Childhoods

'As she had learned to read, she perused with avidity every book that came in her way. Neglected in every respect, and left to the operations of her own mind, she considered everything that came under her inspection, and learned to think . . . In this manner she was left to reflect on her own feelings; and so strengthened were they by being meditated on, that her character early became singular and permanent; but she was too much the creature of impulse and the slave of compassion.'

(Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*[1])

The child furnishes the landscape: books are read, images invested with her own meaning (a knife, a long journey to the North, an icy palace). People tell their stories to the child, about other places, other childhoods; or they keep their secrets; and using them both, the child adds other detail: a revolving door, a full skirt, some flowers' roots. Worked upon and reinterpreted, the landscape becomes a historical landscape; but only through continual and active reworking:

> People's responses to the historical conditions they encounter are shaped both by the point in their lives at which they encounter those conditions and by the equipment they bring with them from earlier life experiences[2]

says Tamara Hareven in *Family Time and Industrial Time*,

but children possess very little of that equipment (and some of it is second-hand, old tales from a distant country), and in the process of acquiring it, the baggage is continually reorganized and reinterpreted.

My mother was born in a cotton town, one of the ring of weaving towns – Blackburn, Burnley, Nelson and Colne – north of Manchester. My great-grandmother, arriving in Burnley in the late 1870s, came to a relatively newly established weaving centre, one marked off from an established cotton town like Blackburn by a late influx of workers from the rural districts.[3] Rural Yorkshire has been specified as the major source of immigrants to these towns,[4] but my grandmother's background in mid-Warwickshire suggests that double-staged immigration, in her case from domestic service to factory work, might still have been common at this time.

The weavers' unions in Lancashire at this time – the late nineteenth century – had what has been called, by way of contrast with the much more exclusive spinners' unions, an 'ecumenical recruitment policy',[5] which paid off for the women who made up the majority of the Weavers' Amalgamation, bringing them an increase in wages for four-loom supervision of 33 per cent in the two decades preceding 1906 (two years after my grandmother started work as a part-timer).[6] The historical and economic background to my mother's childhood must therefore be understood as one of limited and precarious affluence, in which women were responsible for bringing home a considerable proportion of a household's income.[7]

At the turn of the century, in the three major weaving towns of Blackburn, Burnley and Preston 'no less than three quarters of unmarried women worked, and about one third of the women continued working after they were married. In Burnley, as many as 38% of married women went out to work.'[8] Several historians have commented on the specificity of a social situation in which women worked at a trade in which their wages came near to equality with those of men,

and in which equality could provoke 'sceptical social inquiry'.[9] The basis for the growth of the suffrage movement among the working-class women of Lancashire has been explored by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris in *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, and that exploration deals in terms of this particular culture: of women, and women and work, and pride in work.[10]

In this particular industrial and social situation, Seabrook's delineation of 'Mum, the formidable and eternal Mum, virago, domestic law giver, comforter and martyr'[11] has to be elaborated by a woman's own understanding of herself: that a good mother brought the money home as well as getting the food on the table. My own mother operated within, (or rather, as I know now, presented the facade of operating within) Seabrook's definition of 'the good mother', as one who 'managed to feed her children even when there was not enough money, who kept them warm and clean';[12] but both his and Hoggart's versions of 'our mam' are of a woman who does not work, whose

> domestic supremacy was in part her consolation for her inability to express herself outside her marriage and family; and [which] in this respect may always have been makeshift, a substitute for forbidden personal satisfactions.[13]

But for women who work, however boring and exhausting that work may be, the double vision is provided: between what there is, and what of it one lacks. In Burnley, as in the other weaving towns, this sense of disjuncture may have been sharpened by the fact that the much smaller number of male weavers took home larger wages than the women did.[14]

Another factor on the horizon of difference and expectation in a town like Burnley in the pre-First World War years, was emigration. There is a box of postcards from Fall River, Massachusetts, sent as one by one, brother and sister

planned the passage of the next member of the family to leave Lancashire. None of them were ever to return: 'after 1910,' notes one historian, 'up to 1,000 old Burnleyites attended annual reunions in Fall River.'[15]

My grandmother's eight brothers and sisters wrote of hard times, difficult journeys, painful adjustments. But the postcards were about a new place, and a new set of possibilities, and I find in Tamara Hareven's *Family Time and Industrial Time*, which is a detailed description of life at the other end of the journey in this period (not in Fall River but in the huge textile plant of Amoskeag in Manchester, New Hampshire) the most revealing accounts of what migration meant to those who undertook it. Writing of immigrants to this New Hampshire town (specifically of those from a rural European background) she notes that:

> In terms of their life goals, most people in this study viewed themselves as being in a transitional stage from that farm background to an urban middle class life style. They did not identify themselves as 'working class' even though their behaviour might suggest it.[16]

For people passing through a British town like Burnley in the half century between 1880 and 1930, there were many more opportunities for self-definition as working class than there were in Fall River, Massachusetts, or in Manchester, New Hampshire. The growth of independent labour politics, the suffrage movement, and the widespread unionization of the workforce articulated such a position, even for those who were not directly involved in such organizations or movements. But I find Hareven's outline of what she calls a 'life-plan' a most insightful way of reading that series of postcards, of understanding what sense of herself a child born in 1913, within the set of industrial and family circumstances outlined above, might take with her to a different place, and a different time. My mother never identified herself as working class[17] though a sociologist would

certainly have done so, and the health visitor who made her cry by telling her the house wasn't fit for a baby knew exactly who she was. And she certainly had a life-plan; but her story is about the world's indifference to it.

A life-plan 'encompasses a wide range of goals and aspirations around which an individual or family organises its life'.[18] People formulate principles of action and organize their existence in order to reach towards the goals they have set themselves. Within the sociological framework used here, people ideally reorganize and reformulate their life-plan in the light of the social reality they encounter, 'but . . . always . . . in the context of their own customs and traditions'.[19] The formulation ignores entirely the conceptual and psychological baggage that people carry with them, and the disruptions that the irrational and the unconscious make in its running. Yet as a formulation, it removes passivity from the figures in Hoggart's and Seabrook's landscape, suggests what desperations may lie behind the doors of the terraced houses.

*

I know very little about the circumstances of my mother's early years – an only child, a father who died at the Somme when she was three, a powerful and benevolent grandmother, a working mother – only the bits and pieces of the constraining history that were delivered up to me all through my childhood. My widowed grandmother married again when my mother was in her very early teens – a bad one, a flash one – and her daughter often spoke disparagingly of my grandmother's pursuit of a modestly good time: going out, dancing, drinking. 'She liked men, your grandmother,' she said to me once, bitterly; a brief and profound lesson in the impossibility of my doing any such thing. She carried a profound sense of resentment against the circumstances of her childhood. Her system of good mothering was partly a system of defiance, that she constructed out of that resentment, and by which she could demonstrate how

unlike her own mother she was. The most perceptive and responsive audience for this display had to be her own children, for it was only to them that she had given the information that allowed them to see the opposite set of images in play, the darkness round the stage. (Her good mothering though, it should be noted, did not include teaching children right from wrong, on the list that contains managing, feeding and keeping children clean and warm: she told us how to stare ahead when the conductor came past your seat on the bus, in order to save paying the fare.[20]) The custom and tradition, then, which Hareven mentions as acting as the context for people's reshaping of a life-plan, can be used to express a state of mind, in this case my mother's resentment and bitterness against early childhood experiences. Her presentation of herself as a good mother shows also with what creativity people may use the stuff of cultural and social stereotype, so that it becomes not a series of labels applied from outside a situation, but a set of metaphors ready for transformation by those who are its subjects.

She grew up at a time when economic circumstances disrupted collective ideas about what an individual's life might, or ought to be, like. At the turn of the century, and up until the First World War, 'girls in working class families north of Rochdale would automatically go into the mill – usually into the weaving shed – when they left school'.[21] A recent historian of the British labour movement may define weaving as unskilled work in the terms established by the older craft unions, and by the status that derived from those terms;[22] but the culture of the weaving towns saw this transition from school to mill not just as one that would bring cash into the household, but also as the donation of a possession to an individual:

> That was the big thing they used to talk about, the cotton workers, 'You've a trade in your hands, a wonderful trade, a weaver. A trade in your hands if you learned to weave.'[23]

But by 1927, the year my mother left school, all this had changed. The industry was in severe decline, and a child brought up in a social context where a majority of women were considered to be in possession of a skill, became an unskilled worker. Dressmaking had always been one of the few alternative trades to cotton available in Burnley;[24] but the dry-cleaners where my mother found work did not serve to give her a skill, as an apprenticeship to a dressmaker might have done some years before. Later, in the 1930s, she was driven on the path of migration not only by the same sort of (though greatly intensified) difficulties that had sent her uncles and aunts over the Atlantic, but by the propulsion, too, of desire and social aspiration.

