony on his face made him look like an old man. He put on the shorts that mother gave him. He knelt on the clippy mat and washed his arms and head in the tin bath that was stood in front of the hearth. The hessian towels were on the fender ready to dry him. Mother gently washed his back which already had got badly scarred even after one day. He then sat on the cracket (pit stool) and washed the coal dust off his legs. Lottie scraping the dirty pit boots, thanked God for making her a girl who just had to help with the housework and scrape the lads' pit boots.

(Brennan, pp.4-5.)

As the above extract demonstrates, pit empathy worked in response to the notion that pitmen were vulnerable (a notion which the colliers themselves found difficult to admit) and paradoxically, perhaps seems to have reinforced the idea,

among women, of the pitman as familial hero. The representation of the pitman-father, son and husband as heroic figures, risking life and limb for them in the darkness, is one of the recurrent features of the colliery woman's autobiography.

The extract below, taken from Jennie Lee's life account, dramatically reflects this attitude. In it we find "brave knights" slaying "big monsters"; set against the backdrop of the sounds of the pit ventilator and the sights of the coal fire, all taking place in the mind of a small female child - a remarkable example of the way in which physical environment and culturally dominant patterns of perception could fuse together, forming a powerful and lasting impression of the pitman as a noble, if tragic, hero.

> Sometimes at home in the evening it was very quiet outside with only one sound breaking the stillness; the beat of the ventilation fan at the neighbouring pit. That regular beat, beat, beat, invaded our fireside. It got tangled up with the giants and ogres we were reading about. We invented stories in which the pit was a monster and the rhythmic noise we heard the beating of its heart. This monster dragged all kinds of victims to their doom. It imprisoned them in gaunt dungeons. Then brave knights would ride to the rescue. At first every knight met with danger and defeat. The faint hearted turned back. Even the bravest were disheartened sometimes. But, in the end, we always allowed them to set the captives free.
>
> (Lee, pp.31-32.)

In the light of these testimonies, it might have been tempting to have argued that the colliery woman's perceptions of men bear all the hallmarks of a potent and pervasive male ideology, if the particular structure of feeling which informs them (pit empathy) had not lacked a locus in dominant masculine forms of perception and consequent self imagery. But the truth is that the pit village woman's understanding of men persistently penetrated the self delusive ideology of the masculine cult. Thus pit empathy is best understood as a

form of female consciousness which was induced in response to female experience especially in terms of motherhood, death and the forms of degradation associated with the pit.

There is no doubt that pit empathy contributed to the lionization of men in the colliery community, however, the logic which lies behind it betrays the fact that in the pit village nobody wanted to take the risks associated with the mine. The notion of mining or miners being 'glamorous' was generated by, and has been the obsession of, the twentieth century literati,[26] nowhere does it appear in the miners' autobiography.

Finally, and in common with so many forms of working class thought and feeling, pit empathy served to bind men and women together, a function which lent itself well to communities which relied utterly upon social and familial cohesion as their only form of defence, it therefore cannot be properly understood outside of the wider context of class relations.

Socialization and Gendering

The socialization of children in the 'occupational community' betrays the limitation of life opportunities which are open to its young, and the role they will play as adults in its relations of production. Thus while the polite society of Victorian and Edwardian England may have harboured a belief in 'progress' and the myth of the self made man, colliery society responded to its experience and 'fatalistically' (sic) imbued its children with qualities which would equip them to survive as labourers in the production of coal.

The points of socialization in the colliery village increasingly reflected, in the period after 1850, the growing ideological importance of the school and the chapel in Victorian and Edwardian working class society.

Some autobiographers who were born in the late 19th and early 29th centuries believed that the colliery school was not

merely concerned with advancing the knowledge of the children it served, but inducing in them certain values and attitudes. Adeline Hodges, for example, recalled being taught patriotic songs in order to entertain (and nodoubt calm) the local coal owner's wife, Lady Londonderry. (Hodges, 1975, p.3.) But here Jim Bullock discusses the relationship between school, work and social control:

> The boys were taught about pits, told how the pits were constantly improving under enlightened ownership, and they were encouraged to study mensuration and arithmetic with elementary geology. The girls spent more time sewing, knitting, baking and cleaning - in short, serving an apprenticeship for a servant. The used to wonder if the benevolent owner and landlord did not have words in private with the school staff, suggesting that children were taught their place, that they were given no high ideas as to their futures. 'We want servants and we want pitmen. So train them to be humble and to realize their good fortune in having a job to go to' - this could have been the advice given. No one knew for certain, but it was common thinking throughout the village.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.109.)

The connections between "knowing one's place" and school discipline interested many of the autobiographers. For while, as their work indicates, the colliery-owned school reinforced many of the dominant assumptions, attitudes and expectations in the settlement, it also sought to 'civilize' colliery children, inducing in them notions of obedience to local structures of authority, and a particular sense of place and role.[27] These ideas often conflicted with attitudes which were mediated to the children through the home and, in some cases, through the chapel. Thus the often severe standards of behavioural discipline, which were practiced in the colliery school system in order to induce obedience and social quietism in potentially 'reckless boys', clashed persistently with the male child's notion of manhood and the community's sense of social oppression. A number of later autobiographers complain bitterly of their treatment at

school. Frank Hodges recalled that it was there that he first felt,"the wild rush of resentment against the cruelty of man". (Hodges, 1925, p.6.) Others quite literally rebelled, their behaviour dramatically reflecting the social relations of the community as a whole. Thomas Burt and Adeline Hodges have left us accounts of two such revolts. The former (Burt's) took place in the winter of 1845, the latter in the first decade of the 20th century.

> I had been but a few weeks at school when I had a serious difference with the master ... He ran no risk of spoiling his scholars by sparing the rod. In truth, he had quite a collection of instruments of tortune, among which were a formidable cane and a huge leather strap, the latter being reserved for the edification of the bigger and more unruly boys. Into this last named category I fear I must have been justly placed. I had been but a few days at his school before every appliance he possessed had been tried upon me ... I soon discovered that those who cried soonest and loudest got off best; but this discovery availed me little, since I had rather prematurely got the notion into my head that it was cowardly and craven to cry and whine in the presence of the scholars. I had not been accustomed to personal chastisement and the sense of injustice which rankled in my mind wounded me even more deeply than his blows. I am surprized that the dominie's pupils did not break out in open rebellion. All the bigger boys hated him, and at one time, indeed, a scheme was afoot to join forces against him. In this intended revolt I was a ringleader, but nothing came of it. There was constant war, secret or open, between teacher and scholars.
>
> (Burt, p.47.)

School was a terrible place. It was the rule of the rod and parents had no redress. It was supposed to be good for us but I remember on several occasions when some of the oldest boys rebelled against punishment and put the whole school in a terrible state of chaos. I remember once when six of the top boys ran amok in the school leaping over desks and scattering everything in their paths. The staff were very frightened and so were we, but it served its

> purpose. It was seen that these boys at thirteen were too old to be treated cruelly, without fear of rebellion.
>
> (Hodges, 1975, p.2.)

In these passages we note how the power relations of the school room are understood and responded to by the autobiographers in the same way as mining society (in general) has historically responded to its own within the industry. Neither Mrs Hodges or Burt (both respected members of society at the time of writing their life accounts) find any difficulty in supporting what amounts to a challenge to established authority. Indeed, Burt's sense of himself as "a big unruly boy" facing an oppressive authority, his response to the situation - "join forces", and his comprehension of the relations between teacher and pupils - "constant war", at once explain,if symbolically, his life's work and reflect the economic and cultural forces which shaped his attitudes.

The role of the Chapel in the socialization of children during the period is complex.[28] For on the one hand, non-conformism demanded utter submission and self control from its adherents, but on the other, encouraged notions of self respect and 'rational' resistance to forms of worldly oppression. Moreover, pit village Methodism had a distinctive nature which reflected the experience of its congregations and consequently reinforced many of the dominant attitudes which existed in the communities it served. This was especially true in terms of gendering.

Methodism allowed all children to participate equally in the activities of the Sunday school and in Chapel anniversaries. However, a strict sexual division of labour existed in the organizational aspects of Chapel life which paralleled that which existed within the family. Consequently women were expected to act as providers of food for Society functions, Chapel beautifiers and sickbed comforters. Children thus found in the Chapel a further and powerful conformation of the roles they would play in the secular world. Further, as in the home, the organization of female religious work and service existed in a kind of social vacuum. Men rarely seem

to have encroached on this sphere of Chapel life as Jim Bullock's account of "Mothers' Night" demonstrates:

> Wednesday night was mothers' night at the Chapel, and a baby sitting night for the men. What the women talked about at these meetings, we never knew, but what we do know is that arrangements were made for Chapel teas and other social functions, as well as for visits to the sick and aged. I do know that my mother always came home looking relaxed, happy and more contented than when she went out.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.137.)