We were all of us, going as far back as the story lets us, people moving up and down railway tracks, leaving lost relationships in different places along the line. This particular impossible story ended up in London, in the late 1940s, and one of its products was my own childhood. I see my childhood as evidence that can be used. I think it's particularly useful as a way of gaining entry to ideas about childhood – what children are *for*, why to have them – that aren't written about in the official records, that is, in the textbooks of child psychology and child analysis, and in sociological descriptions of childhood. This public assertion of my childhood's usefulness stands side by side with the painful personal knowledge, I think the knowledge of all of us, all my family, going as far back as the story permits, that it would have been better that it hadn't happened that way, hadn't happened at all.

I stayed at school late once, without telling her. There was a man from the BBC there that day who came into the eleven-plus class and recorded voices, trying us out for a children's programme. He told us that anyone who wanted to be seriously considered should stay behind at four o'clock, and I did, held rigid with excitement by the idea of fame, the idea of my voice on the same wireless as the 'Eagle

of the Ninth' which all last year I had run home at night to listen to.

She was waiting on the doorstep: I withered, there was nothing I could say. She'd wanted me to go down the road to fetch a bunch of watercress for tea, and I ought to have known she couldn't go, couldn't leave my sister. I fell into the dark place of her displeasure, the sinking feeling of descent. She wasn't like my grandmother, didn't go out enjoying herself; and neither should I.

In this way, you come to know that you are not quite yourself, but someone else: someone else has paid the price for you, and you have to pay it back. You grow small, and quiet, and take up very little room. You take on the burden of being good, which is the burden of the capacity to know exactly how someone else is feeling.

Becoming good in this way has been described in psychoanalytic terms by Alice Miller, who has written of the way in which

> every mother carries with her a bit of her 'unmastered past', which she unconsciously hands on to her child. Each mother can only react empathically to the extent she has become free of her own childhood.[25]

Unfree in this way, a mother may love the child as a version of herself, something through which she may live, and achieve all her lost hopes. And so, there come into existence children who are

> intelligent, alert, attentive, extremely sensitive and (because they are completely attuned to her well-being) entirely at the mother's disposal and ready for her use. Above all they are transparent, clear, reliable and easy to manipulate.[26]

They are, in fact, children who have been made good.

But a deep resentment of these manipulations developed as I grew. I particularly resented being called cold and unfeeling in my early teens ('There's that woman on the phone again.' 'Why tell me?' 'Who else is there to tell?

You're so unfeeling, Kay.') and would shout back in real fury that it was unfair to say that, as it was she who had made me so. I see the lineaments of this resentment, and an ultimate refusal to be manipulated, that is, in a refusal to *be* my mother, in the connection of intelligence and feeling, two aspects of the individual that Alice Miller divides from each other in *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. She argues that in the circumstances she has described the child's intellectual capacities develop undisturbed, masking often, though, a damaged world of feeling, a false and despairing self.[27] Yet intellectual development can fuel feeling: reading the fairy-tales can give a child a way of seeing what is happening, and a means of analysis. Part of my rage at my mother's accusation of coldness was due to the image of Kay in 'The Snow Queen', with a lump of ice in his heart, and quite accessible to my imagination ever since I had read the story seven years before. There was a simple fear that she might be right, that there might really be that lump of ice there; but pride too, that I *had seen* this a long time ago, that I had an image, an explanatory device. It seems that once intellectual endeavour is specified, that is, once a real child in a real situation is seen making these efforts (reading books, thinking, furnishing an imagination) then it becomes impossible to separate intellectual life from emotional life.

But I think also, that once we move from the psychoanalytic to the social (which any use of these ideas outside the therapeutic framework will provide) then the content of a mother's desire has to be specified and examined. In Miller's exegesis, mothers project 'expectations, fears and plans' on to their good children.[28] Within the theory it is quite proper that their desires retain this abstraction; but in the social world, it is the social that people want – fine clothes, a house, to marry a king; and if these desires are projected on to a child, and if she comes close to the feeling that they are her own desires as well as her mother's, then that social world itself may provide her with some measure of their quality and validity, and help her to stand to one side,

momentarily detached from her mother's longing. What is more, and I find this the most hopeful and interesting feature of Miller's argument, none of this is entirely dependent on a mother: a mother only needs to be just good enough to allow the child to 'acquire from other people what the mother lacks'. Miller goes on to remark that 'various investigations have shown the incredible ability that a healthy child displays in making use of the smallest affective "nourishment" (stimulation) to be found in the surroundings'. This argument will be returned to in the next chapter.[29]

I was made good within specific class and social circumstances: to know how my mother felt meant acquaintance with all the ghostly army of good women, scrubbing the Lancashire doorsteps until they dropped, babies fed by the side wall of the mill, bringing the money home, getting the food to the table, never giving in.[30] I carry with me the tattered remnants of this psychic structure: there is no way of not working hard, nothing but an endurance that allows you to absorb everything that comes by way of difficulty, *holding on* to the grave.

This psychology must have served capitalism at least as well as a desire for the things of the market place, which the cultural critics condemn. At least the cut-out cardboard teenage figures of Seabrook's *Working Class Childhood* know, as they sit sniffing glue and planning how to knock off a video-recorder, that the world owes them something, that they have a right to the earth, an attitude at least as potentially subversive as the passivity that arises from not ever being given very much.

Within the tradition of political and cultural criticism that this book has taken as one of its vantage points, the 1950s, the time of my own childhood, is becoming more and more frequently located as the place where the labour movement failed to place socialism on the agenda of class politics, and at the same time, failed to identify and respond to new constituencies.[31] In delineating a historical period,

the working people of that decade are seen to walk, dehistoricized, through the industrial landscape, the last of 'the old working class'. Yet within that period of time, children grew up, shaped both by the histories they inhabited and by a modern political world.

People said at the time that the War had been fought for the children, for a better future; and the decade represents a watershed in the historical process by which children have come to be thought of as repositories of hope, and objects of desire. Accounts like Jeremy Seabrook's in *Working Class Childhood* see in the material affection displayed towards the children of my own and more recent generations, a political failure on the part of the left to confront the inculcated desires of the market place. 'Instead of the children of the working class being subjected to rigorous self-denial for a lifetime in mill or mine,' writes Seabrook

> they have been offered instead the promise of easy and immediate gratification which, in the end, can sabotage human development and achievement just as effectively as the poverty of the past.[32]

There hovers in *Working Class Childhood* the ghostly presence of more decent and upright children, serving their time in the restriction of poverty and family solidarity: 'the old defensive culture of poverty gave working class children ... a sense of security which is denied the present generation.'[33]

But in this sterner, older world the iron entered into the children's soul, and many of them had to learn that being alive ought simply to be enough, a gift that must ultimately be paid for. Under conditions of material poverty, the cost of most childhoods has been most precisely reckoned, and only life has been given freely. It is important to note as well that out of a childhood lived in the streets of 'the old defensive culture of poverty', my mother brought away a profound sense of insecurity and an incalculable longing for the things she didn't have. She was self-indulgent and selfish

in a way that 'our mam' is not allowed to be, and she learned selfishness in the very landscape that is meant to have eradicated it in its children. She wanted things. Politics and cultural criticism can only find trivial the content of her desires, and the world certainly took no notice of them. It is one of the purposes of this book to admit her desire for the things of the earth to political reality and psychological validity.