Despite the influence which school and Chapel brought, or attempted to bring to bear upon the attitudes and behaviours of the pit village young, it was the home, community and environment which represented the most potent socializing forces within the mining settlement. The clearly defined nature of gender roles, and the unequivocal character of gender relations existing within the pitman's cottage, could hardly have provided children with more sharply defined associational models.

Autobiographers frequently speak of the striking contrast in character between their parents. "I have spoken at length about my father," Jack Lawson informed his readers, "so that you might understand what a contrast he was to my mother." (Lawson, 1932, 1946, p.12.) This form of parental imaging is almost a convention in the miner's autobiography and (almost always) follows a system of binary opposites with the woman manifesting those qualities I have discussed above, and the man represented as possessing antithetical yet paradoxically complementary qualities - his fiery temper matched her sympathetic smile, for example. Parents are almost invariably represented as a "good team". It seems clear that a strong link exists between primary socialization, in the associative sense, and the exaggerated form of parental gender representation in the miner's autobiography. Jim Bullock's account typifies the commonly held impression of opposite parental types:

> My mother and father were totally different characters. My father was a thick set man of fiery temper ... He was intelligent, eloquent and clever with his hands. A fine pitman, he never really knew any smooth times, and at one period was supporting eight children under fourteen. He was full of fight, particularly against the bosses, fighting them at work and in the Chapel. He was a man who never gave in ... My mother told me ... that never since her firstborn arrived could she remember a time when she was not either suckling a baby or expecting one. It is difficult to find words to describe her, for she was the most beautiful, kind and sympathetic person I have ever known. She was a friend to everyone. She was always busy, but never too busy to listen to other peoples' troubles, or to ours. Clean, tidy and hard working, she was a storehouse of knowledge about sickness, disease and accidents. She had soothing hands and a quiet voice - a complete contrast to my father. You did not do wrong things in our house because you did not want to hurt her. These were the differences between my parents - but what a splendid team they made working together.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, pp.3-4.)

Models of masculinity, were of course provided by the pitman and negatively by the behaviour of the colliery woman. Particular attitudes toward danger, physical and mental toughness and personal dignity were thus mediated to male children by example, and reinforced by what Lawson describes as "a rigid code of conduct" (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.13) to which male children were expected to conform.

This reflected the work boys would be expected to perform in later life and the community's historically defined relationship with mining capital. Deep rooted notions such as "fight your own battles without whining", "conduct yourself so that you may never be ashamed" (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.13) lay at the heart of this ideology and informed aspects of the parental response to male children. The often rugged treatment of boys, frequently described in the pitman's autobiography, exemplifies this phenomenon. Adeline Hodges for example noted that one family of "tough boys" were bathed outside by their father in the "poss tub", summer and winter! and then expected to run naked "from the back yard

across the street and into the house to be dried." (Hodges, 1975, p.17.) While Jack Lawson recalled that after being "well thrashed by a boy in our street", he was "further thrashed (by his parents) and chased out to redeem the family honour." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.13.)

Harsh as the male socialization process undoubtedly was, it, more often than not, was tempered by love and a fierce loyalty and thus reflected none of the oppression and arbitrary violence of the late 19th century school room. Moreover, the attitudes boys were expected to exhibit lent to them the notion of dignity in 'manhood' and thus provided a bedrock of self esteem. But more importantly than this, primary socialization psychologically prepared male children for the dangers and severe tests of character they would eventually face as pitmen. Thus George Parkinson was able to "smother down" the feelings of panic and anxiety he felt on his first day at the pit, "keep thi heart up hinney" called an old man to the ten year old child, "tho'll mak a pitman yet." (Parkinson, p.21.) In truth, the making had begun exactly a decade before.

The socialization of female children appears to have been in every way as rigid and unequivocal as that of their male counterparts. "It was the job of the girls in the family," recalled Adeline Hodges, "to look after the welfare and comfort of the workers." (sic) (Hodges, 1975, p.8.) From the earliest age female children became actively involved in the rhythms of the pit and were taught to provide those services which kept the man at the coal face. Both Adeline Hodges and Lottie Brennan recall "dadaing" (beating dust from) or washing pit clothes, preparing baths and meals and generally helping out with the endless domestic cleaning, by the time they were six years old. It was the practical primary socialization experienced by girls which provided the context within which their role and identity would be crystalized.

Thus in the same way as resilience and strength identified a male child in the colliery settlement, skill and dexterity in the practical arts constituted an important indicator of

femininity, lending as it did so a sense of self respect and individuality to the young girl. Skill in the more intricate forms of sewing appears to have been of special importance in this respect. For not only did it manifest a purely practical meaning, but, as Bill Williamson has pointed out, it could also be used as a measure and symbol of "those subtle values of decency and respectability"[29] which were the hallmarks of femininity in the pit village. Adeline Hodges appears to have identified with her mother precisely along these lines, her account is littered with references to her mother's practical skill, dexterity and artistry, and this is frequently linked to implied notions of self respect and familial responsibility. Her mother was, she notes, "industrious", "ingenious" and "proud". (Hodges, 1975, passim, but es., pp.7-13.)

The social shaping of female children within the colliery settlement had at its core one central assumption - that the girls would one day become pitmens' wives. Thus from the earliest age the pit village lass was prepared for marriage. The most striking and influential symbol of this process was the 'bottom drawer' - a concept which Bill Williamson has shown clearly delineated to the growing child the nature of the female role.[30] Lottie Brennan described how various household articles and small amounts of cash were put aside for her as a child ("my greatest treasures") and how, "wonderful dreams were woven around them", as she matured into womanhood and prepared for marriage and her role as pitman's wife. (Brennan, p.10.) Thus in the case of both girls and boys, forms of parental socialization in the colliery community were little more than preparation for a clearly defined occupational destiny.

While both male and female children found within the home concrete symbols of their occupational destiny, and powerful gender models to which they were expected to relate, more general, but nonetheless significant, environmental factors served to reinforce in children dominant ideas, attitudes and loyalties which were shared by the community as a whole.

Village children appear to have been mesmerised by the idea of the pit, symbolished by the winding or 'head gear' which dominated the landscapes in which they lived. The associational meanings of these "grim forbidding monsters" (Bullock, 1976, p.180) both drew and repelled the local children, but more than this induced in them a sense of self and the future, as Bullock's account of his childhood adventures demonstrates:

> As kids we used to dodge the watchman and sneak up to the shaft mouth, and sometimes we used to climb over the guard fence and look down into the inky blackness of the pit shaft. Then we would throw a stone over and listen to its descent in to the very bowels of the earth. Bang! Clang! as the stone bounced from one side of the shaft to the other, and then Splash! as the stone hit the ever present water at the bottom of the shafts. A falling body travels at a great pace, but it seemed to be ages before that stone landed at the pit bottom. We used to come away from this daring adventure very subdued, awed by the fearsome depth and blackness and sheer size of it all. But these shafts still drew us back, time after time, with a sort of hypnotic compulsion. Practically every kid in the village had had a relative mauled, broken or killed by this pit, and yet we still played around it and we all knew as we grew up, no matter what we did, that some day it would claim us.
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.183.)

The colliery child's compulsive fascination with the pit was reinforced by the events which surrounded it as the village's industrial base. The childrens' attitudes towards industrial relations, for example, were influenced by the general atmosphere of industrial conflict. Frank Hodges associated much of his childhood memories with strikes and lock outs, "they seemed to be", he noted, "part of normal life." (Hodges, 1925, p.9.) Arthur Horner recalled that from his "earliest childhood" he was "conscious of the bitter hatred between the men who worked in the mines and the steel works and the employers who grew rich on their labour." (Horner, p.11.) Thus in this way, attitudes towards community and class loyalty were forged in the mind of the child. Similarly, pit village children were orientated by their

experiences of serious injury and violent death. "I learned early", noted Arthur Horner, "that there was blood on coal." (Horner, p.11.) Children frequently lost their parents, brothers and other male relatives in pit disasters or accidents, and suffered not only the pain of bereavement, but often the sting of poverty as a result. Such experiences were the anvil upon which future communal and political solidarities would fuse.

The nature of socialization in the pit village clearly reveals a complex interaction between economic forces and cultural practice characterized by the paradoxical effects of the child rearing process itself which served at once to protect the young from, and expose them to, the forms of commercial exploitation practiced by mining capital. For while on the one hand the family provided capital's future work force with pre-occupational training and 'appropriate' attitudes towards being and role, on the other it induced in its young a basis for self esteem and notions of individual familial and communal obligations and loyalties which would protect them, both physically and psychologically, from the worst excesses of that very exploitation.

The Ideology of Home

Despite the fact that the architectural landscapes of the nineteenth century industrial village frequently left distinctly saturnine images in the minds of life-recorders ("Barracks, barracks everywhere", complained Lawson; Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.28) their impressions of 'home' evoked feelings of personal, community and class pride. A sense of the fusion of parental love and neighbourliness, set stubbornly against a repressive externality, best characterizes this view. "We were taught," noted Adeline Hodges, "that love meant service - I have always been surrounded with love." (Hodges, 1975, p.13.)

Autobiographers were proud of the parental love shown to them as children and frequently saw within it a kind of levelling

principle. Burt reported that "no child born in the purple could have had more loving or better parents" than he had had (Burt, p.22). Lawson went further, "parents at the bottom of the scale are more valuable than many at the top," he argues. "Who among those at the top could have done my mother's job as well as she?", he goes on, "we boys and girls were secretly proud of their qualities and character," (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.24) his parents were a "really striking pair ... unlettered, unknown, herculean workers, magnificently achieving without the least consciousness of their magnificence. Just to feed and clothe their children." (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.23.)

A powerful nexus exists between perceptions of familial self sacrifice and notions of community among Life-historians. In this way at least, autobiographers rarely separated the meanings of home from their sense of communal interaction. Here Adeline Hodges describes interfamilial relations in the Durham pit village of Dawdon at the turn of the century:

> In the village socialism was practiced unknowingly. There was not the talk about it as there is today but it was widely practiced. Nobody could buy a loaf if they ran short, but they could borrow it. Sometimes coal did not last the allotted time because some had more relations and friends to help than others, but there were plenty of volunteers to help out. Nobody paid for services rendered while they were ill but would return the kindness at some other time. A night out for our parents was an hour spent gossiping in a neighbour's house.
>
> (Hodges, 1975, p.13.)

The practice of 'village socialism' or 'neighbourliness' (mutual and community solidarities) which Mrs Hodges describes was felt by autobiographers to be crucial to their understanding of the familial experience. It locked together in their minds notions of familial loyalty and communal loyalty, pride in family with pride in community. Thus it is a sense of the tight weave of intra and interfamilial relations which most powerfully symbolized for these writers the quality of their home life. A way of living which

because it was understood to have transcended the often appalling material conditions upon which it was based, was seen to lend to existence a nobility and dignity which was perceived to be absent from lives cossetted in the material comforts of a more 'genteel society'. "I think," observed Mrs Hodges of her parents, "their (way of) living was much more meaningful than the lives of many which were lauded to the skies." (Hodges, 1975, p.13.)

Such pride in the quality of life lived in the mining village, which is understood as the quality of relationships, insulated the individual, the family and the community from the twin deprivations of formal status and material wealth, just as the quality of relationships, to some degree, insulated the miner from serious injury or violent death.

It is for this reason that the quality of relationships lay at the heart of the ideological bedrock of the mining family, and consequently the reason why the meaning of 'home' is represented by autobiographers as the symbolic epicentre of a series of interlocking solidarities which the villages practiced in order to protect themselves and the community from external social and economic forces. As Jim Bullock notes, "the miner's home was the basis on which the mining villages were built," for its entire ethos, like that of the community, was based upon the notion of "refuge in the time of storm." (Bullock, 1976, p.43.)

Summary

It would be easy to see the mining family in the same way that history has perceived the miner, as archetypically proletarian. But this only serves to obscure the subtlety of pit village familial culture. The roles of and the relationships between husbands and wives, the rearing of children and the meanings of home life were clearly sensitive to the evolution, nature and needs of the industry, but they were not only that. As these testimonies show the family was also a source of love, protection, care and self esteem - the

negotiator of the material and ideological pressures which bore down upon its members. The relationships upon which it was based, the values it espoused and the roles it allotted to its members were not perceived by male or female autobiographers to be either tyrannical, cruel or unjust, but the catalyst of personal and class pride. It is for these reasons that one exasperated 20th century autobiographer found the ideas and imaginative discourses of writers and intellectuals to be, "highly objectionable", the miner's home he observed "is not the place of greasy pots piled in the sink and stinking pit rags so often described by intellectual propagandists, nor is he forever harbouring morbid hatreds of his mates and dark thoughts of murdering his wife and children." (Tomlinson, pp.23-24.) In more recent times it has become fashionable to see the mining family as the site of a "hidden history of intra-class (gender) conflict"[31] and this may well be true, but no evidence of it reveals itself in the consciousness of the coal field autobiographers.

I now move on to examine the place and perceived meaning of leisure in the mining community.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOTES

1. See R. Williams, Marxism and Literature, (Oxford, 1977), Ch.8.

2. See Ch.2.

3. A. John, "Scratching the Surface: Women Work and Coal-mining in England and Wales", Oral History Journal, (1982), Vol.10, No.2, p.18.

4. These could take the form of landowners solely exploiting deposits laying on their own estates, partnerships between landowners and others designed to exploit extant reserves, or partnerships or limited liability companies who leased extraction rights from landowners usually on payment of a royalty. For an analysis of the commercial activity of coalmasters in the North East coalfield see R.W. Sturgess, "The North East Coalmasters, 1820-1855", in R.W. Sturgess, (ed.), Pitmen, Viewers and Coalmasters: Essays on North East Coalmining in the Nineteenth Century, (Newcastle, 1986).

5. This term was coined by Bill Williamson to describe Throckley, a Northumberland pit village, which was commercially and socially evolved during the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the agency of the Throckley Coal Company. See B. Williamson, Class Culture and Community, (1982), pp.56-57.

6. See John Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History, (Dublin, 1980), Ch.4, and especially pp.104-105, for a general discussion of the relations between industrial conflict and housing policy in the mining village.

7. The amount of housing which was provided free of charge or available for rent from colliery companies varied from area to area and even from district to district. High densities of colliery housing existed for example

in the North East, Scotland and Cumberland, lower levels of company owned accommodation existed for example in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and South Wales. See Benson, op. cit., Ch.4, esp. p.93. And M.J. Daunton, "The Export Coalfields: South Wales and North Eastern England, 1870-1917", esp. p.126-139, in Sturgess, op. cit., for an important study of housing in the British coalfields.

8. Quoted by Daunton, op. cit. p.134. (D.C.R.O., N.C.B. 4/3 Meeting between Manager and deputation of workmen, Jan. 1900).

9. Quoted by R. Colls, '"Oh happy English children": Coal Class and Education in the North East', Past and Present, (1976), No.73, p.93. (Buddle to Londonderry, 16 May 1842, D.C.R.O. D/LO/C.142). Similar if less calculating, views have been repeatedly expressed by those who know something of the mining industry, for example in 1981 Victor Allen opined,"only those who grow up in the environment of mining, for whom the costs are an everyday feature, become immune to them (sic), the mining family, therefore serves to perpetuate the mining industry. Anything then which destroys mining families is creating problems for the future of the industry". V.L. Allen, The Militancy of British Miners, (Shipley, 1981), p.84.

10. See Daunton, op. cit., p.133.

11. Here my intention is only to draw attention to links between socialization and the economy of the pit village; thus what follows is merely an outline of the gendering process. A later section will deal with these issues in detail.

12. This process of pre-industrial conditioning of male children by way of primary socialization has best been described as "pit hardening". This concept was evolved

by Bill Williamson, for his definition see Ch.2 p.56, for further analysis see below pp.197-198.

13. For a discussion of power relations and the sexual division of labour within the mining family see below.

14. Jean Stead, Never the Same Again; Women and the Miners Strike 1984-85, (1987), p.28.

15. Chapter 1 of Angela V. John's, By the Sweat of Their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines, (1980), represents the most sustained analysis of female labour in the coalfields during the pre-industrial era, but the author provides no analysis of the division of domestic labour within the family economy, pointing out that little is known about "family organization" until the 1840's (p.20). Moreover, John appears to reject the argument, used by the mining reform lobby in the 1840's, that underground work was destructive to women's ability to acquire domestic skills, seeing this as the propaganda, not to say humbug, of mid 19th century moral ideologues. (See p.31).