Exclusions

> The motions of desire may be legible in the text of necessity and may then become subject to rational explanation and criticism. But such criticism can scarcely touch these motions at their heart . . . So what Marxism might do, for a change, is sit on its own head in the interest of Socialism's heart. It might . . . cease dispensing the potions of analysis to cure the maladies of desire. This might do good politically as well, since it would allow a little space not only for literary Utopias, but also for the unprescribed initiatives of everyday men and women who, in some part of themselves, are also alienated and utopian by turn.
>
> (E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to (Revolutionary)*[1]

What children learn in the course of development is that they cannot always have what they want. The lesson can be described as the assimilation of a set of social rules, of prohibitions and proscriptions: it can be seen as the place where a child enters a culture, and a culture comes to occupy a child. But it is not clear that any child living through these moments of denial, through the first and essential exclusion, sees the matter in this light. What the child experiences is loss, the loss of something that she believed she possessed, or might possess someday, something she had a right to (these things are as ordinary and as various as: a breast, a father, a mother; the sense that she controls the world). The child is excluded, cut off from something that was formerly owned

and enjoyed. Freud's re-writing of the myth of Oedipus is a highly specific account, centred on the particularity of losing a parent as a possession, of the loss that it is the fate of every human child to experience in some way or other.

If there were no history, if people were not conscious of themselves living within time and society, and if they did not use their own past to construct explanations of the present, then the myth – this particular one, others like it – could be allowed to stand, as a timeless and universal allegory of human development, and the relationship of culture to that development. But we live in time and politics, and exclusion is the promoter of envy, the social and subjective sense of the impossible unfairness of things. The first loss, the first exclusion, will be differently reinterpreted by the adult who used to be the child, according to the social circumstances she finds herself in, and the story she needs to relate.

Within Western religious and political thought, envy has long been called a sin, the improper covetousness of that to which one has no right. When Wilhelm Reich considered the formation of class-consciousness in children (and it is extremely rare to consider it as a learned position in this way) he dismissed envy as a usable motivational force, despite knowing that poverty, which naturally gave rise to envy is 'never absolute, but always relative to those who have more'.[2] Envy is thus seen as an enclosed and self-referencing system of feeling, incapable of becoming dynamic or a force from which change might spring, its only possible effect a levelling down of material and cultural life. It has usually been seen too, as the base possession of the propertyless and powerless, of the poor, and of children and women. Psychoanalysis has adopted and manipulated this general social understanding of envy, and has underlined its baseness as an impulse.

Within Kleinian analysis, envy is understood as a more primitive emotion than jealousy: out of rage at what it has lost the baby seeks to destroy that which is the very object of desire. Jealousy, on the other hand, which arises out of

the oedipal triangle, is seen as much more sophisticated, propelled by love for that which is desired, and hatred for a rival. Envy though is a drive, an instinct, and will destroy what is most wanted, making reparation impossible.[3] Conceptually, in this particular account, envy in the human infant bears a strong relation to the idea of original sin.[4]

From a social viewpoint it is possible to see the most extraordinary and transparent political paternalism attaching itself to the general use of the notion within psychoanalysis. Freud was amused at the dreams of his household servant in which she replaced his wife, seeing the fantasy in the adult as a replay of the childish hopes expressed in 'Family Romances', in which children are described ridding themselves of their own parents in imagination, and replacing them with a couple altogether richer, more glamorous and powerful than their own. The replacement of the servant's dream is read through the glass of sexual attraction for the master of the house; but it did not escape the notice of either the children whom Freud observed for the writing of 'Family Romances' or of his domestic servants, that the figures of fantasy who replace the reality are actually the possessors of material goods in the material world.[5]

My mother's sense of unfairness, her belief that she had been refused entry to her rightful place in the world, was the dominant feature of her psychology and the history she told: her life itself became a demonstration of the unfairness. Thirty years after my mother passed her childhood in the North, she brought forward again and again that territory of deprivation and hardship to demonstrate the ease of our existence. The delineation of good mothering that she claimed had grown out of my grandmother's indifference was the point at which she could constantly reiterate her sense of loss, of being denied her due.

Feelings of exile and exclusion, of material and political envy, are a feature of many lives, but it is difficult to deal with them in the framework of morality outlined above. In

The Hidden Injuries of Class Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb make the attempt, dealing with American working life and with its subjects, adult men. Here the injuries are presented as being the result of a particular organization of the labour market and, by way of preparation for a working life, the systematic exclusions practised by school systems. Within this set of conventions, women remain hidden from view, their sense of injury related to the small-scale and the domestic.[6] The presentation of such feelings is easy, because there exists in the USA a language of material and emotional resentment outside the confining European moralities. Ordinary lives can be lived as soap opera, with each the picaresque heroine of her own hard times.[7] But here, on the other side of the Atlantic, there is no language of desire that can present what my mother wanted as anything but supremely trivial; indeed, there is no language that does not let the literal accents of class show, nor promote the tolerant yet edgy smile.

But her exile was not trivial, and she did not see it as such. The borders of her exclusion were immense; her sense of loss resolutely material: there was no point in our childhood when we were not given to understand that the experiences she described connected both with the world as it was, and the world as she wanted it to be. A recent research survey of the linguistic interaction between working-class four-year-old girls and their mothers describes the 'curriculum' of the home (it is the fate of these children in the school system that is being investigated) as wide-ranging, moving through time and space and politics, with the questions of birth and death on the agenda.[8] It is astonishing only that this finding is thought surprising. Political figures and the interstices of class were always the subject of my mother's talking to me. Churchill, she said, was a fat pig, like the rest of them, privileged and powerful; he had everything he wanted during the War: 'No rationing for him, you bet.' And then, holding the contradiction together told how 'He pulled us through. His speeches . . .'. Years later, she manicured the

nails of women involved in the Profumo affair, brought home scandalous insight. Other working-class Conservative voters have been questioned over this incident and their fidelity to their party tested. Like them, she remained 'broadly permissive and indulgent', not because she thought this the right way for the upper classes to carry on, nor from reasons of deference,[9] but because she knew she was like them, or would be if only the world would let her be what she really was, and tolerance was the price she paid for knowing this. 'Still, pigs;' she said, 'they're all the same.'

She expressed the felt injuries of a social system, but analysis of her position and the position of women like her has always been seen in domestic as opposed to social terms, their political understandings imperfectly learned from men, who are full participants in the world of work.[10] Yet to deal with the felt injuries of a social system through the experience of women and girls suggests that beneath the voices of class-consciousness may perhaps lie another language, that might be heard to express the feelings of those outside the gate, the propertyless and the dispossessed. To enter the arena of subjectivity does not mean abandoning the political; indeed, to explore my mother's organization of feeling around a perception of vast personal and material inequality, political Burnley in the years between 1880 and 1920 is probably the place to start, with a description of the political culture, outlined in the last chapter, in which my mother grew and which she brought south with her, to frame and organize the social world for her own children, thirty years later.

*

In the summer of 1969, whilst working on *City Close-Up*, Jeremy Seabrook went to Blackburn and recorded his conversation with several old Lancashire weavers. They repeated over and over again, their sense of 'the unfairness of things'.[11] The phrase transfixes; and yet: there is something missing from the old weavers' tale. They remembered the

tyranny of the mill, the harshness of former overseers; and it would be easy enough to believe that one heard here the expression of a shared and fully articulated experience, call it consciousness of exploitation, call it class-consciousness, and then move on. But historians of the political North-west know how unsatisfactory such labelling is, and the hold of Conservatism on the cotton towns at the turn of the century remains a problem.[12] This sense of unfairness was not necessarily translated into political understanding, nor into the politics of class, at any time over the last century. My mother's tale presents a version of this political problem: she grew to political Conservatism out of a Labour background. Her Conservatism did not express deference, nor traditionalism; nor was it the simple result of contact with rich women who could afford to have their nails painted.[13] She did not express by her political allegiance a tired acceptance of the status quo; in fact, she presented her Conservatism as radical, as a matter of defiance. The problem with this kind of defiance, whatever form it takes, is that it is rude: it disrupts conventional narratives of politics and class, and is disturbing in the way that Elizabeth Gaskell found the Lancashire mill-girls that she observed for *North and South*, who 'came rushing along, with bold fearless faces and loud laughter and jest, particularly aimed at all those who appeared to be above them in rank and station'.[14]

In the late nineteenth century, Burnley, by way of contrast with neighbouring Blackburn, still possessed a local landowning gentry which played a prominent and traditional part in local life.[15] The most important local family were the Roman Catholic Townleys (the bluebell wood with the little stream, where I remember her last day of happiness, was Townley land), but there were others too, and their social presence in the town prevented the rise of an industrial middle class to gentry status.[16] The social rulers of Burnley were then, the traditional ones, figures of the conventional class romance; and this conservative romance and its rep-

resentatives were distanced from the culture and politics of daily life: 'Burnley was known as a "Radical Hole", a Liberal dominated mill-town where land and business kept their distance.'[17]

Cotton owners remained distinct from the town's social elite, and this separation of trade from land provided a free arena for economic enterprise.[18] The establishment of a weaving business was in any case a smaller and cheaper undertaking than the setting up of a spinning shop, and since the 1850s in Burnley it had always been feasible for a cotton worker with savings to set up on his or her own. A local economic practice, which was the easy availability of rooms to rent with power for machinery thrown in, and the much-publicized facilities for saving in the town – for 'getting on' – made the possibility of rising part of its social and political landscape.[19]

Beneath the traditional form of social government represented in the separation of land and trade, a less rigid social structure pertained in Burnley when it is compared with other cotton towns. It is the argument of one historian of the town that this 'fostered greater, not less discontent, as inter-group comparisons and a wider range of reference groups became adopted'.[20] Yet within this framework, and within a social structure that allowed for individual advancement and the telling of social fairy-tales about people making good, the Burnley working class at the turn of the century seems to have shown a greater division between skilled and unskilled workers than was usual in cotton towns. This separation showed itself in the low incidence of residential contact and marriage between the two groups.[21] Burnley, then, in the early decades of this century, presented the picture of a culture in which individual aspiration and success were allowed to express themselves within the broader setting of a traditional form of local government.