16. Characterized by the erosion of the Domestic System of production and the rise of scientific management and factory production. A vast amount of research has been focused upon this topic, for analysis of the impact of the industrializing process upon the working class family, see inter alia, E. Richards, "Women in the British economy since about 1700, an interpretation", History, (1974), Vol.59, No.197, pp.337-357, Michael Anderson, "Sociological History and the working class family: Smelser revisted", Social History, (1976), Vol.1, No.3, pp.317-334, D. Blythell "Cottage Industry and the Factory System", History Today, (1983), Vol.33, pp.17-23, D. Levine, "Industrialization and the Proletarian Family in England", Past and Present, (1985), No.197, pp.168-203.

17. Characterized by the rise of the associated cults of 'femininity' and 'respectablity' in the early to mid Victorian era. For general analysis see for example, D. Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, (1982) and M. Vicinus, (ed.) Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, (1972). For coalmining see John, op. cit., (1980), passim, but esp. Ch.2, 5 and Conclusion.

18. I share the view which has been expounded by Gareth Stedman-Jones, that by 1850 (the era of the effective collapse of Chartism) Industrial Capitalism had achieved a hegemonic position, materially and ideologically, in British society. See G. Stedman-Jones, "Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution", New Left Review, (1985), 90, pp.35-69.

19. In contrast with earlier industrial conflicts (see M. Callcott, "1926-Women Support the Miners", Bulletin of the North East Labour History Society, (1985), No.19, pp.40-42, for evidence of womens activities in the North East during the General Strike) during the 1984-85 dispute women organized themselves into formal discussion and action groups and evolved agendas which proposed activity beyond their traditional modes of servicing soup kitchens and distributing clothes. For example, women frequently analysed their role in the strike, joined in pickets, and demanded access to and influence in union meetings and business by seeking affiliated membership of the N.U.M. This request was refused. See Stead, op.cit., passim, for example. For a splendid review of womens' support groups and womens' writing during the 84-85 dispute see Gerrit Schoone, 'Towards a New Order' (1988), unpublished undergraduate dissertation, University of Oldenburg.

20. Bill Williamson has made the important point that,"women were left to bear the psychological risks of the pit", but he tends to see their behaviours (a strict adherence to routine for example) as pscho-defensive - a means "to

avoid anxiety" rather than a public signification and mediation of it. See Williamson, op. cit., p.118.

21. The notion of being a 'good' pitman or even the 'best' hewer is a distinctive feature in mining culture. Robert Colls has shown how the mythical or fictional characters, 'Bob Cranky', 'Jack Spring' and 'Geordie Shieldykes' all outstripped their fellows as pitmen (see R. Colls, The Collier's Rant, (1977), passim) and this desire for occupationally based status is reflected in the work of the miner-autobiographer's. Here for example is Jim Bullock recalling his father's response to his sons on their return from the pit:

> When they came home in the afternoon, my father would be up waiting for them. The first question he asked was, 'How many have yer filled? - If not - why not? He put them through a real catechism of questions if they had not done all that he thought they should have done ... My father used to glorify in swanking about how hard he could work and the beautiful straight wall he could cut with his pick, and how he could swing it. Miners used to come in the house at night and brag about the amount of coal they could fill, how long it was since they had a day off, how regularly they worked ...
>
> (Bullock, 1976, p.169.)

22. This point was first made by Mark Benney through the fictional character of Francis Johnson; see M. Benney, Charity Main; A Coalfield Chronicle, (1946; Shipley, 1981) pp.23-24, but has subsequently been evolved and empirically analysed by Bill Williamson, see Williamson, op. cit., pp.68-69.

23. Williamson, op. cit., p.126.

24. See B. Campbell, Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80's, (1984), Ch.7, esp. p.109.

25. Raymond Williams evolved this concept in order to move beyond the formal (and at times rigid) concepts of 'world view' or ideology. 'Structure of feeling' express the way in which people conceive of the world as a result of 'lived and felt' experience, such ways of thinking and feeling represent "practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating community". See R. Williams, Marxism and Literture, (Oxford, 1977), Ch.9. See also Ch.1, endnote 44.

26. See George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (1937; 1985), passim, but esp. Ch.2, for example.

27. See Robert Colls' analysis of the North Eastern Colliery School system, '"On Happy English Children", Coal, Class and Education in the North East', Past and Present, (1976) No.73.

28. See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of Methodism in the English Coalfields.

29. Williamson, op. cit., p.149.

30. Ibid., p.148.

31. See Campbell, op. cit., "Baths and Bosses: The Miners", Ch.7, esp. p.101.

CHAPTER SIX

LEISURE IN THE ENGLISH PIT VILLAGE: MEANING AND CHANGE

The pitman's pleasures have historically attracted as much interest as his work. Indeed the tangled strands of coal field mythology and demonology find sustenance in practices associated with the collier's leisure. But what do we mean when we speak of leisure? How is it related to the social whole? and what can we deduce from it?

In the first section of this chapter I will attempt to answer these questions. Subsequently I move on to look at the ways in which theories of leisure have evolved and have been utilized in the field of mining history. In the light of this work I then draw upon the miner's autobiography as a means of gaining further access to the practices and meanings of leisure which have or do exist within the English coal field.

Leisure Theory

The idea of leisure is extraordinarily protean. The concept is frequently confused with one or other of its components parts - sport for example, or one or other of its effects such as relaxation. Yet clearly leisure can no more be defined as one form of social practice than as a catalyst of a particular state or sense. What this tells us is that 'leisure' refers primarily to particular forms of perception rather than particular forms of agency or experience.

Such perceptive forms are invested in both the individual and society and on interaction and in negotiation legitimise and thus define certain practices and experiences as 'leisure' (for example it is acceptable leisure practice to shoot rabbits but not dogs). Thus while the compass of leisure activity includes a multiplicity of behavioural and experiential possibilities, it does have limits which are socially defined.[1]

The idea that leisure is socially legitimized behaviour or experience holds important implications for the ways in which we should comprehend this strand of the cultural fabric. For, as Chris Rojek points out, if leisure is a socially regulated process then leisure relations must, ipso facto, be power relations.[2]

This conclusion contradicts the assumption that leisure time is 'free time' or indeed that leisure is the same as 'play'. Consequently, "leisure relations should not be studied as relations of self determination and freedom"[3], but as an aspect of the complex tangle of social relations which forms society. Such relations are of course not fixed and consequently, like society itself, the rules of pleasure and unpleasure change in the context of time. Interpretations of the nature and meaning of this change are coloured by the major methodological approaches which have been adopted by sociology. It is worth briefly considering a number here.

The dominant impulse within social formalism is to view leisure in the light of two complementary assumptions. The first is that, "society is like a body, a biological structure", and thus to conclude that:

> social institutions can be explained in the same way that biologists explain parts of the body; by reference to their function in keeping the society (the body) alive.[4]

Formalism's second supposition emerges as a corollary of the first. It is that while leisure, like all things within the social corpus, is a fixed and necessary organ, it nevertheless provides a terrain within which 'freedom' may be experienced. The expression of the freedom which actors enjoy within the sphere of leisure is, however, frequently seen to be conditioned by their wider experiences, thus leisure is often understood as 'extension' or 'escape'.[5]

Functionalist analysis has and continues to make a considerable contribution to our comprehension of social action but is nevertheless problematic. This is because its central proposition disguises, by the process of reification,

the fact that 'society' is created and perpetually remade, by a social dynamic - the interaction of people, and thus is not a 'thing' that 'people live in'. As a result of this central flaw functionalism's ability to comprehend and analyse important features of the social process is severely restricted.

The idea of leisure as freedom is symtomatic of this general problem, for in thinking of society as an inert body instead of as a series of active relationships we lend the idea of 'autonomy' or 'freetime' a spurious credibility.[6]

Marxism has in some of its manifestations exhibited a functionalist tendency in as much as leisure is perceived as a response to those forms of alienation which are induced by industrial capitalism, some neo-Marxist analysis builds theories of social control through leisure into this position, while other interpretations have identified leisure as a 'site' of class expression and indeed ideological conflict.[7]

In various ways all of these positions are problematic. The exclusive association of leisure-time with industrial capitalism has fed into discourses which envisage pre-industrial 'golden ages' in which the distinction between work and leisure was blurred if not non existent.[8] Yet it seems clear from empirical evidence that distinctions existed between work and non work time throughout the pre-industrial era.[9] A central flaw of both neo-Marxist positions is their reductionism. Thus while social control theorists assume passivity on the part of the actor, signification theorists privilege the 'struggle for the sign' above all other possible meanings and functions of leisure practice.[10] Moreover, both positions are difficult to validate.