The town expanded rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century, later than the other cotton towns, with the

population more than doubling between 1871 and 1891.[22] Any family established during those years and maintaining a household into the new century, as did my great-grandmother, would have experienced a cycle of depression and boom. Many of my mother's uncles and aunts left the town for Fall River, Massachusetts, between the two severe depressions of 1903/4 and 1908/9, and my grandmother, age twenty-two and five-months pregnant with my mother, married my grandfather during the good year of 1913. Burnley experienced a final period of boom at the end of the First World War, before entering catastrophic recession in 1921.[23]

Through all these fluctuations in the economy, Burnley women worked: in 1911, 56 per cent of females over ten years of age were at work, most of them in the weaving sheds.[24] Work at weaving was understood as a source of pride for women, and Patrick Joyce has speculated of Burnley that 'the principal threat to the [male] weaver was perhaps that to his family authority, in work and at home . . .'[25] Yet, as has already been indicated, there were many ways in which gender divisions were maintained within the factory (particularly by the simple device of men tending a larger number of looms than women) and men received more money for work that was practically identical to that of their female fellow workers.[26]

My mother's experience of households largely supported and maintained by women was given dramatic emphasis by the death of her father at the Somme in 1916. The depression of 1921 and its aftermath changed the climate of expectation for working-class girls in the town: like many in her age group my mother did not do now, in the late 1920s, what she would have done ten years before, and go into the mill on leaving school. Her own mother stopped working in the sheds at this time because there was very little work to be had. This experience, local to Lancashire, is a specific example of a much wider social process whereby across Europe 'the importance of the mother in caring for her

children . . . became much more pronounced in the early 20th century. This placed the mother at the centre of her children's affection.'[27] Children come to expect from adults what they learn to be the common practice of the adults around them. In the context of a developing domestication of women and the developing centrality of motherhood in definitions of women, a Burnley child of the 1920s felt a resentment towards a working mother who behaved less and less like the increasing number of 'new' mothers around her. Thirty years later my younger sister, who has always felt a more bitter resentment against our childhood than I do, and who has a preciser sense of what we lacked, may have learned similar new definitions of good mothering from the rapidly changing maternal practice (influenced by popularized versions of Bowlby and broadcast Winnicott) of the mid-1950s, and wanted what she did not have. Both my mother and my sister brought forward an earlier sense of psychological loss and abandonment – the first exclusion – and interpreted it, still as young children, in the light of social information and observation.

To the 'radical hole' of Burnley, immigrants arrived from rural areas much later than they did to other cotton centres. Some, from the unmechanized weaving centres of the West Riding, brought with them still-living Chartist and radical traditions, a particular perception of society organized by radicalism, and a language for expressing that perception that drew on a political understanding of the unfairness of things.[28] Political radicalism, defined as both 'a vision and analysis of social and political evils', developed in the period 1770–1850. 'It was,' observes Gareth Stedman-Jones, 'first and foremost a vocabulary of political exclusion whatever the social character of those excluded.'[29] Its rhetoric framed the demands of the Chartist movement, and as a tool of political analysis and a language of political expression, it became more and more the property of working-class people as the century advanced.[30] It is the argument of Stedman-Jones in 'Rethinking Chartism' that the development of class-consciousness later in the nineteenth century 'formed part of a language whose systematic linkages were supplied by the assumptions of radicalism: a vision and analysis of social and political evils which certainly long predated the advent of class consciousness, however defined'.[31]

Radicalism asserted the rights of the individual in conflict with privilege, privilege being seen particularly as the twin-headed hydra of Church and aristocracy. Its notable feature as a means of analysis was that its rhetoric allowed the tracing of misery, evil and unfairness to a *political* source, that is, to the manipulation by others of rights, privileges and money, rather than attributing such perception to a shared consciousness of exploitation. It was a coherent device both for understanding the ordering of the world in a particular way, and for achieving that understanding without direct *experience* of exploitation, or of a particular organization of labour, or of the vicissitudes of the labour market. This is by way of contrast with theories of class-consciousness which often do draw on such personal and direct experience, though not always explicitly.[32]

We do not, of course, know to what extent a radical vision and a radical analysis may have informed the political and social understanding of people living and working in Burnley in the period 1880–1920. But it is worth speculating, as Patrick Joyce has done for instance, about how far the perceptions of radicalism shaped the self-understanding of artisans-become-factory workers in Lancashire, cut off from former rights as individual workers over the means of production.[33] For some working people radicalism provided a means of entry to Labour politics and the politics of class;[34] it may equally have fuelled a popular Toryism.[35] Certainly, the political analysis my mother possessed and the political language she used suggest to me that her vision of the world had been organized in this way, at some point.

Burnley is a much-investigated town, and a great deal is known about political movements within it and the shaping

of its political allegiances. However, two factors have been left out of the story so far. The first is any reckoning of the presence of so large a number of women in the workforce, except as adjuncts to the male story of trade unionism,[36] or in terms of a developing suffrage movement. The second missing factor is any discussion of how a political culture might affect children growing up within it. Lacking a vote, women and children have been left out of the structuring of historical analysis; but the very point of analysing a place and time in terms of a political *culture* is to assess the influence of forms of work and organization on social life and on all people's experience of that life.

The circulation of radical thought and radical rhetoric in Burnley in the late nineteenth century allows speculation about it as a set of ideas, and the meaning of these old ideas when they are brought forward into new circumstances. To say that radicalism could provide entry to socialist commitment, as it did for a very small number of working people living in Burnley, Nelson and Colne at the turn of the century, is to outline the trajectory of an accessible set of political ideas. But political ideas can be used by people in other areas of mental life, can be drawn on to help them interpret and reinterpret the world and their relationship to it. Political radicalism spoke to and for those outside the gate, the dispossessed and excluded. Such political understanding connects with subjective experiences of exile and exclusion, and political ideas like this, used to define particular circumstances (like the specific class structure of Burnley, for instance) may help bring personal ones into articulation. Possibly, in the cotton towns in the first two decades of this century, raised expectations, scepticism and resentment about what they did not possess was provoked in many women by the fact of their working in an industry which they dominated numerically, but in which they were still only women, and, in Burnley in particular, by a social structure that held out the promise of change, of advancement, of getting by and getting more, but that of course

denied its realization to the majority. The suffrage movement, which was remarkably successful in campaigning with working women in this area, may well have been fuelled by the substructure of envy and exclusion that the rhetoric of radicalism provided, in the same sort of way.

Women are the shadow within modern analyses of working-class Conservatism, and theories of deference have been wedded to ideas about women's isolation from the workforce, and from those formative experiences that produce class-consciousness in men, in order to explain their position.[37] Yet my mother was not 'isolated from industrial culture'[38] in her growing years; indeed, the argument here has been that it was a political and industrial culture that helped shape a sense of herself in relationship to others. The legacy of this culture may have been her later search, in the mid-twentieth century, for a public language that allowed her to *want*, and to express her resentment at being on the outside, without the material possessions enjoyed by those inside the gate. But within the framework of conventional political understanding, the desire for a New Look skirt cannot be seen as a political want, let alone a proper one. We have no better ways of understanding such manifestations of political culture than they did in Burnley in 1908, when they used to say dismissively that 'a motor car or carriage would buy a woman's vote . . . at any time'.[39]

*

I have presented my own childhood, a 1950s childhood, through the filter of my parents' story and my growing awareness of its odd typicality, because it widens the fissure between the terraced houses that Hoggart and Seabrook have so lovingly described. It was a map of these streets that my mother brought with her to use as a yardstick for our own childhood in the post-War years. But the social world provided other measures.

The 1950s was a time when state intervention in children's lives was highly visible, and experienced, by me at

least, as entirely beneficent. The calculated, dictated fairness of the ration book went on into the new decade, and we spent a lot of time after we moved from Hammersmith to Streatham Hill, picking up medicine bottles of orange juice and jars of Virol from the baby clinic for my sister. I think I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn't told me, in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something. My inheritance from those years is the belief (maintained always with some difficulty) that I do have a right to the earth.[40] I think that had I grown up with my parents only twenty years before, I would not now believe this, for children are always episodes in someone else's narrative, not their own people, but rather brought into being for particular purposes. Being a child when the state was practically engaged in making children healthy and literate was a support against my own circumstances, so I find it difficult to match an account of the welfare policies of the late 1940s, which calls the 'post-War Labour government . . . the last and most glorious flowering of late Victorian liberal philanthropy', which I know to be historically correct, with the sense of self that those policies imparted.[41] If it had been only philanthropy, would it have felt like it did? Psychic structures are shaped by these huge historical labels: 'charity', 'philanthropy', 'state intervention'.

It was a considerable achievement for a society to pour so much milk and so much orange juice, so many vitamins, down the throats of its children, and for the height and weight of those children to outstrip the measurements of only a decade before; and this remains an achievement in spite of the fact that the statistics of healthy and intelligent childhood were stretched along the curve of achievement, and only a few were allowed to travel through the narrow gate at the age of eleven, towards the golden city. Nevertheless, within that period of time more children were provided with the goods of the earth than had any generation been before. What my mother lacked, I was given; and though

vast inequalities remained between me and others of my generation, the sense that a benevolent state bestowed on me, that of my own existence and the worth of that existence – attenuated, but still there – demonstrates in some degree what a fully material culture might offer in terms of physical comfort and the structures of care and affection that it symbolizes, to all its children.

What has been discussed in this chapter are matters little understood by children, but each child grows up in an adult world that is specified by both politics and social existence, and they are reared by adults who consciously know and who unconsciously manipulate the particularities of the world that shaped them. My mother's father was removed from her at the age of three by the foulest and most cynical battle of the First World War. (She remembered, she said, being lifted to the kitchen table to gaze into the face of a soldier home on leave: her father.) Forty years later, knowingly and unknowingly, she removed mine from me. It will not do to describe working-class childhood as a uniform experience, and to reserve the case-studies for the children of the upper classes. What case-studies of such childhood might reveal is a radicalized vision of society, of class-consciousness not only as a structure of feeling that arises from the relationship of people to other people within particular modes of production, but which is also an understanding of the world that can be conveyed to children; what might be called (as well as all the other names it is given) a proper envy of those who possess what one has been denied. And by allowing this envy entry into political understanding, the proper struggles of people in a state of dispossession to gain their inheritance might be seen not as sordid and mindless greed for the things of the market place, but attempts to alter a world that has produced in them states of unfulfilled desire.

But to use such evidence, the evidence of all the unwritten case-histories, involves a difficult double vision. What has been made in this way is a product of material and

psychological deprivation: the subjects of these histories are made what they are out of multiple poverties, and what they do in the course of development is an aspect of their social and cultural marginality: these are sad and secret stories.

Histories

> Pointless stories are met with the withering rejoinder, 'So what?' Every good narrator is continually warding off this question; when his narrative is over it should be unthinkable for a bystander to say 'So what?'
>
> (William Labov, *Language in the Inner City*)[1]

I grew up in a culture and at a time when it was easy to place childhood on a developmental map. My mother, using both the transmitted child psychology of the 1950s and much older notions of what children could do or could be expected to do when they reached a certain age, knew when I stopped being a child. Understanding human development in this particular way is a fairly recent cultural achievement, and it is still somewhat shaky in its application after babyhood is passed, especially where female children are concerned, with little girls often seen to embody the physical virtues of the ideal woman: narcissism, containment, clarity of flesh, large eyes and slenderness. Little boys, by way of contrast, are frequently understood to possess an adult masculinity as soon as they emerge from infancy. Steven Marcus in 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case-History' has pointed out that the late nineteenth century Viennese physician had a great deal of trouble in siting his eighteen-year-old hysterical patient in the tables of physiological and sexual growth:

> he is . . . utterly uncertain about where Dora is, or was developmentally. At one moment in the passage he

> calls her a 'girl', at another a 'child' – but in point of fact he treats her throughout as if this fourteen- sixteen- and eighteen-year-old adolescent had the capacities for sexual response of a grown woman.[2]

Examples of this uncertainty abound in all sociological and literary accounts of nineteenth-century girlhood.[3] William Thackeray, for example, addressed thus the *sixteen-year-old* daughter of an American acquaintance in the 1850s:

> If I were to come there now, I wonder should I be allowed to come and see you in your nightcap – I wonder even if you wear a nightcap? I should step up, take your little hand, which I daresay is lying outside the coverlet, give it a little shake, and then sit down and talk all sorts of stuff and nonsense to you for half an hour.[4]

This uncertainty about development and sexuality also extended to very young girls – to children – and to those of the working class. Henry Mayhew, collecting material for a series of articles in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849/50, and transcribing the conversations that were later to make up *London Labour and the London Poor*, interviewed an eight-year-old street-trader in watercresses and frankly recorded his confusion about her place on the developmental map: 'the little watercress girl . . . although only eight years of age had already lost all childish ways, was indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman . . .'.[5] The little girl herself knew that she occupied some place between childhood and adulthood, and told the social investigator that 'I ain't a child, and I shan't be a woman till I'm twenty, but I'm past eight, I am.' Mayhew mused on her status: 'I did not know how to talk with her,' he recorded; and Freud, after Dora's last visit, did 'not know what kind of help she wanted from me';[6] both of them transfixed by the determinations of femininity, both seduced in spite of themselves, the one moved by compassion, the other by the manipulations of hysteria.

Dora and the little watercress girl are of use here because they both told stories, that is, each of them had an autobiography to impart, and they did so through the agency of the interest and inquiry of two investigators of the human condition. They are divided by age, by class, by time and geography, and the content of their stories seems different too, in so far as each represents a different social reality. They are held together, however, not only by the dichotomous nature of their two narratives and the way in which one illuminates the other, but by being young girls, occupying the contradictory and categorically diffuse place between infancy and womanhood. Dora's and the little watercress girl's stories are used here because they are rare autobiographical accounts of femininity: the little watercress girl, in fact, presents an almost unique piece of evidence about working-class childhood. The two accounts taken together bring into focus certain themes of this book; and in the making of history what evidence presents itself must be used, in spite of the chronological disturbance it suggests (London in the 1850s, Vienna in the 1900s); the making of history might, in fact, be seen as the theorization of such disruption and dislocation. This final chapter, then, is concerned with the relationship between the autobiographical account (the personal history), case-history, and the construction and writing of history. It is about women's history, as indeed this book is, about the difficulties of writing it, the other stories that get in the way, and different kinds of narrative form.

Within this enterprise, childhood is at once revelatory and problematic. Working-class childhood is problematic because of the many ways in which it has been pathologized over the last century and a half.[7] In the romantic construction of childhood, which propelled the earliest child-study and within which the psychoanalytic enterprise must place itself, the children of the poor are only a measure of what they lack as children: they are a falling-short of a more complicated and richly endowed 'real' child; though that

real child may suffer all the vicissitudes of neurosis. Child analysis was a late manifestation of the romantic quest to establish childhood as an area of experience lying within us all, not as a terrain abandoned, but as a landscape of feeling that might be continually reworked and reinterpreted.[8] The appropriation of these ideas – both romantic and literary, and technical – to general social understanding, has tended to de-historicize childhood, has allowed it to be seen as existing in and of itself. Yet childhood *is* a kind of history, the continually reworked and re-used personal history that lies at the heart of each present. What is brought forward for interpretation is structured by its own figurative devices, arranged according to the earliest perceptions of the entities in the real world that give us our metaphors, and the social reality and meaning that metaphor co-joins.