More recent studies of leisure relations focus upon contingency and change. This work often manifests the holistic approach to social production which characterizes the positions taken up by both E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams.[11] In a recent book Chris Rojek calls for leisure

theory to, "begin neither with the individual or society, but rather with the multifaceted, dynamic relations that people have with each other."[12] The advantage of this perspective is that it not only provides the means by which leisure may be understood within the context of the historical process but negotiates the theoretical rocks and whirlpools where 'closed' deterministic and teleological theories flounder.

Moreover, 'culturalist' approaches engender a number of largely unanswered yet clearly significant questions. If leisure relations are relations of power, what purpose(s) have they served? How have such relations been contested? In which contexts have they been contested and to what end?

A consideration of these questions in the light of the perceived and changing experience of mineworkers over a 150 year period will hopefully cast a sharper light upon the ways in which individual, sectional and class interests interact with socially legitimized forms of pleasure and unpleasure. It is partly in such interactions that identity, culture and history is made.

Leisure and Mining Research

The history of working class leisure patterns during the 19th century has received considerable attention during the last twenty years[13], by contrast the place and nature of leisure in the mining community has received relatively scant regard when considered within the context of research based upon work and politics in the coal fields.

In the immediate post war era leisure patterns inherent within mining society tended to be understood as a series of corrective reactions to the deprivations implied by the act of winning coal and thus had a functional orientation. Writing in 1949 Zweig argued:

> We have to realize first that the miner's life is circumscribed by the pit life, and there is

> a strong projection of the group on the miner, mining controls his life and habits more than any other industrial occupation controls the life of its members. Hence there is a strong desire to escape the limitations and narrowness of the group in pastimes.[14]

Later sociological accounts tended to extend and elaborate upon this approach by taking into consideration relations between the geographical location, physical nature and social organization of mining. Concepts much as 'isolated mass' and 'occupational community' were posited to describe mining society and acted as the context within which miners' leisure patterns; frequently seen as "relations of work carried over into non-work activity", could be understood.[15]

Historical analysis in the 1960's became increasingly responsive to ideas emanating from Edward Thompson's classical analysis of the first phase of industrialization in England, The Making of the English Working Class.

For example, R.J. Malcomson's pioneering exploration of proto-industrial leisure patterns[16] starkly revealed the tangled relations between economy, social structure and leisure, and thereby fuelled the debate concerning the relative causal primary between (internal) 'agency' and (external) 'conditioning' in cultural formation and development. A dialectic which constituted the central tension in Thompson's analysis.[17]

During the early 1970's one group of historians working within this tradition began to argue that for the larger part of the 19th century the pitman, unlike many other groups of workers, were able to retain their 'independence' as skilled hewers despite the pace and pervasion of the industrializing process because the nature of mining during the era was resistant to the intensification of the division of labour and close supervision of the work process.[18]

Thus it was argued that pitmen were able to preserve their way of life and, ipso facto, their recreations despite the

broader economic and social change, as it were, going on around them. Consequently practices such as the celebration of St. Monday, withdrawal of labour in the event of fatalities and, perhaps most significantly, control over the length and pace of the 'stint' for hewers continued into the early 20th century, even though this form of autonomy was increasingly under attack as the 19th century wore on.

But it is not only the 'agency' element in Thompson's theoretical dichotomy which has received attention. A number of authors have focused upon the impact, place and import of 'the new ideology' in mining society during the 19th Century.[19] Among these Robert Colls has been influential in drawing attention to the impact of Methodism upon mining culture during the era. Indeed Colls has referred to the early Methodist ministers as "cultural revoluntionaries".[20]

Colls' analysis also manifests a perceptive movement towards, and preoccupation with, cultural semantics, (the historian, he writes, "must take serious account of the myth and the image and their capacity for positively changing reality")[21] and the kind of interpretive methodology pioneered by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz ("a wall or a back yard or a gable end were more than architectural facets, they might have held significance as meeting places for the community.")[22]

Recently this approach has been advocated by perhaps the leading historian of 19th century leisure, Peter Bailey, who has noted that in order to "crack open" leisure it might be useful to read it as "text and performance".[23] And interestingly this approach seems to inform the most sustained historical and cultural analysis of the mining village to date - Bill Williamson's Class Culture and Community.[24]

If the approaches to leisure I set out above fail to advance an analysis of the nature of their subject they go some way to answering questions which, as I have shown, are implied by such an investigation. Certainly a variety of purposes and

meanings for leisure in mining society are postulated. Thompsonian analysis also provides evidence of, and an insight into the social contestation of leisure.[25] While methodologies drawn from the field of cultural studies - semiology for example, effect a means of comprehending the cultural nuances of this process.

Nevertheless, with the exception of one or two notable examples, such accounts cast little light upon the ways in which leisure was perceived by actors situated variously in time, nor the reasoning which informed their responses to patterns of change. Here the life-account with its locus set in the perception and analysis of the relations between self and society, provides us with a potent means of evaluation and investigation.

The Pitman's Pleasure

> I am sorry to be obliged to tell you that when I was quite a boy, there was a great deal of fighting amongst the colliers here at Radstock and neighbourhood ... if the battle was not finished on Saturday nights, it would actually be begun again on the Monday, and they would lose a day's work to finish it, and some of the gentry would go and see these fights, and I am afraid they sometimes helped to keep the battle going by either backing up one side or the other ...
>
> I can well remember when bread was one shilling a' four lb load and I can tell you that in the year 1847 the people here in Radstock were nearly starved - many with large families having scarcely anything to eat except potatoes and a little salt and on one Saturday in the early Spring they made an agreement together and marched round the village and then to Midsomer Norton, visiting the shops and threatening to pull them down if the price of food was not lowered.
>
> (Moses Horler, pp.2-4.)

By the turn of the 20th century the social world of Moses Horler's youth and early manhood had become so remote from general experience and even memory that certain of the

people of Radstock deemed it appropriate to ask the old man to commit his "Early Recollections" to paper and thus posterity. Certainly the isolated proto-industrial Somerset village Horler describes; squirearchic, 'irrational', often violent and by 1847 still subject to the workings of a 'moral economy',[26] had in social terms only tenuous links with the geographically integrated, civically ordered and industrially committed town in which the octegenarian pitman was to write his memoirs.

In common with other pitmen-autobiographers born in the first third of the nineteenth century[27] Horler saw a case for perceiving the early years of their lives as "dark days" (Horler, p.2), characterized by excess and ignorance on the part of the colliers. "Certainly," noted Horler without a hint of irony, "nothing could excuse such conduct if it happened at the present time 1900." (Horler, p.2.)

The Durham pitman George Parkinson was of a similar opinion. He recalled, with some regret, that in the mining village of New Lampton during the 1830's and 40's

> The only place for social gatherings or recreation was a public house formed by uniting two cottages, which with a fenced cockpit and a quoit ground at the front, and a quite place for pitch-and-toss just round the corner, provided opportunities for votaries of these sports, which, with the tap room as their centre, were often accompanied by drunken brawls and fightings, with all the demoralizing influences arising therefrom.
>
> (Parkinson, p.10.)

Votaries of other 'irrational', not to say criminal, pastimes such as poaching were common place. The practice itself in common with others of a similarly dubious nature were accepted as part of the system of popular sports and recreations throughout the 19th century. Indeed a man as 'rational' and staunchly law-abiding as John Wilson (no doubt influenced by his father's favourite pastime) could argue that poaching was a practice which "pure ethics could not condemn." (Wilson, p.25.)

The pre-industrial tone of early nineteenth century life in the mining village is also evidenced by the meanings which early autobiographers attached to carnivalesque and festive rituals. In areas where the 'paternalistic' relationship[28] between master and men was strong the celebratory dinner, often with characteristically feudal overtones of saturnalia, is often recalled and revealingly, hardly ever questioned. However, the traditional system of carnival, meet and feast days is frequently the subject of criticism, but crucially only in terms of the patterns of 'irrational' behaviour associated with them, for such 'holidays' were often transformed in the second half of the nineteenth century into social and political celebrations of miners' and mining life and as such were regarded with much pride and reverance.[29] In the extract produced below Moses Horler's contemporary, Neddy Rymer, neatly sums up both the early autobiographers' uncritical acceptance of the paternalistic relationship and the way in which the more 'irrational' leisure patterns of the pre-industrial world were perceived by 'progressive' elements in mining society such as Horler and Rymer.

> I forget the year, but remember well the day when the whole of the pitmen working for the Marquis of Londonderry were invited to Seaham Harbour to witness the lifting of the first sod of the Nicky Nack ... I stood close to the spot and saw the Marquis dig the silver spade into the turf and place it in a mahogany barrow, and wheel it on to the platform amidst the applause of a vast multitude. The occasion was a sort of festive holiday, and loads of potatoes were roasted in the coke ovens at the Meadows Colliery. Haughton Feast came once a year - in October - and I confess to the belief that never in the annals of England's History was a local feast better patronized, and never did youth excel as in playing pranks ... The race course and tents were the scenes of drinking, gambling and fighting. When one reflects on all the past evils and temptations of mining life, it seems wonderful to find the offspring of some of those very men aiding in the

> intellectual, social and political emancipation of the miners.
>
> (Rymer, pp.5-6.)