*

Henry Mayhew encountered the eight-year-old watercress-seller in the East End of London, probably in the Farringdon area, sometime in the winter of 1849/50. Of all the little girls he interviewed during this winter and over the next ten years, she was the one who touched him the most: he was puzzled by her, he pitied her, he felt affection for her; she was not like the children he knew, and yet she was a child. He was attracted by her, and repelled at the same time:

> There was something cruelly pathetic in hearing this infant, so young that her features had scarcely formed themselves, talking of the bitterest struggles of life, with the calm earnestness of one who has endured them all. At first I treated her as a child, speaking on childish subjects; so that I might, by being familiar with her, remove all shyness and get her to relate her life freely . . .

The method did not work; the child would not be treated as a child; 'a look of amazement soon put an end to any attempt at fun' on Mayhew's part. However, the child did have a story to tell, and she eventually related it,

moving back in time from her current position, after some preliminary remarks:

> I go about the street with watercresses, crying 'Four bunches a penny, watercresses.' I am just eight years old – that's all, and I've a big sister, and a brother, and a sister younger than I am. On and off I've been very near a twelvemonth on the streets. Before that I used to take care of a baby for my aunt. I . . . minded it for ever such a long time – till it could walk . . . Before I had the baby, I used to help mother, who was in the fur trade; and if there was any slits in the fur I'd sew them up. My mother learned me to needlework and knit when I was about five. I used to go to school too; but I wasn't there long. I've forgotten all about it now, it's such a long time ago . . .

From this sequentially accurate (though chronologically reversed) account, the child selected certain themes – her relationship with her parents and siblings, the financial organization of her life, the questions of play and enjoyment that she had formerly denied – and elaborated on them for the benefit of her interlocutor.[9] These themes, which were central to the child's understanding of herself, will be returned to later.

Some fifty years later, in another European city, Freud encountered the upper-middle-class hysteric 'Dora' (in reality, Ida Bauer) who was brought to him by her father at various points during her adolescence in the hope of curing her of coughing attacks, loss of voice, depression and various other nervous symptoms. The implicit expectation was also that the analyst would be able to cure her of a view of her social and sexual reality that did not suit her father, who was at this time and who had for several years past been adulterously involved with the wife of a family friend, called 'Frau K.' in the case-history.[10]

At several points during the four years before she started analysis with Freud, Dora had come to believe that there was a tacit agreement between her father and the husband of

her father's mistress, to hand her over to Herr. K. as the trade-off for the adulterous relationship. 'When she was feeling embittered,' recorded Freud

> she used to be overcome by the idea that she had been handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife; and her rage at her father's making such a use of her was visible behind her affection for him. At other times she was quite aware that she had been guilty of exaggeration in talking like this. The two men had never of course made a formal agreement in which she was an object for barter.[11]

There are several accounts of the case-study available, and indeed, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' is one of the most widely read of Freud's works.[12] The account above, then, is the merest outline of the case itself, and what follows is not concerned with Dora's hysteria, nor with Freud's failure to cure it, nor with her relentless desire to present to her analyst the validity of her own version of events. It is rather concerned with the questions raised by the presentation of personal stories, the relationship of those narratives to history, and above all with the question that Ida Bauer herself raised so explicitly eighty years ago, that of the exchange of women in modern Western society. If we are able to move the idea of the traffic in women through time, space and culture, move it from remote and pre-capitalist societies to our own, and see it as a valid label for subjective experience, then this is largely to do with the evidence that Dora so clearly laid on the table, and that Freud interpreted for us.

Using these two accounts, we may suddenly see the nineteenth century peopled by middle-aged men who, propelled by the compulsions of scientific inquiry, demanded stories from young women and girls; and then expressed their dissatisfaction with the form of the narratives they obtained. Freud began his treatment of Dora by asking her 'to give me the whole story of [her] life and illness'.[13] It was

the unsatisfactory nature of this first narrative that usually allowed the analyst to 'see [his] way about the case': it was with the gaps, the inconclusive narrative connections, the hesitations and spontaneous revisions as to date, time and place, that the patient presented clues to where the true account lay:

> The patient comes with the story of his or her own life. The analyst listens; through an association something intrudes, disrupts, offers the 'anarchic carnival' back into that history, the story won't quite do, and so the process starts again. You go back, and you make a new history.[14]

It has been suggested that in his writing of this particular case-study Freud implied that 'everyone – that every life, every existence – has a story;' and that the story the hysteric tells presents dramatic shortcomings as narrative. 'What we are forced at this juncture to conclude,' remarks Steven Marcus

> is that a coherent story is in some manner connected with mental health . . . and that this in turn provides assumptions of the broadest and deepest kind about both the nature of coherence and the form and structure of human life. On this reading, human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory order and with everything . . . accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence.[15]

What a successful analyst might do is to give the analysand possession of her own story, and that possession would be 'a final act of appropriation, the appropriation by oneself of ones own history'.[16]

Some of Freud's earliest efforts in his short treatment of Dora were directed towards demonstrating that she did not say what she meant, that she was in fact attracted by Herr K., but was unwilling to acknowledge her own desire. He concentrated particularly on an event that took place when the girl was sixteen and, out alone on a holiday walk with

the man, was propositioned by him. She slapped his face, hurried away, and on telling her parents about the incident, was met with disbelief – or a kind of feigned and socially appropriate disbelief.[17] Freud recognized that what obsessed Dora was her father's apparent willingness to believe that this scene by the lake was just 'a figment of her imagination. She was almost beside herself at the idea of its being supposed that she had merely fancied something on that occasion.'[18]

Later, in his revision of the case-study for publication, Freud concluded that 'Dora's story must correspond to the facts in every respect;'[19] but it is not clear that he acknowledged its validity at the time. What Dora needed to do was to demonstrate to him that she had been right, and two years after her analysis terminated she returned to Freud's consulting room on the pretext of asking for further help, but in fact to tell him that she had extracted confessions of adultery from Frau K. and 'an admission of the scene by the lake that [Herr K.] had disputed'.[20]

The failure in narrative that it has been suggested Freud attributed to Dora was not in fact a failure of which he always accused his patients. Indeed, in a later case-study, that of the Wolf Man, there is a clear implication that narrative truth, order and sequence does not much signify in the eliciting of a life history, for it must remain the same story in the end, that is, the individual's account of how she got to be the way she is.[21] To concentrate on narrative sequence is to ignore the transactional nature of individual narratives. Narratives are a means of exchange. People may remember the past, and may verbalize their recollections, but to become a story what they say must 'achieve a coherence and point which are the same for the hearer as the teller'.[22] Dora's early accounts did not become stories because the point of the situation in which they were delivered was to present her with an account that was different from her own, to give her, in fact, Freud's story of Dora.

After the scene at the lake, two years before her analysis with Freud started, Dora had had a recurring dream which she later recounted to him:

> A house was on fire. My father was standing beside my bed and woke me up. I dressed myself quickly. Mother wanted to stop and save her jewel-case; but father said: "I refuse to let myself and my children be burnt for the sake of your jewel-case.' We hurried downstairs, and soon as I was outside, I woke up.[23]

This dream of the 1890s has been taken through many interpretations that move far beyond the one that Freud originally made. An essential feature of all of them though, is the attention that Freud paid at the time to the connection between the German word for jewel-case (*Schmuckkastchen*) and its slang meaning, which is a name for the female genitals.[24] Some time before the 'scene' and the dream, Herr K. had given Dora an expensive jewel-case. 'Bring your mind back to the jewel-case,' suggested Freud.

> You have there a starting point for a . . . line of thoughts in which Herr K. is to be put in the place of your father just as he was in the matter of standing beside your bed. He gave you a jewel-case; so now you are to give him your jewel-case . . . you are ready to give to Herr K. what his wife withholds from him.[25]

The role of the mother in the dream is problematic in Freud's analysis of it, as Maria Ramas has pointed out. In 'Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria', she suggests that Frau Bauer, Ida's mother, saw heterosexuality as representative of contamination, in particular of venereal infection, and that her desire to save her jewel-case in her daughter's dream about the fire, was a repudiation of sexual intercourse and any man's gift – an understanding that Dora had appropriated and which she presented to Freud as her own.[26]

When he came to write his final version of the case-study, Freud was willing to admit social meaning and sociological reality to the narrative:

> It follows from the nature of the facts which form the material of psycho-analysis that we are obliged to pay as much attention in our case-histories to the purely human and social circumstances of our patients as to the somatic data and the symptoms of the disorder.[27]

He has been condemned for this in analytic terms [28] but it is entirely due to his recording of social detail and social interpretation that Ida Bauer's evidence can be used as historical evidence. Dora understood two things about her social and sexual worth. She knew that she was desired and that she might be thought of as an object of exchange between two men. She knew also, with great specificity, what it was that was the subject of exchange: not herself, but her genitals, not a person, but what that person possessed, which was her sex: an object, a valuable item, a thing to be bought and sold. The metaphor that Freud used for interpretation draws on no perceptible connection between genitals and jewel-cases, but rather on a highly specific and powerfully represented *connection* between middle- and upper-class women and their value on the market and in the social world. That, in time and place, was Dora's value, what she understood of herself because the world told her so (Freud too, as part of that world, told her this); and it was this knowledge that she tried to repudiate by her hysteria.[29]

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The little watercress girl on the other hand, possessed nothing, except her labour, and her story, which was coherent, and ordered, though told in reverse sequence. Her interlocutor did not accuse her of narrative inconsistencies and lacunae, of denials and repressions (Mayhew was not listening for them); what Mayhew found fault with was not her story (for unlike Freud, who already knew Dora's story, Mayhew did not know the tale this child told) but herself, and the blank absence of childhood from her face. The child knew that there was a point to the tale she told (and Mayhew allowed her her point of view) and performed the

device known among narratologists as 'the *evaluation* of the narrative: the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its *raison d'être*, why it was told and what the narrator was getting at'.[30] Within these strictly sociolinguistic terms, evaluation is to do with dramatization, that is, the eventual presentation of a dramatic *point* to the story, such as a fight. But the little watercress girl made the same gesture of evaluation in order to reach a different kind of conclusion: the point of her story was herself, and how that self had been made.

What the child chose to extract from her autobiographical narrative and to comment on was the financial ordering of her household, and the way in which her labour was managed and controlled by her mother. The personal relationships she described were all bound by this economic vision. She talked in some detail about a Saturday job that she did for a Jewish couple, and about her career as a baby-minder. She had in her short lifetime looked after a nephew or a niece, and was still engaged in looking after her baby sister. Child care represented paid employment, and even in looking after her sister she was performing a function that would have had cash laid out on it by her mother had she not existed.[31] The child understood herself to be in this way a worker, and described her working life with great exactitude:

> Sometimes I make a great deal of money. One day I took 1s 6d and the cresses cost 6d,[32] but it isn't often that I make as much as that. I oftener make 3d or 4d than 1s; and then I'm at work crying 'Cresses, four bunches a penny, cresses!' from six in the morning till about ten . . . The shops buys most of me. Some of 'em says 'Oh, I ain't a goin to give a penny for these;' and they want them at the same price I buys 'em at. I always gives mother my money, she's so very good to me . . . She's very poor and goes out cleaning rooms sometimes, now she doesn't work at the fur.[33] I ain't got no father, he's a father in law. No, mother ain't married again – he's a father in law. He grinds scissors

> and he's very good to me. No; I don't mean by that that he says kind things to me for he never hardly speaks . . . I am a capital hand at bargaining . . . they can't take me in. If the woman tries to give me a small handful of cresses I says 'I ain't a goin to have that for a ha'porth,' and I goes to the next basket, and so on, all round. I know the quantities very well. For a penny I ought to have a full market hand . . . For 3d I has a lap full, enough to earn about a shilling; and for 6d I gets as many as crams my basket . . . When I've bought 3d of cresses, I ties 'em up into as many little bundles as I can. They must look biggish, or the people won't buy them.

It is clear that under the conditions of distress that her family experienced, she received the most praise and approbation from the adults around her when she made 4d profit out of a bundle of watercress. Her labour functioned as a description of herself – or rather, she used it as a description of what she knew herself to be – and the babies she minded show this metaphoric use she made of her own labour most clearly. In the little watercress girl's account, the baby was both a source of love and affection, a means of play and enjoyment (she spoke of the warmth of a small body in bed at night, the pleasurable weight of her baby sister on her hip, the smiles of infancy); and at the same time the baby was also a source of income and adult praise for earning that income. The baby represented economically what the watercress seller had been in her turn, when she was a baby, and what she was now to her mother: a worker, a good and helpful little girl, a source of income. In this situation her labour was not an attribute, nor a possession, but herself; that which she exchanged daily for the means of livelihood, for love, and food and protection. It was in the face of this integrity of being that Mayhew felt undone.

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The child did possess something after all, she told the social investigator, quite late during the course of their

conversation: some toys: 'Oh yes; I've got some toys at home. I've a fireplace and a box of toys, and a knife and fork and two little chairs . . .' Perhaps presented by Mayhew for the purposes of demonstrating pathos (did she really have play-furniture, or was she, out of her confusion and deprivation, describing her family's limited stock of household goods?), toys, the possible symbols of easier childhoods, rest uneasily in a reading of the child's account. Toys belong to a world of things that we know immensely and conventionally about; the watercresses though, the pieces of fur with the slits to sew up, the pennies saved for clothes, are not only strange entities, but the connections made between them remain unrevealed by our reading.

It is generally recognized in literary accounts of metaphor, that the connective device on which metaphor turns, that is, on the perception of real similarities between entities in the real world, is often in actuality no more than the recognition of culturally highly specific contingent relations: we are used to comparing certain things with particular other things, and metaphor often works through this connection, rather than perceived similarity. Reading literature from unfamiliar cultures often serves to reveal the conventions of our own metaphoric system, for we do not have forty-three names for the eagle, nor a gradation of terms to describe the colour of snow. 'There is scant physical basis for comparing women with swans,' remarks Jonathan Culler on this point; but we are massively used to reading the comparison as metaphor.[34]

In Dora's account the contingencies of our understanding furnish almost everything (it is a world we know about, a real world, a big house, by a lake, or behind a gate: this story has been told before; it is *the* story). There are things (entities, relationships, people: names) and there is the placing of things in relationship to each other, which give them their meaning. When a thing is presented in Dora's story, it takes on a universe of meaning: a jewel-case, a reticule, a closed door, a pair of pearl ear-rings. In this way,

the writing of case-history takes on the dimensions of story-telling: it works by telling us that something is about to be revealed – that the story is already there to tell.

But there is no story for the little watercress girl. The things she spoke to Mayhew about (pieces of fur, the bunches of cress, the scrubbed floor) still startle after 130 years, not because they are strange things in themselves, but because in our conventional reading, they are not held together in figurative relationship to each other. According to some authorities, both narrative and metaphor work by bringing together things that at first seem separate and distant, but which then, moved towards each other through logical space, make a new and pertinent sense. But this shift through space depends on our ability as listeners and readers to accept the new ordering of events and entities which have been made by the plot of a story, or by the use of a metaphor. Where there is not the vision that permits the understanding of these new connections, then a story cannot be told.

Those who have pointed to the social specificity of the personal accounts around which psychoanalysis constructed itself have also been talking about the conventions of story-telling and story-reading that have confined it. Jane Gallop has discussed the position of the maid, the nurse and the governess in classic psychoanalysis, the figure who relates the idealized and isolated family of the late nineteenth-century case-histories to the economic world, but who has always been denied a place in them.[35] In *In Search of a Past*, an autobiography structured by psychoanalytic inquiry, Ronald Fraser replaces the servants in the manor house of his own childhood – in all the haunted houses – gives them a voice, fills the place that classic psychoanalysis cannot discuss.[36] But even with this replacement, the narrative continues to work in the same way, telling a story that we know already.

In the narrative terms that Freud can be seen to have laid down in 'Fragment of an Analysis', the little watercress

girl is a person in mental health, in possession of her story. But it is the story itself that does not fit: all its content and its imagery demonstrate its marginality to the central story, of the bourgeois household and the romances of the family and the fairy-tales that lie behind its closed doors: no different culture here, not a place where they have forty-three terms for the eagle and where a woman cannot be conceived of as a swan; but the arena outside the gate, the set of metaphors forged out of the necessary and contingent relationship between all the big houses and the Clerkenwell rooms in which the child grew up. The marginality of her story is what maintains the other's centrality; there is no kind of narrative that can hold the two together (though perhaps history can): an outsider's tale, held in oscillation by the relationships of class.