The 'dark days of youth' perspective manifested in the life accounts of the early autobiographers lends us insight into the workings and effects of ideological phenomena on the mentality of the individual actors. However, it is important for us to remember that the author's of these works were largely Methodist converts and as such had become active members of an institution which did as much as any other in the era to promote and mediate 'new thinking' to the English working class.[30]

Within this context E.P. Thompson has argued that the process of ideological transformation by Methodism was (culturally) complex and not without conflict and pain.[31] There occurs, he writes, a "very sharp confrontation between the old culture and the new." Methodism, especially in its primitive form, "drove head on at certain features of that (the old) culture (emblemized by 'drink, gambling', old fairs and feasts, old 'indisciplined' patterns of work and leisure, sexual licence, profane songs etc.) ... After this initial confrontation, some process of selective adaption ... can be seen to be going on. There is a transformation of certain components of the culture but the perpetuation and adoption of others." Finally, according to Thompson the effects of cultural conflict on individuals and indeed communities finds "organized personal and internalized expression ... in the experience of (religious) conversion ... whose corresponding social expression is often in the phenomenon of highly emotional revivalism."

This analysis appears not only to relate to the experience of the early autobiographers but in part to explain their views. Here for example is Timothy Mountjoy describing conflict between Methodist 'cultural revolutionaires' and the mining folk of the Forest of Dean in the 1830's:

> These were days of persecution to preach the word of life to the poor in the open air. I have seen ministers and people pushed into ditchs, up to their knees in water and mud, for preaching the gospel to the poor ... One young man who helped push them into the ditch was so condemned that he could not rest 'till he had sought mercy through Christ and found it ... This same young man was baptised in the old Chapel.
>
> (Mountjoy, p.3.)

And here George Parkinson on the relations between revival and shifts in leisure practice in the same era:

> At Shiney Row, a village about one-and-a-quarter miles away, the Methodist revival had 'broken out', and the news spread to all the villages round. In the houses, down the pits and at the street corners, conversation turned frequently on what was going on at 'Shiney Row'. One man at Lambton determined to see for himself what the strange news meant ... On the Sunday morning, therefore, he walked to Shiney Row, and on entering the village met two men. To his great surprise, no dogs accompanied them; they were dressed in their better suits, and altogether had the appearance of men bent on important matters. "N'y, whatten sort o' day had ye yesterde, lads?" he called out to the men. "Eh, there's a bonney gam' on here" replied one of them. "What's the mater noo?" "The Methodies has getten in among huz, and some o' huz hes getten in among the Methodies. The bowling match didn't come off yesterday because baith Harry and Tom was converted last Sunda." There hasn't been a fight all the week end' ... Then a revival began at Lambton. Many were being saved, and the colliery viewer, Tom Smith, had the good sense to see that the converted men were punctually at the pit on Monday morning instead of lounging at the public house.
>
> (Parkinson, pp.11-13.)

Accounts such as these register important moments of cultural contestation and transformation. Moreover, they go some way to explaining how the subjects, and by extension the communities, comprehension of the meaning of leisure and pleasure was re-cast in the context of shifting economic, political and social change.

This process of re-definition led to important behavioural shifts in the English mining communities. The idea of self improvement especially in the area of personal morality and 'useful' knowledge began to take on more and more legitimacy as the 'commonsensical'[32] form of leisure. Like many other autobiographers of his generation John Wilson moved from the old world to the new by giving up drink and taking up politics and letters.

Indeed, figures from Burt to Lawson identified the rejection of the old culture with self and class advancement. Tom Burt for example clearly saw abstinence and class advancement as synonymous as is demonstrated in one passage of his autobiography where he describes his best friend as a man like himself, "a staunch teetotaller, a keen Radical politician and an ardent Trade Unionist." (Burt, p.147.) Similarly Lawson, writing in 1943, asked himself "Where would Britain have been today? if 'all the Jims had gone their way of drunkeness over characterless years ...'" (Lawson, 1945, p.63.)

The mark of the self improvement cult is deeply scored into the fabric of the pitman's life account from the familiar 'pit to Parliament' narrative structure to defensive or celebratory discourses based on stupendous feats of scholarship, musicianship or other creative practices undertaken in appalling conditions and within the scanty confines of a pitman's 'spare time'. This, no doubt, is testimony to the potency and permeation of Victorian bourgeois ideology which is frequently identified as a major corrosive of an often lamented pre-industrial culture or cultures. However, like all other ideological constructs, the 'new thinking' of the Victorian industrial world was not accepted passively by those whom it was often designed to influence. As the life accounts of working class activists show, the hours of leisure time once spent in the pub were now often spent in the library, the institute of the Union lodge, for the cult of self improvement was frequently pressed into the service of <u>class improvement</u>, just as the pitman's autobiography served not just the author but his occupational community.[33]

If the notions inherent to the self improvement cult reorientated leisure practice in the late Victorian coal field it certainly did not transform it. For the 'old ways' of life interacted with, or more often existed alongside the new. There are many and complex reasons which explain why this should have occurred, but clearly the most crucial lay in the relations between leisure and work. The notion that leisure is related to or a reflection of work has found no little support among social scientists.[34] However, this insight seems to be particularly productive in the analysis of certain social groups especially 'occupational communities' where there exists a correlation between work and identity which expresses itself through leisure.

The social organization and physical conditions of production in coal mining is of central importance to this process and moreover represents the relatively constant factors in a galaxy of variables thus providing a basis from which aspects of leisure in the mining community may best be understood.

The production and reproduction of those attitudes and values which made and make the winning of coal possible is such a case. As I have shown, these codes represented an important aspect of the pitman's identity.[35] More importantly in this context they appear to have found public expression in a range of leisure activities.

Jack Lawson's autobiography, A Man's Life, represents the clearest possible evidence of this phenomenon. Lawson identifies qualities such as physical strength, courage and toughness with mining life and consequently with manhood and self. Indeed one of the striking features of Lawson's autobiography is the tension which exists between the moderate rational Methodist M.P. and the colourful and daring pitman. For example in the extract produced below Lawson is introducing a chapter which deals exclusively with a vicious fist fight which was fought over a gambling dispute! Note that there is hardly a hint of condemnation, indeed Lawson associates the qualities inherent to the combatants and the crowd with those necessary for subterranean survival.

> Men of my age saw drunkenness and real cut-em-to-pieces fighting which would have sickened a 'big fight' crowd today. These were regular affairs when the pubs were turning out.
>
> But the one I best remember took place out of a gambling school which I was one. The crowd, the game, and the men were like magnets to me. Fine men there were among them - 'characters' who commanded respect, as straight and true as steel, and selfless as a saint when a man was in danger in the deeps below.
>
> (Lawson, 1932; 1946, p.52.)

Thus the much reported incidents of fighting within the colliery village often found meaning in relations to work. For the pugilist clearly signalled to the onlooker that he possessed those qualities essential to a good workman's dignity and more importantly his 'marra's' survival.

In the same way gambling appears to reflect and thus reconstruct the dangers and obvious contingencies of winning coal. Gambling was a widespread practice in the mining villages of England during the period of this research, but autobiographical evidence suggests that heavy gamblers were widely admired by men, probably because, like Frank Vernon's father (see Vernon, p.4), they were frequently people who more overtly than others constructed their identity in terms of 'resistance' or 'hardness' (thus taking chances and standing firm if one's wages were lost on the turn of a coin confirmed character) a quality which was widely admired.

If sport and gambling can be understood in a sociological sense as 'extension' then drink could be comprehended as relief or 'escape' - "the glorious forgetting about it all" as one autobiographer puts it. This certainly was the view of many of the life-historians. Escape as relief, however, was not just from the drudgery of poverty and manual labour but from the psychological tension created by the fear of an unexpected and violent death. As I have shown in previous chapters, such fear has profound implications in terms of the entire culture of the mining village. But here Arthur Horner

describes the relationship between drink and fear by way of an anecdote concerning the behaviour of his grandfather:

> ... the fear of sudden death or mutilation still hangs over the miners and is felt in every mining village. In my childhood it was even more dominant and always with us were the men with the deadly dust in their lungs, waiting only for death.
>
> My grandfather used to work fourteen hours a day. He would stay sober for up to six months at a time and then, I suppose because he couldn't stand it any longer, he would break loose, and go on the drink, usually ending up with a fight at the Iron Bridge at Merthyr.
>
> (Horner, p.11.)

The use of alcohol as the means of catharsis, while understood, was not universally approved of by autobiographers. Indeed, only Thomlinson celebrated beer associating it, rather curiously, with both 'escape' and 'Englishness' (Thomlinson, pp.174-175). As we have seen other writers, usually ideologically committed 19th century Methodists or 20th century Socialists, associated drink, on the one hand, with 'the dark days of youth' syndrome or, on the other, with fear, frustration and hopelessness. For them drink was the site of ideological contestation and their views demonstrate the way in which leisure practice, in common with so many aspects of the culture I have been examining, was always subject to negotiation and at certain moments, re-definition.

CHAPTER SIX

NOTES

1. This point is developed by Chris Rojek, see Capitalism and Leisure Theory, (1985), pp.177-78.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.177.

4. S. Frith, The Sociology of Youth, (1984), p.18.

5. For an informative discussion of fuctionalism, and in particular the work of Stanley Parker, see Rojek, op. cit., Ch.4.

6. Actors are not only restricted in their recreations by what is socially legitimised, but their ability to gain access to socially legitimised practices. Thus patrons of the opera must not only be able to pay for their seats, but have some relation to, or at least knowledge of, the culturally determined forms and codes which reveal its 'meaning' at any point in time.

7. For social control see inter alia: J. Hargreaves, "Conference Report on the Working Class and Leisure", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, (1976), No.32. L. Senelick, "Politics as Entertainment: Victorian Music Hall Songs", in Victorian Studies, (Dec. 1975), Vol.19, No.2. pp.149-180. F.M.L. Thompson, "Social Control in Victorian Britain", Economic History Review, (1981), No. 34, pp.189-208. A.P. Donajgrodski (ed.), Social Control in 19th Century Britain, (1977), passim. For a critique of these positions see G. Stedman-Jones, "Class Expression versus Social Control? A critique of recent trends in the Social History of leisure", History Workshop, (1977), No.4. pp.162-170. For class 'expression' or 'resistance' through leisure

see inter alia, T. Mason, Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915, (Brighton 1980), Chp.10. G. Stedman-Jones, "Working Class Culture and Working Class politics in London 1870-1900: Notes on the remaking of the Working Class", Journal of Social History, (1974), Vol.7, No.4, p.460-509. S. Hall and T. Jefferson (eds), Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in post war Britain, (1976). S. Cohen and R. Taylor, Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance in Everyday Life, (1978). For a recent overview of British Leisure Studies see P. Bailey, "Leisure, Culture and the historian: reviewing the first generation of leisure historiography in Britain", Leisure Studies, (1989), No.8, pp.107-127.

8. See for example, E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work discipline and Industrial Capitalism", Past and Present, (1967), No.38, pp.56-97.

9. For example Feudal obligation implied a division of, and purchase on, time. In the proto-industrial era the organization of production in the case of town based artisans and rural 'out' workers (a group frequently paid by the "piece") imposed time based discipline. See P. Kriedte, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm Industrialization Before Industrialization, (1977; Cambridge, 1981) for learned analysis of pre-industrial work patterns.

10. For a discussion of semeiotic methodology in the context of leisure see I. Chambers, Popular Culture: The Metropolitian Experience, (1986), Ch.11.

11. See for example, E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (1963; 1982) exp. preface, and Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, (1958; New York 1966), esp. Conclusion.

12. Rojek, op. cit., p.179.

13. For bibliographical details see Bailey, op. cit.

14. F. Zweig, Men in the Pits, (1948), p.104.

15. For a discussion of these trends and bibliographical details see Chapter 1, pp.18-21.

16. See R.W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreation in English Society 1700-1850, (Cambridge, 1973).

17. Thompson sees cultural and thus historical production as "an active process which owes as much to agency as conditioning" (ideology). Thompson op. cit., (1963; 82), p.8. During the 1970's Thompson became embroiled in a protracted philosophical debate with scholars of the 'structuralist' school concerning the relations between experience and ideology and by inference the use of history as a means of comprehension. For a discussion of the 'struggle/structure' debate and bibliographical detals see my introduction.

18. See R. Harrison, (ed.), The Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypal Proletarian Reconsidered, (Sussex, 1978) and A.B. Campbell, The Larnarkshire Miners: A Social History of Their Trade Unions 1775-1874, (Edinburgh, 1979) for example.

19. See R.S. Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics, (Cambridge, 1974). R. Colls, The Collier's Rant, (1977). R. Colls, The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work Culture and Protest, 1790-1850, (Manchester, 1987).

20. Colls, op. cit., (1977), pp.57-58.

21. Ibid, p.12.

22. Ibid, p.17. For a superb discussion of this kind of interpretive approach see C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, (1975), Ch.1.

23. Bailey, op. cit., p.122.

24. See B. Williamson, Class, Culture and Community: A Biographical Study of Social Change in Mining, (1982), pp.13, 14 and Ch.6 for example.

25. See for example E.P. Thompson, "On History, Sociology and Historical Relevance", British Journal of Sociology, (1976), Vol.27, No.3, pp.387-402.

26. For analysis of the 'moral economy' in 18th and early 19th century England see, R.W. Malcolson, Life and Labour in England 1700-1780, esp. Ch.5.

27. I have analysed this group in Chapter 4, I refer to them as the 'Victorian Optimists'.

28. For an analysis of Paternalism in the Durham Coalfield see T. Austin and H. Beynon, "Masters and Servants: Paternalism and its legacy on the Durham Coalfield", (1980), Unpublished Durham University Working Paper.

29. Austin and Beynon, claim that the Durham Miners Gala, "symbolically replaced the annual hiring meeting of miners associated with the Bond", see T. Austin and H. Beynon, op. cit., pp.67-68. George March, a total abstainer and founder member of the South Yorkshire Miners Union, for more than fifty years headed the procession on "Miners Demonstration Day" (South Yorks?) carrying a piece of coal he won in 1856 (Marsh, pp.14-15).

30. See Thompson, op. cit., (1963; 1982), Ch.11. Colls, op. cit., (1977), Ch.3, part 2, Colls, op. cit., (1987), part 2. For a full analysis of this position.

31. See Thompson, (1976), op. cit., pp.398-399.

32. I use this term in the conceptual sense that Antonio Gramsci applied to it, that is "the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become 'common' in any given epoch". See Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith (ed.) Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, (1971), part III, Ch.1, esp. pp.321-322.

33. See Chapter 1, pp.43-45 for a discussion of this view.

34. See M.I.A. Bulmer, "Sociological Models of the Mining Community" Sociological Review, (1975), No.23, for a review of these positions.

35. Passim, but esp., Ch.5.

CONCLUSION: MINERS' AUTOBIOGRAPHY 1790-1945

> It is possible, over long runs of time, to locate established and emergent patterns of perception, and even logics of perception, which are connected to social structure. It is the historian's task, and privilege, to narrate these movements. (Robert Colls)[1]

The English coal miner is among the most mythical of all industrial workers, characterized during the 19th and 20th centuries by dozens of labels and stereotypes from 'coarse and brutal savage' to 'world's hero'.[2] Public perceptions of the pitmen have reflected the importance of the miners' place in modern British history, for coal fuelled the engine of the first industrial state. It is for good reason that the 19th century industrial elité, ever conscious of the basis of its wealth and prestige, interested itself in the work of the miner. 20th century politicians, historians and sociologists have been no less attentive, indeed the outpouring of comment and analysis - the desire to comprehend the miner, has been truely staggering. Patterns of approach could form a subject in its own right, for example investigative reports, books and articles have given way to all manner of sociological studies and in more recent years proud heroic histories have been displaced by more prosaic discourses based upon highly localized microscopic analyses.[3] As a result of this work the historical and sociological landscape of the mining community is now illuminated by a brighter light, but large areas remain in darkness and what can be seen distorts, by virtue of its partiality.

In one sense it could be argued that I have done nothing to resolve this problem since my study of miners' autobiography is intended to contribute towards knowledge not to totalize it. Indeed, in writing this thesis I have been conscious of the fact that Lord Acton's grand vision of an 'ultimate' knowledge of the past now resides in the dustbin of History.[4] But if we have lost our historical innocence we have not lost our desire to 'sense' the past and we can do it in a multiplicity of ways. My argument has been that autobiography is one. By this means I have attempted to identify unities of thought, intensities of feeling and historically and socially

determined disjunctions in both. In short I have attempted to expose that which is distinctive about the consciousness of coal miners and I have attempted to explain it in the context of a shared experience. My analysis therefore has concerned itself primarily with the general rather than the particular.