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She was free, and she was not free. Her father didn't matter, he didn't represent any law: he was just a 'father in law'. The law, the distant functioning world, was the gentleman who stopped her once in the street, not to pity her, but to ask why she was out so early, and who gave her nothing. It was the inexorable nature of the market, the old women wholesalers, some kind, some not. She was free; she was hungry, meat made her feel sick, she was so unused to it. She had integrity; and she was very poor. Her matted and dirty hair stood out wildly from her head, she shuffled along to keep the carpet slippers on her feet; her life slipped away into the darkness, as she turned into the entrance of her Clerkenwell court.

Childhood for a Good Woman

That time, the last time, when she opened the door, she looked like a witch. I've tried to explain this often to friends, to say what this sudden perception means. There was a new children's paperback out, a version of 'Hansel and Gretal' in modern dress, that I'd recently seen.[1] A witch opens the door of the gingerbread house; she stands there; you look at her face: she is like my mother. I've explained often that our imagining of witches is based on a certain real and physiological type of woman, on a Lancashire face, with dark hair and dark eyes, and handsome, gaunt curves to the cheek and nose. That was how my mother looked, and the illness made her thinner and gaunter. Witchcraft endured in Lancashire much later than in other parts of the country; community tensions between Catholic and Protestant, ownership and exclusion, fuelled it as a popular political device.[2]

She talked to me about witches, now and often before. The one book she carried from her childhood was Ainsworth's *Lancashire Witches*, in an edition of the 1880s.[3] She'd walked by Pendle Hill she said, to dances in the 1920s, by the place where Mistress Nutter met her fellow witches, and where the witches were later burned. I found the book in the house after her death, remembered my terrified reading of it at the age of ten, convinced that the mere opening of its pages brought the devil forward.

She wanted to tell me about Lancashire witchcraft I think, because it put her pursuit of the invulnerable body through Food Reform into a kind of historical perspective, gave it a tradition. She did not make the connection clear, but did

talk about the doctor who had attended her when she'd had diphtheria at the age of ten, who'd recommended dried fruit and wholemeal bread, food with properties she'd discovered herself, later in life.

Talk of witchcraft was common in north-east Lancashire in the 1890s, and the connection of Food Reform and herbalism with radical politics in the area is a matter of historical knowledge.[4] What she did, it is clear, is understand her search for spells, for the food that nourished – a kind of magic – in a historical light. Time catches together what we know and what we do not yet know. She thought she might save her life by eating watercress, the food of clear water grown in the distant hills, far away from a useless present. The little watercress girl knew nothing of where the cresses came from. My mother did what the powerless, particularly powerless women, have done before, and do still: she worked on her body, the only bargaining power she ended up with, given the economic times and the culture in which she grew.

She made me believe that I understood everything about her, she made me believe that I was her: her tiredness, the pain of having me, the bleeding, the terrible headaches. She made me good because I was a spell, a piece of possible good fortune, a part of herself that she exchanged for her future: a gamble. If you expect children to be self-sacrificing and to identify with the needs of others, then they often do so, and cannot restrict their identification to one other person. They may even find themselves much later, unknowingly, in their mirror image, in the little watercress girl, the good and helpful child, who eased her mother's life. Whenever I cry over that child, I think what a fool she would think me to waste my tears in this way. She doesn't know that there are means of escape. You can open the books, and see the witch's face that others have seen before, find a story that shows the witch making the rose trees sink into the ground, or the witch flying over Pendle Hill. And then you can turn the page: read on.

It was two weeks before her death that I went to see her that time, the last time: the first meeting in nine years, except for the day of my father's funeral. The letter announcing my visit lay unopened on the mat when she opened the door; and an hour later I came away believing that I admired a woman who could, in these circumstances and in some pain, treat me as if I had just stepped round the corner for a packet of tea ten minutes before, and talk to me about this and that, and nothing at all. But I was really a ghost who came to call. That feeling, the sense of being absent in my mother's presence, was nothing to do with the illness, was what it had always been like. We were truly illegitimate, outside any law of recognition: the mirror broken, a lump of ice for a heart.

As I went out, past the shrouded furniture in the front room (things made ready these ten years past for the move that never came), I saw hanging over the mantelpiece a Lowry reproduction that hadn't been there on my last visit. Why did she go out and buy that obvious representation of a landscape she wanted to escape, the figures moving noiselessly under the shadow of the mill? 'They know each other, recognise each other,' says John Berger of these figures. 'They are not, as is sometimes said, like lost souls in limbo; they are fellow travellers through a life which is impervious to most of their choices . . .' Perhaps, as this commentary suggests, she did buy that picture because it is 'concerned with loneliness', with the 'contemplation of time passing without meaning',[5] and moved then, hesitantly, momentarily, towards all the other lost travellers.

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Where is the place that you move into the landscape and can see yourself? When I want to find myself in the dream of the New Look, I have to reconstruct the picture, look down at my sandals and the hem of my dress, for in the dream itself, I am only an eye watching. Remembering the visit to the cotton mill, on the other hand, I can see myself watching from the polished floor: I am in the picture. To see yourself

outside any law = of recognition

in this way is a representation of the child's move into historical time, one of the places where vision establishes the child's understanding of herself as part of the world. In its turn, this social understanding helps interpret the dream landscape.

When I was about nine, I grew positively hungry for poetry. I learned enormous quantities to say to myself in bed at night. The book I had was Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and I read it obsessively, once going into Smith's in the High Road to ask if he'd written any other poems. I liked the one on the last page best, 'To Any Reader', and its imparting of the sad, elegiac information that the child seen through the pages of the book

> . . . has grown up and gone away,
> And it is but a child of air
> That lingers in the garden there.

You're nostalgic for childhood whilst it's happening to you, because the dreams show you the landscape you're passing through, but you don't know yet that you want to escape.

*

Once a story is told, it ceases to be a story: it becomes a piece of history, an interpretative device. Long, long ago, the fairy-stories were my first devices. Thirty years after my intensest reading of Hans Andersen, I learned that he was an outcast, a poor man intent on pleasing his patrons and recording messages of embourgeoisement.[6] It is significant that Andersen, a working-class writer edgy in the upper-middle-class and gentry world of nineteenth-century Denmark should have presented so many dramas concerning women: the dazzling and powerful Snow Queen, Gerda who looks relentlessly for the cypher Kay along the edges of the world, the Little Mermaid, a thousand witches of the sea. Women are the final outsiders, and Andersen wrote his own drama of class using their names, thus demonstrating a rare reversal of a common transformation of gender in

reading, whereby girls have to read themselves as boys in order to become active heroines in the text.

Using devices like this, the story forms. I know that the compulsions of narrative are almost irresistible: having found a psychology where once there was only the assumption of pathology or false consciousness to be seen, the tendency is to celebrate this psychology, to seek entry for it to a wider world of literary and cultural reference; and the enterprise of working-class autobiography was designed to make this at least a feasible project. But to do this is to miss the irreducible nature of all our lost childhoods: what has been made has been made out on the borderlands. I must make the final gesture of defiance, and refuse to let this be absorbed by the central story; must ask for a structure of political thought that will take all of this, all these secret and impossible stories, recognize what has been made out on the margins; and then, recognizing it, refuse to celebrate it; a politics that will, watching this past say 'So what?'; and consign it to the dark.

Notes

The place of publication is London, unless otherwise specified. The abbreviation PP stands for the Parliamentary Paper Series.

Death of a Good Woman

1. Simone de Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death* (1964), Penguin, 1969, p. 83.

PART ONE: STORIES

1. John Berger, *About Looking*, Writers and Readers, 1972, pp. 370–1.
2. Gareth Stedman-Jones, 'Why is the Labour Party in a Mess?' in *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832–1982*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 239–56. Beatrix Campbell surveys critiques of the 1950s in *Wigan Pier Revisited*, Virago, 1984, pp. 217–34. See also James Hinton, *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867–1974*, Wheatsheaf, Brighton, 1983, pp. 182–7.
3. 'What actually happened is less important than what is felt to have happened. Is that right?' says Ronald Fraser to his analyst, and his analyst agrees. Ronald Fraser, *In Search of a Past*, Verso, 1984, p. 95.
4. Jeremy Seabrook, *Working Class Childhood*, Gollancz, 1982, pp. 23–7, 33.
5. Catherine Cookson, *Our Kate*, Macdonald, 1969.
6. Kathleen Woodward, *Jipping Street* (1928), Virago, 1983.