If we wish to know the past by way of the experience of those who lived it, autobiography has no equal as a primary source for no other body of information brings us into closer contact with the thoughts of people who can no longer speak for themselves. There is no doubt that the information in their accounts is partial, but then again, it is of value precisely because of this factor, for as I have stressed, autobiographers bring unity to experience and thus meaning to their 'lives' by a process of selection. What, characteristically, we get from autobiography is the perceived meaning or 'truth' of experience by means of the conscious rejection of that which is deemed to be meaningless.

In the context of labour history we would be foolish indeed to ignore this kind of subjective evidence because we know so little about the things that mattered, still less why they mattered, to the people we study, and in truth we will not be able to make much sense of working class peoples' lives until we know <u>what they felt</u> and why they felt it.

A primary aim of this thesis has been to show that autobiography can help us understand what was felt and why, but as I have pointed out we must ensure we understand <u>how</u> it can help us.

First, if by autobiographical means we are to learn anything about the relationship between social being and social consciousness we must compare and we must compare like with like. I have argued that the comparative analysis of texts, if sensitive to historical context, makes it possible to identify common features of autobiographical consciousness, content and construction in works written by people who shared similar experiences. But I stress that such

experiences should be particular to shared occupations as well as productive relations.

Clearly it is unhelpful and potentially confusing to search for common autobiographical paradigms, especially in terms of meaning and value, in works written by people whose productive, social, cultural and historical relations are not in some way coterminous. But even if we compare the autobiographical production of people who lived in the same era and belonged to the same social group - the 19th century working class for example, we are always in danger of jumping to the wrong conclusion since differences in social relations exist <u>within</u> class and this will be reflected in the autobiographical production of that class as a whole. Thus if we compare the life-histories of 19th century beggars, cabinet-makers and coal miners in the assumption that they had a "shared experience" of "particular material and ideological forces" (because we assume their social and productive relations to be the same) we may well have reasons to imply, as David Vincent seems to do (by pointing out that the linked group did not produce "identical life histories") that there is no clear relationship between shared experience and autobiographical production.[5]

Of course no two people, however socially similar, will produce identical life-histories no more than they will necessarily enjoy the same food, have the same number of children or be more adept at football than cricket. But this does not imply that there is no discernable correspondence between social being and autobiographical production. On the contrary, analysis of the large sample of pitmans' autobiography studied here shows that shared experience of particular productive and social relations shapes the autobiography of the group in numerous ways, not least in terms of what is selected, how value and meaning are associated with what is selected and how the text is used.

Second, the analysis of recurrent autobiographical paradigms must take place within the context of a more general cultural analysis if their meanings are to be made apparent. In other

words we must ask ourselves how the autobiographical form 'interacts' and to do so we must know something both about the form and the social melieu in which it was made.

It is my contention that autobiography is a medium for the interpretation and representation of experience rather than a means of recording 'facts' about life. The mechanisms of autobiographical production - motivation to write, autobiographical self analysis/selection and organizing purpose, are the means by which the process of interpretation and representation are achieved, and of course each of the elements in this productive dynamic is coloured by culturally determined assumptions which shape it, but which may not be immediately apparent to the reader. If therefore we wish to 'unpack' an autobiographical testimony we must know something of, and have a means of comprehending, the social context from which it sprang.

Chapter 1 of this thesis was written in the light of the points I note above. The autobiographical production of English coal miners was then examined in the light of both theoretical and empirical research based upon the sociology and history of coal mining. In this analysis a number of common features of autobiographical production and central principals of thought found in the miner's life history were identified. In brief they were as follows:

i) The paradoxical autobiographical practice of writing a 'plural' life account - a history of selves' rather than self.

ii) The recurrent preoccupation with certain facets of experience commonly associated with occupational danger.

iii) The desire to reveal the 'reality' of what is seen as an arcane subterranean world.

iv) The representation of this world by means of diabolical imagery.

v) The linkage of the above two points to calls for greater public appreciation of the miners.

vi) The association of mining with masculinity.

vii) The organization of past experience around grievance or suffering or both.

The interconnectedness of each of these perceptive, selective, motivational, representational and structural paradigms is striking, especially, as I have shown, if considered within the context of the history and sociology of coal mining. It points to the fact that, unlike much bourgeois autobiography, the autobiography of the mining community finds a unity in a single point of convergence which is the pit.

This explains why the common elements of autobiographical production listed above, in part or in total, are a recurrent feature in texts written by people who lived over a 150 year period, since experience of deep seam mining is characterized by certain universal and transhistorical qualities among which 'unnatural' working environment and constant danger are the most distinctive. Moreover, during the 19th and early 20th centuries public ignorance and fear of the mining community shaped the pitmens' attitudes, as did the gross exploitation they experienced as a class of men and the attendent patterns of conflict they engaged in as a class of men. All of these factors fed into the collective memory and cultural landscape of mining society and thus may be detected in its autobiography which in general began to be written towards the end of this culturally formative period.[6]

The working and cultural environment of the coal miner 1790-1945 lies at the heart of Chapters II, III, IV, V, VI. In each Chapter I examined the miner-autobiographers' responses to five key aspects of their experience in order to build up a picture of how life was understood and appropriated by them.

The research undertaken here reveals a remarkably resilient and imaginative body of people responding essentially to a single phenomenon - work. The miners' autobiography demonstrates that the winning of coal shaped not only the

material terrain of its author's life but the ideological and psychological contours of his being. Work was the anvil upon which identity was forged, family values fashioned, political and religious traditions wrought and leisure shaped.

The reason for this phenomenon lay as much in the environment within which work was performed as in the work itself. Mining is hard and difficult work but it is also singularly dangerous work. The miners' autobiography shows that, despite outward appearances, the mining communities of England lived on their nerves. Indeed, as I have been at pains to point out, the spectre of a sudden and violent death is invested in the pitman's representation of self, and his attitudes towards his family, his religious and political traditions and not least the 'safe' outside world.

If the fear of sudden death is the condition of a mining life, that fear does not exist within a vacuum for it is understood in relation to other factors. Thus the forces which shaped the social and economic landscape of industrial Britain during the 19th and 20th centuries interacted with the community's concern for its own well being. The rapid expansion of the English coal fields during the 19th century, and their moment of crisis in the 20th, posed a series of difficult problems for the generations of English pitmen and their responses to them are the stuff of the miners' autobiography.

The majority of autobiographers who knew the coal fields in the first phase of rapid expansion (1830-1860) frequently saw in organized religion (particularly Methodism) a means by which to solve a variety of complex problems. Could not the community trust in God's deliverance of the poor pitman from his material and social Gehenna? was consequently their essential autobiographical message. It was a logical argument for a community which had few formal structures and limited conduits of self expression.

The voice of the pitman-Methodist was not the only voice in the 19th century coal field, but it was powerful and its echo

can be detected in the work of later generations of autobiographers, for they had learned to respect themselves and despite the fact that many now wore new ideological clothes their message to the 'outside' world was essentially the same - 'respect us'.

The sharp focus that autobiography brings to the past allows us to see why miners have used their life accounts in this way. For in autobiography the action of being on consciousness is captured and pictured. We 'see' the terrified boy of ten - lamp out - crouching in the darkness, the shattered corpse, the picket-line violence, the wet 3' seam, the shuffling and dejected unemployed father and we 'see' the home, the public bar and the Chapel and in them we see love and goodwill and sometimes cruelty, anger and hopelessness. In short in autobiography we 'see' the texture of life and then we hear the verdict. We have every reason to learn from it.

CONCLUSION

NOTES

1. R. Colls, The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield; Work, Culture, and Protest, 1790-1850, (Manchester, 1987), p.304.

2. See for example F. Mundell, Stories of the Coal Mine, (1895), Ch.1, esp. p.60, for a late Victorian view, see also Chp.1 & 4 for analysis.

3. For an instructive analysis of the historiography of mining see R. Church, Outram, D.N. Smith, "Towards a history of British Miners Militancy", in, British Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin, (Spring, 1989), Vol. 54, No.1, pp.21-36.

4. See E.H. Carr, What is History?, (1961, 1984), Ch.1., esp. pp.7-9, for a trenchant analysis of Acton's view and the ideas associated with it.

5. See D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working-Class Autobiography, (1981), passim, but esp. p.10, and pp.198-199.

6. I have been able to find only two miners' autobiographies published before 1830. Works began to appear in the 1880's (Mountjoy for example) followed by a steady trickle into the new century. See also Ch.4, Note 14.

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